



Diana constantly experimented with different looks



1972: Her slim frame made Diana the perfect clothes-horse



1973: Her passion for wigs was legendary



1981: After more than 20 years in the business Diana still managed to look sexier than ever



1973: Diana's elegant yet sexy sensibilities proved inspirational to both black and white women



You can see where rapper Lil' Kim gets her ideas from



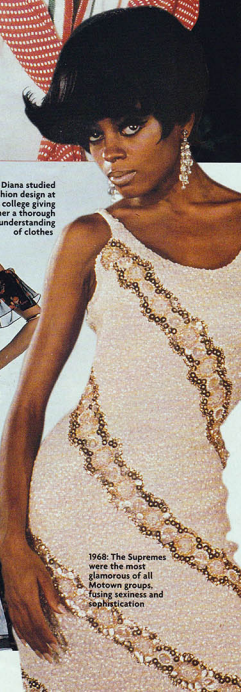
Diana in the early days with her fellow Supremes, Mary and Florence



1973: False eyelashes were an important part of Diana's image



1973: Diana studied fashion design at college giving her a thorough understanding of clothes



1968: The Supremes were the most glamorous of all Motown groups, fusing sexiness and sophistication

THE SUPREME

DIVA

NO-ONE DOES DIVA DIVINE LIKE DIANA ROSS. LOOKS HAILS THE SEXY, SEQUINED SONGSTRESS OF STYLE

FEATURE SHARON WRIGHT



Dressed in megawatt sequined gowns, her hair always big, Diana Ross is a living embodiment of all things 'maxi'. Rumoured to spend over £35,000-a-month on clothes, she's got a wardrobe to rival Elton John's. Today her high-fashion style is an inspiration for the latest generation of wannabe divas such as Missy, Mariah and Mary J, and fashion designer Anthony Mark Hankins has dubbed her 'the closest thing we have to black royalty'. Yes siree, Ms Diana Ross is one Supreme Diva. Here is her story...

BIG DREAMS

Diana was born the second of six children to a poor but respectable family in a Detroit ghetto in 1944. As a little girl, she loved to sing along to the jazz classics that were forever playing at home.

The young Diana was hell-bent on self-improvement. She once said, 'I think it's just instinctual. It's who I am. As a kid I went to beauty school on the weekends and I worked at Hudson's department store in the

afternoons after school and I was going to modelling school on Saturdays.'

At 14 she teamed up with friends Mary Wilson and Florence Ballard to form a group called The Primettes which performed at neighbourhood parties. Still at high school, Diana had already found her two great loves – music and fashion. She eventually badgered another friend from the ghetto – Smokey Robinson – to wangle the trio an audition with Berry Gordy, the head of Motown. He loved them and in 1961, when Diana was barely 16, they signed their first record contract. Motown was the first black-owned record company which created a legendary era by making soul commercial. Gordy changed their name to The Supremes, but insisted they finish their education first. So Diana went to college, was voted Best Dressed Girl and majored in fashion design – very useful for the girl determined to become not only a musical, but also a sartorial superstar.

SOPHISTICATED SEXY

At first, The Supremes wore the mod styles of the early 60s.

'They were trying to come across as ladylike, but at the same time, hip,' says American fashion commentator Rod Stafford Hagwood. 'So they had the A-line skirts, co-ordinated outfits with matching suits, hats and shoes and the mod spin of geometric shapes and big buttons. Then they added African American colours to that, the reds, yellows and greens.'

They had their first hit with *Where Did Our Love Go?* and as their success grew, so did the glamour. A lot of girl groups around at the time, such as The Ronettes, had a sassy, sexualised kind of look,' says Lynda Cowell of black newspaper *The Voice*. 'In contrast, The Supremes were the sophisticated side of sexiness. So they wore long, clingy dresses and long gloves. It was a classy look, well-groomed and polished.'

The Supremes loved the glitz, elegant, evening look, but there was no clothing budget to cover it, so Diana put her fashion skills to work. The girls would club together for fabric and agree on a design before Diana spent days cutting and sewing to create their matching stage outfits. And who could forget the hair?

Again, it was Diana who combed through magazines and watched TV to find the styles she liked, before recreating them for herself, Mary and Florence. Then came the wigs. Between them, the Supremes owned 300.

Although Berry Gordy is often credited with managing their style, Diana tells it differently in her memoir, *Secrets of a Sparrow*. 'Even as teenagers we had a sense of sophistication that made us stand out from other performers. Nobody created that look for us; we did it for ourselves. We brought it to Motown.'

