

00:00:00	Music	Transition	<p>“Crown Ones” off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs. Chill, grooving instrumentals.</p>
00:00:05	Morgan	Host	<p>Hello, I’m Morgan Rhodes. You’re listening to <i>Heat Rocks</i>. My co-host, Oliver Wang, is out doing scholarly things, scholarly pursuits, and he will be back with us next week.</p> <p>As you well know by now, every episode we invite a guest to join us to talk about a heat rock. You know, fire, flammables, combustible material. And today we’ll be going right back to 1971, to the seminal album by Marvin Gaye, <i>What’s Going On?</i></p>
00:00:30	Music	Music	<p>“Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)” off the album <i>What’s Going On?</i> by Marvin Gaye. Soft, funky soul with layered vocals.</p> <p><i>Whoa, ah, mercy, mercy me</i>  <i>Oh, things ain't what they used to be, no, no</i>  <i>Where did all the blue skies go?</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]</i></p>
00:00:51	Morgan	Host	<p>If you’ve listened to this show a time or two, you’ve probably heard the phrase “layered vocals” often. And while there are a myriad of ways to describe Marvin Gaye’s 11th album, <i>What’s Going On?</i>, any description should include the use of multi-tracking and layered vocals, which produced an internal call and response, back and forth, an echo that sounded like his conscience, which resonated with our own. How could it not? How could you ignore the utterings of a man whose party at the opening at the album went awry, after Frankie came home from combat and the world turned blue? Shout-out to Joe Sample.</p> <p>Pondering, pensive, rapt, musing. These are all synonyms for introspective. War, police violence, criminalization of Black and Brown folks, and a sobering grief. These are all reasons to <u>be</u> introspective.</p> <p>Reasons to break from your norm, sonically. Reasons to break from your genre. Reasons to surprise your fans, and your label, and Berry Gordy. Reasons to unite protest songs that dissolve so seamlessly between tracks. Reasons to want to holler, albeit in a falsetto. Reasons not to escalate. Reasons that the answer to a war was behind door number three, after faith and hope. Reasons to prophesy. Reasons to speak softly while carrying a big heart. Reasons to name, start, and end your album with one central and timeless question: what’s going on?</p> <p>This album is a heat rock, meeting all the standards of a heat rock, meeting all the criterium of a heat rock. It is, for sure, a heat rock, because on May 21st, 1971, Motown and Marvin Pentz Gaye released a masterpiece, and I think Marvin Gaye <u>could</u> see them coming down his eyes, so he had to make the song cry. To that I say, Lord have mercy, mercy, mercy me.</p>
00:02:49	Music	Music	<p><i>[An instrumental section of “Mercy Mercy Me” fades back in and</i></p>

*plays for a moment before fading back out under Morgan]*

- 00:03:16 Morgan Host *What's Going On?* was the album pick of our quest today, Father Amde. A griot is a storyteller in West African tradition, a praise singer, a poet or musician. A repository of oral tradition. We also call them preservationists, one who retains and recalls history for the uplift and safe keeping of culture. Our guest is certainly that.
- One of the founding fathers of the legendary Watts Prophets, he's contributed to culture, engaging all of his senses. His are the hands that baptized Nina Simone. His is the voice that spoke at Bob Marley's funeral. His are the eyes that saw firsthand the revolution and the uprising here in the city. He and his brothers lent their ears. His, and Richard Dedeaux's, and Otis O'Solomon's, to the voices of revolution, of uprising, and blessed us with their social commentary.
- His music, his and the Watts Prophets', blends jazz and spoken word. I'm honored to have Father Amde in the studio today. Welcome to the show.
- 00:04:17 Father Amde Guest Thank you so much for inviting me.
- 00:04:19 Morgan Host We always ask at the beginning of the show, how did you come to have this album in your possession, or what was your introduction to *What's Going On?*
- [Morgan responds emphatically and amusedly several times as Father Amde speaks.]*
- 00:04:29 Father Amde Guest Well, I don't know anybody during the era of Marvin Gaye when he made *What's Going On?* I don't know any African American that, if they had the money, they didn't have that album. I mean, there was a part you couldn't go anywhere in America and not hear—any community where there was music, you were going to hear that album soon as you got out of the car somewhere.
- But how I became acquainted with Marvin Gaye is Watts Prophets. I was working for the Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade, a philanthropic organization, and each year we did a concert, and it would be a tribute to someone. And this year, it was a tribute to Quincy Jones, and he had just gotten out of the hospital.
- And so we had become, being poets, you know, nobody really wanted us around at that time, 'cause poetry was just beginning to touch people. So, being working at the Brotherhood Crusade, we got chosen a lot—'cause I helped write the show—we got chosen to do tribute poems, or introductory poems. And so we became quite well known for doing that.
- And so, we got chosen to introduce Marvin Gaye, and when Richard finished the poem—I can't remember it now, I wish I knew where that poem was—Richard said, "Marvin Gaye!" And Marvin walked past us, went out to the microphone. The people were standing, screaming.
- 00:06:04 Father Guest And he turned around and left the mic and said, "Who are y'all

Amde

men? I ain't never been introduced like that. Who are you?" And then the producer was like, "Man, get back out there on stage!" 'Cause the people were just screaming. And so he ran back out on stage, but he went, "I want y'all number, I want y'all number!" He was saying that as he went back out on stage.

