

## Gladys Knight: A Candid Conversation



Gladys Knight

By Mary L. Datcher  
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Motown Records was considered the number one most influential company to lead in setting a precedent for talent, style, good music, swag and success. The Detroit label was founded on the same business model of automotive companies that ruled the blue collar town during that time. Founder Berry Gordy believed in building a company that scouted and signed raw talent, polished them and carried them through an assembly line of artist development that is sadly missing in today's music business.

Gladys Knight and the Pips were part of the 'golden era' of Motown Records. They contributed to its long illustrious line-up of catalog hits that included "Neither One of Us", "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" and "If I Were Your Woman" among them.

In 1976, the group left Motown and joined Buddah Records, where they continued to create a string of classic hits like "Midnight Train to Georgia." After much success Ms. Knight moved on to embark on a successful solo career with Columbia Records and MCA Records reuniting with the Pips in the 1980's. The lead vocals on each song belonged to Gladys Knight and her smooth and timeless voice still rings strong today.

*Chicago Defender* had an opportunity to engage the seven-time Grammy awarded artist and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee in candid conversation while in town for a concert at Ravinia and to promote her latest single "Just A Little". The independent release of her single is available on September 25th and produced by Grammy award producer, S1. She's no stranger to overseeing her own music

company but this time it's with the help of her husband and manager.

"I told my crew, please don't sign me to another record label. You can give people chance, after chance, after chance but it hasn't changed," Knight said. "Why do you think there aren't any record labels left? People got tired of not being paid while these mega companies are at the top with executives living in big houses, owning luxury cars and taking our money sending their kids to college. I have kids in college as well, and I need my money."

With her new company, comes new talent and she's happy to bring on young and fresh ears. Rising singer and current vocal arranger, R&B singer Avehre has managed to capture Knight's interest in becoming one of the premiere artists on her independent label.

"Avehre is an amazing, talented and respectful young man. My husband has taken him under his wing. They are in the studio right now," Knight said. "This man can write, produce and do his own thing."

As the business has changed over the years Knight has experienced challenges including the loss of her son James Newman who was also her manager, and her daughter and former manager who fell ill. She confesses that her spirituality and relationship with God has kept her going. As a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, she's noticed a cycle of social injustice that has continued to plague our community. Current day injustices have stirred past memories citing that the generational gap is not too different than when she was coming up in the Civil Rights movement.

"We were determined more than we were angry so we marched. We came together as a people. We held up our heads. Not only were we fighting for jus-

tice, we were fighting for respect," Knight said there's a difference between her generation's approach and

want to hear it. 'I'm mad now!' Growing up, they need what we've received on the spiritual side in or-

Knight and her husband William McDowell of 15 years are happily married and reside in Canton, North

Carolina. There they recently purchased the schoolhouse, where McDowell attended elementary school. The building has been abandoned for a number of decades and they are seeking to transforming it into a state-of-art performing arts facility for new students. She is looking forward to reaching out to her industry friends for assistance in helping others.

As she wraps up, she recounts what makes Chicago so special every time she visits the Windy City, "It's a team place. I've had friends here and I worked here all my young life. The theaters were something here. They were a learning place. It's just a wonderful, aggressive place," She said, "Being friends with the Staples, Jerry 'Iceman' Butler and other friends, I got to learn about the city and the clubs. That's what I love about Chicago. I still get a good feeling when I come here."

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the following generation. "You can't demand respect if you're not respectable. In our homes, when we try to teach our kids about being respectable - they get so much pressure from outside of the homes. They just got tired, so they don't

der to keep them grounded," said Knight. "The concept of God was taken away from us and everything and everybody along the way. That's the primary reason why we are where we are today. We're too busy being politically correct."

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