

Stephanie Mills

Stephanie Dorthea Mills^{[9][10]} (born March 22, 1957)^{[1][11]} is an American singer, songwriter and actress. Mills rose to stardom as "Dorothy" in the original Broadway run of the musical *The Wiz* from 1975 to 1977. The song "Home" from the show later became a Number 1 U.S. R&B hit for Mills and her signature song. During the 1980s, Mills scored five Number 1 R&B hits, including "Home", "I Have Learned to Respect the Power of Love", "I Feel Good All Over", "[(You're Puttin') A Rush on Me]" and "Something in the Way (You Make Me Feel)". Mills won a Grammy Award for Best Female R&B Vocal Performance for her song "Never Knew Love Like This Before" in 1981.

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Early life and career

Born **Stephanie Dorthea Mills** to Joseph and Christine Mills^[2] (as well as raised) in Bedford–Stuyvesant, Brooklyn,^{[12][13]} Mills sang gospel music as a child at Brooklyn's Cornerstone Baptist Church. Mills began her professional career at age nine, appearing in the Broadway musical *Maggie Flynn*.^[11] After winning Amateur Night at the Apollo Theater six weeks straight at age eleven, Mills went on to become the opening act for the Isley Brothers.^[11] In 1973, Mills was signed to Paramount records by Michael Barbiero, and her first single "I Knew It Was Love" was released. Mills was later signed to Motown. Her first two albums there failed to produce a hit, and Mills left the label in 1976.

The Wiz (1975) and later success

Stephanie Mills	
 <div>Mills on stage performing at the Detroit Opera House, April 2017.</div>	
Born	<div>Stephanie Dorthea Mills</div> March 22, 1957 ^[1] <div>Brooklyn, New York, U.S.</div>
Residence	Charlotte, North Carolina, U.S.
Occupation	Singer • <div>songwriter • actress</div>
Years active	1966–present
Spouse(s)	<div><div><div>Jeffrey Daniel</div><div>​</div> (m. 1980; div. 1983)<div>[2][3][4]</div></div><div><div>Dino Meminger</div><div>​</div> (m. 1989; div. 1991)<div>[5][6]</div></div><div><div>Michael Saunders</div><div>​</div> (m. 1993; div. 2001)<div>[7][8]</div></div></div>
Children	1
Musical career	
Genres	R&B • soul • gospel
Instruments	Vocals
Labels	ABC Records •

Mills's career took a rise when she portrayed Dorothy in the Broadway musical *The Wiz*, an African-American adaptation of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Her song "Home" from the show would become her signature tune for years, and would be covered later by Diana Ross for the movie adaptation three years later. Commercial success in the music industry remained elusive until 1979, when she signed to the 20th Century Fox Records label. There, Mills found her niche in mainly disco music, recording songs such as "Put Your Body In It", "You Can Get Over", and "What Cha Gonna Do with My Lovin'". The resulting album, *What Cha' Gonna Do with My Lovin'*, was Mills's first gold record and the first major hit for the James Mtume-Reggie Lucas production team. She quickly followed the success with 1980's *Sweet Sensation*, which featured Mills's hit "Never Knew Love Like This Before". The single became a #12 R&B and #6 Pop hit in 1980, as well as reaching #4 in the UK Singles Chart.^[14] 1981's *Stephanie* featured a top hit for her and Teddy Pendergrass entitled "Two Hearts".

Her 1983 album, *Merciless*, featured her hit cover of Prince's "How Come You Don't Call Me Anymore?", as well as the #3 dance chart hit "Pilot Error", which was her first dance hit in the U.S. In 1984, Mills had her third UK hit with "The Medicine Song" (#29),^[14] which also reached #1 on the U.S. dance chart and #8 on the R&B chart. On May 24, 1984, Mills returned to theater to star in a short-lived touring revival of *The Wiz*. The production closed on June 3, after 13 performances and 7 previews. In 1985, Mills's recording of "Bit by Bit (Theme from *Fletch*)" was featured in the Chevy Chase film, *Fletch*, and reached #52 on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Singles & Tracks chart, #78 on The Billboard Hot 100 and #15 on the Dance Chart.^[15]

Success for Mills had peaked until 1986, when her version of the Angela Winbush-penned "I Have Learned to Respect the Power of Love", hit #1 on the R&B singles chart. Mills truly returned, however, with her next release, *If I Were Your Woman* in 1987 under MCA Records, which she was now signed. The hits from the album include the title track, originally a hit for Gladys Knight & the Pips in 1971, a three-week #1 R&B hit, "I Feel Good All Over", and "You're Puttin' a Rush on Me", to name a few of the songs released. The album reached platinum status. That same year, she appeared in the NBC TV special, *Motown: Merry Christmas* along with other musical artists and actors, performing the song, "Christmas Everyday", which was written by actor/comedian Redd Foxx. Mills's success continued with 1989's *Home* album. The hits from that album include "The Comfort of a Man", the title track, a cover of her old standard from *The Wiz* and another song penned by Winbush titled "Something in the Way You Make Me Feel". It became another platinum record for Mills.

Later career

Mills would record one more album (1992's *Something Real*) and a Christmas album before being released from her contract with MCA in 1992. In 1993, she once again starred in the role of Dorothy in "The Wiz". This revival was also short lived, closing after 28 performances. Mills released a live gospel recording in 1995 on GospoCentric Records entitled *Personal Inspirations*. The set was produced by Donald Lawrence and featured a spiritualized retooling of her hit "I Have Learned To Respect The Power Of Love". Thereafter, Mills took a break from recording to care for her son.