And that's how we got to know Marvin Gaye, and to sometimes talk to him and do little things with him. Or just, you know, never a show, but we would be on shows with him. And we all got to be his friend. He kind of always had the blues a little bit, but he was a nice cat. Always kind and—

I had another experience with his wife, telling me about when he wrote that album *Trouble Man*, how he would go out each day. He always brought bums home, she said. Just people off the corner, he'd pick them up sometimes, bring them home, feed them, let them hear some music, and this and that.

And so he would, when he was doing that album *Trouble Man*, he was—he would bring the same guy home, and the guy would just sit in the corner. And his wife said, every other day you'd see that guy sitting in the corner. So at the finish of the album, she had to make out the credit list, and who gets paid. And she saw this name, and she asked Marvin who is this? He said, "Oh, that's that guy who was sitting in the corner over there." And she said, "What? He didn't do anything." And Marvin said, "Yes, he did. He sat in the corner over there, in His spirit."

00:07:49 Morgan Host Providing inspiration.

00:07:50 Father Amde Guest Yes. I just wanted to say that. I didn't want to get off of that—  
*[Morgan responds assuringly with "oh, no".]*

—album that we're talking about, but those were some of the experiences I had around Marvin Gaye.

00:07:58 Morgan Host It's good that you're bringing that up, because spirituality, Marvin's conscious is one of the things that makes up *What's Going On*? What's going on is a rhetorical question, and a real question about what was going on in 1971. And for the benefit of listeners that might not have been around in 1971, and be aware of what was going on, tell us what your experience was. What was going on in the world, and what was going on with you, in 1971, as an artist and as a man?

00:08:25 Father Amde Guest *[Morgan responds affirmatively multiple times.]*

In 1971, DeeDee McNeil, who was a contract writer for Motown and had written songs for many of the stars there, was a part of our group. So we kind of knew when Marvin was trying to put this album together, because they didn't want it at Motown. It wasn't the type of music that they did. They wanted something else. They didn't want that.

Not that sound, they didn't want that kind of conversation. He got

very political on that album, and he took you through the ghettos of America, and he took you on a trip in doing that album, you know what I mean? It flowed from—you could walk through what's going on, which is the question we still ask today. That's what made him, to me, such a great griot, such a great poet. Because his work, to this very moment, lives in the very library of people's minds all over this Earth.

There is nowhere where you don't hear Marvin Gaye played somewhere on this Earth, every day somewhere. His stuff, as I said, lives and continues to live. I think that that's what makes a great poet. Shakespeare's been dead, I don't know how many hundreds of years, and his work is being said somewhere every day, to date.

*[Father Amde responds affirmatively multiple times.]*

00:09:42 Morgan Host Marvin Gaye's album, and we'll get back to it a little bit later, is one of those albums—and I get asked this a lot—like, when you talk about the soundtrack to your life, this album is certainly a part of how I grew up, because it's synonymous with Black folks.

To your point, you're gonna hear this growing up. You're gonna hear this album, somebody's gonna have this, somebody's gonna play this. Whenever we'd have a Black history program, "What's Going On" and "Inner City". It was a part of every Black history play. Every conversation we did on the revolution.

Talk to us about what was going on when you came to hear this album for the first time. What were your first impressions when you heard the song—the whole album?

00:10:25 Father Amde Guest It was a wonderful—it was everything, it was wonderful. It talked about what we was experiencing. I was an ex-drug addict, so I knew what he was talking about in his "Flyin' High".

00:10:37 Music Music "Flyin' High (In The Friendly Sky)" off the album *What's Going On?* by Marvin Gaye. Slow, passionate, layered soul.

*I go the place where danger awaits me  
And it's bound to forsake me  
So stupid minded  
I can't help it*

*[Music fades out as Father Amde speaks]*

00:11:01 Father Amde Guest I was asking the same question: what was happening to our community? He took us a walk through our community at that time. You got sort of a visual in song of our lives at that time.

One of the Watts Prophets, Richard Dedeaux, would turn Marvin Gaye on and sit at his desk for two or three days, playing it over and over and over and over again, writing. He would, it would just motivate him to write. He didn't take anything from Marvin. He had all his stuff stacked up in his mind. But when he would get ready to release it, he would just sit there and turn Marvin Gaye on, and he didn't care what was happening around him. Marvin Gaye would

focus him.

00:11:44	Music	Music	<p>“What’s Happening Brother” off the album <i>What’s Going On?</i> by Marvin Gaye. Up-tempo soul with Marvin Gaye’s main vocal line being sung over a chorus of high vocalizations.</p> <p><i>War is hell, when will it end? When will people start getting together again? Are things really getting better, like the newspaper said?</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Father Amde speaks]</i></p>
00:12:05	Father Amde	Guest	<p>And I can remember the last time I was with him. It was at the Shrine Auditorium again, and it was a very different performance, um.</p>
00:12:17	Morgan	Host	<p>What year was this?</p>
00:12:18	Father Amde	Guest	<p><i>[Morgan responds several times, saying “sure” and laughing.]</i></p> <p>I can’t remember. It was not long before he got killed, I believe. And he had a bunch of girls in his entourage, a bus full. And he got on stage and he took his shirt off. He had just kinda gotten a little raunchy. And he didn’t even have to, but it looked like he was trying harder and harder to touch the audience in another kind of way. But that was the last time that I had an opportunity to be with him.</p>
00:12:56	Morgan	Host	<p>I want to talk a little bit about what was going on with Marvin Gaye in 1971, and sort of the inspiration of this album.</p> <p>What we do know is that part of the inspiration of this album was he had just come off of quite a bit of a depression, after losing Tammi Terrell. She had, you know, lost her battle with brain cancer and she was gone. His brother, Frankie, had come back from the Vietnam war, and had stories to tell, horror stories to tell.</p> <p>In trying to push this album off, Marvin Gaye had approached Berry Gordy and said, “I want to write this socially conscious songs.” And Berry Gordy was like, “No. Man, are you trying to ruin your career? Like, this is the trajectory we have you on.” But this was on Marvin Gaye’s heart, particularly the war, the Vietnam war.</p> <p>In 1971, my father had been back from the Vietnam war only a year and a half. So—and he doesn’t talk about it that often—but what I know now about the Vietnam war is, like many wars, it was hell, and there were a lot of brothers that suffered specific things to being a Black man fighting a war, and then coming home and still being considered not a hero, but a second class citizen.</p> <p>Let’s hear a little bit of “What’s Going On”.</p>
00:14:14	Music	Music	<p>“What’s Going On” off the album <i>What’s Going On?</i> by Marvin Gaye. Mid-tempo, passionate soul with multi-layered vocals.</p> <p><i>You see, war is not the answer For only love can conquer hate You know we’ve got to find a way</i></p>

