



Otis Redding

By Michael Hill

OTIS REDDING WAS, quite literally, sittin' on the dock of the bay when he began to compose the tune that would become his most enduring hit after his sudden and untimely death in December of 1967. Despite the song's forlorn tale, Redding was, at the time, sitting on top of the world.

Redding had gone where few soul men of his day had dared to tread, taking his Memphis revue to the Monterey Pop Festival, where the nascent Woodstock generation gathered to listen to its new heroes — bands like the Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother and the Holding Company with Janis Joplin and a young black guitarist named Jimi Hendrix. Redding came with Booker T. and the MGs and the Mar-Key Horns, all resplendent in slick green suits, and took the stage after the Airplane.

Redding provided an electrifying set (preserved on *Jimi Hendrix and Otis Redding: Classic Performances from the Monterey Pop Festival*) that included his heart-wrenching "I've Been Loving You Too Long," Sam Cooke's "Shake," "Respect" (which he wrote and Aretha Franklin later took to the top of the charts) and his funky remake of the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction." He topped the set with an intense, extended rendition of "Try a Little Tenderness," with its famous coda, which Redding improvised with the fervor of a Georgia preacher.

Backstage, according to author Peter Guralnick in his book *Sweet Soul Music*, the Stones' Brian Jones, watching with Hendrix, was reduced to tears. Afterward, critic Robert Christgau reported in *Esquire*, "The love crowd was screaming its head off."

Redding faced Monterey and the rapidly changing pop scene with the same unflagging confidence with which he had embarked upon his career. In his home town of Macon, Georgia, Otis found plenty of inspiration. James Brown and his Famous Flames were unknown local boys before the world heard "Please Please Please."

Redding's idol, Little Richard, was another Macon native who shouted his ribald rhythm & blues in the dance halls. Redding was determined to follow in Little Richard's footsteps — musically, not sartorially. In fact, Redding got his professional start around 1958, touring the South with Little Richard's former backup band, the Upsetters.

It was back in Macon, though, that Redding first began to cause a stir, after he entered a Saturday-morning amateur show sponsored by a local radio station. Week after week, Redding was voted the popular favorite, which won him the admiration of Johnny Jenkins, one of Macon's more promising guitarists, who offered Redding the job of vocalist with Jenkins's band, the Pinetoppers.

Jenkins was managed by Phil Walden, a white R&B fanatic who was hustling gigs for local black bands at white fraternity dances. Walden offered to manage Redding as well. At first, Walden's parents questioned the propriety of their son's avocation — he had to sneak off to early gigs with the Pinetoppers — but the entire Walden family eventually became part of Redding's management team, and his lifelong friends as well.

Outside of Macon, Redding was not an overnight sensation. In 1960, when it looked like his local success would grow no further, the restless and ambitious Redding left for Los Angeles. He moved in with one of his sisters, got a job at a car wash and cut four sides, including "Gamma Lamma" (à la Little Richard), for a couple of small labels. When he returned to Macon the following year, he cut another single, "Shout Bamalama," in the same style for the Confederate label. (The song became a hit six years later for the R&B singer Mickey Murray.)

"Shout Bamalama" found a champion in DJ John R. at WLAC, in Nashville, a popular station with a powerful signal, but it never caught on with record buyers at large.

Johnny Jenkins seemed to be the musician with a better shot at stardom, scoring serious airplay and decent sales — not to mention the interest of Atlantic Records — for a locally released instrumental number called "Love Twist." Walden had arranged for Jenkins to meet Joe Galkin, Atlantic's Southeast promotion man, whose ears were fine-tuned to the local R&B scene.

Through Galkin, Jenkins landed a deal with Stax Records, the Atlantic affiliate that pioneered the recording of unadulterated Southern soul; in October 1962, Jenkins went to Memphis with his band to record a follow-up to "Love Twist" at the Stax studio.

As legend has it, Redding was acting as Jenkins's driver and valet, and when Jenkins's sessions started to fall apart, Redding somehow coaxed the studio's executives to let him take a turn at the mike.