In 1997, Mills played the lead in a major production of Stephen Schwartz's *Children of Eden* in New Jersey, which Schwartz has called "the definitive production" of the show. Mills was heavily featured in the cast recording CD that resulted from this production. In 2008, Mills began a comeback with singles recorded with BeBe Winans and rapper DMX to name a few. She made a comeback in independently-releasing *Born For This* (released on Expansion Records in the UK) on August 3, 2004. Her first

Motown • 20th Century • Casablanca • MCA • GospoCentric • LightYear • Expansion Records
Associated acts Diana Ross • Teddy Pendergrass • Mary J. Blige • Angela Winbush • James Mtume • Robert Brookins • Melba Moore • Anita Baker • Phyllis Hyman • Regina Belle

single in over a decade, "Can't Let Him Go", garnered buzz at urban contemporary radio. Mills is currently touring. A 2-disc, career-spanning greatest hits compilation entitled *Gold* was released by Hip-O/Universal Music earlier last year. Mills just finished production of a live DVD recorded at BB Kings in New York which will be sold online and at her shows.

Mills made an appearance in the 2007 gospel TV series *Sunday Best* and was recently featured in a live interview on *The Yolanda Adams Morning Show*, where she mentioned that she now has her own record label (JM Records). Mills performed prior to Pope Benedict XVI celebrating Mass at Yankee Stadium in New York on April 20, 2008. Her track, "Yesterday", is available for download on iTunes. Towards the end of 2012, Mills released a new single "So In Love This Christmas", available for download. In 2015, Mills was cast as Aunt Em in the NBC live musical production of *The Wiz*, forty years after her initial Broadway run in the show.^[16]

Mills made headlines in August 2018 with her response to singer Sam Smith, who remarked in a video posted to Instagram that they did not like Michael Jackson, but the Jackson hit "Human Nature" was a "decent song".^[17] Mills' fiery response quickly gained traction as she criticized Smith in her own Instagram responses, both accusing Smith of cultural appropriation and referring to them as a "one hit wonder".^[18]

On June 25, 2019, *The New York Times Magazine* listed Stephanie Mills among hundreds of artists whose material was reportedly destroyed in the 2008 Universal fire.^[19]

Personal life

Mills has been married three times:^{[2][6][20][21][22]}

- Jeffrey Daniel: (1980–1983), Jeffrey Daniel was from the R&B/soul group Shalamar.
- Dino Meminger: (1989–1991).
- Michael Saunders: (1993–2001), Minister Louis Farrakhan officiated the wedding ceremony.

Mills has a son, Farad Mills, who was born with down syndrome.^[23]

Mills had a brief relationship with fellow singer Michael Jackson.^[24]

Discography

Studio albums

- *Movin' in the Right Direction* (1974)
- *For the First Time* (1975)
- *What Cha' Gonna Do with My Lovin'* (1979)
- *Sweet Sensation* (1980)
- *Stephanie* (1981)
- *Tantalizingly Hot* (1982)
- *Love Has Lifted Me* (1982)
- *Merciless* (1983)
- *I've Got the Cure* (1984)
- *Stephanie Mills* (1985)
- *If I Were Your Woman* (1987)
- *Home* (1989)
- *Something Real* (1992)
- *Personal Inspirations* (1994)
- *Born for This!* (2004)

Stage work

- *Maggie Flynn* (1968)
- *The Wiz* (1975–78; 1984; 1993)
- *Harlem Suite* (1988)
- *Stephanie Mills Comes Home to Broadway* (1989)
- *Children of Eden* (1997)
- *Purlie* (1998)
- *Funny Girl* (2002) (Actors Fund benefit concert)

Awards

- 1981 – won Grammy Award: Best Rhythm & Blues Vocal Performance – Female ("Never Knew Love Like This Before").
- 1981 – won American Music Award for Favorite Female Artist – Soul / Rhythm & Blues

Nominations

- 1974 – nominated for Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Actress – Musical ("The Wiz").
- 1979 – nominated for American Music Award: Favorite Female Artist – Soul / Rhythm & Blues.
- 1980 – nominated for an American Music Award: Favorite Female Artist – Soul / Rhythm & Blues
- 1980 – nominated for Young Artist Awards: Best Young Musical Recording Artist – Female ("Two Hearts").
- 1981 – nominated for a Grammy Award: Best Rhythm & Blues Vocal Performance – Female (Stephanie).
- 1983 – nominated for a Grammy Award: Best Rhythm & Blues Vocal Performance – Female ("Merciless").
- 1989 – nominated for American Music Award: Favorite Female Artist – Soul / Rhythm & Blues

See also

- List of number-one dance hits (United States)
- List of artists who reached number one on the US Dance chart


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External links

- [Stephanie Mills \(http://www.wlatalent.com/roster/stephanie_mills/artistprofile.htm\)](http://www.wlatalent.com/roster/stephanie_mills/artistprofile.htm) at Wenig-LaMonica Associates
- [Stephanie Mills \(https://www.allmusic.com/artist/p4918\)](https://www.allmusic.com/artist/p4918) at AllMusic
- [Stephanie Mills \(https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0590196/\)](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0590196/) on IMDb
- [Stephanie Mills \(https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/53170\)](https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/53170) at the Internet Broadway Database 

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