

The Olympics

The Olympics are an American Doo-Wop group, formed in 1957 by Eddie Lewis and lead singer Walter Ward. Walter Ward, a mainstay of the group for 50 years, was born in Mississippi and sang gospel with his father and three uncles (as the Ward Brothers). In the early 50s, the family relocated to Los Angeles, and he met up with his cousin, Eddie Lewis, who had also come to L.A. from Mississippi. While at Willowbrook Junior High School, Walter and Eddie (both tenors) formed the West Coast Gospel Singers (with James Lloyd and Walter's uncle, Jimmy Ward).

In 1954, Walter and Eddie started attending Centennial High School in Compton and formed an R&B group called the Challengers. The other members were pianist Marcus Banks, a second tenor Nathan, and baritone Freddy Lewis. One day, at a talent contest, the Challengers met Charles Fizer and Walter Hammond. They decided that it would be more advantageous to join together rather than compete, Charles and Walter replaced Freddy and Nathan.

In 1956, as a result of appearing on a television show, they were offered a recording session by Joe Fornis, owner of Melatone Records. The Challengers only cut a single record for Melatone (the ballad "I Can Tell," backed with the vaguely Latin-ish "The Mambo Beat"), but at least they were on their way. However, they found out that there was another group calling itself "The Challengers," so they renamed themselves "The Olympics" and they recorded "Western Movies" (Demon Records) in the summer of 1958. Co-written by Fred Smith and Cliff Goldsmith, "Western Movies" made it to #8 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. The song reflected the nation's preoccupation with western themed movies and television programs. It told the story of a man who lost his girl to TV westerns, and it included doo-wop harmonies as well as background gunshots and ricochet sound effects. Shortly after "Western Movies," Charles Fizer left for a while, and was replaced by Melvin King. Their next release was "(I Wanna) Dance With The Teacher" (in October 1958), the first of the Olympics many dance records.

In 1959 the group recorded "(Baby) Hully Gully," which initiated the Hully Gully dance craze. "Big Boy Pete," which the group released in 1960, served as inspiration for The Kingsmen's "Jolly Green Giant." Mack Starr, formerly of The Paragons, (who recorded "Florence") joined the group in 1968 and was replaced by William DeVase in 1980. The combination of Walter Ward, Eddie Lewis, Kenny Sinclair, and William DeVase was together for over 20 years. In all that time, the group made a single record, released in the 80s: "I Feel Your Love (Comin' On)"/"Papa Will."

This group continued until March of 2003, when Kenny Sinclair died and was replaced by Vel Omarr, who had been doing a tribute to Sam Cooke as an opening act for Brenton Wood. When Walter Ward passed away on December 11, 2006, the group continued on as a trio. When William DeVase passed in May of 2009, he was replaced by Alphonso Boyd, who's known for writing the hit song "Standing On Shakey Ground", performed by The Temptations. Eddie Lewis, is the only surviving member of The Olympics, and has been with the group for over 55 years. The Olympics continue to record and perform, electrifying audiences all around the world.



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