As Phil Walden explained to Rob Bowman for the notes that accompanied Atlantic's *The Otis Redding Story*, Walden and Redding had carefully prepared their assault on Stax: "The plan was to make a follow-up for Johnny Jenkins but also to give Otis a chance to sing. That was my understanding with Joe Galkin. I said, 'Otis, if you get a shot, you got to do it as fast as you can 'cause you probably won't have much time.' Of course [the Stax studio crew] didn't know, and thank God Joe was there 'cause it probably wouldn't have happened if he hadn't been." The result of this hasty session was Redding's "These Arms of Mine," a rather stately ballad he wrote himself.

"These Arms of Mine," which at first didn't impress Stax owner Jim Stewart, was released on Volt, a Stax subsidiary, toward the end of 1962. It wasn't until the following spring, however, that it became a hit, thanks largely to the support, once again, of Nashville DJ John R. A less reserved Redding returned to Stax in June 1963 to record the more impassioned "That's What My Heart Needs."

Jim Stewart favored the ballads and encouraged Redding to focus on them. The approach then was to record a single with an uptempo track for one side and a ballad for the other. As guitarist Steve Cropper told Bowman: "[Stewart] wasn't satisfied till he got his ballad no matter what [Redding] was doing. He loved the fast stuff too, but he needed Otis to sing that soul ballad. And he was just holding onto a good thing. With Otis, there were two influences in his whole life. One was Sam Cooke, the other was Little Richard. Little Richard was an uptempo singer, Sam Cooke was more of a ballad singer. So it went from one extreme to another."

The Sam Cooke side took precedence as far as the public was concerned. Redding became a consummate balladeer with songs like the yearning "Pain in My Heart" and the contrite "Come to Me." A DJ dubbed Redding "Mr. Pitiful" because of his affinity for tear-jerkers, and Cropper suggested he and Redding use that as the subject of another single, with the nickname as its title: "They call me Mr. Pitiful/Baby, that's my name/They call me Mr. Pitiful/That's how I got my fame."

Redding's gospel inflections gave a raw edge to his work, particularly in his trademark codas, which were impassioned ad-libs. There was an earthiness and candor to his every performance, whether it was a song he composed himself or a cover of a future soul classic like "That's

Otis Redding

How Strong My Love Is." Onstage in the early days he had a lot to learn, but as Jerry Wexler told Peter Guralnick in recalling Redding's first appearance at the Apollo Theater in 1963, "You could feel this plea coming from him."

Redding quickly became a popular live attraction, and he maintained a grueling schedule. Johnny Jenkins, however, stayed behind, unwilling to travel, and reluctantly ceded his role to Cropper. On the road, Redding befriended many of the soul singers he had looked up to a few years before. In a Buffalo, New York, hotel room, he collaborated with Jerry Butler on "I've Been Loving You Too Long," which would be the second-biggest pop hit of Redding's career – a smoldering performance in which the Mar-Key Horns swell up behind his each and every emotion.

Although the song was first recorded for a single release, "I've Been Loving You Too Long" was to become part of *Otis Blue*, an album that remains a classic in the annals of soul. Among its many treasures are a devastating reading of Sam Cooke's elegiac "A Change Is Gonna Come" as well as a version of Cooke's "Shake"; covers of William Bell's elegant "You Don't Miss Your Water" and his friend Solomon Burke's "Down in the Valley"; the original recording of "Respect," which became a Top Forty hit three years before Aretha's authoritative remake; and a hastily recorded version of the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction," which beat the Stones at their own game by turning their scruffy rock & roll into galvanic R&B. In fact, many people thought the Stones had borrowed the tune from him.

The frankness and immediacy of his recordings seem to reflect the atmosphere of the sessions Redding oversaw in Memphis. His fellow musicians, among the best that Memphis ever produced, have only fond memories of Redding and his instinctive approach to record making. He would sing the horn parts to the players so they could get a feel for what he wanted; if a guitarist or a drummer couldn't quite capture a particular sound, Redding would show him how by taking the instrument and playing it himself.