*To bring some loving here today, oh, oh, oh*

*[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]*

00:14:33 Morgan Host It's interesting with that song, because in 1971 and around then, war was on a lot of people's minds. The Vietnam war was heavy on a lot of artists' minds. That specific war. Besides what Marvin Gaye was talking about, Watts Prophets had things to say about war, and I think it's "Pain" where you guys addressed a little bit of the war?

00:14:59 Father Amde Guest Yes, we talked about war a lot. But I just kind of teared up right there when you played that, because today is—what Marvin was talking about was all of it. It wasn't just the war. He was talking about police brutality, which is the same problem that we have today. It hasn't changed. And he saw so many mothers crying. I still see so many mothers crying.

And uh, he was so far ahead. I mean, you can turn, you can go through that song and see all of the same things that he's talking about are accelerated or exaggerate—are much more than they was when Marvin was talking about it.

He was sort of like a prophet, and giving us a picture of what's going on. We finally began to figure out what actually was going on, and sometimes it seems like we're being evicted from Earth, and uh, and he understood that. He understood pain. He always put feeling into everything that he did, and he was very serious about it. And as I said, many of these songs live in the library of people's minds. I mean, there's hardly any African American I can ask that wouldn't know one. One line.

00:16:32 Father Amde Guest But Berry Gordy was very clever at that, you know, in his song writing. He kind of changed song writing a bit to me, because he made the hook be repeated numerous times, and they said the reason why—I think DeeDee told me this—was at that time, you know, you—there wasn't the internet and all this—so you might—you heard the music in the community. The community was loud. You'd hear it up and down the streets.

*[Morgan laughs and agrees.]*

But when you would hear, "What's going on, what's going on, what's going on," you would hear it as a car passed, hey man. And you'd go in the record store and say, "Hey man, I heard a thing, it said 'what's going on'." "I know what that is. That's Marvin Gaye."

You know, so Berry kind of—he was a very brilliant cat. He put that hook in there and hook in there so that if you just passed, instantly you'd know the name of that song.

00:17:28 Music Music *["What's Going On" fades back in]*

*Don't punish me with brutality  
Talk to me, so you can see  
Oh, what's going on  
What's going on*

*Yeah, what's going on*  
*Ah, what's going on*

00:17:43 Morgan Host

*[Father Amde responds affirmatively multiple times.]*

It's the unmistakable quality of that voice, that echo that went through the album. This is the first album that Marvin Gaye produced mostly by himself. His was the decision to start this song out as sort of—it starts out conversational. It starts out with the saxophone and people greeting each other, brothers. "Hey man, what's going on, what's going on?" You think it's a party, and it is a party of sorts, but it's welcoming his brother home—his brothers home—from what they've been through.

I wanted to play a little bit of Watts Prophets' "Pain".

00:18:18 Music Music

"Pain" by Watts Prophets. Begins as acapella spoken word before a few distant strings fade in.

*Pain, pain, pain*  
*A little for some and a whole lot for others*  
*Complete crushing for those who never understand*  
*In this society, pain is a part of man*

*Pain*  
*Endure you must*  
*Or be crushed*  
*Pain*  
*(Pain)*  
*Pain*  
*(Pain)*  
*Pain*

*Like fire and irons burning flesh*

00:18:42 Morgan Host

I wanted to play that clip primarily because I think it's so brilliant how you tapped into so many of the themes that are present on this album. That there's a lot of conversation about pain on this album, about overcoming pain, about absorbing the pain that's going around you in your world and your community as an artist.

We expect our artists to absorb this pain and then speak to the people about the pain. That's part of the responsibility of a prophet, to speak to the people on behalf of what's going on. To sort of be the voice, the voice of God.

In terms of this album, what do you think Marvin Gaye did best? In terms of communicating what was going on in the world, what did he do best? What did he leave you with?

00:19:27 Father Amde Guest

He left me with his voice. He left me with inspiration. He was another one who taught us how to swing the blues. You could dance off of his blues, like B.B. King. He was another one who taught us to swing the blues, and he's in that kind of character.

00:19:45 Music Music

"Every Day I Have The Blues" by B.B. King. Upbeat, fast swing with passionate vocals over jazzy instrumentals.

*Every day, every day I have the blues  
Every day, every day I have the blues  
When you see me worried, woman*

*[Music fades out as Father Amde speaks]*

00:20:02 Father Amde Guest He taught us to swing the blues. He looked into the future for us. He defined our present state at that time clearly. Marvin, you know, kind of gave us inspiration for the day to continue, asking the same question: "What's going on?"

