

# **The Boy Band & Girl Group Phenomenon**

**1980s, 1990s and 2000s**

## Boy bands - The Origins

One would have to say it had its origins in the 60s with Motown and groups like Jackson 5, The Temptations and Four Tops, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles.



On reflection, these groups seem to have more credibility but probably because of the significance they have in music history.

That's not to say boy bands of the 80s, 90s and 2000s weren't hugely successful, it's just that their success seemed to be associated with millions of screaming, crying early teenage girls. The other issue is that they are usually put together by a third party with a view to making money, rather than coming together themselves because of like-minded musical interests. And appearance was everything, they had to be good looking (read what BMG & Simon Cowell said about Westlife). *The instability in these bands probably relates to the young age at which most of them joined.*

You will also see that a number of these boy bands eventually sue the management that put them together over financial matters, usually fraud related. This probably relates to the fact that because they are put together, the primary motivation is money more than the music.

But, a lot of them did write their own songs, which the aforementioned Motown bands did not (except for Smokey Robinson and the Miracles).

You can however go further back with the concept of pure vocal groups with the following in the 1950s. The term Doo-Wop was used for the musical style of a lot of these groups.

The Drifters ("Money Honey"), The Coasters ("Poison Ivy"), The Spaniels ("Goodnight Sweetheart, Goodnight"), The Chords ("Sh-Boom"), Frankie Lyman & the Teenagers ("Why Do Fools Fall In Love"), The Del-Vikings ("Come Go With Me"), The Platters ("The Great Pretender") and many more.



OR even the 1940s with "The Ink Spots" and "The Mills Brothers"

*So, the use of the "Boy Band" or "Girl Group" in this context, from 1980's onward, describes a pop vocal group. Usually, they do not play any instruments and focus their attention on singing and dancing. And as said above, they are usually a put together and appearance / image is critical to marketing.*

## New Kids on the Block (Dorchester, Massachusetts, USA) 1984

The so called “boy band” phenomenon probably started in the 80s with **New Kids on the Block**. *Yes, a put together group* by manager Maurice Starr (who had previously been sacked by New Edition for embezzling funds). Formed in 1984, the group initially included Donnie Wahlberg and younger brother Mark Wahlberg. Mark, however, left after a few months. The average age of the group at this time was 15.

Lineup: Donnie Wahlberg, Jonathon Knight, Jordan Knight, Joey McIntyre, Danny Wood



Their period of success ran from 1986 (first album) through to 1990. Their second album “Hangin Tough” (1988) featuring the smash hit “You Got It (the Right Stuff)” and their 4<sup>th</sup> album “Step by Step” (1990) were both #1 smash hits.

On their first two albums the group wrote the songs, with Donnie being the major contributor. The 4<sup>th</sup> album was mostly written by their manager and the 5<sup>th</sup> featured lots of 3<sup>rd</sup> party songwriters with contributions to some songs by group members,

The band split after their 5<sup>th</sup> album in 1994. However, in 2008 they reformed with all the original lineup. Since then, they have released 3 albums, the most recent being in 2024.

## Take That (England) 1990

Then in 1990 came Take That from Manchester, England (with Robbie Williams and Gary Barlow). Initially lasting from 1990 to 1996. Robbie Williams (the youngest member) was only 16 when the group was formed by then manager, Nigel Martin-Smith. After hearing Gary Barlow and given his songwriting ability, Nigel decided to build the group around him. *So essentially a put together group.*

Lineup (ages in 1990): Gary Barlow (19), Robbie Williams (16), Mark Owen (18), Howard Donald (22), Jason Orange(20).

From 1990 – 1996 the band released three albums ( two number 1s and one number 2 on the charts) and had 14 top ten singles, with the EIGHT of which were #1 smash hits.



“Back For Good” is perhaps their most well known song worldwide with all age groups.

Robbie Williams left the group in 1995 and the group officially broke up in 1996. However they reformed in 2002 with all original members except Robbie Williams. Since then, they have released 6 albums five of which reached #1 and the sixth reached #2.



## Boyzone (Ireland) 1993



Formed in Dublin, Ireland in 1993, it featured Ronan Keating.

Created by talent manager, Louis Walsh. *So again, a put together group.*

Lineup: Ronan Keating, Michael Graham, Keith Duffy, Stephen Gately, Shane Lynch

They released three albums from 1995 – 1998, all either #1 or #2 on the charts.

