Between Father and Son: Music and Creativity Across the Generations

A Conversation Between Lamont Dozier and Beau Dozier

Moderated by Josh Kun

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Between Father and Son: Music and Creativity Across the Generations

Larry Gross: I’d like to welcome you all to the Annenberg School. I’m Larry Gross. I’m the director of the School of Communication. That gives me the right to open this event, which is an honor and a pleasure. This event, as you can see, has many sponsors, because it’s such an impressive event that lots of people wanted to claim authorship.

I want to particularly note, besides the Annenberg School where you’re sitting, the Popular Music Project, which is a new endeavor of the Norman Lear Center, which is also part of the Annenberg School and is the brainchild of one of our newest, but already most important faculty members who will be taking over to moderate this event in a minute.

I’m particularly pleased, as I think you all will be, by this event bringing together parents and children. Part of this is the soundtrack of my childhood and it may be the soundtrack of some of the younger folk’s childhoods here as well. This is a terrific opportunity to make clear that communication is more than the news, it’s more than television, it’s more than media. It’s the cultural environment that we all live in.

And it was for that reason that I was delighted, as were my colleagues, when we recruited last year a new member of our faculty, Josh Kun, who is perfectly suited to study, research, teach and share with us the importance of sound and music as a shaper of culture. I won’t take any more time from this terrific event, but hand it over to Josh now.

Josh Kun: I want to thank everybody for coming. Glad it was something positive and not negative. When I was growing up, one of my favorite songs was a tune called “Levi Stubbs Tears” and it was written by a young British protest singer named, Billy Bragg. I don’t know if people still listen to Billy Bragg or know about Billy Bragg. But it had a line in the song that went like this, and I’m going to try doing it with Billy Bragg’s accent, which is pretty thick.

And it went like this: [in heavy, British working-class accent] “Holland and Holland and Lamont Dozier too, are here to make it all okay with you.”

Now, for years, I admit that I had no idea what Billy Bragg was saying. But with time and some wisdom, I realized that “Lamont Dozier” was Lamont Dozier and that Levi Stubbs, who had tears in his eyes, was in fact the singer from the Four Tops and that he was singing about the legacy of Motown.

But what stuck with me, even though I didn’t quite understand what he was singing about, was that Bragg was talking about popular music’s greatest power, the power to heal us, to make our lives better, to make us happy.
after a long day’s work, to soothe us after a bad breakup. That’s what pop songs really are for, to let us heal from our pain, to let us celebrate our joys. But most importantly, we do all that through the emotions of other people, through the lyrics and lives and words and music of someone else’s songs. And if they’re good songs, they arrive like kind of musical balms, in that they are like surprise gifts from some magical person called a songwriter, a magical person called a musician, who pulls melodies and words and harmonies, seemingly from straight out of the air and in doing so, changes our lives forever without us knowing about it at first.

They are, as Billy Bragg very wisely said in that song, here to make everything okay for us. That’s one of the jobs of a great pop song, to make it okay.

So today we’re going to be celebrating that art, that power. And I’m beyond thrilled and beyond honored that we have Lamont Dozier and also Beau Dozier here with us today. We’re going to have to work on a British pronunciation of Beau Dozier that works really well. Beau, Lamont’s son, I really think does represent the next generation of where this art of making things okay is going next.

Born and raised in Detroit, where he was fed a steady diet of gospel and classical music, Lamont is best known as part of the famous Holland-Dozier-Holland songwriting team, who are responsible for some of this country’s most famous and most enduring popular songs. There would be no Motown sound without Lamont. Without Lamont, artists like the Supremes and the Four Tops and Martha Reeves and Marvin Gaye would not be the artists that we know them as today.

Indeed, I really think it’s impossible to even think about what 20th century American pop music would have sounded like without our guest today. He remains one of the most popular, most recognized, most covered songwriters in the world. In 1990, he and the Holland Brothers were finally inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and with good reason. Lamont is behind over 54 number one hits. In the 1963 to 1967 four-year period alone, he was behind 25 Top 10 pop records, 12 of which reached the number one spot. In addition, they wrote 12 other songs that made the Top 10 on the rhythm and blues charts, making a total of 37 in that one period.

He’s been responsible for a record-setting string of million-selling songs, everything from – and hopefully you recognize some of these tunes –

[Music plays]

[“Where Did Our Love Go?” by The Supremes]
You can sing along.

[“You Keep Me Hangin’ On” by The Supremes]

Or one of the best descriptions of what love is when it hits us:

[“Heat Wave” by Martha and the Vandellas]

Or

[“How Sweet It Is To Be Loved By You” by Marvin Gaye]

Or even more recently, his work with Phil Collins on this song:

[“Two Hearts” by Phil Collins]

I think the true test of a song’s greatness is its ability to endure cover versions and Lamont’s legacy has been covered by everyone from – I don’t think there’s a single living artist who can claim this – everyone from the hardcore Long Beach Mexican Ranchera Queen, Jenni Rivera, to ’80s new wave king, Soft Cell, to James Taylor, The Who, and I’ll just list off a few other minor artists like the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Barbara Streisand, Eric Clapton, Michael Jackson, and Rod Stewart. And if people listen to the radio these days, the Mark Ronson cover of “Stop Me,” the Smith’s song, actually segues into a Lamont tune at the end. It’s on the radio right now. It’s currently one of the few videos MTV is actually playing and it includes a bit of “Keep Me Hanging On” at the very end.