As the 60s progressed, The Supremes chalked up 12 number one hits, including *Baby Love* and *You Can't Hurry Love*. But there were growing tensions in the group, with the others complaining that Diana was hogging the limelight and Gordy's attention. And they were proved right when, in 1967, Gordy renamed them Diana Ross and The Supremes. From then on, the group's slick gowns became ever more fabulous and centre stage, every time, was Diana. Which is why by 1970, The Supremes were over and Diana Ross stepped into the spotlight alone. ➤

STYLE ICON: DIANA ROSS

DESIGNER FEVER

At the end of the 60s, Diana met TV costume designer Bob Mackie, whose theatrical tastes took her 70s solo look to new heights of drama. 'There were lots of tiger stripes, very, very bold sequins and feathers about 10 feet high', says Hagwood. But not content with being a singing superstar, Diana wanted to be a movie star too. Soon she was rehearsing *Lady Sings The Blues*, the story of Billie Holiday. Mackie designed the costumes for the film and was later nominated for an Oscar for his work.

Diana was now strictly designer-only – and not only when it came to her clothes. For her second film, *Mahogany*, in 1975, she actually played a dress designer and designed all the clothes herself! Off-screen, Diana favoured designers Norma Koch



Sequinned top
£19.99 Diva

SEQUIN CHIC THE ESSENTIAL ITEMS FOR ANY WANNABE DIVA...



No. 7
Ball lipgloss
trio £6



Strappy sandals
£49.95 Office

Givenchy
bronze nail
polish £10.50



'DRAG QUEENS CAN EASILY LOOK LIKE ME. JUST PUT ON SOME FALSE EYELASHES AND FIX THAT HAIR'

and Ray Aghayan, combining high glamour with the funkier elements of 70s style. The regulars at the ultimate New York hangout, Studio 54, drooled over her outfits, desperate to know who'd made them. 'The 70s were the time in the US when we really got into the idea of designers becoming celebrities', Hagwood says. 'And Diana was a big part of that. It meant everything to them to have Diana wearing their clothes. So her name was linked with Claude Montana, Halston, Yves Saint Laurent.'

Into the 80s, Diana flaunted her trim figure in Thierry Mugler bodysuits. Her look was still pure

diva, with ball dresses and glittery opera coats featuring heavily. But when she married for the second time, to Arne Naess, in a million-dollar wedding in a Swiss castle, she ditched the feathers and glitter for an antique lace creation by Elizabeth Courtney.

today, I'll be blonde.' And referring to her huge gay following, she added: 'That's why drag queens can easily make themselves look like me. Really, it's not hard to look like me: just put some false eyelashes on and fix that hair.'

In 1997 she modelled Gai Mattioli designs at the Rome couture shows and a year later, she posed in the John Galiano collection for Dior.

BEYOND (GHETTO) FABULOUS

Today, four decades after stepping into the spotlight, Diana Ross can still create a fashion sensation. During the furore caused when she refused to be frisked at Heathrow in 1999, she was photographed in a pair of Gina purple python boots. 'That incident set off a massive chain reaction, even though the boots cost upwards of £600,' said Angie Kirk, Gina's managing director. 'We had Kate Winslet banging on the door wanting a pink ankle-

length pair.' Madonna and Sarah Jessica Parker weren't far behind.

And you can see Diana's influence on the style of other stars. Take Lauryn Hill's embroidered Gucci jeans, Missy Elliott wrapped in fur, Mariah Carey displaying her assets in a beaded Ungaro halter top, or Lisa 'Left Eye' Lopez in her green wig and sequined body suit. But when Jennifer Lopez, Lil' Kim and Mary J Blige et al step out in head-to-toe Versace and gold, they're being ghetto fabulous. This 'look at me' pose may bear all the trademarks of Diana's diva style, but there is one essential difference. As designer Anthony Mark Hankins says: 'With ghetto fabulous, you haven't graduated to Dom Perignon. You're still rough around the edges. Ghetto fabulous is when you haven't met the Queen of England.' In other words, you're still not a true diva. Not like Diana Ross. 'She is a diva,' he said. 'There is no other.'

Diana's impact on fashion is beyond huge, says Rod Hagwood. 'She was the first black woman that white women wanted to look like. And she paved the way for all the black models from Iman to Naomi Campbell. When *Mahogany* was released, black women saw her and thought, she looks like me and she looks fabulous. I can do that. That's what "role model" means.'

As Diana herself once said: 'People want the glitter, the fantasy. And why not? What's wrong with dreams of splendour? Absolutely nothing, we say. ♡



VIVA LA DIVA

Where does the term come from?

'Diva' originally meant a 'highly distinguished female singer, but it's also come to describe any female performer who has a high-maintenance look and demanding ways.

What does it mean to be a diva?

It's a state of mind. A way of life. Divas don't think of themselves as ordinary people and don't expect to be treated like them. Do you know who I AM? I would sum it up best.

Who was the first diva?

One of the first women to be dubbed a diva was Maria Callas, the opera singer. She had striking looks and ruled her entourage with a rod of iron.

And the divas today?

The list of hopefuls is long and includes pretty much anyone prone to fur coats and tantrums. But closest to the crown are Mariah Carey, Jennifer Lopez and Whitney Houston.