*[Morgan repeats "what's going on?" back to Father Amde.]*

"What's really going on? Where are we really at? Where are these algorithms taking us?"

I was just watching the other day how all these people were going after a chicken sandwich, and I knew what did it. Algorithms.

*[Morgan and Father Amde both begin laughing.]*

00:20:44 Morgan Host Popeye's algorithms, huh?

00:20:46 Father Amde Guest Popeye's algorithms, you got it, baby!

00:20:50 Morgan Host For sure, for sure.

Um, I wanted to say something about how Marvin Gaye's mindset at the time in 1971 was shared by a lot of other artists. So, of course the focus of our conversation is his album, but I just wanted to mention that war and inner-war and outside turmoil was on the minds of a lot of artists. And I wanted to talk specifically about war.

He was not the only artist to talk about war then, to record about war. In fact, before we got we got here, he had recorded a song called "Soldier's Plea" in 1962, and, you know, the rumor around that was he was working his way into talking about war, but there was something that happened to him between 1962 and 1971. So he was sort of, you know, outside of consciousness when he was talking about it in 1962, and more tapped in, soul-wise, in 1971.

You can hear the difference, if we could play a little bit of Marvin Gaye's "Soldier's Plea" from 1962.

00:21:48 Music Music "Soldier's Plea" off the album *That Stubborn Kinda Fellow* by Marvin Gaye. Slow soul with layered vocals over rolling, marching drums.

*Soldier boy to you  
We all must do our share  
And darling, I don't mind  
The only thing that's grieving me is leaving you behind*

*Just say you'll be my girl and always be true*

*[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]*



- 00:22:13 Morgan Host Early Marvin Gaye talking about war, but from a completely different perspective. He speaks in the perspective of a soldier that's hopeful. By the time we get to *What's Going On?* he speaks more to the aftermath of soldiers coming home. Of people that have had that experience of watching lives being destroyed and experiencing on their own level.
- And so there is a little bit of a difference there between 1962, and of course there's a difference in his career in 1962 than 1971. Something has happened to him in between.
- 00:22:42 Father Amde Guest Well, you know, he probably always had this inside of him. He didn't just come up with that album. That album was in his soul. But you're working with a record company. You're trying to make money. You're trying to satisfy the CEO of that company that you're working for, and they are—Marvin was handsome and could sing and make sex things come up and all that.
- You know, so that's where he was trapped in a sense. It probably was part of his frustration that he couldn't get what he really wanted to say. A writer when they first start has to vomit, and he never got a chance to do that. He just came into the business singing beautiful love songs and getting over. But he never got a chance, until he had to take it, and that's when he said, "I'm doing this album, and this is what I'm going to say."
- 00:23:49 Morgan Host We'll be right back on *Heat Rocks* with our guest, Father Amde, talking Marvin Gaye's 1971 seminal album, *What's Going On?* after a brief word from our sibling MaxFun podcasts. Don't go anywhere.
- 00:24:03 Music Transition "Crown Ones" off the album *Stepfather* by People Under The Stairs
- 00:24:05 Promo Promo **Music:** "Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw. A jaunty, jazzy tune reminiscent of the opening theme of a movie.

**Speaker 1:** [*Severely distorted.*] I've got a message for you.

**April Wolfe:** Hi! It's me, April Wolfe! The host of *Switchblade Sisters* and co-writer of the new horror film, *Black Christmas*.

**Katie Walsh:** And I'm Katie Walsh. Film critic and occasional host of *Switchblade Sisters*.

**April:** We're here to announce that, for one episode, we will be doing something a little different. Much like Jeff Goldblum in David Cronenberg's *The Fly*, I will be going through a truly disturbing transformation!

**Katie:** April will transform from the interviewer into the interviewee. I will be asking her all about her new film, *Black Christmas*, her writing process, and ongoing existential dread.

**April:** But I will also be discussing John Carpenter's perfect masterpiece, *Prince of Darkness*.

**Speaker 2:** You guys seen any movies you like?

**Katie:** So, tune in to *Switchblade Sisters* for a one-of-a-kind episode, with April Wolfe. And me! Katie Walsh.

**April:** See you then!

**Speaker 3:** Only the corrupt are listened to, now!

[*Music ends.*]

00:24:51 Promo Promo

**Music:** Upbeat, fun music.

**Lisa Hanawalt:** Hey, if you like your podcasts to be focused and well-researched, and your podcast hosts to be uncharismatic, unhorny strangers who have no interest in horses, then this is not the podcast for you.

**Emily Heller:** Yeah, and what's your deal?

[*Lisa laughs.*]

I'm Emily.

**Lisa:** I'm Lisa.

**Emily:** Our show's called *Baby Geniuses*!

**Lisa:** And its hosts are horny adult idiots. We discover weird Wikipedia pages every episode.

**Emily:** We discuss institutional misogyny!

**Lisa:** We ask each other the dumbest questions, and our listeners won't stop sending us pictures of their butts.

**Emily:** We haven't asked them to stop! But they also aren't stopping.

**Lisa:** Join us on *Baby Geniuses*.

**Emily:** Every other week on [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).

[*Music ends.*]

00:25:28 Music Transition

"Crown Ones" off the album *Stepfather* by People Under The Stairs

00:25:30 Morgan Host

Alright, and we are back, talking Marvin Gaye's 1971 seminal *What's Going On?* with Father Amde.

Let's talk a little bit about one of the tracks on the album which I think speaks a lot to what was going on in the community, sort of the community heartbeat, the burden of the community, and what was on people's minds? It's also one of my favorites, which is "Inner City".