But it’s not all about the Motown days with Lamont and for us today. Holland-Dozier-Holland started their own labels Invictus and Hot Wax and then Lamont emerged as a solo artist and is still to this day singing and writing and producing. His solo albums from the 1970s are among the most sampled within the world of hip hop by everyone from Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac, to Three 6 Mafia, Mary J. Blige, Nas, Usher and even Linkin Park. That one I don’t know, but I want to hear that one, Lamont.

And as well, Lamont’s been doing some writing with his son, Beau. I’m really thrilled that Beau is here, because as a producer and writer and performer, Beau is part of a new generation of R&B and hip hop and pop producers who are blurring the boundaries between all of these categories, hip hop, pop and R&B. He’s worked with the likes of B2K, which some people might know – there’s some resistance to B2K; I had my B2K moves ready, but Beau told me not to do them – as well as artists like Avant. Clearly he’s inherited the gift of “love storyteller.”
There’s a long list of artists that Beau has worked with as well: Boyz II Men, 3OW, Backstreet Boys, and most notably perhaps, JoJo and Joss Stone. In fact, we’ll get at that; we’ll hear that one in a second. And if you remember Joss Stone’s GAP ads from a little bit back, that was all Beau’s work on those songs. I know his family is really proud of him.

I’m really happy that he’s here and I’m thrilled that both of you are here to have this conversation. Please welcome Lamont and Beau Dozier.

[Audience applauds.]

Lamont Dozier: Hello.

Josh Kun: You on? We got you. You guys hear Lamont okay? Beau?

Beau Dozier: Yes, I think so.

Josh Kun: Okay, good. So first off, first of all, thank you both.

Lamont Dozier: My pleasure.

Josh Kun: It’s really wonderful to have you here. What was it like growing up in this household?

Lamont Dozier: I guess it was sort of a lot of confusion, in one sense. I think Beau could probably tell you more. He was always looking at – I remember him watching all of the people that would come over, the musicians, Phil Collins or whoever – and Beau would be watching their feet. I guess he was about three years old. He’d just be on the floor watching their feet! And I said, what are you looking at? He says, their feet. As if the music was coming out of their feet. So we eventually got him a set of drums when he was about five years old and you know what? He got on those drums first time, man, and started playing this stuff. I said, Barbara, you better come and listen to this.

But then later I got it that he was really trying to get into the feeling of it. Phil Collins would be playing drums in the living room and he’d just be watching his feet. So we eventually got him a set of drums when he was about five years old and you know what? He got on those drums first time, man, and started playing this stuff. I said, Whoa! And then I said, Barbara, you ought to come and hear this.

And so after the drums, he came home one day and said, Dad, what is this I’m hearing? I hear this song in my head and it sounds familiar, but I don’t know. He sat down and started playing a little bit of “Clair de Lune.” He just heard it from the car radio. He started playing this thing, I said, Barbara, you better come and listen to
this! He had just heard it one time, a little bit of it and started playing. I said I think we’ve got somebody with a gift in this house.

**Josh Kun:** You’re the kind of kid I hated when I was little. I couldn’t play anything.

**Beau Dozier:** I really couldn’t play that well either, but I could play by ear. I never could play like how I wanted. There were kids who were little prodigies and they would play and you’d go Wow! I can still only play and you know, doodle around or whatever.

**Josh Kun:** So what are some of the big memories for you growing up? Were there moments when you realized, Wow! These people are in my house or I’m hearing this song or I’m hearing this thing happening and I want to do that?

**Beau Dozier:** I remember when Phil Collins was in the house, because I used to love Phil Collins. I loved Darryl Hall and John Oates, too. But I loved Phil Collins’s voice and so I think when my dad started working with Phil and he was in the house, I was like, Oh man! you know? But before that, I really didn’t think anything was abnormal. It was, oh, there’s a bunch of guys in the house and they would go off and sometimes Dad would take me into the studio. I would go and play on their instruments and try not to break the stuff. It was fun, though.

**Josh Kun:** So often parents don’t want their children to go into the same field that they’re in. Did you ever think, I hope he doesn’t become a musician?

**Lamont Dozier:** No, I really felt that if he had the gift or the calling, I was not going to discourage that. Because I don’t think I ever had what you’d call the gift or the calling. I just sort of worked at it and worked.

When I was a little kid about nine-years-old, I had a little red wagon. Back east in Detroit. And I used to go to the A&P and ask people to help them to their car, you know, help take their groceries to the car for a tip. And every dime I got, I would go and – I think records were about a quarter then, some of the 45s or something like that – I would get records and I would just listen to them and listen to them.

