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Marvin Gaye Sings "The Star-Spangled Banner"

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Marvin Gaye Sings “The Star-Spangled Banner”
(N.B.A. All-Star Game, Los Angeles, February 13, 1983)

Aviator shades
shading dark eyes,
suit conservative,
he strides up to center
court and touches the mike
with the half-funky
drum beat already
booming forth from
the P.A. Before
he’s hit a note,
there’s already risk
in the air, this sense
of exploratory grace
that only deepens when
he sings the first few bars
way down low,
soft, slow, and soulful.
Somehow the song,
hard to sing in the first
place, seems a new
thing, a new body
with new blood,
full of air and open
space, wounded and healed.
You don’t know
where he’s going with it,
and what’s exciting is that
it sounds like he doesn’t
know either. The ramparts,
the broad stripes, the bright
stars, the twilight’s
last gleaming, the bombs
bursting in air, all
alive and open to oxygen
again. The crowd gets
more into it
as he goes along; they whoop
and holler when he nails
the high notes, and by
the end he’s won over
the entire Forum, Doctor
J included. It’s
a gorgeous moment, and Marvin,
coke-sick and exhausted,
basks in the warm applause,
gives ’em a grin, won’t
take off his shades.