00:25:54 Father Guest

[*Laughing*] I knew you was gonna say that.

Amde

00:25:55 Music Music “Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)” off the album *What’s Going On?* by Marvin Gaye. Soulful R&B with percussion and layered vocals.

*Bills pile up sky high  
Send that boy off to die  
Make me wanna holler  
The way they do my life  
Make me wanna holler*

00:26:11 Morgan Host What’s your first feeling, coming out of that, hearing it?

00:25:13 Father Amde Guest I’m still hollering.

*[He laughs, and Morgan responds affirmatively, saying “dig”.]*

I’m still hollering. Still makes me want to holler. I feel the same way he do right this very moment. I mean, there’s some way out things going on now. Some good things, but overall people are just rushing through life. And it’s very different for me, as a poet as an artist, because my download came from my grandmother, my uncle, my aunt, and my cousins, and so and so.

But this generation's download came from a computer, and that’s a little different than the download that I got. I hear a lot of old people say, “When I talk to my youngsters today, I’m talking to them, and their phone is there also in the conversation.”

So, we live in a parallel universe is what I’m kind of saying sometimes. At least, I do. I go in and out of digital as much as I can.

00:27:18 Morgan Host Same, same. But I’m not exactly a part of this new generation. I’m Generation X, so. And we talk about this on the show all the time. I’m always teasing Christian, because Christian’s a millennial. So this generation you’re talking about with the phone right next to them, that’s him. No shame. *[Laughs]* No shame, Christian.

But I hear your heart, and your concern about the youth. And this was also evident on this album. I mean, one of the most beautiful songs on this album, to me at least, is “Save The Children”.

00:27:47 Music Music “Save The Children” off the album *What’s Going On?* by Marvin Gaye. Slow, passionate R&B with spoken words echoed by singing (in parentheses).

*Who’s willing to try  
(Who is willing to try)  
To save a world  
(To save a world)  
That’s destined to die  
(That is destined to die)*

*[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]*

00:28:07 Morgan Host And to me, that’s prophecy. That’s prophecy.

00:28:10 Father Amde Guest That's right. The world's not singing now. As you look across America at the homeless, and the numbers growing, and who really cares?

*[Morgan repeats "who really cares?"]*

You know, Otis has a point when he says, "Everybody's full of booze, trying to get a little pull, if possible a wagon."

*[Father Amde and Morgan both laugh.]*

Seems to be where everybody's at, and everybody's rushing.

00:28:37 Morgan Host Right. And the continuing generations, especially the children, certainly on your heart on that, definitely on the heart of Marvin Gaye, and also on the heart of Curtis Mayfield. 'Course 1971 is the year he puts out the *Roots* album, and one of my favorite song son there is "We Got To Have Peace".

00:28:55 Music Music "We Got To Have Peace" off the album *Roots* by Curtis Mayfield. Upbeat, folky soul with strings and percussion.

*Give us all an equal chance  
It could be such a sweet romance  
And the soldiers who are dead and gone  
If only we could bring back one  
He'd say, "We got to have peace  
To keep the world alive  
And war to cease*

*[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]*

00:29:12 Morgan Host I'm not an artist and I won't know what it's like to be an artist, but I've always wanted to ask—and sometimes I ask artists—what does it cost, and what does it give back, to speak about what's going on in the community? To pour your heart and your soul into your art, to speak about the pains and the ills? What does it cost you, and what does it give back? What does it take from you to have these conversations and to use your art to make commentary?

00:29:42 Father Amde Guest It's very difficult to speak the truth a lot of times, if it's raw and very hard truth. We've talked about Marvin Gaye and what he talked about, what was going on. But when Marvin was talking, there were no algorithms. There was no digital world. There was no internet. So, I hope that in this interview I get to where I can do a poem on what I think Marvin would be talking about today. May I do it?

00:30:20 Morgan Host Absolutely.

00:30:21 Father Amde Guest *Internet  
is a wonderful thing  
but everything has a yin and a yang*

*And I hear people say  
each and every day  
that the internet will set modern man free  
like a dolphin in the sea*

*Now this statement completely confused me  
since when, my friends  
has a net set anything free?*

*now my simpleness, I regret  
but where's the freedom  
in the net?*

*Fishermen make nets  
spiders weave webs  
both are traps*

00:31:05 Father  
Amde

Guest

*The spider knows all in his web  
he keeps it inside  
day and night  
wrapped real, real tight  
with a click and a bite*

*Is it online, inline  
download, unload  
where's the freedom in a net?*

*Stealth traps in your laps  
net zero hero  
skytel intel DSL email tell  
tell, tell*

*Processing your personal soul for info  
no telling where it go  
only the netmaker really know*

*Now, you used to be able to shred it  
but now that's jive  
the hard drive is always alive*

00:31:51 Father  
Amde

Guest

*Wrapped real, real tight  
with a click and a bite  
spiderman can pull you up tonight*

*Free man freely entering a net  
with one big experienced regret  
because there's no freedom in a net*

*Fishermen control their nets  
spiders control their webs  
who, my friend  
controls the world wide web you're in?*

*What spider has you in its website?  
wrapped real tight  
with a click and a bite.*

00:32:30 Father  
Amde

Guest

I think that's what Marvin Gaye would be talking about today, now. That era is gone. The youth of today have to deal with now, and what are they dealing with? They must understand that phone in

their hands, and how that instrument affects them. And that's the only way they can deal with it, they have to understand how it affects them. And one example is to see all those people running after that chicken sandwich.