Either I would do that or I would go to the Rialto Theater, which was right up the street from where I lived, and I would sit there and watch these musicals of the ‘50s over and over. *My Fair Lady.* Man, I must have seen that thing 30,000 times or something, you know. I’d sit up right in the front row. You know, some kids like to sit in the front row. Here I am, nine or 10-years-old, just watching *My Fair Lady.* Just watching. And it made me feel like I was in the movie with the people, you know, and loving it.
But what it did, really, was give me such a charge. I knew that I wanted to be somehow or other in the entertainment field, music or movies. So with my records and my memories of these movies, I sort of forged out a career. I started doing this on the piano and –

Josh Kun: You started very young as well, around 10 or so, no?

Lamont Dozier: Yes. My aunt was a big influence on me. She was taking lessons and the music teacher, Mr. Shaw, was rough. She was in there playing that piano. My grandmother called me and said, Lamont, you want to take piano lessons? Then I hear something, Pow! He had this stick. Every time she hit a wrong note, Whack! Lamont, you want to take some lessons? I said, No thank you! I’d take off running.

Josh Kun: Where’s my red wagon?

Lamont Dozier: Yes, get my red wagon and run away! So I didn’t take the lessons, never took any lessons, but I just really learned to play by ear and listen, just listen and play by ear, listen to everything I could get my hands on, music, films and stuff like that. What I’m trying to say is music was the biggest thing in our house. Living with my grandmother, we used to play music, too, so it was always around.

And my grandmother told me to go and join the church, so I did and I had to go to choir rehearsals on Thursdays and be there every Sunday morning. So all of that singing and all that music just filled me and filled our house and really got me motivated into wanting to be somebody in the music business or entertainment field.

Josh Kun: So Beau, did that approach – of music from church and from film and many different influences when you were growing up – get filtered down to you or were you off on your own path, like you said, with Hall and Oates? Was there ever a moment when you were listening to stuff and your dad said something like, what is that? I’m not having that music!

Beau Dozier: No, not at all. I used to have girls come to the house – I had a little Fisher-Price record player and I would bring girls over and shut the door and we’d listen to records. Honestly, I always wanted to do it. I wanted to be Darryl Hall. I wanted blonde hair, that’s what I wanted.

Josh Kun: Did anyone ever want to be Oates?

Beau Dozier: I don’t think so. I don’t know. But I don’t think so.
Josh Kun: He didn’t seem like he was a star. I felt so bad for him always. What about the Motown stuff that you heard? Was that a big influence on the way you thought about songs?

Beau Dozier: Well, the thing is, yes and no. When I was growing up, my dad had a bunch of solo records. I remember he had a song called “Fly Away Little Bird” and I used to put it on and start crying. I was three-years-old.

Lamont Dozier: Yes, he was just crying and crying.

Beau Dozier: I don’t know what it was.

Lamont Dozier: I said, what’s wrong, Beau? And he said, oh, it sounds so pretty. He’d sit there on the floor and just play it again and again. So he’s just crying, and I said, it sounds so pretty. You want me to stop? He goes, no, just play it again.

[Audience laughs.]

Beau Dozier: Yes, I was more into the stuff from his solo records. I didn’t really get influenced by the Motown stuff until I think we were at a BMI awards one night. He gets a BMI award basically every single time. And then “Baby, I Need Your Loving” comes on and I’m like, Wow, that’s a beautiful record. There’s something about the strings in it. It’s just such a rich feeling and I listen to it all the time and it’s one of my favorite records. And that’s great.

Then I started listening to all that stuff and I thought, Wow! this is crazy. One day I was watching a skateboard movie – I wanted to skateboard and I was never really good at it. The movie was called Gleaming the Cube, with Christian Slater, and he’s hiding in the backseat of a car while a Korean dude’s getting killed. And they’re playing a Korean version of “Same Old Song” and that was crazy! When they’re translating his records into all these other languages, I thought, okay, maybe I’ll do his thing.

Josh Kun: But as Beau started writing and producing and doing his own thing, the pop musical landscape obviously was quite different than it was when you started. Are there things about his writing and his contemporaries that have actually started to influence you or that have affected you in some way?
Lamont Dozier: Yes, it has. You know, when he first started bringing home some of his rap friends, I said, what in the world? A lot of people say I’m from the old school. So when he and his friends were talking and rapping, I was trying to figure out what they were saying: What is this mess? You know? And he said, Dad, you have to understand. This is the new thing. I said, the new what? I was really totally down on it.

And he kept talking and talking to me about it. I still said in five years this crap is going to be out of here.

Beau Dozier: You know, Debbie Gibson said that one time. I remember I got in trouble when my friend Walter and I made a dirty record. We were into 2 Live Crew and, yes, we made a 3 Live Crew record. We made a dirty record on my little home studio. I got grounded.

Josh Kun: Tell me it wasn’t on the Fisher-Price.

Beau Dozier: No, it wasn’t on the Fisher-Price. It was on a reel to reel eight-track. Made a dirty record and got in trouble and I was grounded for two weeks. And I remember we were swimming in the pool and Dad was working with Debbie Gibson and I remember she said that rap stuff is here today, gone tomorrow. And I was like, okay. It was interesting.

Josh Kun: I like that in your household you’d get in trouble for making dirty rap records.