Gately passed away in 2009, aged 33 (undiagnosed heart condition)

Reformed in 2010 with four original remaining members – released four albums since #1, #7, #12, #10

## Westlife (Ireland) 1998

From Ireland, the group formed 1998 in Dublin and included Brian McFadden, once engaged to Delta Goodrem and a judge on The Voice Australia.

Original lineup came together naturally Kian Egan, Mark Feehily, Shane Filan (all schoolmates) plus Derek Lacey, Graham Keighron, Michael Garrett. Originally called Six As One and then IOYOU.

They then came to the notice of Boyzone manager Louis Walsh. Simon Cowell, then at BMG, would not sign them because, in his words, “They have great voices but they are the ugliest band I have ever seen”. Which further tells you how “Boy bands” are perceived and marketed.



So Louis then put together a new version of the group, keeping Kian, Shane and Mark. To this lineup he then recruited Brian McFadden and Nicky Byrne and so in July 1998 “Westlife” was born. *Essentially, a put together group.*

Lineup: Brian McFadden, Nicky Byrne, Kian Egan, Shane Filan, Mark Feehily.

They were signed to RCA records by Simon Cowell. Disband in 2012, reunited in 2018.

Since then they have released 12 albums - TEN #1s and TWO #2s on the music charts. Most recent release being 2021.

Brian left in 2004, after their 4<sup>th</sup> album.

## Backstreet Boys (Orlando, Florida, USA) 1992

Formed in 1992 by manager Lou Pearlman. *Another put together group.*

Lineup: Nick Carter, Howie Dorough, AJ McLean, Brian Littrell, Kevin Richardson



Released 4 albums between 1996 and 2000.

Released six albums from 2005 to 2022)

All but their Christmas album have been top ten, with three #1s and three #2s.

June 2006 Richardson left the band. 2012 Richardson rejoined the group.

## NSYNC (Orlando, Florida, USA) 1995

Lineup: Justin Timberlake, JC Chasez Chris Kirkpatrick, Joey Fatone & Lance Bass (who replaced Jason Galasso)

Formed 1995. Chris Kirkpatrick, one of the members, put the band together following conversations with Lou Pearlman who created Backstreet Boys. *Essentially put together.*

The name was initially inspired by Timberlake's mother who commented on how "in sync" the voices were. But, maybe, coincidentally it also follows the last letters of their first names justin**N**, chris**S**, Joe**Y**, jason**N**, j**C**



Released four albums from 1997 to 2001)  
#2, #7, #1, #1

Most well known songs: "I Want You Back", "Bye, Bye, Bye"

After their fourth album the group went on an indefinite break. Timberlake went onto a successful music and acting career.

Occasionally get together for one-off shows.

# More Recently

## Jonas Brothers (New Jersey) 2005

Brothers: Joe, Nick, Kevin



Formed 2005

All but first album in the top ten, with three consecutive #1s

## One Direction (London, UK) 2010



Formed on X-Factor in 2010. *Put together group.*

Five albums 4 x #1 and 1 x #2

Lineup: Niall, Zayn Malik, Liam Payne, Harry Styles, Louis Tomlinson

Zayn left after the 4<sup>th</sup> album in 2015

2016 the group split.

2024, October Liam Payne died (falling from balcony in Buenos Aires) – age 31.

## K-POP – boy bands

South Korean pop bands.

**BTS** are probably the biggest of these bands.

*Put together* by Big Hit Entertainment

Also Seventeen, Stray Kids, EXO, NCT, ATEEZ.





## Girl Groups



**The Andrews Sisters**



**The Chordettes**

Can be traced back as far as the 40s and The Andrews Sisters.

### **The Andrews Sisters - Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA**

(three sisters - Laverne, Maxine and Patty) – “Rum and Coca Cola” (1945) and “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy”(1941) the latter covered by Bette Midler in the 1970s.

They really started performing at a very early) in 1925

Being sisters they started singing together very young, ages 14, 9 & 7 in 1925, but only came to the attention of people in **1937, via their radio broadcasts**, at which point they were 23, 21 & 19 respectively.

They were massive in their day, working not only with the bands but also making numerous cameos in movies. Also working with the likes of megastar, Bing Crosby.

