

Soul Music

The beat of R&B and the exuberance of gospel combined to enhance one another in Soul Music. Soul singers conveyed messages of human love and relationships with the same passion used by gospel singers as they praised God. In fact, many soul singers were also gospel singers. The characteristics of gospel singers became important qualities of the soul vocal style. There was a smooth flow of uneven beat subdivisions, stress on the backbeat, and energetic horn or sax solos giving soul its gutsy richness.

The Musical Roots of Soul

The term “soul” did not come to be used until the mid-late 60’s, but the style was being developed in the 50’s through the work of singers such as Ray Charles, James Brown, Sam Cooke, and others. Out of the influences of these singers came the many artists recorded by Atlantic Record Company, Stax and Volt Records, Chess, Motown, and Philadelphia International.

Ray Charles

Ray Charles Robinson was blinded by glaucoma when he was only six years old. He had already been learning the piano and music gave him a world where sight was not essential. In addition to the piano, Charles took up the saxophone, the trumpet, and the clarinet. He also learned to read and write music in Braille and studied composition. After being orphaned at the age of 15, Charles made his living by playing music. Charles dropped his last name to avoid being confused with the fighter, Sugar Ray Robinson. Although he was one of the few soul singers to not perform gospel, he employed gospel elements in his style.

The use of *call/response* can be heard in Charles recording of *What’d I Say* (1959).

***Listen to Ray Charles---What’d I Say* (V. 1:1)**

A different version of this same piece appeared on each side of the record. The polished R&B version was a hit, but the flip side featured a gospel style group responding to Charles’ lead vocals.

Listen to Ray Charles---What’d I Say (Part Two)

Charles begins this version with a tribute to the jazz singer, Cab Calloway, by using nonsense syllables in much the same way Calloway did in the 20’s.

Setting Charles apart was his ability to synthesize country, R&B, and jazz with gospel styles. He produced two albums of country/country-styled songs in 1962. On these were covers of songs by Hank Williams and others.

***Listen to Ray Charles---Your Cheatin’ Heart* (V. 1:4)**

Ray Charles had hit singles of the Beatles and continued touring in the 70's. In 1980, he had an important role in the movie, *Blues Brothers*.

Sam Cooke began his performing career in 1951 when he took a lead role with the established gospel group, the Soul Stirrers.

Listen to Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers---You Send Me (v. 1:5)

His recording of You Send Me in 1957 marked the beginning of his success as a pop singer and his beginning of the influence his light, high, pop vocal style would have on future singers. He became a teen-idol pop star for young African-Americans in much the same way Dion and Frankie Avalon were to their white counterparts. That image was shattered in 1964 when Cooke was shot to death in a motel room by a woman who claimed he had attacked her.

Another musical innovator who started performing in order to stay alive was James Brown. His mother left him by the time he was five and his father didn't live with him. His mother left him to be raised by her sister. He earned his own money and helped support his aunt by dancing on street corners. The more elaborate the step, the more money he earned. In his early 20's Brown was accepted into the gospel group, the Swanees. Brown soon became their lead singer and they began recording secular music, changing their name to James Brown and the Famous Flames.

Listen to James Brown---Please, Please, Please (V. 1:6)

James Brown has been called *Mr. Dynamite, the Hardest Working Man in Show Business, Soul Brother Number One, the Godfather of Soul, and the Man with all the Names*. He performed with great energy, falling on the ground and doing leg splits, much like the antics of the gospel singers already discussed. With *Papa's Got a Brand New Bag*, Brown developed a style much more dependent on African rhythms than melody. That style was the beginning of what would be called *funk*.

Listen to James Brown---Papa's Got a Brand New Bag (v. 1:7)

Like Charles, Brown was featured in *The Blues Brothers*.

Jackie Wilson began his career in 1953 when he began singing with the Dominoes. Because he had a versatile voice, he was at home with pop music as he was with soul. He had an energetic stage presence and captivated audiences in a way similar to James Brown. Among his antics was a fake heart attack, from which he would recover and complete the performance. In 1975, he suffered a real heart attack on stage and lapsed into a coma. He remained comatose until his death in 1984.

Listen to Jackie Wilson---Higher and Higher (v. 1:11)

Chicago Soul

The Blues center of Chicago developed its own style of soul music. This style was defined by The Impressions. The style was much smoother than the soul from Nashville, Detroit, and other places. The style had the production qualities of Chicago Blues, including background vocals similar to doo-wop, and an orchestra type ensemble.

Listen to the Impressions---Amen (v. 1:13)

The lead singer of The Impressions after Jerry Butler was Curtis Mayfield. As the Civil Rights movement progressed through the 60's, he recorded songs giving support to the movement.

Listen to The Impressions---It's All Right (v. 1:15)

Mayfield's greatest success came in 1972, after leaving The Impressions, when he recorded the soundtrack for *Superfly*.

Listen to Curtis Mayfield---Superfly (v. 1:14)

Memphis Soul

Memphis had been an important center for the development of pop music since Sam Philips moved there to record blues singers and, eventually, marketed Elvis Presley. In the 60's, musicians took the gospel based style of James Brown and Jackie Wilson and combined them with the energetic R&B style of Little Richard and others to create their own brand of music. The result came to be known as Memphis Soul.