Beau Dozier: It was a pretty dirty record. It was pretty vulgar.

Lamont Dozier: But then all of a sudden, things started to change and as people started to put it down, the rappers were smart enough to change some of the lyric content, get away from all of the negative talking about where they live. Because a lot of kids started to buy this thing and it just took off. And I thought, it’s been 10 years and this stuff is still hanging on.

Beau Dozier: Oh, yes.

Lamont Dozier: Then all of a sudden here it is, it’s been like what –?

Beau Dozier: Forever.

Lamont Dozier: 25 years almost.

Beau Dozier: Forever.

Lamont Dozier: And it’s still here. It reminded me of what they said about rock
and roll back in the ‘50s. I remember seeing Richard Rodgers. I loved Richard Rodgers. It hurt me bad when he said, what is this crap? You know what I mean? He was doing an interview. Now I love Richard Rodgers, right? And when he said that, I was having a lot of success at the time at Motown. And they just happened to be talking about one of the Motown songs and he said something about this mess and dah, dah, dah. He really cut me to the quick. I really loved this guy. But sure enough, he said the same thing I said, what is this stuff? This stuff will be out of here in five years. Almost identical to the words I said. And the stuff lasted. It’s still going strong, Motown stuff.

Beau Dozier: They incorporated, like with the rap stuff, a lot of pop elements in their songs.

Lamont Dozier: Right.

Beau Dozier: It started becoming very radio.

Lamont Dozier: That’s what I was going to say.

Beau Dozier: And I think with any type of music, when you try to get rid of it, it only makes the audience rebel and go hard for it. They tried to do it with rap. There was a point in time, even four or five years ago, when KISS-FM wouldn’t play rap. There’d be a rap bridge and they would take the rap bridge out! They wouldn’t play rap. Until rap songs started being number one. It’s like, dude, you guys kind of have to play it.

Lamont Dozier: Yes.

Beau Dozier: It’s your thing, you know: number one songs.

Lamont Dozier: MTV wouldn’t play it when it first came out.

Beau Dozier: Yes, MTV was like –

Lamont Dozier: And now that’s all you hear on MTV.

Beau Dozier: But then as soon as MTV was done with their little anti-rap campaign, they were the first ones to have Yo! MTV Raps. It’s crazy.

Josh Kun: So let’s talk a little bit technically about the process of songwriting. Because one of the big debates about 1960s and 1970s era pop songs versus pop songs today – depending on where you sit – is that people don’t know how to write pop songs anymore. Even though I actually disagree with that, I will say, you’re hard pressed to find – well, if you listen to the
songs you wrote, particularly in that late ’60s period, those are some of the most complex and sophisticated pop songs I’ve ever heard. I don’t think anyone since can touch those.

But obviously now, in terms of production, writing a pop song is so different than it was. So I want to know – maybe if we could start with Lamont – how do songs happen for you? How do you actually put them together? And then Beau, to have you talk about that as well.

Lamont Dozier: You know, I’m really sort of a gushy-mushy type of guy, a love song type of guy. And I’m a crybaby. So I can sit playing and crying to my – that’s probably where he got it from.

Josh Kun: That’s right. Beau’s like, “Thanks, Dad.”

Lamont Dozier: And I feel, if I play a chord – I don’t read music, first of all; it’s all strictly by ear – so if I play some chords or something that feels good or that hits me here, the point where it’s just so intense and it just takes over my emotions, you know, then that’s the song that I’ll finish. And a song as simple as “Where Did Our Love Go,” my first number one hit by the Supremes, had that kind of a mood in it.

And I was [Singing] Baby, baby, baby. Of course you have to have some background: There was snow up to here in Detroit. It was cold and my girlfriend had dumped me for my best friend and, you know, all the proppings that help write the song. I’m sitting there, where did our love go? Oh, don’t you want me? I’m crying and the girl is gone and the snow is piled up, I can’t get out of the house. And here it comes, that melody and that feeling and it just takes over everything.

So the next day I go back to the studio and I said, guys, I think I got one. I think I got the quintessential number one hit. I was just talking. But sure enough, that’s what it was. We tried to do it with the Marvelettes. The Marvelettes were big. They had, “Please Mr. Postman.” But they were kind of cocky, since they had this big hit. So when I gave them this song, I said I think this song is perfect for you. Nuh-uh, honey, we a’int doing no slop like that.

I was shocked. I had already gone in and cut the track. And the deal was that if you cut a track, you’ve got to make sure somebody records this thing or sing it or else you don’t get paid for the track. I said, oh Lord, this girl won’t do the song. So I looked at the totem pole, you know, the roster totem pole and the lowest group on the totem pole was the Supremes. So I figured that they couldn’t refuse this. So I thought this is how I’ll get out of this. I’ll get them in here to do this song and I don’t have to pay for it. It won’t be stuck on me.
So, sure enough, they came in. And what Gladys Horton did, she went around and told the girls, they got a song they trying to pedal on you, don’t you go for it, or else y’all girls will never have anything if you go for this. So then I told the Supremes, I got this song, it’s going to be the biggest smash of your career. Nuh-uh, we a’int going for that! Baby, we heard about that ugly song! And I said, Oh, my God. But then Eddie Brown and I, talked to them and convinced them that this is the song they need. And they did the song and sure enough, it was a 4-million seller and the first of 12 consecutive number-ones for them and everybody knows the story of the Supremes becoming huge.

