

The Righteous Brothers

By Jerry Blavat



RADIO, WITHOUT A DOUBT, IS THE MOST IMPORTANT vehicle for a recording artist. How many times did you turn on your radio and hear a great song by a great artist — maybe Johnny Otis singing “Willie and the Hand Jive,” the Magnificent Men doing “Peace of Mind,” or the Soul Survivors performing “Expressway (To Your Heart)” — not realizing these were white performers, ones who had the soul and the ability to sound black? Conversely, did you ever listen to an artist like Ella Fitzgerald, Carmen McRae or Nancy Wilson and say to yourself, “Wow, what a fantastic performer,” and assume she was white? That’s the wonderful thing about music: The great equalizer, it knows no race, no color, no creed.

And the Righteous Brothers — California-born Bill Medley and Wisconsin-born Bobby Hatfield — are the epitome of white performers influenced by the black performers they admired and listened to on the radio. Their early role models included the great vocal duos Marvin and Johnny, Jesse and Marvin, Charlie & Ray, and Gene and Eunice. For the Specialty label, Don & Dewey (Don “Sugarcane” Harris and Dewey Terry), in particular, had recorded songs that prefigured what Hatfield and Medley would do: “Pink Champagne,” “Farmer John,” the original “Big Boy Pete”



and “Leaving It All Up to You,” which years later became a Number One hit for Dale & Grace. Two-part harmony was not unique then — but a pair of white boys emulating the great black two-part-harmony sound? That was new.

For Bobby Hatfield and Bill Medley (born a month apart in 1940), it began separately. Both started singing at Orange County, California, clubs as teenagers. In the early 1960s, Bobby had his group, the Variations, and Bill his, the Paramours. In 1962, Bobby’s group incorporated with the Paramours. One of their first big shows together was at the Rendezvous Ballroom, in Balboa, California, a famous haunt during the big-band era. “There were 300 kids the first night,” Medley recalled later. “We kept coming back every weekend, and after a while there were 2,000 kids. We did nothing but rhythm & blues.”

Because they had that black sound, it was easy for them to gig the chitlin’ circuit in central L.A. and Watts, often being booked sight unseen by club owners who thought they were a black vocal duo. One night, after they completed a set at the Black Derby, in Santa Ana, an audience member yelled out, “That’s righteous, brothers!” From that moment on, the Righteous Brothers, with their blue-eyed soul, were destined to become a major force in entertainment.

Soul men: The Righteous Brothers — Bill Medley (left) and Bobby Hatfield — helped to originate the style known as blue-eyed soul.





Above: Bill Medley and Bobby Hatfield were regulars on 'Shindig' in the 1960s. **Left:** the Righteous tykes: Hatfield (left) and Medley, circa 1945.



Bill Medley produced their 1962–64 recordings for a small L.A. label, Moonglow: "Little Latin Lupe Lu," "Justine" and one of my all-time favorites, "I Need a Girl." These soul classics did well in local markets and set the stage for the Righteous Brothers to develop that back-and-forth vocal exchange that would become their trademark.

Medley and Hatfield really took off vocally when their talents came to the attention of one of the most creative producers and writers of all time: Phil Spector was responsible for a slew of innovative, revolutionary recordings released on his Philles label by artists like the Crystals, Bobb B. Soxx and the Blue Jeans, the Ronettes and Darlene Love. Phil knew where the Righteous Brothers lived musically and exactly what he wanted to do with them. With the writing team of Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, he tailored a song specifically for the Righteous Brothers, perfecting not only the sound but the dynamics of the group: "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'" highlighted the duo's astonishing vocal range and the interplay between Medley's soulful baritone and Hatfield's gospel-imbued tenor and falsetto. When Spector sent me the demo of "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin',"

there was no doubt in my mind, nor in the mind of anyone else who heard it, that the Righteous Brothers had arrived. As Spector wrote in the liner notes to the duo's Philles album *You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'*: "It is not often that a record company can be so proud of its artists' talents that adjectives of praise become insufficient. . . . I became a victim of the speechlessness that one feels when describing the brilliant and quite unbelievable talents of the Righteous Brothers." The song settled at Number One on the pop chart, hitting Number Three on the R&B survey.