Memphis Soul recordings had a fairly consistent sound that resulted from many recordings having the same instrumental sound, Booker T. and the MGs. Booker T. was a reference to Booker T. Washington. MG stood for Memphis Group. The group placed a great deal of emphasis on the bass. Members of the group went on tour with The Blues Brothers and appeared in the movie by the same name. In addition to guitar, organ, bass, and drums, many Memphis recording sessions included a horn section.

Listen to Wilson Pickett---In the Midnight Hour (v. 1:16)

The piece featured the *Memphis horn sound*. This horn combination was used often in Memphis recording sessions.

The biggest selling singer at Stax Records was Otis Redding (1941-1967). He had the energy of Little Richard with the crooning style of Sam Cooke.

Listen to Otis Redding---Try a Little Tenderness (v. 1:20)

Redding wrote many of his own hit songs, including *Respect*, which he recorded in 1965 and Aretha Franklin covered in 1967.

Listen to Otis Redding---Respect (v.1:19)

After Redding was killed in a plane crash in 1967, Johnnie Taylor took the #1 spot at Stax Records.

Listen to Johnnie Taylor---Cheaper to Keep Her (v.2:1)

Atlantic Records

One of the primary producers of soul during the late 50's and 60's was Atlantic Records. They recorded a diverse group of bands, including Joe Turner (blues), CSNY, Led Zeppelin, and The Velvet Underground.

Aretha Franklin was one of the significant performers produced by Atlantic Records.

Listen to Aretha Franklin---Respect (v. 2:3)

Franklin was born in Memphis, the daughter of a Baptist minister. At the age of six, her family moved to Detroit. By the time she was an early teen, she had been singing gospel in her father's churches. Early in her career, Franklin sang in a more restrained style. After signing with Atlantic Records in 1966, she was encouraged to sing in a more energetic manner that was more similar to the way she had sung gospel. *Respect* was one of her early recordings with Atlantic.

Listen to Aretha Franklin---Oh Happy Day (v. 2:7)

Listen to Aretha Franklin and Otis Redding---Eleanor Rigby (v.2:8)

Aretha Franklin was the first woman to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Motown

Berry Gordy, Jr. was an African-American songwriter who saw that the white audience had matured sufficiently to be able to accept music by African-American performers. But, he also saw that the African-American performer needed to achieve much more than just acceptance. After hits performed by Jackie Wilson, Gordy decided to form his own record company. The studio was named *Motown* in recognition of Detroit's nickname, Motor Town. During the period of extreme unrest, Motown artists were singing love and other concerns with which people of all races, religions, and political beliefs could identify. And, he cultivated a sophisticated image in the groups he sponsored. Not only did he record groups, he managed them through his talent agency, Talent Management Incorporated (TMI). He hired Maxine Powell to train Motown's performers to drop the African-American modes of walking, speaking, and dancing. She taught them to accept and develop a demeanor that would be expected of the white upper class. Powell told

one performer that they were to act as if they were at the White House or Buckingham Palace, regardless of where they actually were. Powell and others oversaw the style of dress worn by Motown performers. It was common for groups of the 60's to wear matching outfits. But, they were not always sophisticated. Motown artists would wear sparkling gowns or some other type of glamorous gown. Men would be seen in tuxedos. Even names were changed to make them seem more sophisticated. The Matadors became the Miracles, the Primes became the Temptations, the Primettes became the Supremes, and Steveland Morris became Stevie Wonder.

Motown's producers used sophisticated background arrangements that often included orchestral string sections along with jazz instrumentation. Gospel elements were evident with the use of tambourines and the call-response technique. Motown arrangements often included infectious rhythms. Latin rhythms were often used.

Listen to Smokey Robinson and the Miracles---Mickey's Monkey (v. 2:17)

This rhythm was based on a Cuban *Son claves beat*.

The Temptations *Cloud Nine* was based on rhythmic patterns of the *Brazilian Samba*.

Listen to Temptations---Cloud Nine (v. 2:12)

In addition to the Latin rhythms, traditional rhythms in white styles were also used. This assured an appeal to a broader audience.

Motown employed a regular backup band to assure consistency of sound. The group was made up of musicians experienced in jazz and R&B. They were so essential in the studio that they weren't allowed to leave Detroit without special permission and then only for a short time. The group was known as The Funk Brothers. Other musicians were called on periodically when a particular sound was needed. But, the Funk Brothers made up the core of Motown's backup band.

An example of the approach taken by Funk Brothers musicians is the way James Jamerson played the bass. He was a jazz musician who preferred the upright bass. But, he knew that a more clear, amplified sound was necessary to create the sound required by Motown. To that end, he would first record the bass line on an upright bass, then he would overdub that part with the electric bass. Also, Jamerson wasn't content with the standard two-beat bass or the cliché bass lines. Rather, he developed walking bass lines with chromatic passing tones and syncopated rhythms. Other musicians in the funk Brothers followed the same pattern of being more innovative on their instruments rather than just playing the standard lines.