*[Both laugh.]*

Again I say that.

00:33:10	Morgan	Host	So in other words, the children need saving right now. Save the children.
00:33:13	Father Amde	Guest	So many—in so many levels. On so many levels, they need saving.
00:33:19	Morgan	Host	“Save The Children” is, as I said, it's one of my favorites—
00:33:22	Father Amde	Guest	Save the world, though.
00:33:23	Morgan	Host	Save the world.
00:33:24	Father Amde	Guest	The whole world needs saving right now.
00:33:26	Morgan	Host	It's—there's a moment on that song, and I think it's at the 3:07 mark. One of the most beautiful things about this album is the way that each song segues into the next. It's like one complete thought. So there isn't a—

*[Father Amde responds emphatically.]*

It's the whole heart of Marvin Gaye, one complete thought. He never stops and starts. This is him, as you say, putting his soul out there, finally getting a chance to put his soul out there.

00:33:52	Music	Music	“Save The Children” off the album <i>What's Going On?</i> by Marvin Gaye.
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*You will save the babies, all of the children*

*But who really cares?*

*Who's willing to try?*

*To save our world*

*[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]*

00:34:20	Morgan	Host	The reason why I feel like—and thank you so much for bringing up this album. Because you forced me to go back to it and to relisten to this album, and I think I heard it in a way that I hadn't heard it before. Growing up, you'd hear the elders always say, “Ain't nothing new under the sun.”
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*[Father Amde responds affirmatively.]*

There's nothing new under the sun. And listening to this album, that was the first thing that I thought. There's nothing new under the sun. What he was talking about, he was so—it was such a visionary

response to what was going on. Not just what was going on now, but it was almost like he knew that this album would survive him, but also these themes would survive him, that nothing would change. And he's asking us, like, "I'm laying the groundwork, but I'm also asking you, what are you gonna do? Who really cares, do you care? Not just in general who really cares, but do you care, and do you care enough about what's going on?" So, one of my favorite songs.

And I want to ask you, because we ask our guests all the time, if there's a song on the album—let's just say, you know, we talked about everyone should know a Marvin Gaye song, everyone should know a song off this album. But let's just assume that we meet someone who doesn't, who's never heard this album. To get them into the mindset and the spirit of Marvin Gaye, which song would you suggest that they listen to from the album?

00:35:37 Father Amde Guest Oh, that's very difficult to say, but just a complete stranger, I probably would say "What's Going On."

00:35:43 Morgan Host "What's Going On."

*[Father Amde says "mm-hm" affirmatively.]*

Why that one?

00:35:45 Father Amde Guest To put that quote, put that question out there. And I think it shows you what's going on with the questions that it asks. You know, so I think that would be very revealing to a person who first gets that album.

00:35:59 Morgan Host What do you think you learn about Marvin Gaye as an artist and as a man in that song?

00:36:07 Father Amde Guest Oh, I learned that he had very deep feelings and a very broad understanding, and as I say, in a wonderful spirit. When you see guys, artists like this, what you have to understand with artists, like that guy that—it's not all him. It's also his ancestors that wanted something said. You see, we're the end results of thousands of years of ancestors, father to son, father to son, father to son. We're the end results of all of that.

Marvin was the end results of all of his grandfathers that ever came about, and whatever they went through was in him, too. And somehow, as you become less egotistical and a more seasoned artist, and you are serious, with deep feeling, you find out it's not always all about you. It's those voices, those lines that you hear in your mind.

00:37:11 Music Music "God Is Love" off the album *What's Going On?* by Marvin Gaye. Upbeat, impassioned soul with layered, stacking vocals.

*Don't go and talk about my father  
'Cause God is my friend  
Jesus is my friend  
He loves us whether or not we know it  
And He'll forgive all our sins*

*[Music fades out as Father Amde speaks]*

00:37:30 Father Amde Guest And I know Marvin heard lines, 'cause I can hear those lines, and I see those lines living, as I said, in the library of people's minds. And so I—that's the one that I would give to them and he, again, as I can say, was a wonderful spirit. A wonderful, inspiring spirit. I can listen to that song, to his album, anytime. It doesn't make and it's always fresh. Like one of the Watts Prophets said, "Truth don't spoil, it's always fresh whenever you get it."

*[He laughs, and Morgan agrees emphatically.]*

00:38:05 Morgan Host Indeed, indeed. This album is not just social commentary, but to me it's also a deeply spiritual album. And spirituality is something that's a conversation that surrounded Marvin Gaye his whole career, it was a part of his life. He was asked about his faith and a little about his beliefs in an interview that he did when he was living overseas. He was interviewed on a show called *The Follies*, and if we could play a little bit of that.

00:38:31 Clip Clip **Host:** In your career, you've done an LP centered around the theme of sex, and other songs—

**Marvin Gaye:** I did, yeah.

**Host:** —very religious. The LP was. And also some of your songs are very spiritually minded, very religious, with the body and the soul. Could you elaborate on that?

**Marvin:** Well, I think that, you know, I'm not gonna pretend I'm a saint or a monk or anything, but um. I am what I am. And I think as a whole individual, one should express what one feels, and what one feels inside one's soul, as an artist, and—

*[There is a tapping sound of someone hitting a mic.]*

**Marvin:** Whoops, pardon me. And um, I just try and express life as I see it, and certainly sensuality and sex is a great part of our lives. Though we don't like to speak of it too often. It seems better if it's done quietly, but um. I don't mind recording about it, and I feel that it's been within taste. As far as the spirituality is concerned, I'm the son of an apostolic minister, and I know a great deal about God. I've been with God all my life. And uh, there too sounds hypocritical, but I'm a pretty religious guy. I don't feel that sex and religion, um—they're both controversial, but if one can work it out properly, I think it works okay.

