

# THE JACKIE WILSON UNRELEASED BOX SET



All of my life, I adored Jackie Wilson, and it was not just the Motown connection, which mattered because from fifteen years old, I was obsessive about collecting Motown, and Berry Gordy had, of course, given Jackie Wilson all of his early hits.

My best friend was Les Cokell, the DJ at the Twisted Wheel in Manchester, and he raved over many Jackie Wilson records, most particularly "I Don't Wanna Lose You" and "This Love Is Real". In 1972 Jackie was appearing in England and I went to Bolton to see him appear live, with my friend from Blackpool Mecca, Mark Houlding who everybody called "Legs". Jackie's performance was sensational, and he still had all of the moves. Many years later, Michael Jackson cited Jackie as his main influence for his wonderful dance moves.

A couple of years after we witnessed his stellar performance, Jackie fell ill, and spent years in a coma. Eventually he died, and it was the greatest loss in history for soul music. Now Lee Jeffries from Sonic Wax is bringing you a box set of ten double sided Jackie Wilson singles, all of which have never appeared on vinyl before. This is a set to treasure for a lifetime, and an opportunity that will never be repeated again. My hero lives on through these new singles and also through his biological son, the amazing Bobby Brooks Wilson.

*Ian Levine*

Jackie Wilson scored hits as he entered the 1960s with the No. 15 "Doggin' Around", the No. 4 pop ballad "Night", another million-seller, and "Baby Workout", another Top 10 hit (No. 5), which he composed with The Midnighters member Alonzo Tucker. His songwriting alliance with Tucker also turned out other songs, including "No Pity (In The Naked City)" and "I'm So Lonely." Top 10 hits continued with "Alone at Last" (No. 8 in 1960) and "My Empty Arms" (No. 9 in 1961). Following the success of "Baby Workout", Wilson experienced a lull in his career between 1964 and 1966 as Tarnopol and Brunswick Records released a succession of unsuccessful albums and singles. Despite the lack of sales success, Wilson still made artistic gains as he recorded an album with Count Basie, as well as a series of duets with R & B artist LaVern Baker and gospel singer Linda Hopkins.

In 1966, Jackie Wilson scored the first of two big comeback singles with the established Chicago soul producer Carl Davis with "Whispers (Gettin' Louder)" and "(Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Higher and Higher", the latter a No. 6 pop hit in 1967 that became one of his final hits. "I Get the Sweetest Feeling", despite its modest initial chart success in the US, has since become one of his biggest international chart successes, ranking in Top 10 twice in the UK (in 1972 and 1987), and in the Top 20 of the Dutch Top 40. "I Get the Sweetest Feeling" spawned numerous cover versions by other artists such as Edwin Starr, Will Young, Erma Franklin and Liz McClarnon.

A key to Jackie Wilson's musical rebirth was Davis insisting that Wilson no longer record with Brunswick's musicians in New York; instead, he recorded with legendary Detroit musicians normally employed by Motown Records and also Davis' own Chicago-based session players. The Detroit musicians, known as the Funk Brothers, participated on Wilson's recordings due to their respect for Davis and Wilson.

By 1975, Wilson and the Chi-Lites were the only significant artists left on Brunswick's roster. Wilson had continued to record singles that found success on the R&B chart, but found no significant pop chart success. His final hit, "You Got Me Walkin'", written by Eugene Record of the Chi-Lites, was released in 1972 with the Chi-Lites backing him on vocals and instruments.

On September 29, 1975, Wilson was in the middle of performing for Dick Clarke, singing "Lonely Teardrops" when he suffered a massive heart attack. On the words "My heart is crying" he collapsed on stage; audience members applauded as they initially thought it was part of the act. Clark sensed something was wrong, then ordered the musicians to stop the music. Cornell Gunter of the Coasters, who was backstage, noticed Wilson was not breathing. Gunter was able to resuscitate him and Wilson was then rushed to a nearby hospital.

Medical personnel worked to stabilize Wilson's vital signs, but the lack of oxygen to his brain caused him to slip into a coma. He briefly recovered in early 1976, and was even able to take a few wobbly steps, but slipped back into a semi-comatose state. Wilson's friend, fellow singer Bobby Womack, planned a benefit at the Hollywood Palladium to raise funds for Wilson on March 4. Wilson was deemed conscious but incapacitated in early June 1976, unable to speak but aware of his surroundings. Wilson was a resident of the Medford Leas Retirement Center in Medford, New Jersey, when he was admitted into Memorial Hospital of Burlington County in Mount Holly, New Jersey, due to having trouble taking nourishment, and Wilson died on January 21, 1984, at age 49 from complications of pneumonia. He was initially buried in an unmarked grave at Westlawn Cemetery near Detroit. In 1987, fans raised money in a fundraiser spearheaded by an Orlando disc jockey Jack (the Rapper) Gibson to purchase a mausoleum. On June 9, 1987, a ceremony was held and Wilson was interred in the mausoleum at Westlawn Cemetery in Wayne, Michigan.