Trumpet player Wayne Jackson told Bowman: "He had to have two cans of Right Guard to keep him down. I mean, the man was *physical*. Emotional and physical. Otis was an unusual person. He would have been unusual had he been a fighter, a football player, a singer or a preacher. He had the kind of energetic ego-drive thing. We all loved him. God, we really did. . . . He'd just get right in front of you with that big fist up in the air and strut and sing that stuff at you until you were foaming at the mouth."

"It was never a routine session with Otis," bassist Duck Dunn told Guralnick. "You'd go along six weeks, say, eight hours a day and all you'd ever see was [Jim Stewart] sitting with his hand on his chain, and then Otis would come in, and, boy, he'd just bring everybody up. 'Cause you knew something was gonna be different. When Otis was there, it was just revitalization of the whole thing. You wanted to play with Otis. He brought out the best in you. If there was a best, he brought it out."

Otis Blue was recorded in a single twenty-four-hour period, starting at ten o'clock one morning and ending at the same time on the next – and that included a break from 8:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. so the session cats could make their regular club dates.

Manager Walden didn't find this routine surprising; but Tom Dowd, the Atlantic engineer who came down from New York to help record the session, was astonished. "I had never been in the studio with anybody other than him," Walden says. "I thought, 'Hell, this is the way everybody did it.'"

In 1966, Redding matched the brilliance of *Otis Blue* with another breathtaking collection, *The Otis Redding Dictionary of Soul*, an album that Jon Landau hailed as "the finest record ever to come out of Memphis and certainly the best example of modern soul ever recorded." Its centerpiece was a song that many consider to be Stax's finest hour, Redding's performance of "Try a Little Tenderness," which builds slowly and deliberately from a deceptively subtle ballad into a serious gospel-style workout.

Redding displayed a more playful side on "Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa (Sad

Song)"; the chorus is nothing less than a duet between Otis and his beloved horn section. The horn riffs, as they do in so many songs, serve the role of Otis's background singers, a wordless choir, the instrumental echo of a vocal performance that is relaxed, mischievous and thoroughly charming. Redding also tackled another pop song from the British Invasion, the Beatles' "Day Tripper," which he gamely turned into an R&B raveup. That choice indicated how adventurous Otis could be and how aware he was of the larger pop world around him.

In the spring of 1967, the Stax-Volt Revue – dubbed Hit the Road, Stax – began its tumultuous European tour in England. The arrival of the Stax entourage in London – Otis Redding, Booker T. and the MGs, the Mar-Key Horns, Redding's protégé Arthur Conley, Sam and Dave, Eddie Floyd and others – caused nothing less than pandemonium. By the end of the tour, in April, everyone on the journey knew just how far the power of Southern soul had reached.

In June, Redding would be at Monterey, once again facing an overwhelming response from a seemingly unlikely crowd. It had been a gamble to go there; none of the acts were even getting paid to appear, but as Wayne Jackson remembers, "when Otis came on, it was over. Over. End of story for anyone who had played up to that point. The crowd just went absolutely bananas. . . . They were mobbing the stage just wanting to touch Otis."

