

APOLLO EDUCATION

LIVE WIRE

SHE'S A REBEL: GIRL GROUPS OF THE 50s, 60s, & 70s



A Conversation with Joshie Jo Armstead, Sarah Dash, and Martha Reeves

Moderated by Christian John Wikane

Thursday, November 14, 2019

6:30 p.m.

Apollo Theater

253 West 125 Street, New York, NY



The Chantels

“Maybe,” 1957

The Shirelles

“I Met Him on a Sunday,” 1958

The Exciters

“Tell Him,” 1962

The Crystals

“Da Doo Ron Ron,” 1963

The Velvelettes

“Needle in a Haystack,” 1964

The Supremes

“Back in My Arms Again,” 1965

The Blossoms

“Cry Like a Baby,” 1967

The Sweet Inspirations

“Sweet Inspiration,” 1968

The Three Degrees

“You’re the One,” 1970

The Pointer Sisters

“Yes We Can Can,” 1973



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APOLLO LIVE WIRE: SHE'S A REBEL - GIRL GROUPS

Tonight, we honor the power of harmony through the stories of three phenomenal women, Martha Reeves, Sarah Dash, and Joshie Jo Armstead. As founding members of “girl groups” who formed during the 1960s, they each created a sound and style that expanded the foundation set by forebears like the Shirelles, the Chantels, and the Bobbettes. The hits are legion. The groups are legendary.

Hearing each woman tell her story, it's clear that being in a group was often a springboard to reinvention, sometimes within the group itself, other times as a solo artist, and occasionally venturing into spheres beyond music. From opening the Motown Revue as Martha & the Vandellas to presiding on Detroit's City Council, Martha Reeves embodies fearless strength and dedication. From being christened one of the “Sweethearts of the Apollo” as a member of Patti LaBelle & the Blubelles to becoming the very first Music Ambassador for Trenton, NJ, Sarah Dash is rich in soul and spirit. From performing one-nighters as one of the original Ikettes in the Ike & Tina Turner Revue to graduating with honors from the New School of Social Research, Joshie Jo Armstead follows a compass that's guided by curiosity and determination.

Why are these women rebels? Throughout their respective careers, they challenged music business conventions and created new paradigms in the industry. Marvin Gaye once wrote, “Of all the acts back then, I thought Martha & the Vandellas came closest to really saying something. They captured a spirit that felt political to me.” Indeed, when Martha Reeves & the Vandellas released “I Should Be Proud,” they became the first Motown act to record a song that protested the Vietnam War. After facing blatant sexism and discrimination in the industry, Sarah Dash, Nona Hendryx, and Patti LaBelle established their own business and management team with *Ready Steady Go!* producer Vicki Wickham while also pioneering an Afrofuturistic aesthetic as Labelle, two decades before the concept was widely introduced. The same year that Sylvia Robinson (“The Mother of Hip-Hop”) launched All Platinum Records, Joshie Jo Armstead followed the trail blazed by record company owners Vivian Carter (Vee-Jay Records) and Florence Greenberg (Scepter Records) and became one of the first women to found her own record company, Giant Records, while writing and producing hits for herself and other artists.

As we continue to celebrate the 85th anniversary of the Apollo Theater, it's the perfect time to celebrate those artists who created a space so that others could soar. Martha Reeves, Sarah Dash, and Joshie Jo Armstead have all graced the Apollo's stage, filling the walls with their unforgettable sound. It is my privilege to welcome them home.

Christian John Wikane
November, 2019

APOLLO LIVE WIRE: SHE'S A REBEL - BIOGRAPHIES



Christian John Wikane is a NYC-based music journalist and essayist. He's a Contributing Editor for PopMatters and has interviewed more than 300 recording artists, songwriters, and producers, including Paul McCartney, Janelle Monáe, Donna Summer, Pete Seeger, Annie Lennox, Maurice White, Carly Simon, and Kenny Gamble. He's curated and moderated several events at the Apollo Theater for Apollo Education's Apollo Live Wire series, including "Legendary: A Conversation with Dionne Warwick and Melba Moore" and "Bold Soul Sisters" a panel discussion featuring Nona Hendryx, Ruth Pointer, Kathy Sledge, and Rochelle Fleming.