Josh Kun: And so do you start at the piano?

Lamont Dozier: Yes, I start at the piano. It just usually depends on the feeling of the song. I start with my left hand. I love starting with a base line, you know, like “Sugar pie, honey bunch,” you know, something like that for the Four Tops. And I get the feeling and I’ll stomp. They used to call me the Stomper, my landlord. “Hey Stomper, Stomper, stop that stomping!” You know what I mean? This is before the stuff was beginning to take off and I’m just stomping and she was screaming at us. Hit the broom on the ceiling.

Josh Kun: I actually want to talk about that song. But before, can we hear – Jim, if you’re back there, can we hear track 10, really quick, just the beginning? Everyone know this song?

[“Like a Virgin” by Madonna plays.]

Lamont Dozier: Oh, okay. You know what, that’s the first time. Somebody else was talking to me about this song.

Josh Kun: I heard recently –

Lamont Dozier: I said, what are you talking about? You know, the Madonna, “Like a Virgin?”

Josh Kun: Yes.

Lamont Dozier: You know, after all these years, I just now heard what she was talking about! Wow!
Josh Kun: I recently read in –

Lamont Dozier: So they owe me some money!

Josh Kun: I recently saw an interview with the two songwriters who wrote “Like a Virgin” and the one who did the music said he was walking to the studio and a car drove by playing “Sugar Pie, Honey Bunch.” When he got to the piano, he said, he just inverted the opening bass line and there was the song.

Lamont Dozier: Wow! God! You know, I don’t think I’d get much now. The statute of limitations is – they won’t pay me.

Josh Kun: Well you know, Madonna is always reinventing herself, so maybe the contracts keep getting reinvented. You never know.

Lamont Dozier: You know, that’s something though.

Josh Kun: How did that song get written? What’s the history of that song?

Lamont Dozier: “Sugar Pie, Honey Bunch?”

Josh Kun: Yes.

Lamont Dozier: Oh, I guess it started with my grandfather. First of all, my grandmother had this home beauty shop. She was always into the kids, the grandkids, to be entrepreneurs, to have your own business, you know.

So she had a little home beauty shop. I was out there one day, washing my red wagon and getting ready to go. And my grandfather, as my grandmother’s customers were coming in to have their hair done, he would be sitting out in the garden, sort of a flirt with the women, how you do, sugar pie? How you doing this evening? Using the old colloquiums of the South. That’s the way he talked. How you doing, sugar pie? And that’s what he would say to the women as they came in there. And I was washing my wagon and just watching him, flirting and stuff with these women as they came in to get their hair done.

That stayed with me here 20 years later, I guess. And I was sitting at the piano… [Singing] “Sugar pie, honey bunch”… thinking about him, how he used to talk. Oh, boy. Your daddy’s flirting with these women.

Josh Kun: The best songs come from these stories.

Lamont Dozier: From those stories.

Josh Kun: Earlier today you were telling what is, I guess by now, within the Lamont history, the great story of “Stop In The Name of Love,” which, just for the sake of retelling it, you should share with the people, because it’s a good one.
Lamont Dozier: Yes. I got caught doing wrong. I’ll put it that way. My girlfriend caught me cheating. And she tracked me down –

Josh Kun: And you wonder why he’s got the Fisher-Price turntable and that dirty rap.

Lamont Dozier: She tracked me down, because somebody had told her or snitched – I thought I saw him down at so and so motel – and she followed me down there and was banging on the door. I said, Oh, my God, who’s this? What is that? Sure enough, I looked out the side window, and I said, Oh, girl, you got to go quick! So I led her to the back door of the place.

And my girlfriend was still banging and the door wasn’t that sturdy and Bang! she came in. What’s going on, where is she!? She was babbling and crying. I was trying to stop this fiasco that had happened to me. And I said, Oh, sweetheart, what are you talking about? Nobody’s here. I was feeling bad, I had a headache. I came here to rest and dah, dah, dah. And I said, please, come on now, stop in the name of love! Please! And she said, stop in the name of love? That ain’t funny to me! And I said, wait, didn’t you hear that cash register?

Because I was thinking. I thought about what I said – cash register, stop in the name of love. And that whole theme came from stop, look and listen, what you told the kids when you cross the street: Stop, look and listen. Stop in the name of love equals number one record for the Supremes. I took it to the guys and said hey, I think I’ve got another one.

Josh Kun: That’s great.

Lamont Dozier: I’ve got a great title and idea. Brian Holland just happened to be at the piano…he was just playing…and I said, man, you know that title I told you I have, stop in the name of love? He said, yes. And that’s how a lot of those ideas came about.

Josh Kun: That’s so different in many ways from, particularly within hip hop and R&B these days and in pop, the way songs are written. We’ve talked a lot before about the impact of sampling and using Pro Tools and using available materials in one form or another. I actually want to play the JoJo track really quick, as a – this is a track you produced, right?