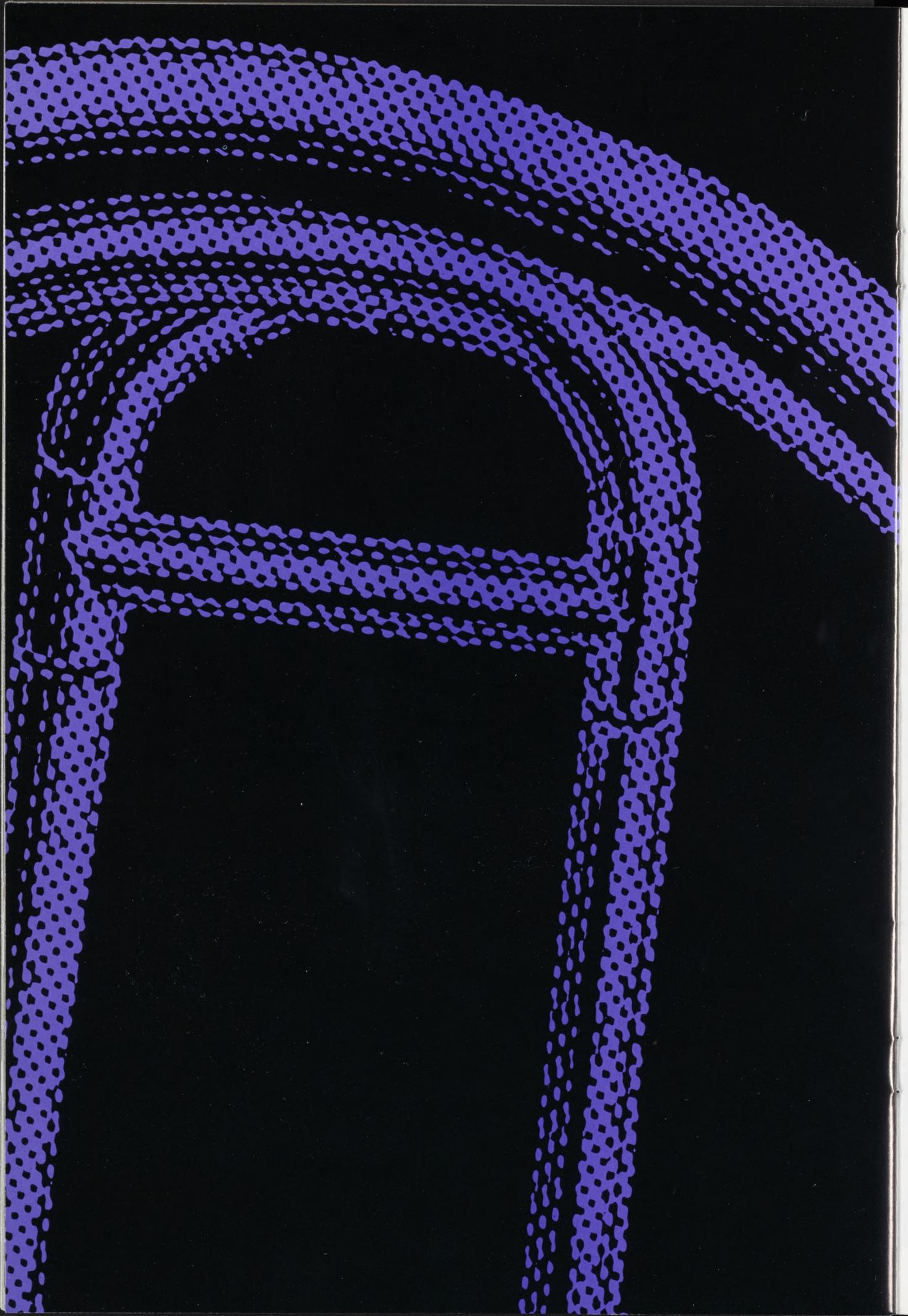
By then, Redding was not only a highly regarded singer but a husband, a father, a successful businessman and the proud owner of a ranch just outside of Macon. In 1965 he had set up his own label, Jotis, to be distributed by Stax, and had hoped to develop his talent as a producer of other artists. His one major success as a producer-mentor was Arthur Conley, for whom he wrote the now classic paean to Southern soul, "Sweet Soul Music." In December of 1966 he recorded an album of duets with the queen of Stax, Carla Thomas; the album was popular enough to fuel speculation that it would be the first in a series. (Another rumor at the time suggested that Redding would next team up with Lady Soul herself, Aretha Franklin.)

In October 1967, after his West Coast triumphs, Redding took what may have been the longest break of his hectic career; he had developed throat polyps and needed an operation that required nearly two months of rest and recuperation. By December, when he was ready to test his vocal chords, Otis was naturally raring to go and arrived at the studio bursting with material. He had little time to record; he was due in Cleveland on December 9th for a television appearance, and from there he was to embark on a club tour.

On December 6th, at the end of marathon sessions, he cut "(Sittin' on) The Dock of the Bay," a song that several in Redding's circle at first felt strayed too far into pop territory. Unlike his usual approach – emotive first, articulate later – Redding narrated his melancholy story in a remarkable, spoken way. The horns were backing him up, of course, but were restrained, atmospheric. And for the coda, Redding was whistling, not singing – an extraordinarily different sort of ad-lib that lent the song a final note of optimism. (Cropper claims that Otis had worked up a vocal fade-out but forgot it while the tape was rolling and simply resorted to whistling.)

