

# YESTERDAY &

BY ALEXIS BURLING

Stevie Wonder,  
then and now
**YESTERDAY**

## Little Stevie Wonder

Born blind and poor, he dazzled the world with his singing and songwriting talents

**I**t was 1961. A group of executives were packed into a recording studio. They were raving about a musician who had just auditioned. He was only 10 years old. And his name, Steveland Judkins Hardaway, was a mouthful. But he was so **sensational** they offered him a contract on the spot. They also gave him a new name: Little Stevie Wonder.

And what a wonder he was. He was poor. As

an African-American, he faced **discrimination**. And he was born blind in both eyes. But Stevie didn't let his blindness hold him back. He climbed trees. He played ball. He sang solos in his church choir. And above all, he made his own music. By the age of 4, he was writing songs for the harmonica and bongos. Not long after, his mom decided he was ready for the Big Time.

In 1954, Stevie and his family moved to Detroit. In the late 1950s, Detroit was

home to one of the most important record companies in the world:

Motown Records. Its president, Berry Gordy Jr., was known for finding superstars. And with Little Stevie Wonder, he'd found one of his brightest stars yet.

Within two years of his first audition, Stevie had his first No. 1 single—"Fingertips: Part 2." He was 12 years old. And the hits kept coming. Not only did he have a soulful voice, but he also played the piano, synthesizer, and bass guitar. He wrote dozens of songs. Each year, his skills grew. In 1973, Stevie became the first African-American to win a Grammy for Best Album of the Year, for *Innervisions*. Since then, he has won 24 more Grammys, including a Lifetime Achievement Award—the most Grammys of a male solo artist in American history.

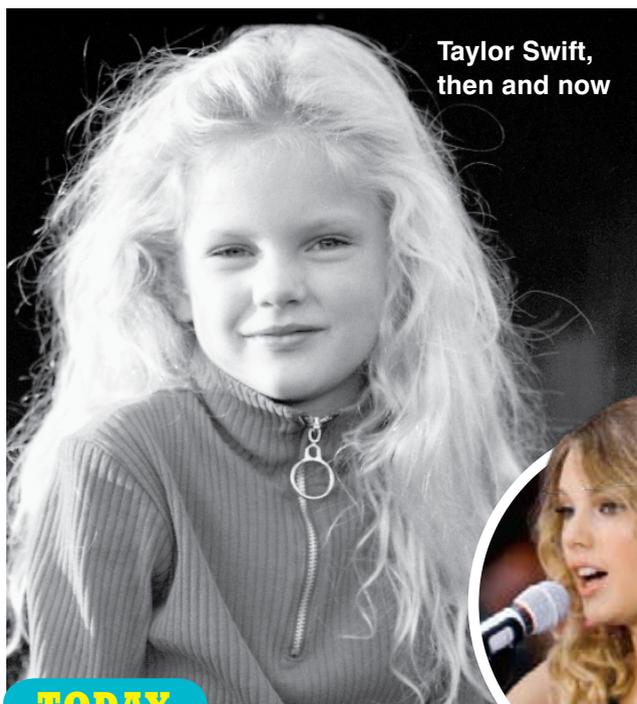
When Stevie was just starting out in his career, people told him he'd never make it. But still performing at the age of 60, and with more than 40 albums under his belt, Stevie smiles when he remembers those who doubted him. "People said that because I was blind, I couldn't do what others did," he said recently. "I never believed that. And I never will." ■



**DIRECTIONS:** 1. Read both articles. 2. Write down five facts each about Stevie Wonder's rise to fame and Taylor Swift's experience. 3. On a separate piece of paper, write a paragraph that explains how the artists' paths to stardom are similar and different.



**LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S 5 WORDS IN BOLD**



Taylor Swift, then and now



**TODAY**

## Taylor Swift

**Bullied and ignored in middle school, she is now a worldwide superstar**

**F**or a certain 11-year-old, a 6th-grade field trip to Nashville, Tennessee, was life changing. She loved the Country Music Hall of Fame. She devoured the BBQ at the Wildhorse Saloon. But the best part of the trip? When she went to every record company in town and dropped off a tape of her songs. The studios' executives didn't take the girl seriously. But they should have. Why? Because that girl was Taylor Swift.

Ever since she could talk, Taylor was

obsessed with singing. She listened to Shania Twain and Dolly Parton records until she knew every word on their albums. She performed at all the **karaoke** contests and county fairs near Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, where she grew up. And at age 12, she taught herself how to play the 12-string guitar and wrote her first song.

Taylor's parents knew their daughter had unusual talent. So they moved the family to a Nashville suburb. Making friends at her new school was hard for Taylor. Nobody sat with her at lunch. "People thought I was weird," she remembers.

So Taylor just focused on her music. By the age of 14, she was working part-time as a songwriter at Sony/ATV Publishing, a music label. She also performed at the Bluebird Café, a local **venue** where musicians tested out new songs. It was there that Taylor got her first big break. She was offered a record contract before she even knew how to drive.

The rest is history. From the moment Taylor's first album, *Taylor Swift*, hit the airwaves in 2006, it was a huge hit. Her second album, *Fearless*, was even bigger. And in 2010, Taylor became the world's top-selling digital artist, with more than 24.3 million digital tracks and 10 million albums sold.

So what is it about Taylor that makes her one of the most popular artists across all genres today? The title of her second album says it all: She's fearless. "It's all about following your gut," she says. "And listening to your heart." ■

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