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From the archive: Diana loves Detroit Diva brings her Motown spirit home for visit

Susan Whitall / The Detroit News

[Diana Ross](#) brought a tight band, truckloads of tulle, sequins and feathers, and a voice that is both mellow and durable as she performed at The Palace of Auburn Hills Monday night.

The singer emerged with clouds of hair bobbing over a frothy red tulle wrap, to perform in front of 7,653 fans, a crowd that included her father, Fred, former Motown etiquette teacher Maxine Powell, several of Florence Ballard's daughters, and a host of friends. The song selection ranged from her Motown years with the Supremes, and as a solo artist, up to her solo disco hits and into the present, from her new album "I Love You."

The Motown hits were what got the mature crowd on its feet, arms waving. Ross provided all the appropriate hand movements in "Stop in the Name of Love" and tapped into the effervescent, still-girlish upper range that made her voice stand out on all those cheap AM radios.

One fan's pantomime with Ross early in the show demonstrated exactly how much of the hometown audience felt during her concert Monday night at The Palace.

After Ross leaned over from the stage to accept the fan's gift of flowers, he threw up his arms in exultation, then pointed at her. The singer clutched the roses, pointing back at the fan. This caused him to go into paroxysms of delight, ending with the "I am not worthy" bowing pose.

The show is paced well, allowing for three costume changes so that Ross can twirl out in a variety of dresses ranging from fabulous to unbelievably fabulous. Like every Motown artist trained by the label's experts, she understands the importance of lighting up the stage and being seen from every distant seat.

"Love Hangover" was an opportunity for the guitarist and bass player to step forward and funk it up on an extended jam as Ross exchanged one glittery gown for another backstage.

Halfway through the show, Ross came out to sing two songs associated with Billie Holiday, wearing a sexy silvery gown with an illusion neckline and strategically placed paillettes. The sight of it was too much for one besotted fan, who yelled "Hey beauty! Hot! Hot! Hot!"

"Fine and Mellow" and "Don't Explain" weren't just tossed in to remind the audience that the singer played Holiday in "Lady Sings the Blues," but "Don't Explain" particularly created a cloud of moody humidity where moments before the stage had been an upbeat disco. Ross drew out her vocals and it felt, for a moment anyway, what it might be like to see her in a small club.

"I'm so proud of her," Motown's Maxine Powell said before the show.

"I like her because of her staying power. That's the way I taught them."

Powell was hired by Berry Gordy Jr. to teach Ross and the other Motown stars etiquette, grooming and comportment. She remembers Ross as a slender girl who worked hard, and padded her hips because she thought she was too skinny. "I told her you don't have to do that."

Ross listened avidly to all of Powell's instructions. "One day I caught her pulling faces while she was singing," said Powell. "She said she was feeling the song. I said you can feel the song, but have a pleasant look on your face. She still practices what I taught her."

It was obvious that she did when Ross came out in a black sequined stunner to sing "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," the ultimate transcendent Motown anthem, and the ultimate song for a girl who emerged from the projects to become the ultimate pop diva.