

THE TEMPTATIONS

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DENNIS EDWARDS

When Dennis Edwards first stepped in for David Ruffin back in 1968, he told reporters he was worried because he had a "hell of a pair of shoes to fill". As on-target an assessment as that was, it's worth it to note that Dennis, over the next decade or so, rose to the challenge and more. He has carved his own niche and in a group as filled with talent as the Temptations is, that's not always the easiest thing to do.

Dennis, like Eddie and Paul, was born in Birmingham. The son of a minister, Dennis started out singing gospel with a group called the Golden Wonders. Later, the itch to do so-called "secular" music bit him and he wound up first with a group called the Fireworks and, later, in a Motown act called the Contours,

It was while Dennis was with the Contours that David Ruffin decided to split from the Temptations after having been a star there for four years. In an extraordinarily risky move, producer Norman Whitfield chose that crucial moment to switch the Tempts from the R&B ballads and uptempo tunes for which they had become famous. His abrupt change of course took the Temptations into the realm of Sly Stone-influenced psychedelic soul, on a journey to "Cloud Nine.

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The traditional lead/chorus structure was thrown out in favor of a structure that gave each Tempt a part of the lead, with most of the weight falling on the new kid.

The gamble worked--so well, in fact that the Tempts won their first of three Grammy Awards and Dennis found himself firmly-entrenched with Tempts fans. In 1977, Dennis packed up his raging cries and his soft, bluesy whispers, and exited the Tempts. Two Years later, he was back in the group and at the helm of one of the Tempt's biggest recent hits, "Power".