Among other live events, he's moderated "The Soulfulness of David Bowie" featuring Carlos Alomar and Robin Clark as part of Brooklyn Museum's "David Bowie is" exhibit and Stevens Institute of Technology's CAL Dean's Lecture Series. Most recently, he conducted a Q&A with disco legends D.C. LaRue and Felipe Rose (original co-founder and Native of Village People) for *Queer/Art/Film's* screening of the Motown-Casablanca film *Thank God It's Friday* (1978) at IFC Center and hosted a conversation with West End legend Ray Shell at SpoonfedNYC to celebrate the 35th anniversary of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Starlight Express*.

Since 2010, Christian has authored extensive liner notes for more than 200 album re-issues by Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductees, Grammy winners, and other icons of R&B, rock, dance, pop, and jazz. He's also conducted interviews for several BBC Radio documentaries, Sirius XM's Studio 54 channel, Chase Bank ("Inside Access"), and hosted/produced more than a dozen concerts at Joe's Pub (the Public Theater), the Blue Note, Iridium Jazz Club, and Wölffer Estate Vineyard. He's guest lectured for Barnard College's "Harlem Semester" Program and presented at EMP Pop Conference, the Parrish Art Museum, Apollo Education's "Master Class" Series, and NYU Steinhardt's Department of Music. He's the sole author of *Casablanca Records: Play It Again*, a 50,000-word oral history that documented the 35th anniversary of Casablanca Records. www.christianjohnwikane.com

Photo: Sekou Luke Studio

APOLLO LIVE WIRE: SHE'S A REBEL - BIOGRAPHIES



Joshie Jo Armstead, wrote one New York critic, “...is like a priceless work of art that stays tucked away in some private collection and becomes available for the public to gaze upon its splendor on but rare occasions.” Such applause has been the hallmark of this multifaceted lady’s career from the cotton fields of Yazoo City, Mississippi to the legendary

Cotton Club in New York.

Joshie started singing in church at the age of five. Her Mother the Reverend Evangelist Rosie Armstead would take her to churches throughout the State to sing. Classical training in high school earned her scholarships for her outstanding achievements as a soprano. High school was also where she earned the nick name “Joshie” due to her quickness and speed as an athlete. The name stuck and followed her to the stage. In 1961, with a tip from Joshie’s sister, Ike Turner knocked on her mother’s door looking for one more girl to complete his group the Ikettes. Joshie auditioned and got the job becoming a full fledged original member of the “The Ikettes” with The Ike & Tina Turner Revue. The Ikettes’ first recording “I’m Blue (The Gong Gong Song)” established them as one of the all-time favorites of girl groups.

After leaving the Ikettes, Joshie became part of New York’s fervent Brill Building scene where she met and partnered with Nick Ashford and Valerie Simpson. She continued to earn exceptional credits singing back-up for Diana Ross, Bob Dylan, James Brown, Quincy Jones, and Roberta Flack to name a few; co-writing songs with Ashford & Simpson for the great Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin, as well as owning her own publishing (Josteady Music Co.) and record company, Preacher Rose Records. Since the late-’60s, Joshie has always stressed the importance of maintaining ownership of her copyrights. Beyond singing, songwriting, and producing, Joshie also brought her talent to film and the Broadway stage, starring in Melvin Van Peebles’ “Don’t Play Us Cheap.” Most recently, Joshie’s song “I Feel An Urge Coming On” as recorded by Nick Waterhouse was licensed to the hit TV Show “Riverdale.”



Sarah Dash defines the word “legend.” As an award -winning vocalist, songwriter, and actress, Sarah is a unique force whose voice has touched millions of listeners around the world. From co-founding Patti LaBelle & the Bluebelles and making history as a powerful one third of the groundbreaking group Labelle

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to solo stardom she has blazed a trail in every facet of her remarkable career. This Grammy Hall of Fame inductee, who topped the international dance charts with the disco classic “Sinner Man,” has had her recordings as a solo artist covered by Dionne Warwick and sampled by Kanye West. She has also collaborated with everyone from Nile Rodgers to Sylvester to The Rolling Stones and served as the only female member of Keith Richard’s super-group – The X-Pensive Winos. She currently serves as the Mayoral-appointed Capital City Music Ambassador of her hometown, Trenton, NJ and serves as spokesperson for Mercer Street Friends’ Send Hunger Packing program which provides grocery items in take-home back packs to children experiencing food insecurity on weekends, when school-based meals are not available.



