



Jackie Wilson: The Man, the Music, the Mob

Tony Douglas

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When Jackie Wilson died in 1984, he was buried in a pauper's grave devoid of even a simple marker. Yet at his peak he was one of the 20th century's finest singing talents who, between 1957 and 1968, achieved 24 Top 40 hits in the United States with tracks like "To be loved", "Higher and Higher" and "I Get the Sweetest Feeling". In live performance his amazing vocal range and rapturous, gliding stage style influenced how Elvis Presley sang aand paved the way for Michael Jackson's "Moonwalk". In all aspects he pioneered the crossover of black artists into the more lucrative market of the "white" pop charts. Off stage Wilson's personal life was no less explosive, as he lived every moment and pushed his body to extremes. Professionally controlled by the Mob and hounded by the taxman, he embarked on three marriages and untold extra-marital affairs. He suffered massive alcohol dependency and chronic addicton to amphetamines and cocaine. Shot and critically wounded by a demented fan in 1961, he was later immobilised by a heart attack in 1975 and remained in a vegetative state until his death nine years later.



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