Following his television appearance, Redding was scheduled to perform at a Madison, Wisconsin, club called the Factory. The weather was poor – all commercial flights in the area had been suspended – but Redding, the indefatigable professional, wanted to play his date. He spoke to his wife, Zelma, on the morning of December 10th, then took off with his current touring band, the Bar-Kays, on a twin-engine Beechcraft. Their plane crashed into a lake just outside of Madison; only one of Otis's band members survived.

At an emotionally charged funeral in Macon, Redding was paid tribute by family, friends and fans; by the musicians with whom he'd recorded, toured or simply inspired; by record executives and soul stars. Then the world at large paid Otis Redding tribute when "(Sittin' on) The Dock of the Bay" was released on January 8th, 1968. The record climbed to the top of the charts, honoring a man who had been, for five short years, sitting on top of the world. 



MEMPHIS

You May Go, But This Will Bring You Back

By Stanley Booth

MY OWN ENLIGHTENMENT came in Cleveland, Mississippi. I was leading the orchestra in a dance program when someone sent up an odd request. . . . Would we object if a local colored band played a few dances?

We eased out gracefully as the newcomers entered. They were led by a long-legged chocolate boy, and their band consisted of just three pieces, a battered guitar, a mandolin and a worn-out bass.

The music they made was pretty well in keeping with their looks. The strumming attained a disturbing monotony, but on and on it went, a kind of stuff that has long been associated with cane rows and levee camps. Thump, thump, thump went their feet on the floor. Their eyes rolled. Their shoulders swayed. And through it all that little agonizing strain persisted. It was not really annoying or unpleasant. Perhaps *haunting* is a better word, but I commenced to wonder if anybody besides small-town rounders and their running mates would go for it.

The answer was not long in coming. A rain of silver dollars began to fall around the outlandish, stomping feet. The dancers went wild. Dollars, quarters, halves – the shower grew heavier and continued so long I strained my neck to get a better look. There before the boys lay more money than my nine musicians were being paid for the entire engagement. Then I saw the beauty of primitive music.

– W.C. HANDY,
Father of the Blues

The bottom line, for those who prefer the bottom line first, is that Memphis doesn't make as much money from music as does Los Angeles, New York or even Nashville. Money is not the first thing one thinks of when hearing the phrase "Memphis music." Though it also contains enough shuck and jive to deserve to be called the Bluff City, Memphis is where they make music with sincerity – a quality that has come to be called soul.

Every so often some place besides Memphis will produce a record with soul; every so often in Memphis, a record is produced without soul. The difference lies in the proportions. What creates this difference is history and mystery: an old black Memphis musician stood one night in an alley beside a young white guitarist, pointed to the stars and said, "You

don't play de notes – you play de molecules."

"What is it about Memphis?" I once asked a record producer there.

"It ain't Memphis," he said. "It's the South."

"Well, what is it about the South?"

"People down here don't let nobody tell them what to do."

"But how does it happen that they know what to do?"

"It ain't any explanation for it."

There may be no explanation, but the peculiar history of Memphis provides some clues regarding why it is to rock & roll what the heart is to the human body.

On the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff of the Mississippi River, where Memphis now stands, the Indians once hunted bear and buffalo and hauled hundred-pound catfish from the river's channels. The first Europeans to come within a hundred miles of the area arrived in 1541. Spanish soldiers, led by the gold hunter Hernando De Soto, were the last knights in armor – brave, cruel, obsolescent, punishing the Indians for their misdeeds by feeding them alive to dogs. They were followed as they came by a trail of buzzards in the sky.

The Indians fought bravely, and no good came to De Soto, who was buried in the Mississippi. But the white man kept coming – Spanish, French, English, American – until 1818, when the Indians were forced to sell the land to the United States government for five cents an acre. The next year, generals Andrew Jackson and James Winchester and Judge John Overton – land speculators from Nashville who were

already the de facto owners of most of the land before the government bought it – laid out plans for a town they named Memphis, after the ancient river city in Africa.

