

Martha love

Liz Nicholls speaks to Martha Reeves, 73, lead singer of original Motown girl group Martha and the Vandellas, who is set to rock Cornbury festival this July.

What is your best ever festival moment? "I find all festivals exciting in their own way. I enjoy every opportunity to perform for thousands of people and the variety of entertainers we're presented with. I love the atmosphere in a festival. I once had the pleasure of singing with Earth, Wind & Fire and it was all spontaneous, but a moment in time that I will cherish forever."

How do you find our homegrown audiences compare with American ones? "Our Motown music is a winner, and whenever we are visited by the people who listened to the DJs who brought our music to them in their homes, it's the sound of America that Berry Gordy dreamed it would be. Dave Godin, president of the Tamla-Motown Appreciation Society, paid a visit in 1964 and made Berry aware our music made it necessary for us to cross the ocean and come visit the music lovers, and it's been a fellowship ever since. Dusty Springfield and Georgie Fame worked with us, introduced us personally to our audiences and came to America in exchange, so we've been one big happy family. Music makes the difference."

How do you feel about Motown today? "Motown is one of the most successful recording companies in our history, and since its beginning in 1959, more than 30 acts have been discovered, developed, and succeeded in producing millions of records and fantastic careers for most. I am one of the pioneers of the label and in the



top five most-celebrated – and am most proud to be!"

What are you up to, apart from playing Cornbury?

"This is my 56th year in professional entertainment and I still have so many dreams to be fulfilled. I look forward to the plans for this year and desire to visit and share our good times and great shows. We have plans for a movie, to reveal all of the wonders that I have witnessed during this illustrious life."

What's it like being on tour?

"Everything in life has its ups and downs, however I accept whatever conditions there are, for the love of touring. Good or bad, I'll be on the stage, enjoying it with our hosts. Our music is the Sound of America and, emotionally, I feel the same way every time I sing my songs. This music – made by the most prolific producers and writers – has filled my heart with gladness and just the sound of the pick-up or opening notes brings that joy every time. Any music that comes from professional musicians and gifted singers makes my heart beat faster, my feet tap and my spirit soar."

Who are your musical heroines?

"I place all the musical people, who the world has embraced, as my entertainment heroes. I must mention Della Reese, Lena Horne, and my mother, Ruby, who used to sing me and my 11 siblings to sleep." [One of the songs her mother sang was *God Bless the Child* which Martha recorded for her own *Home to You* CD and often performs in concert.]

What would you tell your younger self as she was just starting out?

"I am a product of great teachers. Take instruction from learned professionals and learn as much about your trade as possible."