In 1964 the rest of the world was introduced to blue-eyed soul when legendary producer Jack Good, the man who put rock & roll on British TV, brought his hit show *Shindig* to America. He needed that soul sound, and the Righteous Brothers became part of the *Shindig* family, along with Darlene Love and the Blossoms. *Shindig* was also a stepping stone for performers such as Glen Campbell, Billy Preston, Leon Russell and Delaney and Bonnie. The Righteous Brothers made close to thirty appearances on *Shindig* from 1964 to 1965, doing backup harmony for many acts who appeared on the show.

Following "Lovin' Feelin'," the Righteous Brothers had three more hits on Philles: "Just Once in My Life," "Ebb Tide" and "Unchained Melody," which had been a hit in 1955 for both Al Hibbler and Roy Hamilton. Interestingly, when Danny Davis (Spector's national promotion director at the time) sent me a demo of "Unchained Melody," the A side was intended to be "Hung on You," produced by Spector. After listening to both sides, I called Danny and told him the single's flip side, "Unchained Melody," had to be the A side. Produced by Bill Medley, "Unchained Melody" reached Number Four; twenty-five years later, in 1990, it

**The duo's
sound
has never
been
duplicated**



The duo posing around the time of "(You're My) Soul and Inspiration"

became a hit for the Righteous Brothers again when it appeared in the movie *Ghost*, earning a Grammy nomination.

After the Righteous Brothers left Philles, in 1966, the Spector sound was still evident in their recordings for Verve, including Mann and Weil's "(You're My) Soul and Inspiration," which, by the way, has rarely been covered – unusual for a Number One hit and a testament to the originality of that production and performance. In 1968, Medley and Hatfield chose to go their separate ways for a while – with Medley pursuing a solo career – but in 1974 the two reunited. They then scored their third-highest-charting *Billboard* hit, "Rock and Roll Heaven," which soared to Number Three, becoming the guys' first Top Twenty single since '66. Followup Top Forty hits included "Give It to the People" and "Dream On."



The Righteous Brothers are renowned for their emotive live performances, such as this one in the Copa Room of the late, great Sands Hotel in Las Vegas.

To this day, the Righteous Brothers' sound has never been duplicated. What the late Lillian Roxon wrote about them nearly thirty years ago still holds true: "No one . . . has been able to come up with that same mixture of jazz, gospel, rhythm & blues, rock & roll and spiritual." Collectively, their songs, including Medley's duet with Jennifer Warnes, *Dirty Dancing*'s "(I've Had) The Time of My Life," which won a Grammy and hit Number One, have been featured in more than two dozen films. The Righteous Brothers' 1990 career retrospective on Curb went platinum, and their 1991 release, *Reunion*, was a compilation of their classics newly recorded and using the latest digital technology.

Soul – blue-eyed or otherwise – is the ability that some artists have to reach deep within themselves, tap into their God-given talent and project to their audience their honesty and emotions, enabling that audience to connect with them. And that's exactly what the Righteous Brothers have. Their roots? Soul. Their

legacy? To present, with unmatched skill, a sound that is pure emotion, pure passion, music transcending color. They've maintained the ability over the years to entertain any age or any generation, making what they do believable and honest. You hear and you feel. And that's what

**Medley and
Hatfield
epitomize
blue-eyed
soul**



Since re-forming in the 1970s, the duo has performed on a regular basis.