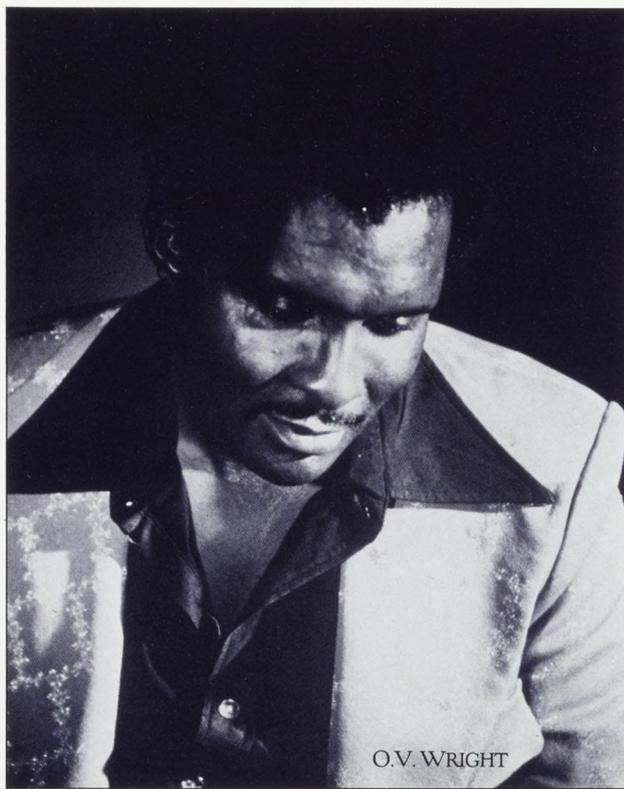
In the quarter-century that followed, Memphis grew from a flatboat town to a steamboat town with strange, grand houses built away from the river beside huge magnolia trees. The streets had mudholes that could swallow a mule.

During the Civil War, after the twenty-minute Battle of Memphis, the Union army was headquartered on Beale Street, where local blacks, most of them freed slaves who feared the local whites, began to gath-



JACKIE DAVIS, DOTTIE SMITH AND LOUIS JORDAN





O.V. WRIGHT

er. Never a citadel of purity, Memphis was corrupted by the war like any conquered city. Memphis's postwar situation was complicated by the presence of many Irish who had fled the 1845 potato famine. The Irish had replaced the city leaders – the mayor, aldermen, firemen and police were Irish almost to a man. Patrolling the city at the same time were 4000 black soldiers. *Harper's Weekly* for May 5th, 1866, called the city "the worst behaved . . . in the Union," with "a floating population made up of the dregs of both Armies." That same week, a fight broke out when Irish police arrested two black men. A policeman was killed, a three-day riot of vengeance on the blacks left forty-six dead and four churches and nearly a hundred houses burned.

The year after, as if it needed more trouble, Memphis suffered its second serious outbreak of yellow fever. Five hundred and fifty townspeople died. Six years later the fever killed about 2000 Memphians. In 1878, when the yellow fever came again, more than half the city's 55,000 inhabitants left. Six thousand whites and 14,000 blacks stayed. More than 10,000 blacks survived; all but about 2000 whites died – meaning that the deepest links to the city's history would henceforth and forever lie in the black community. Memphis went bankrupt, lost its charter and didn't become a city again until 1891.

In spite of – and partly because of – its misfortune, Memphis remained a fertile field for speculators. Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy, came to Memphis after the war and went into the insurance business. At the same time, a young man named Thomas Edison was working at a telegraph office just off Main Street and living next door at a boarding house where the roaches were so bad he developed a way to transmit current and electrocute them. Purged by the yellow fever of what had passed for gentry, stripped of the few traditions it had known, Memphis had become a blank page on which innovative men drew the plans for a new century. You didn't need family in Memphis, as you did in Boston or Charlestown. You didn't even need money, if you had the right idea – as did Clarence Saunders with Piggly Wiggly, the first supermarket. Or if you knew when other people had the right ideas – as did W.C. Handy, who wrote down the blues he heard on Beale Street. Or if you just knew how to control votes, like that carrot-topped upstart from Holly Springs,

Mississippi, the Red Snapper, Ed Crump.