00:40:00 Morgan Host Did you think—because this has been a bit of a debate around his career—did you think Marvin Gaye was struggling with being an artist that wrote about sexuality and one that wrote about spirituality? Was he struggling with two sides of himself, or did he just embody two sides of himself? Did you see his career and his life as a struggle between two parts?

00:40:20 Father Amde Guest I think he was a complete human being. He had all of that in him. You know, we have all the extremes, we can go from hate to love. Marvin had all of that, but he had a profoundly deep spirit. And as I



said, maybe he didn't articulate it, but as you get older, you begin to, you know—where do those lines come from in your mind? You know, you begin to wonder about the spiritual part of you. And I think he was holding himself Pentecostal, and they were always on that feeling, that spirit within you, or that was always there.

So I see him as a deeply spiritual man, and again, you know, sometimes God works in mysterious—different kind of ways, they say. And if you don't go the way that you—go down the wrong road, you stumble until you get on the right track. And I think that all the tracks that your mind or your spirit is trying to get out of you to say. I think when he got to *What's Going On?*, all of that spirit, all of those ancestors came out of him.

00:41:41	Morgan	Host	As well as the voice of God.
00:41:42	Father Amde	Guest	There you go.  <i>[Morgan repeats herself.]</i>  The spirit. That's right, the spirit of the most high.
00:41:46	Music	Music	"Wholy Holy" off the album <i>What's Going On?</i> by Marvin Gaye. Slow, tender, ballad-like soul with horns and strings under fervent vocals.  <i>(Wholy holy)</i> <i>We should believe in one another</i> <i>(Believe in Jesus)</i>  <i>Jesus left a long time ago, said he would return</i> <i>(Believe it)</i> <i>He left us a book to believe in</i> <i>In it we've got a lot to learn</i>  <i>[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]</i>
00:42:13	Morgan	Host	I see a person who is able to speak about community stuff, the battles in the community, his beautiful relationship with God, and also other themes. I don't see a battle. I see, what you say, a complete, whole human being—
00:42:27	Father Amde	Guest	That's right, and—
00:42:28	Morgan	Host	—and a complete artist.
00:42:29	Father Amde	Guest	—and people labeled him. The Watts Prophets were labeled militants. We weren't militants. We were just fathers and sons that were speaking about the things that were going on in our lives and within our communities. And we—that was—we lost many a jobs, because they would say, "Oh, they're militants." And we weren't militant at all. We were just speaking about our lives, and what we were experiencing as human beings. And that's all Marvin was doing at that time.

We were all—that era was a very vocal era. It was the beginning of

rap, and that's what the Watts Prophets started out. We started out to open an area of expression for those with no area of expression. And Marvin was, too. He made people step out and speak up.

00:43:20	Morgan	Host	I wanted to ask you, 'cause you hinted at this a little bit earlier and we didn't get a chance to get into it. But one of the songs on here is about addiction. It is "Flyin' High in the Friendly Skies." Which I thought was a very clever way to describe and to talk about heroin addiction. And although the subject's heavy, it is to me one of the most gorgeous songs on this album.
00:43:42	Father Amde	Guest	Me, too.
00:43:43	Music	Music	"Flyin' High (In The Friendly Sky)" off the album <i>What's Going On?</i> by Marvin Gaye. Rolling soul with drums and soaring vocals.  <i>But I go crazy when I can't find it, In the morning, I'll be alright, my friend. But soon...</i>  <i>[Music fades out under Morgan speaking.]</i>
00:44:02	Morgan	Host	<i>[Reciting song lyrics]</i> "I go the place where danger awaits me." And in 1971, heroin is a big issue. We've, by this time, lost Frankie Lymon, we've lost Rudy Lewis, we've lost Billie Holiday. We're en route to lose Janis Joplin. I thought it was an interesting and really pretty stance in the way he expressed addiction and what was going on. Your thoughts about that song? 'Cause it's one of my favorites.
00:44:30	Father Amde	Guest	Very close to me, because I was a heroin addict. And that's a poem.  <i>I had plenty of fun and shot plenty of dope And off and off and thought there was no hope  But then a man who thought I fought And searched for the key that would set me free From my high that's been out all night</i>  So I knew what he had experienced. I knew that may help somebody, to hear him expressing what he went through. So it touched me very, very deeply, as I said. And we were all kind of writing about the same themes. If you go to Curtis Mayfield, I can't remember the song he got. He's got a song about drugs. The Watts Prophets.
00:45:18	Morgan	Host	James Brown.
00:45:19	Father Amde	Guest	James Brown got—
00:45:20	Morgan	Host	James Brown got "King Heroin."
00:45:22	Father Amde	Guest	"King Heroin." You know, we were all addressing what we were actually experiencing, and you couldn't miss it if you were an African American community.