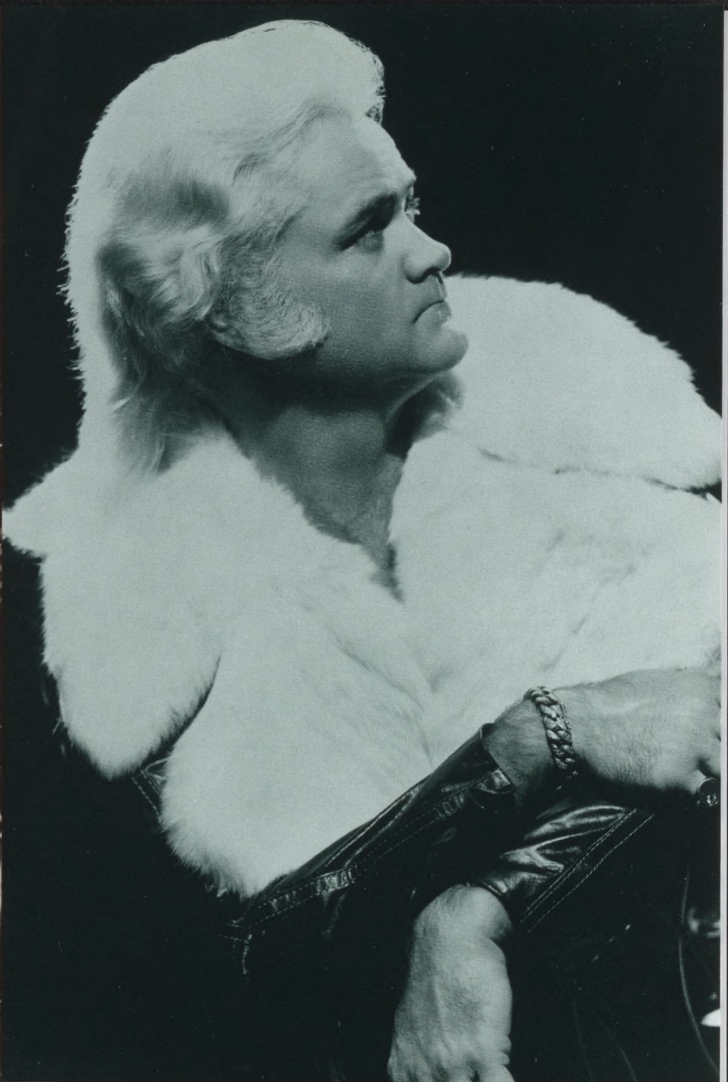
music is all about. It truly is the universal language.

Tonight we welcome a pair of our most powerful conveyors of that language – Righteous Brothers Bill Medley and Bobby Hatfield – into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. □



Above: The Righteous Brothers brought white soul to the world via their numerous television appearances. Right: Medley (left) and Hatfield, circa 1966.





Blue-Eyed Soul

Trying to define the term describing black music performed by white artists can be tricky. Here, we examine some of the genre's greatest practitioners who are among its most obscure.

By Andy Schwartz



ONE NIGHT IN EARLY DECEMBER, I SAT WITH music-business veteran and fellow Hall of Fame voter Gregg Geller in a Manhattan nightclub. When the conversation turned to the topic of this essay, he reflected, "Soul, as a vocal quality, is timeless, eternal. But 'blue-eyed soul' is a moment in time."

Gregg was referring to a pop-music phenomenon whose rise and fall paralleled that of African-American soul music itself. Among its spiritual predecessors were Bing Crosby ("the first hip white person," said bandleader Artie Shaw); Johnnie Ray, whose histrionic style borrowed heavily from black gospel and early R&B; and Elvis Presley, who scored hits on the pop, country and R&B charts alike.

When I e-mailed some twenty music aficionados around the country, informally soliciting their favorite "white soul" artists and recordings, their enthusiastic replies cited nearly seventy names, spanning the musical alphabet from Mose Allison to Timi Yuro. A New York label entrepreneur's all-British list included Tom Jones, the Bee Gees and Simply Red. A Georgia journalist named prewar jazzmen Bix Beiderbecke and Jack Teagarden. A New Jersey memorabilia dealer vouched for Mark Farner of Grand Funk Railroad and the Four Seasons' Frankie Valli.

