

My Guy star Mary Wells succumbs to cancer

By ROBERT JABLON
Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Mary Wells, who tried to sell Motown Records a song she had written and wound up a singing star with Top 10 hits that included the bouncy "My Guy," has died of cancer at 49.

Wells, who underwent surgery for cancer of the larynx in 1990, died at a hospital on Sunday. Diana Ross, Bruce Springsteen and other stars had helped pay her medical bills because she had no health insurance. From 1961 to 1964, Wells hit the Top 10 on the pop

charts with "The One Who Really Loves You," "You Beat Me to the Punch," "Two Lovers" and her signature song, "My Guy," all written or co-written by fellow Motown star Smokey Robinson.

"I don't think there's any audience with an age of 30 through 50 that doesn't know the words to 'My Guy,'" said Lucy Gordy Wakefield, Motown Records' first sales chief.

Wells left Motown in 1964 after a contract dispute following the release of "My Guy."

"She didn't make a dime off of it," said her manager, Thomas "Beans" Bowles.

Like many artists of the time, Wells was naive about the business end of the music, her friend Maye James said. "They were beat out of a lot of money, Mary included. They were just signing contracts, they were so happy to be making music," she said.

Wells signed with 20th Century Fox records and later recorded for Atlantic-Atco and Jubilee. But she never approached her previous success. Before she fell ill, she continued to perform in clubs and oldies revues.

"Money was always tight, so she always had to work," James

said. Wells was born in Detroit and began singing at 10 in local clubs and talent contests. At 16 she approached Motown Records founder Berry Gordy hoping to sell a song and found herself signed as a performer. "She wanted Berry Gordy to get someone to sing her song," said Esther Gordy Edwards, Wells' manager at Motown. "He said she could sing it, and she says, 'Oh, I can't sing.'" But she did, and "Bye, Bye Baby" became a hit.

Later she toured with the Beatles.

When Wells was diagnosed

with cancer, the two-pack-a-day smoker had no medical insurance, and she lost her modest home in Los Angeles.

The Rhythm and Blues Foundation in Washington raised more than \$50,000 to pay her medical bills. Ross gave \$15,000, Rod Stewart and Springsteen \$10,000 apiece, and the Temptations \$5,000.

"People say this is a cruel business — and it is," she said after surgery in 1990. "But a lot of people in the business do have hearts."

She is survived by four children and a brother. Funeral arrangements were incomplete.

S.C. minorities want share of BMW work

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Some minority business owners say they want the state to help them get a share of the work building the new BMW plant in Greer.

The governor's office could start by compiling a list of minority contractors for BMW to use, said James T. Floyd, who has been part of the Governor's Competitiveness Council for several years.

The governor's office has contacted BMW to ensure that the automaker will be open to information about minority-owned businesses, said office spokesperson, Tucker Eskew.

"That's not to offer any guarantee," Eskew said.

But Floyd said work has already begun for BMW, and minority contractors weren't informed.

"They have started grading already," he said. "I know two or three minority contractors who own pretty good grading equipment, but nobody said anything to them."

The president of Columbia's Urban League, J.T. McLawhorn, said that government offices, such as the Minority Business Development Centers and the Governor's Office of Small and Minority Business Assistance, should be aggressive in helping minority businesses get BMW contracts.

But minority business owners

say they don't want a handout.

What they want is an entry so that we can compete on a fair and equal basis," said John Brown, founder of South Carolina's largest minority-owned business.

Brown, who runs Am-Pro Protective Agency Inc. in Columbia, said the owners calling for the state to help should step forward themselves.

The Peace Center in Greenville is an example of how encouraging use of minority-owned businesses adds to a project, minority business leaders said.

Julia Chiles Adams, director of the Greenville human relations commission, said the opening of

doors was not a handout but a good business decision.

General contractor for the Peace Center, Fluor-Daniel, carved out areas of expertise and matched them with minority-owned businesses whenever possible.

"There was no federal mandate," Floyd said. "It was just a group of managers who decided for the Peace Center all projects would involve minority contractors as prime and subcontractors."

To Floyd, the BMW case is different from the Peace Center. In this instance, the state is providing \$150 million for the project. That financial involvement puts more responsibility in state government's lap, he

said.

"If the state can provide \$150 million for this project, it should step forward and take responsibility for minority contractors," Floyd said.

Students sterilized

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native Dr. C. Nash Herndon performed many of the sterilizations. Chaitkin quotes Herndon as saying that the surgery was "usually" not done on "children younger than eight or ten years old."

Herndon, 76, retired three years ago from Bowman Gray Medical School, where he was the chief geneticist for many years, but is not a surgeon. He was on the faculty in residency training in 1941 when the medical school first moved here.

"I have never performed such an operation," he said this week. "I have never heard of Chaitkin."

Although he maintained that sterilization of mentally retarded was not performed at Bowman Gray, he did acknowledge that there was a eugenics law in the state from the 40s through the 70s. Eugenics is the science of developing the best breeding population of the human race. "It permitted sterilization of mentally retarded," he explained. "They were the chief target. You had to have an IQ of less than 70."

Herndon also verified the existence of a group Chaitkin charges led the sterilization project, the Human Betterment League of North Carolina. Tobacco and textile mogul James G. Hanes was the president, and Gorden Gray's great-aunt, Alice Gray, was the secretary.

Asked about the purpose of the League, Herndon answered, "It had to do with the general improvement of the human population. To have a nice, well, I don't know exactly how to say that, but it didn't advocate sterilization. We were interested in seeing that the mentally retarded were brought under control as well as we could, but we didn't have any large-scale sterilization project. We

were trying to prevent the mating of those people in the first place. That was a better way."

Herndon said the group was founded in 1946 and operated for about 10 years, after which "there was a general drop-off in interest."

Herndon said race was not a factor, but "if you're going to get picky and look at percentages, it may have been higher for blacks."

Chaitkin says the Sterilization League of America, a pro-fascist eugenics group from the 1930s, is

now called the Association for Voluntary Surgical Contraception "and is paid by the U.S. Agency for International Development to head up our government's program to sterilize predominantly non-white people in the Third World."

Chaitkin charges that the Human Betterment League was the NC branch of the national eugenics sterilization movement.

Asked if eugenics sterilizations were carried out at Bowman Gray, Bill Blance, director of information,

said, "I don't think we would have a comment on that because we know nothing about it."

Chaitkin also charges that Dr. Clarence Gamble, heir to the Proctor and Gamble soap fortune, was the sterilizers' national field operations director. Herndon verified that Gamble was associated with the Human Betterment League. "Gamble came down here and stayed quite a lot. He and Mr. Hanes were friends. It was a diffuse organization. It collected a lot of people."

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