

## IN APPRECIATION OF...

## SOUL

BY JEFF RANDALL

It is sweat. It is sweetness. It is pain. It is joy. Since its inception in the late 1950s and early 1960s, soul music has been all of these things. And even though the high levels of popularity it enjoyed in the 1960s are long gone, its influences remain highly visible on the surface of pop music today.

Soul started when the genres of rhythm and blues and gospel were blended by artists — most notably Ray Charles and Sam Cooke — who already were well-established in those individ-

ual styles.

Soul's elaboration on rhythm and blues involved increasingly intricate melodies and vocal harmonies that were rooted in both gospel and doo-wop sounds. The lyrics usually focused on romance, but were more emotionally naked and raw than their mainstream pop counterparts.

When pop music crooned, soul music screamed. When pop music held out its hand and smiled, soul music got on its knees and begged. When it was at its best, soul music earned every bit of its name.

In the South, soul built itself on the "chitlin circuit," an established ritual for black artists of the day in which they performed throughout Southern states in small-town halls and churches.

But by the mid-'60s, soul artists were big enough to mingle with the big names both on the charts and in the venues.

Otis Redding, Smokey Robinson, Aretha Franklin, Mary Wells, Wilson Pickett and dozens of others furthered the genre in

their own ways. In the 1970s, others followed. Gamble and Huff created the Philadelphia Sound, Al Green continued the down-home traditions of Memphis, Tenn., and Motown artists such as Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder expanded their lyrical and musical reaches.

James Brown injected the politics of black pride, backing them with rhythmic innovations that mesmerized listeners, even as they danced.

But like most good things, soul music didn't last. By the late '70s, disco and arena rock had knocked the gutbucket soulsters back to the "chitlin circuit," and one of pop music's most heartfelt and original genres had gone with them.

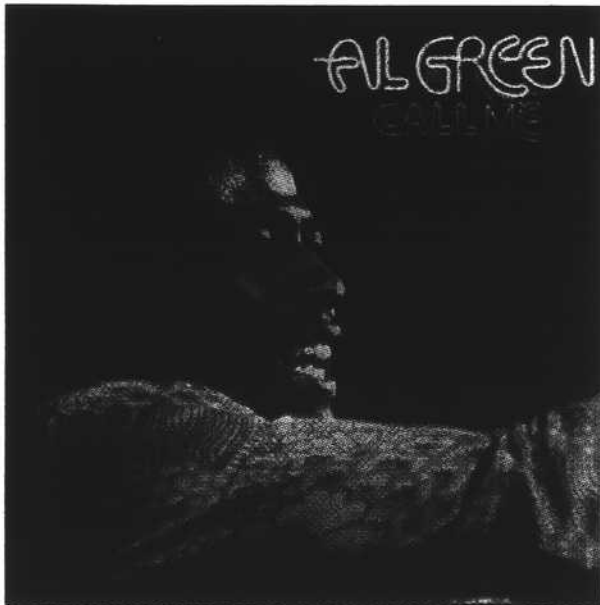
Nowadays, the soul tradition is best seen in artists such as Maxwell and Erykah Badu, some of the few artists who continue to write and record under the artistic wing of old-school soul greats. Countless hip-hop artists pay tribute to soul music's influence with their samples, and even the occasional cover is still heard on mainstream radio.

But for the most part, the only way to truly appreciate soul music is to delve into the old record racks and start skimming. And even if



STEVIE WONDER'S album "Talking Book," released in 1972, is considered by many critics to be one of his greatest efforts.

you've never known the pain of a broken heart, the struggle for equality or the joy of pure love, soul music will do what it was always meant to do: It will speak to you.



AL GREEN'S 1972 album "Call Me" contains classic songs such as the title track, "Have You Been Making Out OK" and "You Ought to Be With Me."

## THE ARTISTS

The roll call of soul legends is long and unwieldy, but the beginning collector can look to a few notables for a good introduction to the genre.

The Godfather of Soul, the Hardest Working Man in Show Business, Soul Brother No. 1, Mr. Dynamite. **James Brown** has many monikers, but his music is instantly recognizable because of its hard-driving rhythms and improvisational tendencies. In 1991, Polygram Records released "Star Time," a four-disc boxed set that provides everything you need to know about soul music.

**Sam Cooke** is regarded by many as the inventor of soul music. His move from gospel superstardom to pop music is evident when listening to his church-like vocals and occasional Christian metaphors. "The Man and His Music," an RCA records compilation of songs that Cooke wrote and performed, is worth every penny. "Sam Cooke Live at the Harlem Square Club, 1963" is another worthy purchase.