But soul music "has a beginning and an end," noted another respondent, Dan Hodges of Berkeley, California, in his provocative three-thousand-word (!) response. "I'm unwilling to call something 'white soul' that wasn't recorded during the historical period of soul music. Whatever else, for example, the Beastie Boys may be, I don't consider them blue-eyed

soul." In awarding his soul seal of approval to the Motown recordings of the little-remembered singer Chris Clark and to Dusty Springfield's landmark *Dusty in Memphis*, Hodges established two compelling criteria for the sound: "One . . . is that the white singer and song should 'fit' with what we recognize as soul music already. It would mean that, for example, the white soul singer was recorded by a record company that released soul records and that the records were made as they would have been with a black singer." "Two . . . is that the white singer's performances should be accepted as soul music since they would be so accepted if sung by blacks and [that] if a black singer recorded the song, it would be considered soul. In contrast, whether a white group or the Supremes made an album of Rodgers and Hart songs, it wasn't soul music."

Dan's definition would accommodate such exponents (whether famed or forgotten) as the Righteous Brothers, the Magnificent Men, Roy Head, Eddie Hinton, Len Barry, Billy Harner, Roland Stone, Bob Brady and the Con Chords, Bob Kuban and the In-Men – even Lulu (in her Muscle Shoals period) and Charlie Rich (whose version of "When Something Is Wrong With My Baby" predated that of Sam and Dave). But it would exclude Hall of Fame inductees the (Young) Rascals, as well as the Box Tops, Tony Joe White, Bobbie Gentry, Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels, Sir Doug Sahn, Laura Nyro and the Spencer Davis Group – to mention just a few more names that came over my Internet transom.

The Temptones, Wayne Cochran and the Rationals are three classic examples of the profound impact of soul music on a generation of white performers.

Which of the artists pictured on the following pages do you consider as representative of blue-eyed soul? Texas's Roy Head; Detroit's Wayne Cochran; California's Righteous Brothers; Mississippi's Bobbie Gentry (clockwise from top left)



Memphis boys the Box Tops featuring sixteen-year-old Alex Chilton (on motorcycle); Memphis songwriter Dan Penn; Atlanta's Joe South (clockwise from top)

The Temptones

In 1966, four Temple University students – Daryl Hall, Paul Fogel, Ken Halpern and Brian Utain – were performing around Philadelphia as an a cappella vocal quartet called the Temptones. After Fogel enlisted in the air force, another Temple student, Barry Glazer, replaced him.

The new lineup recruited a rhythm section and shifted its



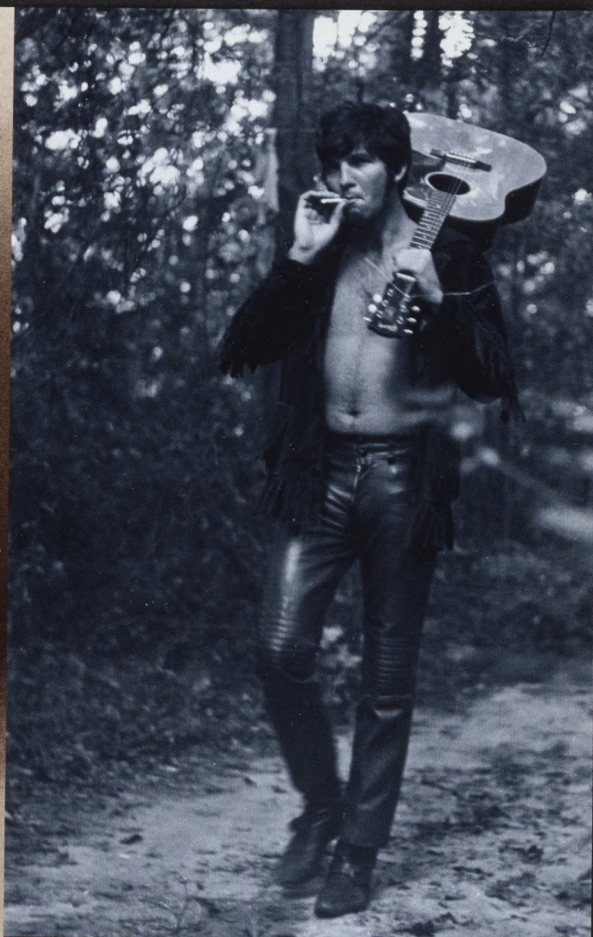
Temple University's Temptones meet their mentors the Temptations

repertoire away from doo-wop revival standards toward contemporary soul music, with an emphasis on the songs of the group's idols, the Temptations. A typical Temptones set might include the Spinners' "I'll Always Love You," the Miracles' "Ooo Baby Baby" and such Tempts favorites as "I Wish It Would Rain" and "My Girl."

