

APOLLO

EDUCATION



**APOLLO THEATER
WALK OF FAME LEGEND**

**GLADYS KNIGHT
AND THE PIPS**

GLADYS KNIGHT & THE PIPS



In the summer of 1952, eight year old Gladys Knight, her brother Merald “Bubba” Knight, and their cousin William Guest were gathered for a party at the Knight’s home in Atlanta, Georgia. It was Bubba’s tenth birthday. Toward the end of the evening’s festivities, a talent show broke out. Gladys, Bubba, William, and their older sisters, Brenda Knight and Eleanor Guest, decided to form a singing group.

Everyone was so impressed with their performance; the young singers were encouraged to pursue their musical talents further. Thanks to a family coming together through song, the musical group which became known as “The Pips” was born.

“Pip” was the nickname of another family member, James Woods, who happened to be connected to several music venues in Atlanta. Once he learned his younger cousins had formed a singing group, he became their manager and organized shows for them around town. The group’s first big break came when they won a talent contest and were booked for two weeks in Atlanta’s legendary Royal Peacock Club.

Word spread quickly about the hot young act and The Pips started to receive offers to record and perform around the country. Barely even teenagers at the time, they toured the **Chitlin’ Circuit** opening for acts like Sam Cooke and Jackie Wilson. Not everyone could commit to life on the road, and Brenda and Eleanor left The Pips to attend college. In their place, another cousin, Edward Patten, stepped in and joined the group.

BIRTHDATES

Gladys Knight

May 28, 1944

Merald “Bubba” Knight Jr.

September 4, 1942

William Guest

June 2, 1941

Edward Patten

August 27, 1939

With the change in lineup, The Pips became three boys and one girl. Gladys became lead singer while the boys danced and sang backup vocals. With a new group name, “Gladys Knight and The Pips,” they recorded their first hit song in 1961, entitled “Every Beat Of My Heart.” That same year, they traveled to New York City to perform for the first time at the world famous Apollo Theater.

Gladys Knight and The Pips quickly became an audience favorite at the Apollo. They performed as many as four shows a night and learned about show business from some of the great entertainers who came before. It was at the Apollo, that legendary tap dancer Cholly “Pops” Atkins helped develop The



Pips' **choreography**. It was also at the Apollo, where Motown Records founder Berry Gordy first saw Gladys Knight and The Pips perform in 1966. Later that year, he convinced the group to move to Detroit and become part of a new and exciting music wave sweeping the country called the "[Motown Sound](#)."

At Motown, Gladys Knight and The Pips found success with hits like "[I Heard It Through The Grapevine](#)", "[Nitty Gritty](#)", and "[Friendship Train](#)". In 1973, they began recording on Buddah Records, where they landed even more hit songs, including "[Midnight Train To Georgia](#)" and the soundtrack to the movie "Claudine".

DO NOW

The Pips were famous for their signature dance style. Try choreographing some dance steps of your own to your favorite song. Then with your friends, take turns sharing your signature moves, as if you are a dancer on [Soul Train](#)!

Gladys Knight, Bubba Knight, William Guest, and Edward Patten continued to record and tour together as a group until 1989. In a career that spanned over 30 years, their brand of Soul and R&B music, tight vocal harmonies, and elegant choreography influenced generations of singers and dancers. Gladys Knight and The Pips' musical legacy will forever live "[On and On](#)" through their records, inspiring future stars to pursue their talents and dreams.

Gladys Knight and The Pips were inducted into the Apollo Walk of Fame in 2006.

DID YOU KNOW?

On April 29, 1952, seven year old Gladys Knight appeared on the nationally televised Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour. She won the contest singing Nat King Cole's "Too Young" in front of 5,000 people at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Gladys singing "[Too Young](#)" on Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour

In 1971, Gladys Knight and The Pips appeared on the first episode of the popular television program, [Soul Train](#). Soul Train was a dance and variety show, and like the Apollo, featured some of the top performers of the day.

Gladys Knight and The Pips' most popular hit, "[Midnight Train To Georgia](#)," was originally titled "Midnight Plane To Houston."



WORDS TO KNOW

Chitlin' Circuit

A route of performance venues that stretched from the Southeast United States, up the East Coast, and into the Midwest. Catering to African American performers, many musicians got their start in the music industry playing the clubs and theaters of the Chitlin' Circuit, which included the Apollo Theater.

Noted theaters on the Chitlin' Circuit:

- Royal Peacock in Atlanta
- Carver Theatre in Birmingham, Alabama
- The Cotton Club, Small's Paradise and the Apollo Theater in New York City
- Robert's Show Lounge, Club DeLisa and the Regal Theatre in Chicago
- The Howard Theatre in Washington, D.C.
- The Uptown Theatre in Philadelphia
- The Royal Theatre in Baltimore
- The Fox Theatre in Detroit
- The Victory Grill in Austin, Texas
- The Hippodrome Theatre in Richmond, Virginia
- The Ritz Theatre in Jacksonville, Florida
- The Madame C. J. Walker Theatre in Indianapolis

Choreography

Is the order of steps and movements in a dance routine, the movements that are done by dancers in a performance.

A **Choreographer** is one who designs dance routines and decides how dancers will move artistically and expressively in a performance.

Motown Sound

Founded by Berry Gordy in Detroit in 1959, Motown Records had a crisp, clean, pop sound all its own. Artists like Smokey Robinson and The Miracles, Diana Ross and The Supremes, and "Little" Stevie Wonder helped put Motown on the map in the 1960s.

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Photo of Gladys Knight and the Pips performing on the television program Soul Train. Wikipedia.

Designed by
Van Gennep Design

Leadership support for education programs from:



The Ronald O. Perelman Family Foundation

Generous support from Apollo EmpowerHer, Conscious Kids Inc., Con Edison, Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, Insperty, The Reginald F. Lewis Foundation, Ellis L. Phillips Foundation, Pinkerton Foundation, and public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.