00:45:33	Morgan	Host	In 1971.
00:45:34	Father Amde	Guest	That's right. And just about at this time, too. Things haven't changed, they've just accelerated and grown.
00:45:42	Morgan	Host	Let's hear a little bit of "King Heroin", Christian.
00:45:43	Music	Music	<p>"King Heroin" off the album <i>There It is</i> by James Brown. Spoken word over slow guitar and drums.</p> <p><i>I had a dream the other night, and I Was sitting in my living room</i></p> <p><i>Dozed off to sleep So I start to dreaming I dreamed I walked in a place and I saw a real strange, weird object</i></p> <p><i>Standing up, talking to the people And I found out it was heroin That deadly drug that go in your veins He says:</i></p> <p><i>"I came to this country without a passport..."</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]</i></p>
00:46:05	Morgan	Host	<p>I love "King Heroin". I love that song. I love the difference between that song and "Flyin' High in the Friendly Skies". We're still talking about the same drug. We're still talking about the same effects. It's just everyone's different narrational point. But I think, to your point, you were all saying the same thing, writing about the same things. The price that it cost, that addiction costs. Especially heroin. And so many African Americans and so many artists had lost their lives by that time.</p> <p><i>[Father Amde responds affirmatively.]</i></p> <p>Let's talk a little bit about "Mercy Mercy Me", 'cause that hasn't come up in the conversation.</p>
00:46:39	Music	Music	<p>"Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)" off the album <i>What's Going On?</i> by Marvin Gaye</p> <p><i>Ah, oh mercy, mercy me Ah, things ain't what they used to be, no, no Radiation underground and in the sky Animals and birds who live nearby are dying</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades to background as Father Amde speaks]</i></p>
00:46:59	Father Amde	Guest	It's just so prophetic. I couldn't tell you that I like any one better than I—each one is a jewel to me.
00:47:07	Music	Music	<p><i>[Song fades back in.]</i></p> <p><i>Oh mercy, mercy me</i></p>

*Oh things ain't what they used to be  
What about this overcrowded land  
How much more abuse from man can she stand?*

*[Music fades out again as Morgan speaks]*

- 00:47:23 Morgan Host It's hard to ask people to do this, especially writers and poets and artists. But we ask this of all of our guests. If you had to describe the album in three words, what would they be?
- 00:47:35 Father Amde Guest Wonderful is one. Inspiring is another. And divine inspiration. Divine inspiration is the other.
- 00:47:45 Music Music "What's Going On" off the album *What's Going On?* by Marvin Gaye

*Yeah, what's going on?  
Tell me what's going on  
I'll tell you what's going on  
Right on, baby  
Right on, baby*

*[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]*

- 00:48:02 Morgan Host So glad that you picked this album, Father. So glad to have the chance to speak with you as an elder, and I know you walk as a prophet and as a poet. So I appreciate you picking this album, from one poet and prophet talking about another. So, thank you so much.
- 00:48:18 Father Amde Guest Thank you very much for having me and being such a wonderful host.
- 00:48:21 Morgan Host Thank you so much. Tell us where we can find you and what's going on and what's next.
- 00:48:25 Father Amde Guest Uh, well I'm doing an album called *In Defense of Reality*. I'm, you know, I don't want artificial reality, I want reality. And so, that's what my new album is about. I have different kinds of poems on there that might, you know, strike out a little bit with some of the things that I see. Like, I have one poem, it's called "Google Told Me A Lie."

*[Morgan and Father Amde both laugh.]*

- 00:48:58 Morgan Host I love it.
- 00:48:59 Father Amde Guest You know what I mean. So, these are the things that I'm talking about. My response to how technology is effecting me. And I think anybody that wants to understand it has to seek directly how it's affecting them.

Like, when you think of something and suddenly there it is on your phone. Well, to an older person like me, I don't like my mind invaded like that, and I'd like to know how you invaded it, and I would like to have the key to lock you out.

*[Morgan laughs.]*

But the younger generation don't care about their privacy, but I do.

00:49:39	Morgan	Host	That's gonna do it for our interview with Father Amde about this gorgeous, precious, prolific album, <i>What's Going On?</i> by Marvin Gaye. For the benefit of those that are listening, familiarize yourself with this album and the career of Marvin Gaye, as well as the career of the Watts Prophets, who continue to be strong and voices and in support of the preservation of this culture.
00:50:04	Oliver Wang	Host	You've been listening to <i>Heat Rocks</i> with me, Oliver Wang, and Morgan Rhodes.
00:50:07	Morgan	Host	Our theme music is "Crown Ones" by <i>Thes One of People Under The Stairs</i> . Shoutout to Thes for the hookup.
00:50:13	Oliver	Host	<i>Heat Rocks</i> is produced by myself and Morgan, alongside Christian Dueñas, who also edits, engineers, and does the booking for our shows.
00:50:20	Morgan	Host	Our senior producer is Laura Swisher, and our executive producer is Jesse Thorn.
00:50:25	Oliver	Host	We are part of the Maximum Fun family, taping every week live in their studios in the West Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles.
00:50:31	Morgan	Host	And before we get out of here, here's a teaser for next week's episode where we sit down with Cristela Alonzo to talk A Tribe Called Quest's <i>We Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service</i> .
00:50:41	Cristela Alonzo	Guest	<p>I'll be honest with you. "We The People".</p> <p>I stopped doing stand-up in 2016. I took a break from doing stand-up. I devoted my life for the next three years, traveling the country, helping out communities, helping out people that needed—that were shell-shocked from the election, because of this song.</p> <p><i>[Oliver responds emphatically with "damn".]</i></p> <p>That's what I did. I left stand-up, and I decided to devote my life to the community because of this album. So like, when I knew I was coming on here, I wanted this album because I know that the podcast is about an album that changes your life. This song changed my life. Like, that's how important music is. That like, this song, "We The People" changed my life.</p>
00:51:24	Speaker 1	Promo	<a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> .
00:51:26	Speaker 2	Promo	Comedy and culture.
00:51:27	Speaker 3	Promo	Artist owned—
00:51:28	Speaker 4	Promo	—Audience supported.