For nearly 60 years, **Martha Reeves** has reigned as one of the greatest stars to emerge from Motown. Selected to open and set the pace for that first legendary Motown Review of 1962, her list of evergreen hits includes: “Come & Get These Memories,” “Heat Wave,” “Nowhere to Run,” “I’m Ready for Love,” “Jimmy Mack,” and her signature, “Dancing in The Street.” Martha played the

Apollo numerous times between 1962 and the early 2000s. She was part of the first Motown Review to play here in December 1962. A 1966 poster featuring Martha & the Vandellas and the Marvelettes is a best-seller on Ebay. Shortly before both acts left Motown, Martha Reeves & the Vandellas and the Four Tops (who had backed Martha on “My Baby Loves Me”) enjoyed a sold-out week of performances. She was among the stars featured on the “Motown Returns to the Apollo” TV special in 1985. She and the Vandellas were part of the last Motown to play the Apollo in 1992. Martha received a special award from Black Women in Publishing on the Apollo Stage in 1995, recognizing her contributions as a writer for SOUL Newspaper and the publication of her best-selling autobiography, “Dancing in the Street: Confessions of a Motown Diva.” Named “Motown’s ultimate soul diva,” she remains in constant demand on casino, club, concert and festival stages around the world. Within the past few months, she and her sister Vandellas have played to sold out audiences in cities as diverse as Hamilton, Ontario; Amsterdam, Netherlands, and the Guinness Jazz Festival in Cork, Ireland. Reeves is a member of the Rock & Roll, Soul, Rhythm n’ Blues, Vocal Group and Alabama Music halls of fame. The former Detroit City Council representative continues to be an international ambassador for both the Motown label and Detroit, making sure that you “can’t forget the Motor City.”

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Apollo Theater Archives

All images from the Apollo Theater Archives. The Apollo Theater Archives documents both the historic and ongoing contributions of Harlem's legendary Apollo Theater to American culture through a unique collection of photographs, audio and video recordings, posters, business records, promotional materials, and other materials. These materials are currently in the process of being identified, catalogued, digitized, and preserved, in order to enrich the theater's programming and educational endeavors, increase awareness of the Apollo's legacy, and eventually to make them accessible to fans and researchers.

Above Images: 1. *The Charmettes* 2. *The Crystals* 3. *The Gypsies*
4. *The Sandpebbles* 5. *The Raelets* 6. *Honey & The Bees*

Front Cover: Top Left Image - *Patti Labelle & the Blue Bells*, Bottom Left Image - *Martha and the Vandellas* (Courtesy of the Apollo Theater Archives); Right Image - *The Ikettes* (Courtesy of Joshie Jo Armstead)

ABOUT THE APOLLO THEATER

The Apollo is a national treasure that has had significant impact on the development of American culture and its popularity around the world. Since introducing the first Amateur Night contests in 1934, the Apollo Theater has played a major role in cultivating artists and in the emergence of innovative musical genres including jazz, swing, bebop, R&B, gospel, blues, soul, and hip-hop. Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Billie Holiday, Sammy Davis, Jr., James Brown, Michael Jackson, Bill Cosby, Gladys Knight, Luther Vandross, D'Angelo, Lauryn Hill, and countless others began their road to stardom on the Apollo's stage. Based on its cultural significance and architecture, the Apollo Theater received state and city landmark designation in 1983 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. www.apollotheater.org

APOLLO EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Apollo Theater Education Program extends the Apollo's commitment to enhancing the life of the community. The Education Program focuses on four distinct areas of learning and engagement: residencies, workshops and tours for schools; curriculum materials aligned to state and national learning standards and study guides derived from the Theater's history; career development for teens and adults through the Apollo Theater Academy; and discussions and lectures for the public that highlight the history of the Apollo and its impact on American art, culture and entertainment.

LIVE WIRE

Produced by the Apollo Theater Education Program, *Apollo Live Wire* is a discussion series that focuses on the arts, culture, entertainment and other topics pertinent to the legacy of the Apollo Theater.



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Education at the Apollo Theater



Podcasts of Career Panels and Live Wire: mixcloud.com/ApolloEd/

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