In 1909, when Crump ran for mayor, Memphis didn't reach the greatest heights, but it had depths that went all the way to hell. "Mister Crump was . . . going to drive out gambling and . . . other things," W.C. Handy recalled years later, "and there were those . . . who didn't believe he was going to do what he said. . . . You know how things are today."



ELVIS PRESLEY



THE BAR KAYS

The blues Handy used in his compositions were recorded in Memphis by Okeh and Vocalion during the late 1920s. The Depression slowed recording activity – and forced some Memphians to eat clay from the river bluffs – but men like Jimmie Lunceford, Buster Bailey, Phineas Newborn Sr., Al Jackson Sr. and Tuff Green were refining and extending the musical heritage of Sam Thomas, James Harris, Robert Baker, John Love, G.P. Hamilton, West Dukes and Jim Turner, whom Beale Street chronicler George Lee calls “the greatest of the early orchestra leaders and the discoverer of W.C. Handy.”

After World War II, a couple of young Caucasian victims of the boogie disease named Sam and Dewey Phillips came to Memphis.

They were not related, but they were brothers in bop. When they met, Dewey was selling records at Grant’s dime store on Main Street, and Sam was engineering broadcasts from the Peabody Hotel’s Skyway Ballroom, shaking his earphoned head nightly and saying, “There has to be something better than this.” (“They had some great bands,” Sam said, “but some of those guys had been reading the same charts every night for ten years, and they’re still turning the pages.”)

Dewey, from the West Tennessee town of Adamsville, hitherto distinguished himself in Memphis by getting fired from the Taystee Bread Company – he somehow convinced the entire work force to make not loaves of bread but little bread men, like gingerbread men – and creating traffic jams on Main Street by playing records and talking over the dime store’s intercom. He then pestered the staff at WHBQ radio, across the street from Grant’s in the Hotel Chisca, until they let him take over a fifteen-minute popular music show, *Red, Hot and Blue*.

Dewey couldn’t read copy, and he couldn’t cue records without scratching them, but as Sam said, he had a platinum ear. He also

had a warm, loving nature and a brilliant line of dopey jive. “Take a wheelbarrow full of goober dust” – they made him stop saying “pissants” – “they got beautiful plate-glass doors, just run right through ‘em, and tell them Phillips sent you, from *Red, Hot and B-L-E-W Blue*.” He appealed to listeners regardless of race. “Dewey was not white,” Rufus Thomas has said. “Dewey had no color.” In its first year, Dewey’s show expanded by popular demand from fifteen minutes to three hours daily.

As a boy on his family’s farm in Florence, Alabama (Handy’s home town), Sam Phillips had listened to a man he called Uncle Silas, a thin, ancient black man dying of syphilis, who sang “Oh, Didn’t He Ramble”: “Didn’t he ramble, he rambled till the butcher cut him down.” Sam’s response to the old man’s songs was so deep that it caused him to question who and what he came from and the nature of spirit and matter in reality. The quality of Uncle Silas’s voice remained in Sam Phillips’s mind like a beacon. In 1950 he started the Memphis Recording Service, at first doing mostly weddings and funerals then recording such artists as B.B. King, Walter Horton, Jackie Brenston and Howlin’ Wolf for other labels. After a couple of years he began releasing records on his own Sun label. He kept saying that if he could find a white man who could sing with the black man’s individuality and conviction he could make a million dollars. The money was important both in itself and as a symbol. Sam Phillips was saying that with such a singer he could change history. He did just that.

Between 1949 and 1953, Elvis Presley, living with his parents in cheap apartment buildings and the Lauderdale Courts federal housing project,



ANN PEEBLES

listened every night to Dewey Phillips. He heard artists like Louis Jordan, Wynonie Harris, Rosetta Tharpe, Big Boy Crudup, Frankie Laine and Ella Mae Morse played back to back with no regard for race or any other consideration except keeping the groove going, a format that makes today’s segregated radio sound very cheap. Sun had its first successful releases in 1953, the year Presley went to the Memphis Recording Service to make, as most of the world must know by now, a record for his mother. At this time Sam would make acetate copies of records he was thinking of releasing and take them to Dewey, who would play them on the air. If the listeners liked them, Sam would press them up. Sam had had small hits with Rufus Thomas, the Prisonaires and Little Junior Parker before the epochal night when Elvis, Scotty Moore and Bill Black cut “That’s All Right (Mama).” Dewey played that acetate eleven times in a row the first night he got his hands on it, then inter-



AL GREEN



HOWLIN' WOLF

viewed Elvis on his show. The world would never be the same.

