

Sam and Dave

In the summer of 1964, Jerry Wexler of Atlantic Records was attending a DJ convention in Miami. Florida record man Henry Stone suggested he stop in at a nightclub called the King of Hearts to check out a local singing duo known as Sam & Dave.

"It was like 165 degrees," Wexler later told writer Rob Bowman. "It was hot and *they* were hot... When I heard them there that night, that was all she wrote. I signed them up immediately."

Jerry Wexler's soul epiphany had its roots deep in Fifties gospel and R&B. Samuel David Moore was born October 12, 1935 in Miami to a deeply religious and highly musical Baptist family. He'd sneak out to sing with street-corner ensembles like the Majestics, who later changed their name to the Gales and switched from R&B to straight gospel singing. While working with another Florida gospel quartet, the Millionaires, Moore declined an offer to replace the departing Sam Cooke in the Soul Stirrers and became an MC and house vocalist at the King of Hearts.

In December 1961, one of the club's regular amateur nights attracted another youthful veteran of the Florida gospel circuit: David Prater, Jr. Born May 9, 1937 in Ocilla, Georgia, Dave had come to Miami in 1959 to sing lead for his brother's gospel group, the Sensational Hummingbirds. On stage that night, Dave was unsure of the words to Jackie Wilson's "Doggin' Around," and Moore, the MC, cued him through the song.

Sam: "When it got to the part where Jackie Wilson would drop to his knees, Dave tripped. I was responsible for all the instruments and microphones that got broken... so he and I went down together, and I caught the mike. The audience thought *that* was the act. It wasn't, but they went crazy." The "Double Dynamite" duo of Sam & Dave was born.

Beginning in 1962, they released seven singles; none served to set them apart from their idols like Ray Charles and Jackie Wilson. But in early 1965, Jerry Wexler sent Sam & Dave to the Stax/Volt studios in Memphis. On "Goodnight Baby," the ballad flip of their first Stax single, "one can readily hear how close their three and a half years together had brought them," notes Rob Bowman. "They answer, echo and finish each other's lines... with a grace and ease that is mesmerizing."

When David Porter teamed with Isaac Hayes four months later to write and produce "I Take What I Want," they set the

pattern for Sam & Dave's hitmaking career, a perfect balance of pop melody and pure church feeling. In the spring of 1966 came the breakthrough: "Hold On, I'm Coming" (a #1 R&B and #21 Pop hit), quickly followed by the wryly salacious "You Got Me Hummin'," the poignant "When Something Is Wrong With My Baby" and the 1967 million-seller and Grammy Award winner "Soul Man" (#1 R&B/#2 Pop). Sam & Dave gave one of the most exciting live shows of the soul era, complete with shake dancers, duel drummers and a small army of horns. Yet offstage, the two men rarely spoke to each other.

In 1968, the distribution agreement between Stax and Atlantic ended — and with it, the peerless match of Sam & Dave with Isaac Hayes, David Porter and Booker T. & the MGs. In June 1970, Sam & Dave split up; they regrouped, split, regrouped again. By 1979, both men were strung out, reduced to cutting inferior new versions of their Stax classics even as the Blues Brothers hit the Top 20 with a vaudevillian cover of "Soul Man." Sam & Dave played their very last show together on December 31, 1981 at the Old Waldorf in San Francisco.

A close friend, Joyce McRae, urged Sam Moore to enroll in a rehabilitation program. By March 1982, Sam was drug-free and newly-wed, with Joyce managing her husband's renaissance career. Then, on April 9, 1988, David Prater was killed in an automobile accident near Tifton, Georgia.

Sam kept on singing. The lean years had not robbed him of his extraordinary vocal powers, as he proved in performances ranging from a Republican inaugural gala to New York's Lone Star Roadhouse. Thirty years after that amateur night at the King of Hearts, he could still create (in Greg Tate's words) "the kind of pent-up bodysoaking ritual release that soul music was invented for." In 1992, Sam Moore will record his first solo album.

"I've gotten the Grammy. I've performed for presidents, kings and queens. Done movies, soundtracks. I've sung with some of the biggest people in the music business... My only thing now is, *I've got to do it all again.*"

— Andy Schwartz

Soul Men: Sam Moore and Dave Prater in action.