Between 1938 and 1945 they had 30 top 10 hits and 6 #1s.

Patty left the group first in 1950 and the group finally broke up completely in 1953.

## The Chordettes - Sheboygan, Wisconsin, 1946

**Main songs:** Mr Sandman (1954), Lollipop (1958): formed in 1946; disbanded 1963.

Original lineup: Janet Ertel (b. Janet Buschmann), Alice Mae Spielvogel (b. Alice Buschmann), Dorothy Schwartz and Jinny Osborn. In 1950 Carol Buschmann replaced Alice and in 1952 Lynn Evans replaced Dorothy Schwartz.

The group's final lineup was Carol Buschmann, Janet Ertel, Jinny Osborn, Nancy Overton, Lynn Evans.

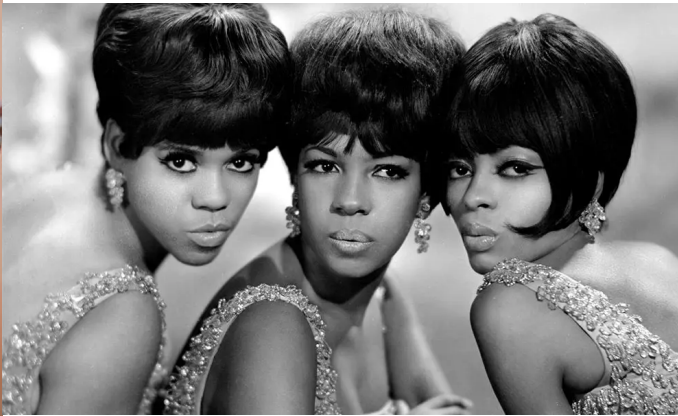
The group folded in 1963.

---

By the 1960s it was quite a big thing with Motown groups **The Supremes**, **Martha and the Vandellas**, **The Marvelettes** plus other artists from other labels such as **The Ronettes**, **The Crystals** & **The Shirelles**.



The Marvelettes



The Supremes (Diana Rolss far right)



The Shirelles

## Pointer Sisters - Oakland, Ohio, USA 1969

(Sisters June, Bonnie, Anita, Ruth). Between 1969 to 1972 the group grew from a duo (Bonnie & June), to a trio (plus Anita) and finally a quartet (Ruth).



They released 15 studio albums and had 13 Top 20 US hits between 1973 and 1987.

Bonnie left the group in 1977.

2006 June died and was replaced by Ruth's daughter Issa. 2009 Ruth's granddaughter Sadako joined the group. In 2015 Anita left the group due to ill health leaving Ruth as the only original member. Anita died in 2022. Bonnie died in 2020.



## **Sister Sledge – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA 1971**

Again all sisters - Kathy, Joni, Kim and Debbie Sledge. Formed in 1965, but they were very young (the eldest Debbie being 11).

In 1972 they signed to Atlantic Records (the youngest Kathy was 13), the eldest was now 18. Their first Top 10 hit “He’s The Greatest Dancer” and Top 5 hit “We Are Family” came in 1979. Their ages now ranged from 20 to 25. They had been releasing songs since 1971.



In 1989 Kathy left, but returned in 1993. Kim left in 2000. By June 2003 the lineup was Debbie and Joni plus Debbie’s daughter Camille. At this point they were a trio. In 2006 Debbie’s eldest daughter, Amber, joined the group. By 2008 the lineup was Joni, Amber and friend Chele Davis (replacing Debbie)

## **Salt’n’Pepa - New York City, USA 1985**

Real name Sheryl James and Sandra Denton respectively

Songs: “Push It” (1987); “Lets Talk About Sex” (1991); “Whatta Man” (1993) with En Vogue



## En Vogue - Oakland, California. USA 1989

Formed by Atlantic Records personnel Denzil Foster and Thomas McElroy. *So, again a manufactured group.*



## Bananarama - London, UK. 1980



Lineup: Sara Dallin, Keren Woodward, Siobhan Fahey

Had numerous hits between 1981 and 1989. This included ten Top 10 hits.

Their success started with “It Aint What You Do (It’s The Way That You Do It)” which also featured The Funboy Three.

As of 2025 they are still performing.