Beau Dozier: Right.

Josh Kun: It’s called “Anything.” This is track eight. You might recognize the sample in here.
A melody will come into your head. It usually starts like that. And I’ll get on my cell phone and call my voicemail and start singing the melody into the phone.

You don’t really write these things. Nobody really does. You’re kind of like an antennae and it comes through you.

— Beau Dozier

“Anything” plays. Sample is from “Africa” by Toto

Beau, what’s the process here of putting together this song or songs like it that you work on?

Beau Dozier: Songs that involve samples?

Josh Kun: Yes and just in terms of or in contrast to what your dad just described, sitting at a piano and –

Beau Dozier: Really, it depends on who you’re working with. As a matter of fact, I had heard that record, not “Africa,” but I knew the sample. I always had it in my head, but I never knew who did it. I wanted to use it. And my friend, Justin, came over and said sample one of these and he played it. I was like, Wow! I’ve been trying to sample this for three or four years and do the record.

Other times you’ll sit at the piano and come up with something like a chord progression and a melody. Or a lot of times for me, I’ll be driving – talk about that another time – you’ll be driving and a melody will come into your head. It usually starts like that. And I’ll get on my cell phone and call my voicemail and start singing the melody into the phone. Then when I get home, I listen to my messages and play the melody, putting chords around it if it comes around. Or sometimes I sit in the studio and make tracks all day long and then a writer or an artist will come over and say, I like that one. Okay, cool, get out. And then we’ll write something real quick on the spot.

I feel like the songs that are real are the ones where the melody comes and you just hear this thing; that’s when you really are accidentally connected to this thing. Because you don’t really write these things. Nobody really does. You’re kind of like an antennae and it comes through you. When you are writing these songs – I mean, you start putting something down and you do what makes sense to that track. But then you have that thing just kind of hit you and you’re like, Oh, man!

We went to the Deepak Chopra Center in La Jolla and I had no studio, no computer, no anything and I wrote this whole ballad. I kept hearing this song, the whole thing. I heard the bass line, I heard what the piano was doing, I heard what the strings were doing, the chorus – everything and I sang the whole thing into my voicemail. I get home and I have 30 voicemails and it’s all this song! I go home and have the demo singer come over and demo it and we put it all together.

Josh Kun: So the two of you have collaborated on a handful of songs now, right?

Beau Dozier: Yes, a few songs.

Josh Kun: What was that process like? Any battles?

Lamont Dozier: Well, we did a thing a year and a half ago or so, for Joss Stone,
“Spoiled.” When they asked me to come up with something for Joss Stone, I said, well, how old is she? She’s 15 to 16-years-old. You can’t make the song too suggestive. She’s only 16. So you have to be very careful about what you give a young girl like that to sing. So I said, 16, what can I think about, what would I give a 16-year old girl? Right then, my daughter came walking in the room, giving orders to the household about what she don’t want and she don’t like. And I said, there it is:

Josh Kun: Where is Desiree?

[Lamont’s daughter Desiree waves from the audience.]

Lamont Dozier: Spoiled.

Josh Kun: Everyone’s looking for you. Wow.

Lamont Dozier: That’s what hit me. I said, there it is, there’s the title, “Spoiled.” And sure enough, I started playing, got a little hook on the piano, that’s “Spoiled” and I brought it over to Beau in his studio at his house. We got to fooling around with it and Joss showed up and we started playing it and that’s how the piece is there. He jumped on the verse and then did a bridge and then we started giving Joss the melody. And it fit perfect for her.

Beau Dozier: Yes, we wanted to do it like Sam Cooke. We were saying so many songs these days sound so programmed. This is what your verse sounds like and this is what your chorus sounds like and then it goes back to that section. So I thought what if we have this hook, what if we have the first verse sound like this and then go into the second verse. I said, we’re going somewhere else. Let’s break that standard. And it was kind of cool.

Josh Kun: Let’s hear a little bit of it. Jim, this is track 11. This is the song they wrote together.

[“Spoiled” by Joss Stone plays.]

Too bad she can’t sing, right? I mean, beautiful, beautiful.

So I thought maybe we should open it up to the audience, get some questions. I’ve got plenty more, but I’d love to hear what people out in the crowd have to say. Yes? Oh, I’m sorry – there are microphones on both sides; the easiest I think might be to come up to the mic. If not, shout if you can’t get over there.

Unidentified Audience Member: As you were talking, I was thinking about the documentary, Standing in the Shadows of Motown, which I just found fascinating and the whole idea of where the musicians came from.
And I’m interested in the juxtaposition of what the musicianship is like now, compared to back then, because it’s so different. So, I’d love to hear both perspectives on the musician side of it.

**Beau Dozier:** I feel like it really depends on the project that you’re working on, because sometimes you get in with a band and you want it to be organic. You get a bunch of players together and you chart out your song and jam like they used to do back then.

Sometimes there’s one guy sitting at a computer that has all these sample libraries and everything. But look at Amy Winehouse. She can go in and get that whole sound, with the exact same technique like it’s always been. It stays around. It just really depends on who the artist is.