The year was 1954. The first Holiday Inn, the brainchild of Memphian Kemmons Wilson, was two years old. Hank Williams had died the year before. This year Boss Crump would die. He had become the mayor of Memphis when it was the murder capital of the country. Although the murder rate was still high when Crump died, Memphis was the nation's cleanest, quietest city. School segregation was outlawed this year, and a "hillbilly cat" who bought his clothes at Lansky's on Beale Street, where the black pimps traded, and who had been regarded as "different" at all-white Humes High School, broke through America's color line, altering its popular culture for all time.

There were so many strong Sun artists – Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Charlie Rich, Roy Orbison, Billy Lee Riley, Charlie Feathers, Warren Smith – that there wasn't enough time to record jazz artists like Phineas Newborn Jr. and gospel artists like Herbert Brewster. When RCA Victor offered \$35,000 for Elvis Presley's recording contract, Sam Phillips, thinking of what he could do with his label with that much money, asked Kemmons Wilson (Sam was an early Holiday Inns investor) whether he should sell Elvis. "I wouldn't hesitate," Wilson said. "That boy isn't even a professional." Sam could not have known that Carl Perkins would have a near-fatal car wreck or that Jerry Lee Lewis would marry his thirteen-year-old cousin.

In 1958, with Elvis in the army and Sun Records starting to decline, a grammar-school teacher named Estelle Axton and her brother, a bank officer and country-fiddle player named Jim Stewart, installed a one-track tape recorder behind the Satellite Dairy in Brunswick, Tennessee, where they sold hamburgers between takes. In 1960, Stewart and Axton found an empty movie theater in a black South Memphis neighborhood that rented for \$100 a month, and Rufus Thomas – who had started out on Beale Street at the age of six playing a frog in a show at the Grand Theater, had been a Rabbit's Foot Minstrel, a master

of ceremonies at the Midnight Rambles, half the dance team of Rufus and Bones and the first person to have a hit on the Sun label – brought the first hit to what would become "Soulsville, U.S.A.," the Stax/Volt Recording Company.

Rufus's daughter Carla followed with the first national hit on Stax – "Gee Whiz," a song she had written three years before, when she was fifteen. Many hits were to come for the studio, from the Mar-Keys, Booker T. and the MGs, Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, Eddie Floyd, William Bell, Albert King. Even after the death of Otis Redding and the original Bar-Kays, the Staple Singers, Isaac Hayes, Luther Ingram and Johnnie Taylor kept the classics coming.

The assassination of Martin Luther King only a few months after Redding's death changed the racial climate all over America. Many things affected the fortunes of Stax/Volt, but on January 12th, 1976, a federal bankruptcy judge ordered its doors locked. In the meantime, American Studios, another prolific source of hits in Memphis, had come and gone, as had the Goldwax label and other Memphis worthies. But happily, Willie Mitchell's Royal Recording Studio was producing a superb series with such artists as Al Green, O.V. Wright and Ann Peebles.

In the Seventies a band from Texas called ZZ Top began hanging out in Memphis, where they eventually made the best-selling blues recordings of all time. Jim Dickinson and Alex Chilton carried on a somewhat clandestine effort, now coming to light, in sessions at Ardent Studios with bands like Green on Red, the Replacements and R.E.M. Keith Richards came to Memphis to work on part of his solo album. Studios are sprouting on the bluffs like magic mushrooms. The Peabody Hotel has one that it rents at special rates to guests.

One Memphis producer observed that in the absence of prevailing trends, popular music splits into its black and white roots, and therefore Memphis is always in the music's future. As Sleepy John Estes said, "Memphis has always been the leader of dirty work in the world." 