## Spice Girls London, UK. 1994

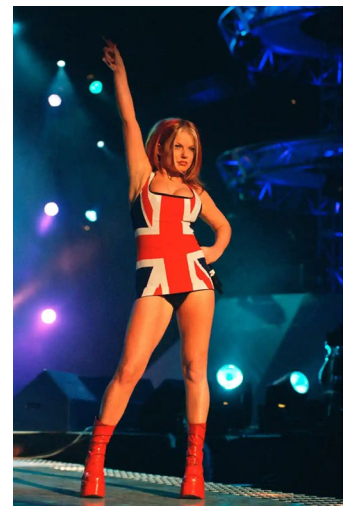
Formed by Heart Management in 1994. *So, again a manufactured group.*

Image, songs, video clips.

Lineup: Ginger Spice (Gerri Halliwell), Baby Spice (Emma Bunton), Scary Spice (Melanie Brown), Sporty Spice (Melanie Chisholm) and Posh Spice (Victoria Beckham).

They were very focused on control of their direction. They had also spent extensive time in songwriting workshops. All songs credited to Spice Girls.

The group left Heart Management in 1995. Eventually signed with 19 Entertainment (Simon Fuller) in mid 1995. But by this stage there was significant “buzz” around the band with numerous record companies now wanting to sign them. A few months later they signed a 5 album deal with Virgin Records.



On 8 July 1996 they released their first single “Wannabe” in the UK. The single was not released in the US until January 1997. It entered the charts at number 11 – the highest ever debut by non-American artist at the time. It reached number 1 in the US within 4 weeks.

They released a book “Girl Power!” which sold out in a day and made a film “Spice World”. The soundtrack to the film

Main songs: Wannabe, Say You’ll Be There, Spice Up Your Life, 2 Become 1, Stop they had 9 x #1 (6 consecutive #1s – second only to The Beatles with 7) and 1 x #2 singles.

Geri Halliwell left the group in 1999 and in December 2000 they technically split. But in 2007 they reunited for a world tour. Since then there have been occasional performances (without Victoria Beckham). As of 2026 rumours have surfaced of a reunion including Beckham.



## Destiny's Child – Houston, Texas, USA 1997

Seeds of the group began 1990. Beyonce and friend LaTavia Roberson joined another group. Kelly Rowland who was living in the Knowles house at the time joined in 1992. The group was a 6 piece called Girl's Tyme.

In 1993 the lineup was reduced to four. At this stage Beyonce's dad started managing them (voluntarily). Also the name changed to DESTINY.

In 1997 their name became Destiny's Child.

Signed to Columbia Records in 1992.

At this stage the lineup was Beyonce Knowles, Kelly Rowland, LaTavia Roberson and LeToya Luckett. This lineup appeared on the first two albums.

First single in 1997 was "No, No, No"

Problems in December 1999 led to a lineup change.

New lineup Beyonce Knowles, Kelly Rowland, Michelle Williams and Farrah Franklin.



Farah quit a few months after joining leaving them as a 3 piece, Knowles, Roland & Williams.

The group released 5 albums. The 3 piece lineup featured on the last three albums.

Their 3<sup>rd</sup> album "Survivor" went to number 1 and the 5<sup>th</sup> album went to number 2. The 4<sup>th</sup> album was a Christmas album.

Main Songs: "Say My Name", "Bills, Bills, Bills", "Jumpin Jumpin ", "Survivor", "Independent Women", "Bootylicious" – all of which were either #1 or #2 hits.