"The Temptations' harmonies were tighter and more melodic than [those of] the doo-wop groups," says Barry Glazer. "Daryl, who was a music major at Temple, did all the vocal arrangements and was our main lead singer."

When the Temptones finally met the Temptations, backstage at Philadelphia's Uptown Theater, the Motown stars were impressed by the white group's unaccompanied rendition of an early Tempts ballad, "Farewell My Love." Temptation Paul Williams became a solid supporter, buying the white kids some new stage clothes and later arranging for an audition with Smokey Robinson (a Motown recording contract was not forthcoming).

When the group took second place in a James Brown Talent Show at the Uptown (coming in behind the Ambassadors but ahead of the Delfonics!), WDAS jock Jimmy Bishop brought them to local indie Arctic Records. On their 1966 sessions, the Temptones were backed by many of the session players who would later form MFSB – the musical backbone of Kenny Gam-



Blue-eyed soulsters? Great Britain's Dusty Springfield; Louisiana's Tony Joe White; Mississippian Delaney Bramlett with Bonnie and friends (clockwise from left)

ble and Leon Huff's Philadelphia International Records.

Glazer and Hall cowrote the group's first single, "Girl I Love You," as well as the followup, "Say These Words of Love." " 'Girl I Love You' went Top Twenty on some local radio charts and got us on TV shows with the DJs Hy Lit and Jerry Blavat," Glazer recalls. "We also played two Freedom Shows, big concerts sponsored by the NAACP. We almost always played with black acts."

Neither disc did anything to extend the Temptones' appeal beyond their home turf. A second Freedom Show at Convention Hall would have been the group's last gig but for the thunderous reception that greeted its rendition of "Ol' Man River" (in the Temptations' arrangement, naturally). This led to a showcase for the Ashley Famous Agency at New York's Village Gate, where the Temptones' rhythm section included John Oates on guitar. It was the first time he and Hall ever performed onstage together.

Following personnel changes, the Temptones disbanded for good in 1969. "John and Daryl started doing music together," says Barry Glazer, "and the rest is history. [Hall and Oates released

their debut, *Whole Oates*, in 1972.] But the Temptones were pretty damn good and very unusual for our time. We didn't even like the Beatles. I mean, we *really* wanted to sound black!"

Wayne Cochran

Throughout the Sixties and Seventies, Wayne Cochran may have done more than any other single white performer to spread the gospel of Southern soul music – and he did so without having anything close to a hit record.

Born in Thomaston, Georgia, in 1939, Cochran was a close friend and frequent performing rival of Otis Redding in the early Sixties. (Wayne played bass on Otis's second single, "Shout Bamalama," in 1962.) In 2001 Cochran described his red-dirt upbringing to author Scott Freeman in the Redding biography *Otis!*: "Father a cotton miller and moonshiner. Grandfather a paid-up member of the KKK for life. . . . Music just takes all that away. You appreciate someone's talent and they become your idol. Who cares what color?"

With his imposing six-two figure topped by a towering white-blond pompadour, Wayne fronted a skin-tight, horn-

**Soul, as
a vocal
quality,
is timeless,
eternal**



The Rationals – Steve Correll, Bill Figg, Terry Trabandt, Scott Morgan (from left) – rock a Mt. Holly, Michigan, ski resort. Right: Cochran shakin' a tailfeather.

heavy band known as the C.C. Riders that served as an incubator for such gifted musicians as bassist Jaco Pastorius. Throughout the Sixties, Cochran regularly performed in “the same places as Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis, Jr.,” according to writer James Porter. “At a time when black soul acts who played that circuit were reduced, in their *heyday*, to doing stuff along the lines of ‘There’s No Business Like Show Business,’ the fact that Cochran could get away with performing maximum R&B for a blue-haired audience is significant.”

