

Temptations: Army of Trained Harmonists

By ED OCHS

NEW YORK — Motown's finest, the Temptations, wear their look-alike suits and patent leather half-boots like a five-man honor guard. Charter members of the Motown school, the Temptations have been scaling the charts with military efficiency ever since "Way You Do the Things You Do" in 1964, to their current winner, "I Could Never Love Another." Today, the Temptations are another word for rhythm & blues.

No longer do the Temptations worry about record sales or beat the well-worn promotional trail so painfully familiar to most artists. In fact, the Temptations aren't even curious. "We never even know what's on our albums till they come out," said Mel Franklin, the group's spokesman, in a recent interview. To prove it, Franklin tore the cellophane from a fresh copy of the group's latest LP, "I Wish It Would Rain," and played it. As each tune came on, Franklin twitched, grinned and remembered, adding a footnote to the song's history. He joined in the singing, punching at the beat, like a loyal fan of the Temptations—which he is.

"We all love the group," he said. "There's nothing else we'd rather be doing." For Franklin and the rest of the group—David Ruffin, Paul Williams, Eddie James Kendricks and Otis Williams—their allegiance to the Temptations and Motown is devotion to a cause, loyalty to family, and a tribute to the Motown regimen. "The thrill of representing the group, of hearing the Temptations introduced to an eager audience, and seeing hundreds of smiling faces—that's everything."

The Temptations are professionals. "Longevity, that's what we're aiming for," said Franklin. "We'd like to be an institution—like the Mills Brothers—and sustain a quality of performance that we can be known for."

On stage, the Temptations move like quicksilver, flowing in and out of carefully plotted routines, choreographed in Motown studios and polished to the point of drill-team perfection. Musically, their harmony is a vintage blend, honed by nine years of togetherness and work. Their harmony has turned to gold many of the compositions by Norman Whitfield, Smokey Robinson and Holland & Dozier.

"We are all lead singers," said Franklin. "Any of us can take the lead, and any one of us can be absent without losing any part of our act." The Temptation recently worked the Apollo, appeared on the "Ed Sullivan Show" and the "Rohan & Martin Laugh-In," and are considering network bids for an all-Motown TV show with the Supremes next season. Franklin, the group's bass, is a member of Pro Enterprises, along with basketball star Dave Bing, and Willie Horton of the Detroit Tigers.