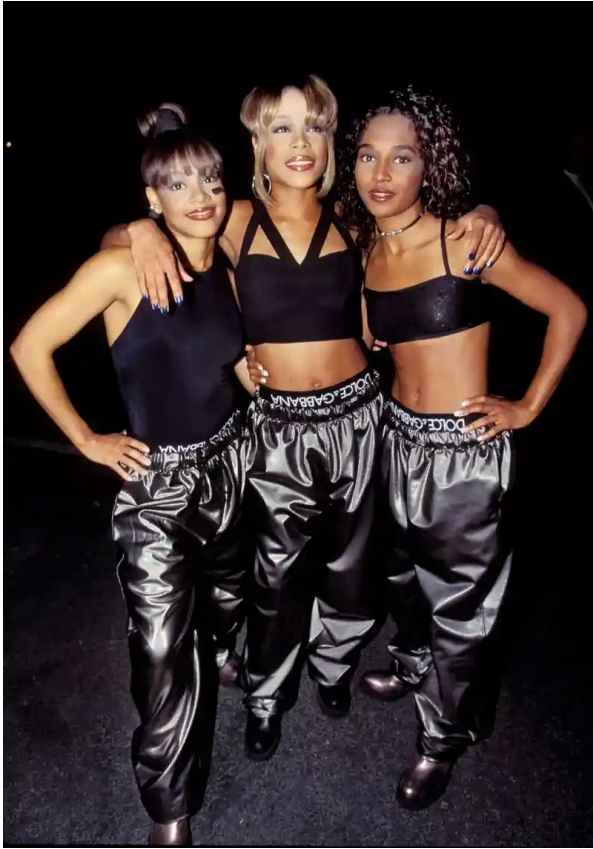
The group ended in 1996 and Beyonce went on to a mega solo career.

## **TLC - Atlanta, Georgia, USA 1990 – 2002, 2015 -**

Formed by record producer Ian Burke and one of his clients Crystal Jones.

*Manufactured.*

Lineup: Rozonda "Chilli" Thomas, Tionne "T-Boz" Watkins, Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes (died 2002)



## **Pussycat Dolls - Los Angeles, California, USA 2003 – 2008, 2017-2022**

Went through numerous line up changes between 1990 and 2003 when Interscope Records became involved. *Manufactured really.*





## **Fifth Harmony - Miami , Florida, USA 2012 – 2018, 2025 -**

Product of X Factor USA. *So, manufactured.*



## **Little Mix - London, UK 2011 - 2022**

A product of X Factor UK. *So, manufactured.*





## **All Saints - London, UK 1993-2001, 2006-2008, 2013-2016, 2017-2022**

Formed by two of the members.



## **Sugababes - London, UK 1998 -**

Formed by All Saints manager, Ron Tom and Sarah Stennett.

*Again manufactured.*



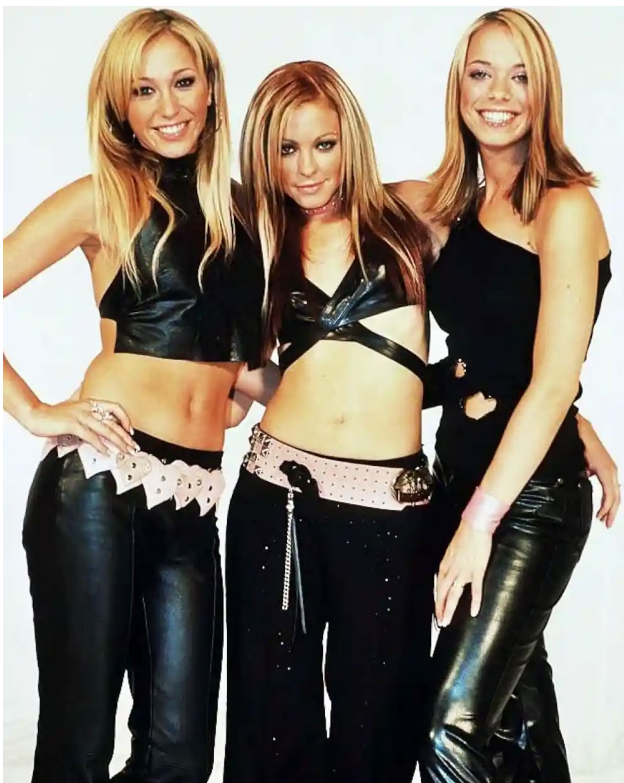
## **B\*Witched - Dublin, Ireland 1997 – 2002, 2012 -**

Two sisters plus 2 friends.



## **Atomic Kitten - Liverpool, UK 1998 – 2008, 2013 - 2024**

Put together by Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark members Andy McCluskey and Stuart Kershaw. *Again manufactured.*





## Girls Aloud - London, UK 2002-2009, 2012-2013, 2023-

Created through TV Show Popstars hence *manufactured*



## K-POP – girl groups

South Korean pop bands.

**Blackpink** are probably the biggest of these bands. Formed in 2010 by YG Entertainment. *Put together.*



Others include: AKB48, New Jeans, Girls Generation, Red Velvet, 2NE1, Twice, Wonder Girls