

“FOR THE GOOD TIMES” PITCH DOC

1/2-hour drama/fantasy/music - Eight to Twelve episodes

At its heart, this is a story about denial of the self, hundreds of years of racial injustice, arrogance, and ultimately, finding truth and love through confrontation with one's own histrionics. The story has one foot in America's bigoted past, while the other is firmly rooted in today's inability (or refusal) to reconcile that past. It also has kick-ass music, romance, comedy, and did I mention the absolutely kick-ass music that will permeate this world?

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE DREADED “SCI-FI ELEMENT”

What if you could travel through space and time? What would you do with that gift? Witness the destruction of Pompeii, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Hindenburg disaster? Smother Adolph Hitler in his crib, foil the assassination of JFK? Or maybe you'd use it for selfish and esoteric reasons. That's what Reggie does when he sees a beautiful young woman in a Motown documentary. He thinks, “what if I traveled back to 1965 Detroit, applied for a low-level job that I'd certainly get, and then became a musician, playing on classic records, while getting to work alongside the woman of my dreams?”.

Reggie is no virtuous hero. He learns about Motown, but fails to immerse himself in the political and social climate of that time and place. He treats time travel as his personal entertainment, but soon learns there are dire consequences to his casual meddling. He talks a good game, saying the right things to get the job, but takes none of it to heart.

His journey is one of discovery, failure, and ultimately, profound understanding of his own culture and history.

Time-travel is simply a catalyst for Reggie's journey from arrogant young man to enlightened adult. The sci-fi element will be subtle, no time-jumping Nazi scientists or episodic “missions to the past”. This isn't LOST, but moments in Reggie's present will parallel his experiences in the past, even influence and change aspects of his life in unexpected ways.

MAIN CHARACTERS

- REGINALD “Reggie” WATKINS (20s) - A mystery man who arrives at Motown and begins a meteoric rise from janitor to heralded musician. His talents and background are almost too good to be true, and soon his secret is in danger of being revealed.
- WILMA ETIENNE (20s) - A young woman of Haitian descent, Berry Gordy's personal assistant. She helps Reggie navigate the office politics and personalities at Motown while gently shooting down his lame attempts to ask her on a date.
- BERRY GORDY (30s) - Motown's impresario, co-founder and president. He knows talent and facilitates Reggie's rise up the ranks of the record label.
- MARY WELLS (20s) - The popular singer and Motown's first international superstar. She is aware of her growing fame and wants to be compensated. She tries to renegotiate the contract she signed as a teenager, but Berry isn't having it. Her days at Motown are numbered.
- WILLIAM “Smokey” ROBINSON (20s) - Songwriting genius and co-founder of Motown. He champions Reggie's ascent to drumming glory, using him on recording sessions, and acts as a mentor.
- MARVIN GAYE (20s) - Motown star and activist. His personal life is filled with conflict and odd desires, including a sincere desire to play football for the Detroit Lions, not-to-mention his infamous parties.
- STEVIE WONDER (20s) - The young wunderkind, a budding genius starting to find his brilliant songwriting ability, and career autonomy, despite Berry Gordy's control.
- WILLIS EVANS (20s) - Drummer, Reggie's main rival.
- RUSS TERANA (20s) - Chief audio engineer, mainly responsible for the “Sound of Motown”.
- LAWRENCE HORN (20s) - Audio engineer, would later go on to reveal a very dark future.

Other recurring characters include:

- GWENDOLYN AYERS (20s) - Secretary at Motown, Wilma's best-friend.
- THE FUNK BROTHERS (20s-30s) - A special group of Motown studio musicians responsible for many of their hit recordings.