Cochran recorded sporadically for King, Chess and Mercury, but his closest brush with the Hot 100 came when his version of Bob & Earl’s “Harlem Shuffle” bubbled under for a few weeks in late 1965. As a songwriter, however, he had better luck. In the fall of 1964, his classic tale of teen tragedy, “Last Kiss,” became a Number Two pop hit for J. Frank Wilson and the Cavaliers, obliterating Cochran’s original version. Thirty-four years later, Pearl Jam cut the song in one take at a sound check and pressed it up on a seven-inch single as a fan-club giveaway. Radio programmers picked up on the track, which took on an unexpected poignancy in the wake of the April 1999 massacre at Columbine High School. By the year’s end, “Last Kiss” had reached Number Two and become Pearl Jam’s highest-charting song.

Cochran retired from music in the early Eighties and today is pastor of the Voice for Jesus Christian Center in Miami. “In the end, it wasn’t music to me—it was a cause,” he has said. “We took soul and R&B music and dressed it up like Las Vegas. And while they weren’t lookin’, we snuck up behind them.”

The Rationals

Of all the white teen rock & roll bands to emerge from the Great American Garage in the mid-Sixties, none interpreted contemporary soul music with more skill and passion than the Rationals, from Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Vocalist Scott Morgan and guitarist Steve Correll, while junior high school students, formed the embryonic Rationals in 1963 and were joined within a year by bassist Terry Trabandt and drummer Bill Figg. By then, their focus had shifted from instrumentals to a blend of hip British Invasion covers

(Pretty Things, Them, et al.) and promising originals. Meanwhile, Morgan recalls, “Steve Correll’s mother would drive us to the Fox Theater in downtown Detroit to see the Motortown Revue shows with Little Stevie Wonder, the Temptations, everybody. We’d be among the few white kids in the place.”

Jeep Holland was the group’s manager, the founder of the A-square label and a dedicated collector “extremely well-versed in rhythm & blues,” says Morgan. “Jeep was the one who turned us on to songs like ‘I Need You’ by Chuck Jackson, ‘Listen to Me’ by the Esquires and ‘The Entertainer’ by Tony Clarke.” In late 1966, Holland chose the Otis Redding song “Respect” for the Rationals’ third single. This recording preceded Aretha Franklin’s “Respect” by nearly a year and—in light of its local-hit status in her hometown of Detroit—likely influenced the Queen of Soul’s own arrangement.

Creeping to Number Ninety-two, “Respect” became the Rationals’ sole *Billboard* chart entry. The group commanded a loyal following in the 1967–69 heyday of Detroit’s Grande Ballroom scene but gradually lost momentum. Just months before the band’s 1979 breakup, Bob Crewe released its debut. It’s an uneven LP, but the

Morgan-Correll duet on “Temptation ‘Bout to Get Me,” in its raw power and desperate yearning, cuts the Knight Brothers’ hit version.

Although their greatest recordings have never been legally reissued, the Rationals are partially represented on *Medium Rare 1970–2000* (Real O Mind, 2001). This Scott Morgan rarities compilation features the group’s last studio recording alongside tracks from its 1991 reunion sessions, including Major Lance’s “The Monkey Time” and Darrell Banks’s “Open the Door to Your Heart.” For thirty years, Morgan has continued to perform and record with such groups as Sonic’s Rendezvous Band, Dodge Main and the Hydromatics. A still-vibrant survivor of a legendary music scene, he remains (to quote David Fricke) “one of America’s Great Voices.” □

[Thanks to all the blue-eyed soul survey participants. Special thanks to Gregg Geller, Geoff Ginsberg, Barry Glazer, Daniel M. Hodges, Scott Morgan, Phast Phreddie Patterson and Don Waller.]

Cochran played R&B for a blue-haired audience