**Josh Kun:** What’s interesting is one of the hottest albums in the country right now is the one I mentioned a little earlier, Mark Ronson’s album called *[Version]*. And the whole record is really an homage to the 1960s Motown and late ’60s-’70s Stax sound, with a live band, real organic, big horns. There seems to be a return in the whole Amy Winehouse record, and Sharon Jones – it seems like everybody, even within hip hop and R&B communities who are used to working with Pro Tools and sample libraries, is throwing it out the window and trying to get back to the live sound.

**Beau Dozier:** Right. Yes. Some of these artists won’t let you use Pro Tools, won’t even let you record on Pro Tools.

**Josh Kun:** To get back to the authentics.

**Lamont Dozier:** Yes.

**Beau Dozier:** It’s cool and kind of annoying sometimes though, too. Not mentioning any names, but there is one particular artist who would not let us record with Pro Tools and so we’d have to stripe a brand new tape and keep putting these tapes on a two-inch reel, over and over and over. He said, I don’t like the sound with Pro Tools. I’m like, dude, you’re not going to be able to tell the difference. And you sit there and forget how much studio time you actually waste rewinding the tape.

**Josh Kun:** And your time is not cheap.

**Beau Dozier:** Oh, man, definitely not. I’m glad it wasn’t my dollar.

**Unidentified Audience Member:** Hi. First off, I want to thank you. I’m from Michigan. I can’t even tell you how alive your music is. It was the soundtrack to all of our lives there, so I thank you.

**Lamont Dozier:** Thank you.
Unidentified Audience Member: That being said, my friend Drew back there is a DJ from Detroit. He actually has your record with him today. You got it, Drew?

Lamont Dozier: Oh, Wow! Is that me with my belly hanging out? Oh no, that’s Lamont Dozier’s new album or something like that?

Unidentified Audience Member: Love and Beauty.

Lamont Dozier: Love and Beauty, yes. That’s that album they were talking about. Everybody thought that was me.

Unidentified Audience Member: The picture will never change.

Lamont Dozier: Yes, she thought that was me. That wasn’t me. But I mean, that’s a girl. She was a model, a black model back in the ‘70s. Yes, there’s some nice songs on that.

Unidentified Audience Member: I wanted to ask you: Drew and I are both pretty involved in the Detroit hip hop community and I wanted to know what you think it was about the 1960s that made Motown so accessible and pushed it so far out into the world? Yet today, the Detroit hip hop community is so strong and it’s rooted in the same kind of soul and the oppression that comes out of that city, it’s just so strong, but the sound can’t seem to reach outside of the borders of the state. I want to know what you think it was about the ‘60s that made it so special then?

Lamont Dozier: You know, so many people around the world were touched by the ‘60s music, because it hit home. It hit all people right in the same place. It was so infectious.

And when we were writing those songs, we thought if we didn’t feel it, nobody else would feel it. So we would keep banging away at the piano until that feeling happened, that mixture of gospel and classical. That was our niche, that rich mixture of sounds. If you really take apart the Holland-Dozier-Holland songs, you would hear gospel, classical, jazz, even some country and western. All mixed together and blended.

It’s like making a cake. It either tastes good or bad or you don’t have the right ingredients in it. A chicken cacciatore, you leave out one little bit, you miss it. So we tried to make sure that our songs had all of these ingredients so the flavor was just right and you get this thing that’s just so infectious that it makes you want to get up and do something. Dance when you can’t dance. You just feel it.
And the reason why I think maybe it hasn’t gotten over the borders now – I mean, back in the day everything that came out of Detroit would go to number one, around the world even – is because it’s staying in one place. It’s not considering everybody. It’s geared for one set of people or one set of culture or just kids, when it should be for everybody.

When I first came to Motown, Motown was considered just an R&B company. The R&B director there said, you have to understand this is an R&B company. And I said, well why can’t you make music for everybody? Well, this is just an R&B company, meaning a black company. And I said, I don’t agree with that. Everybody feels music, no matter what it is. And if you put together the right stuff, everybody will like it.

And so one of the first things I did was, “Here Is Your Teddy Bear.” It was supposed to be a Martha and the Vandellas song. But I had written the song for Loretta Lynn. It was a country song. And the guy looked at me and he said man, you crazy or something? He said that ain’t going to work over here. I said, I bet it will.

Then I figured he might be right, so I hedged my bet. I cut it two ways. I cut it one way for Loretta Lynn. I tried to get it to Loretta Lynn, but I figured wasn’t nobody going to pay attention to me, you know, because I wasn’t in their community.

But I cut it another way, added a little R&B with a little bit of jazz and a little bit of gospel thing tied to it. And Berry Gordy came to the studio, to make a long story short, and he said, what is that? And Brian Holland said, I told Lamont not to do that because you wouldn’t like it. I told him. I told him. Go and blame it on me, you know, my partner. No, I told him you wouldn’t like it.