Wilson had converted to Judaism as an adult but had a reputation for being short-tempered and promiscuous. In her autobiography, Patti LaBelle accused Wilson of sexually assaulting her backstage at a Brooklyn theater in the early 1960s. On February 15, 1961, in Manhattan, Wilson was reportedly shot by a fan named Juanita Jones. However, Jones was one of his girlfriends, and she shot him in a jealous rage after he returned to his Manhattan apartment with another woman, fashion model Harlean Harris, an ex-girlfriend of Sam Cooke. Wilson's management supposedly concocted the story about her being a zealous fan to protect Wilson's reputation. They claimed that Jones was an obsessed fan who had threatened to shoot herself, and that Wilson's intervention resulted in his being shot. Wilson was shot in the stomach; the bullet resulted in the loss of a kidney, and lodged too close to his spine to be operated on. In early 1975, during an interview with author Arnold Shaw, Wilson maintained it actually was a zealous fan he did not know that shot him. "We also had some trouble in 1961. That was when some crazy chick took a shot at me and nearly put me away for good..." No charges were brought against Jones. In 1960, Wilson was arrested and charged with assaulting a police officer when fans tried to climb on stage in New Orleans. He assaulted a policeman who had shoved one of the fans. In 1964, Wilson jumped from a second floor window at Kiel Auditorium in St. Louis to avoid being arrested after a show. His arrest stemmed from a default of a \$2,200 contract judgement in which he failed to appear at The Riviera Club in 1959. He was caught by the police and jailed for a day before he posted a \$3,000 bond. In March 1967, Wilson and his drummer, Jimmy Smith, were arrested in South Carolina on "morals charges"; the two were entertaining two 24-year-old white women in their motel room. In 1961, Wilson declared annual earnings of \$263,000, while the average annual salary at that time was just \$5,000, but he discovered that, despite being at the peak of success, he was broke. Around this time the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) seized Wilson's Detroit family home. Tarnopol and his accountants were supposed to take care of such matters. Wilson made arrangements with the IRS to make restitution on the unpaid taxes; he also re-purchased the family home at auction.[6] Nat Tarnopol had taken advantage of Wilson's naiveté, mismanaging his money since becoming his manager. Tarnopol also had power of attorney over Wilson's finances. Tarnopol and 18 other Brunswick executives were indicted on federal charges of mail fraud and tax evasion stemming from bribery and payola scandals in 1975. Also in the indictment was the charge that Tarnopol owed at least \$1 million in royalties to Wilson. In 1976 Tarnopol and the others were found guilty; an appeals court overturned their conviction 18 months later. Although the conviction was overturned, judges went into detail, outlining that Tarnopol and Brunswick Records did defraud their artists of royalties, and that they were satisfied that there was sufficient evidence for Wilson to file a lawsuit. However, a trial to sue Tarnopol for royalties never took place, as Wilson lay in a nursing home semi-comatose. Tarnopol never paid Wilson monies he had coming to him, and Wilson died owing a large sum to the IRS and Brunswick Records.

At the age of 17, Wilson married his girlfriend Freda Hood in 1951 while she was pregnant. Together they had four children (Jacqueline Denise, Sandra Kay, Jack Leroy Jr, and Anthony Duane). Hood divorced Wilson in 1965, after 14 years of marriage, as she was frustrated with his notorious womanizing.

In 1967, Wilson married his second wife, model Harlean Harris (1937–2019), at the urging of Nat Tarnopol to repair his image. They had been dating since at least 1960, and had a son, John Dominick known as Petey, born in 1963. Wilson and Harris legally separated in 1969. Wilson later lived with Lynn Guidry. They had two children, son Thor Lathan Kenneth (b. 1972) and daughter, Li-Nie Shawn (b. 1975). Wilson was in a relationship with Guidry, who was under the impression that she was his legal wife, until his heart attack in 1975. However, Wilson and Harris never officially divorced. Harris became his court-appointed guardian in 1978. Wilson's 16-year-old son, Jackie Jr, was shot and killed on a neighbor's porch near their Detroit home in 1970. Wilson sank into a period of depression, and for the next couple of years remained mostly a recluse. He turned to drug abuse and continued drinking in an attempt to cope with the loss of his son. More tragedy hit when two of Wilson's daughters died when young. His daughter Sandra died in 1977 at the age of 24 of an apparent heart attack. Another daughter, Jacqueline, was killed in 1988 in a drug-related incident in Highland Park, Michigan. Wilson also had children out of wedlock with different women. One of his sons, Bobby Brooks Wilson, was raised in a foster home and now performs his father's songs as a tribute act.