The daughter of a preacher, **Aretha Franklin** brings the best of gospel to her soul repertoire. As the first woman inducted in the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame, she stands as a legend. Rhino Records' "The Very Best of Aretha Franklin" reveals this with every track.

At first, **Marvin Gaye** wanted to model his singing career after those of Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole. Luckily, he didn't, and his recordings for Motown stand among the best of any genre. For the best exposure to Gaye's work, look to the four-CD box set "The Master (1961-1984)" from Motown Records. For individual albums, "What's Going On" is unparalleled.

**Al Green**'s recordings in the 1970s furthered the Memphis sound that started with Stax Records, but also brought new meaning to the word "smooth." "Call Me," which was released in 1972, is considered by many critics to be his greatest album, and I happen to agree. For good measure, pick up "Let's Stay Together," too.

**Isaac Hayes** may be known nowadays as the voice of "Chef" on "South Park," but in the late '60s and '70s his work as a producer, songwriter, arranger and performer was groundbreaking. His Grammy-winning soundtrack to "Shaft" is a fine example of soul's instrumental style. "Hot Buttered Soul" and "To Be Continued" contain equally strong examples of Hayes' extended-jam take on songs.

**Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes**, supported by the powerful lead singing of Teddy Pendergrass, are one of soul's greatest vocal groups. Legacy's "Rhythm and Soul" series released "The Best of Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes" in 1995, and nobody has topped it yet.

The O'Jays typified Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff's "Philadelphia Sound" in the 1970s. CBS Records' 1989 release of "The O'Jays Greatest Hits" typifies the O'Jays' sound.

**Otis Redding** died before he reached the age of 30, but he had already changed the face of soul music with his gritty vocal style, his charismatic

stage presence and his deceptively complex arrangements. Well worth the investment, Rhino Records' "Otis! The Definitive Otis Redding" is four discs of masterful work.

**Diana Ross and the Supremes** were one of Motown's flagship groups, and they remained a steady fixture of Top 20 charts between 1964 and 1972. Motown's 1995 two-disc compilation, "The Best of Diana Ross and the Supremes" is the best single purchase for this group.

**Sam and Dave** are best known for their hit "Soul Man," but this duo recorded many equally powerful songs, most of which were written by Isaac Hayes and David Porter, Stax's legendary songwriting team. Rhino Records' "The Very Best of Sam and Dave" is a suitable introduction to the group.

The **Temptations** remain as one of pop music's most consistently popular groups, still touring today. But their work for Motown in the 1960s and '70s is by far the best of their work. Gordy Records' 1985 release, "Compact Command Performance," contains 17 of the Temptations' greatest hits from this period.

**Stevie Wonder** has been one of Motown's most consistent artists in both popularity and quality, but he hit his best stride in the early '70s, when he recorded both "Innervisions" and "Talking Book," two albums that arguably set the standard for Motown artists for the remainder of that decade.

## HUNTING &amp; COLLECTING

Soul music's waning popularity after the 1970s can make finding original recordings of older artists a harrowing task, but several record stores in the area make the job easier.

In Lincoln, places such as **Recycled Sounds**, 1211 O St., and **Backtrack Records**, 3833 S. 48th St., buy and sell older albums, including many hard-to-find gems that aren't available on compact disc reissues.

In Omaha, **Dirt Cheap Records**, 1026 Jackson St., and **Harry O's Groovie Records**, 6208 Maple St., are equally worthy of a look. **Leola's Records and Tapes**, 5625 Ames St., specializes in soul, rap and r&b music.

Just a bit farther down the road, Council Bluffs' **Kanesville Collectables**, 530 S. Fourth St., is a dream come true for record collectors, with literally thousands of dust-covered treasures (usually available for \$2-\$6 each) and clerks who know the answer to just about every question you could ever ask.

## PRINTED MATTER

Although nothing compares to a live recording, one can gather plenty of information on soul music from the shelves of a local library.

The definitive historical account of soul is Peter Guralnick's "Sweet Soul Music," an outstanding book that links the evolution and rise of soul music to the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

"Where Did Our Love Go? The Rise and Fall of the Motown Sound" by Nelson George is another excellent source of historical perspectives on the genre. Also worth mentioning is Gerry Hirshey's "Nowhere to Run: The Story of Soul Music."

For biographical accounts, none can top "You Send Me: The Life and Times of Sam Cooke" by Daniel Wolff. This book's details on the "chitlin circuit," the gospel vs. secular music debate and Cooke's own struggles in both make for a great read.



PHOTO COURTESY OF POLYGRAM RECORDS  
**JAMES BROWN**, seen here in a publicity photo from the late 1950s, is considered by many to be one of soul music's great innovators and showmen.