Berry said, that’s the most creative thing I heard come out of here, ever. Then he started picking my brain. He said, what did you do? What is this? Why does this song sound like this? I said, because you have to stop thinking that this is some R&B company and make it music for everybody. And he said, oh. And that was, as far as I was concerned, the beginning of the Motown sound.

Josh Kun: The sound of young America, right?

Lamont Dozier: The sound of young America.

Unidentified Audience Member: Thank you so much. Thank you.
Unidentified Audience Member: I guess this question is for Mr. Dozier, senior. Could you talk a little bit about the creative process? I mean, to what extent would you interact with Diana Ross or Flo Ballard or Martha Reeves? You come in with the song, but obviously they’re going to perform it. How much back and forth was there? What was the creative process there?

Lamont Dozier: In say, “Where Did Our Love Go?” or any of the songs for that matter, we would make demos. The three of us, the Holland Brothers and myself, were all singers. We were all from the church and we all sang. So we would make our own demos with all of the reflections and all of our performance ideas crammed into the song.

And we gave them the demo, usually a little cassette – no, not a cassette, a reel to reel tape in those days! And so the song, the performance and the way it should be delivered was all there. All she had to do was take it home, put it on her Webcore and listen to it and learn the song. Everything was there; just learn the song as is. Don’t try to do anything different. We’ve already done the work for you, just copy it. And that’s how it went.

And if somebody else tried to come in there and do it in a different way, we’d have words – we didn’t tell you to sing this song like that! What is that? You know what I mean – unless somebody came along and sung the thing and it was just wonderful, if their idea was better than what we had.

But then we had people like Marvin Gaye and Levi Stubbs or the Four Tops. These guys never heard the song before. They go in the studio; Marvin’s trying to rush off to the golf course. He tells us, I ain’t got time for this, man. What is this stuff? What is it? What’s the name of that? It’s there on the tape man, just learn it! He says just let me hear a little bit of it. “How sweet it is to be loved”…okay, roll the tape, man. I said, man, what you doing? How can you – you haven’t even heard the song. I heard it. One take. And he sings, “How sweet it is to be”…all right, that’s it. I’ve got to go now.

Josh Kun: Was that song really in one take?

Lamont Dozier: One take, just like that. And we were still standing there in the control room looking at him with our mouths open. And then he actually just walked out the door, as if to say you’re not going to get any more, that’s it. And he just heard it that one little short time, sang the song like that and we were sitting there in shock. I never heard anybody do that, just half-assed, never heard the song. And sung that thing – well, you heard the song. Man!
And Levi Stubbs was close to doing that, too. He did that a couple of times. “Sugar Pie, Honey Bunch,” or “Reach Out,” whatever, he was another one of those one take guys. Sometimes Diana Ross, when she wasn’t pissed off at everybody, would get one in one or two takes, too, you know.

Josh Kun: We have time for two quick – these will be the last two quick questions.

Unidentified Audience Member: Lamont, I was glad to hear that music can speak to all of us, because I’m one of those unfortunate souls that can’t help but clap on one and three. And with that background in mind, Beau, I’ve got a real simple question for you. I didn’t know what a sample or samples were? Sampling?

Beau Dozier: Oh, a sample is basically when you take somebody else’s record and there might be an available four bars of a song and you take it and incorporate it in a new song. It would probably be the driving force of your track. For the JoJo song we took “Africa” from Toto, and then we added some drums to the first four bars of the song. It happens a lot in hip hop and in R&B music.

Unidentified Audience Member: You’ll actually borrow someone else’s –?

Beau Dozier: Take someone else’s actual recordings and loop it.

Unidentified Audience Member: And that’s cool?

Josh Kun: And often pay for it.

Beau Dozier: Oh yes! You pay for it dearly. You start doing records for free at that point.

Lamont Dozier: Yes, you have to pay for that.

Josh Kun: Last question.

Unidentified Audience Member: I think this is a follow-up question to one of the earlier questions. I grew up in Philly and was there for the ’70s and ’80s and Hall and Oates, a big fan of Blue Eyed Soul, which borrowed from and owed a lot to the O’Jays and groups like that.

Lamont Dozier: That’s right.

Unidentified Audience Member: You talk about trying to write songs that were
for everybody, but my sense is a lot of musicians today are just more fragmented. My question, Beau – and it sounds like from what I heard today you’ve picked up a lot of your dad’s – well, I would never think of a Toto song going with JoJo – is it your sense today that musicians are geared more towards fragmented types of audiences or are there musicians who are trying to connect with songs for everybody?

**Beau Dozier:** Again, it really depends on who the artist is and where you’re trying to put the song. If you want to put the song in the club, then you’re going to have an MD record and it’s going to be kind of drum-driven. It might have a sample, but most of the audience isn’t even really listening to the song or trying to take some meaning from it. They’re just dancing and having fun and it evokes a fun spirit and that’s what it is.

But sometimes when you want to hear a real record – there’s artists that, again, you’ll have an organic thing with and you’ll have a song with changes and it’ll keep growing and it’ll be a big metamorphosis. It really just depends on who the artist is. I think it’s 50/50, it’s equal.

**Josh Kun:** I thank you both for being here. Thank all of you for coming today.

**Lamont Dozier:** Thank you.