Listen to the Supremes---Baby Love (v. 3:1)

In this recording, several people stomped out the beat on plywood boards. At other times, tambourines and congas are used.

One of the first significant acts for Motown was Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. Smokey Robinson was a songwriter and wrote for other Motown acts.

Listen to Smokey Robinson and the Miracles---Just to See Her (v. 2:15)

Smokey Robinson eventually became vice president of Motown Records

Motown's girl groups included The Marvelettes, The Supremes, and Martha and the Vandellas. The Supremes outpaced the others in terms of their success.

Listen to The Supremes---Where Did Our Love Go (v. 3:4)

Listen to The Supremes---You Can't Hurry Love (v. 3:5)

The Supremes frequently repeated the opening melody (the hook) at the end in order to give a feeling of completeness. Songs performed by The Supremes would also sometimes change keys---unusual for pop songs.

Berry Gordy moved the entire operation to Hollywood in 1971 in order to add films to Motown's productions. Diana Ross became a film star in *Lady Sings the Blues*.

One of the most popular male groups from Motown was The Temptations.

Listen to The Temptations---In the Still of the Night (v. 2:9)

Listen to The Temptations---My Girl (4:14)

The Temptations employed a thick polished sound. Their style changed through the years, depending on who was singing lead. When The Temptations recorded *Cloud Nine* in 1968, they were attempting to emulate the funk styles of James Brown and Sly and the Family Stone. *Cloud Nine* made reference to drugs, but its message reached beyond that to a different level. It spoke of very poor conditions many African-American youths grew up with and attempted to show that as the reason many turned to drugs to escape.

Gordy maintained strict control over most of the musicians recording for Motown. One of the few who were allowed to write and produce his own albums was Stevie Wonder.

Stevie Wonder was blind from birth, yet spent his childhood playing a number of different musical instruments. His blindness and gospel-style voice earned him the reputation of being a young Ray Charles. At 21 he moved to New York and made significant changes in his writing style. He incorporated more gospel, jazz, and African-type rhythms in his works. He overdubbed his own singing and played most of the instruments on his recordings. He grew fond of the possibilities of the synthesizer. He wrote songs that expressed personal concerns. He urged Congress to honor Martin Luther King, Jr. with a national holiday and his composition, *Happy Birthday*, was written in King's honor.

Listen to Stevie Wonder---Happy Birthday (v. 3:12)

He received *Best Original Song Oscar* for *I Just Called to Say I Love You*, performed in *The Woman in Red*.

***Listen to Stevie Wonder---I Just Called to Say I Love You* (v. 3:13)**

Gordy liked having a child star like Stevie Wonder, but children grow up. Wonder was 19 when Michael Jackson and his four older brothers signed with Motown. Jackson quickly became the company's new child star. Gordy teamed himself with others to write and produce songs for the Jackson Five, which was geared toward pop music and teen/pre-teen fans.

The Jackson's father had managed the boys prior to signing with Motown and continued to do so after beginning that relationship. When Gordy wouldn't allow him to control his sons' career, he decided it was time to leave Motown. After a suit with Motown, the name was changed to The Jacksons.

***Listen to the Jackson 5---ABC123* (5:1)**

Michael Jackson became a solo star in the late 70's. In 1979 he teamed up with arranger/producer Quincy Jones. In 1982 the two accomplished more than a musical hit with *Thriller*. The album sold close to 40 million copies and broke through the racial barriers of MTV. This album the most hit singles ever on any album. It included the popular hit, *Beat It* which featured a guitar solo by Eddie Van Halen.

***Listen to Michael Jackson---Beat It* (3:18)**

He recorded a more gospel-oriented song with *Man in the Mirror*. This recording included a message that *changes start with the individual*. He used back-up vocals effectively to strengthen the message.

***Listen to Michael Jackson---Man in the Mirror* (3:16)**

The Commodores signed with Motown in 1971. Their early recordings were influenced by James Brown and Sly and the Family Stone. As the success of songs by Lionel Richie, a member of The Commodores, began to overshadow other songs, he became the group's principal songwriter. After some of his solo hits and recordings with Diana Ross became popular, he left the group for a solo career.

***Listen to Lionel Richie---Endless Love* (4:6)**

The Motown Company was sold to MCA Records in 1988. Several of Motown's artists continued to record on the Motown label into the 90's.

Philadelphia Soul

Partially because of American Bandstand, Philadelphia had played an important role in the development of music in the 50's and 60's. The production team of Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff moved from pop to soul in the late middle 60's. They formed the Philadelphia International Record Company and turned out hit after hit for the group The O'Jays, The Spinners, and Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes. The Philadelphia Soul Sound was backed by the record company's house band, MFSB (Mother, Father, Sister, Brother---but not at all related). The group was made up of keyboardists, guitarists, horn players, and percussionists.

Listen to the O'Jays---Love Train (4:8)

One of the most important stars for Philadelphia International was Teddy Pendergrass. Pendergrass was enormously talented, but his career with Philadelphia International was cut short when he suffered partial paralysis after a car accident in 1982. But, he was able to continue writing and recording. He did several recordings with Whitney Houston.

Listen to Teddy Pendergrass with Whitney Houston---Hold Me (4:13)