PILOT SUMMARY

We are introduced to Reginald Watkins as he practices his drumming on his bare legs in his cramped studio apartment. The scars and welts on his thighs grow redder with each hit. It's clear he's done this before. Instead of cutting from anxiety, he opens wounds with his drum sticks. The next day, he's in front of Motown founder Berry Gordy, looking for a job as janitor, even though his resume touts higher education and experience. He gets the job, and begins to clean up the offices. It's not long before he finds a way to impress Berry with his drumming and is soon asked to turn-in his overalls and sit-in on a recording session. Along the way, he meets Wilma, Berry's assistant and attempts to ask her out with no luck. He meets Stevie Wonder at the start of the young genius' transition to a songwriter in control of his own destiny. At the end of the day, he leaves work just as Wilma goes to talk to him, but he exits. For a moment, she hears strange music, loud thumping bass from somewhere outside before the door closes. She opens it, Reggie and the music are gone. She closes the door and wonders. Outside of Hitsville, Reggie walks down the sidewalk to his 2010 Volkswagen, grabs an iPhone from the glove compartment, blasts a Stevie Wonder song that, in 1965, hadn't been recorded yet. It's the finished song that Stevie had started to write. What's going on?!

SERIES OVERVIEW

SEASON ONE would concern Reggie's rise through the ranks of Motown, his pursuit of Wilma, his late night talks with various Motown stars who educate him on the realities of being black in America, even if you're selling millions of records. Conflicts with rival musicians, economic depression, racist attacks, and hope for a better future weave through his life in '60s Detroit. The season will end on Reggie returning to his Detroit studio apartment to find his main rival (think Doakes from Dexter) sitting on his bed, the iPhone in his hands. "What the fuck is this?"

SEASON TWO would concern his continued rise in Motown and pursuit of Wilma. He is blackmailed by his rival, giving up sweet gigs to keep his secret, even though the rival doesn't know exactly what's going on. More Motown stars enter the picture, mentoring Reggie. When he's rebuffed by Wilma for the umpteenth time, he accepts a date from an activist woman he meets at one of Marvin Gaye's parties. He receives a crash course in what it means to be black in '60s Detroit, and how injustice can be fought against. We learn that he has the studio apartment because something is wrong with the time travel. He has to limit his jumps back in time as they seem to take something from him. He becomes a convert and throws himself fully into an activist operation that becomes very dangerous. At the last minute, he wants to bail on it, but doesn't want to be seen as a coward. The season ends on the ramifications of his decision and a horrible explosion that claims the lives of the activists.

OPENING SCENE: A young man walks into a record store in 2022, heads to the SOUL section, picks up a Motown album, flips it over and sees a photo of the band, in particular, the drummer. Is that Reggie? A BRIGHT FLASH and now we're in 1965, the same image but alive this time, Reggie behind the drums.

SEASON THREE would concern the aftermath of the activist operation, Reggie's subsequent guilt, and more revelations about the time travel and how it affects him, and the future. Somehow, Reggie is made out to be a hero and he leans into it. Wilma sees something different in him and finally agrees to a date. Turns out, Reggie's activist girlfriend survived the bungled operation and lies in a coma, threatening to reveal Reggie's true involvement if she ever wakes. This should be a happy time for Reggie, he finally got the girl and the gig, but the various threats to reveal his deceit clouds every moment. He decides the only recourse he has is to tell the truth to Wilma and hope she returns to the present with him. She does, and they walk out into the 2022 Detroit night. Reggie looks into the rearview, sees his eyes are bleeding, then is startled when Reggie's rival is in the back seat. "Where to, motherfucker?"

MAIN LOCATIONS

HITSVILLE U.S.A. - Nestled in a suburb of Detroit, home to the greatest soul artists and musicians ever assembled.

REGGIE'S APARTMENT - A cramped studio apartment in 1965 Detroit.

MARVIN GAYE'S HOUSE - The basement hosts wild parties of mythological proportions.

WILMA'S HOUSE - Modest home she shares with her mom and three brothers.

CLEOPATRA'S - A warehouse speakeasy that serves as the meeting place of an early incarnation of the Black Panthers, responsible for protests and violent insurgency against racist laws and corrupt law enforcement.

ALTERNATIVE SETTING

The current world depends on the cooperation with Motown. My initial thought was to approach actor/musician Evan Ross to play the role of Reggie, considering his godfather is Berry Gordy. But, if that doesn't happen, I can revise the script setting to be a fictional record label/recording studio in another city: Memphis, Nashville, Chicago, Los Angeles, NYC, Miami. Same plotlines, but with fictional characters similar to those at Motown, and (kick-ass) original music.