

## SOUL MUSIC

### Fromm Institute

#### Week Three: Southern Soul

##### Recommended Listening:

**Arthur Alexander, *The Ultimate Arthur Alexander*** (Razor & Tie, 1993). It's a tough call as to whether Alexander should be placed within the time frame of transitional early '60s rock or early soul, as he straddled both eras. The best of his early-to-mid-'60s work is collected here, and although he isn't too famous, he was one of the first notable performers of soul music in the modern style. He was also a big influence on the Beatles, who covered his song "Anna" on their first album, and other Alexander numbers like "Soldier of Love" and "A Shot of Rhythm and Blues" live and on the BBC.

**Booker T. & the MG's, *The Very Best of Booker T. & the MG's*** (Rhino, 1994). The best soul instrumental group was one of the best instrumental groups, period, and had a lot to do with establishing the sound of Southern soul and Stax Records. This has the hits they made throughout the 1960s, including "Green Onions," "Time Is Tight," and "Hang 'Em High."

**James Brown, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Collection*** (Universal, 2003). There are plenty of James Brown compilations, including box sets. But this is the best distillation of the most essential recordings of his prolific career, stretching from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s, though the first 15 years of that span were his best and most influential. This starts with his roots as an R&B singer, but his prime period was undoubtedly the mid-to-late 1960s, when he and his band moved soul into funk with hits like "Out of Sight," "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag," and "Cold Sweat."

**James Brown, *Live at the Apollo*** (Universal, 1963). Recorded in 1962 at the Apollo in New York, this album was arguably at least as significant for its commercial impact as its frenetic music, rising to #2 on the pop charts at a time when soul LPs (especially ones that didn't contain original versions of hits) didn't sell much. Brown recorded several other live albums in the 1960s, including another at the Apollo in the late 1960s that's musically superior, but this remains his most famous concert recording.

**Wilson Pickett, *The Very Best of Wilson Pickett*** (Rhino, 1993). The best of one of the roughest and most aggressive soul stars, including "In the Midnight Hour," "Land of 1000 Dances," and "Funky Broadway." At sixteen songs it's on the short side, and if you want more, you should get the two-CD, forty-track *A Man and a Half: The Best of Wilson Pickett*, also on Rhino.

**Otis Redding, *The Very Best of Otis Redding Vol. 1*** (Rhino, 1992). Often hailed as the greatest Southern soul singer, and certainly one of the premiere artists on the influential Stax label from Memphis, Redding made his mark with soul hits like the original version

of "Respect" and his cover of the Rolling Stones' "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction." He moved into more introspective, non-romantic lyrical territory on his #1 single "(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay," which topped the charts shortly after death in a plane crash in late 1967.

**Sam & Dave, *The Very Best of Sam & Dave*** (Rhino, 1995). Along with Otis Redding and Booker T. & the MG's, Sam & Dave were the most important and successful of the acts recorded by Stax Records in Memphis. The soul duo is most known for the anthemic "Soul Man," which is here along with their other most popular recordings, like "Hold On! I'm a Comin'."

**Percy Sledge, *It Tears Me Up: The Best of Percy Sledge*** (Rhino, 1992). Perhaps the most esteemed of the so-called "deep" Southern soul singers specializing in romantic ballads, including his signature song, the 1966 #1 hit "When a Man Loves a Woman."

**Carla Thomas, *Gee Whiz: The Best of Carla Thomas*** (Rhino, 1994). The most successful of the woman singers on Memphis's Stax label, with hits like "Gee Whiz," "B-A-B-Y" and "Tramp," the last a duet with Otis Redding.

**Irma Thomas, *Sweet Soul Queen of New Orleans: The Irma Thomas Collection*** (EMI, 1996). Documents the greatest era of the greatest New Orleans soul singer, with nearly two dozen tracks from the early to mid-1960s mixing pop and New Orleans rhythm and blues. Includes her version of "Time Is On My Side," covered by the Rolling Stones for their first US Top Ten hit.

**Rufus Thomas, *The Best of Rufus Thomas*** (Rhino, 1996). Although Thomas was not the most serious of soul men, he was consistently funny and entertaining, usually on songs built around silly dances. This compilation emphasizes his Stax material of the 1960s and early 1970s, including his most famous song, "Walking the Dog" (covered on the Rolling Stones' first album), and early-'70s funk dance tunes like "Do the Funky Chicken." It also goes back to the early 1950s for his R&B hit "Bear Cat."

**Ike & Tina Turner, *Bold Soul Sister: The Best of the Blue Thumb Recordings*** (MCA, 1997). The Turners recorded prolifically for numerous labels, which seems to have made a good best-of for their late 1960s-early 1970s work difficult to assemble. But this is a good collection of 1969 material, though it doesn't draw more from rock as much as some of their slightly later recordings do, like their hit cover of "Proud Mary."

**Various Artists, *Crescent City Soul: The Sound of New Orleans 1947-1974*** (EMI, 1996). It's also a little strange to list this four-CD set in several different handouts. However, in the absence of a strong collection of 1960s New Orleans soul, the post-1950s material on this anthology will have to do, including songs by such important artists as Irma Thomas, Aaron Neville, and Lee Dorsey.

**Various Artists, *The Stax Story*** (Stax, 2000). Four-CD box set documents the legacy of the top Southern soul label, including hits by Otis Redding, Sam & Dave, Booker T. &

the MG's, Carla Thomas, Rufus Thomas, Johnnie Taylor, Albert King, the Staple Singers, and others, along with an entire CD of live recordings.

**Various Artists, *Take Me to the River: A Southern Soul Story 1961-1977*** (Kent, 2008). Three-CD, 75-song collection of all shades of southern soul from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, including songs by major figures like Arthur Alexander, Otis Redding, Percy Sledge, Wilson Pickett, Al Green, Johnnie Taylor, and many others, including some pretty obscure names. As expected, the earlier material is better than the later selections.

### **Recommended Books:**

***Dreams to Remember: Otis Redding, Stax Records, and the Transformation of Southern Soul***, by Mark Ribowsky (Liveright, 2015). Satisfactorily in-depth biography of Redding, with lots of attention paid to his recordings, performances, and songwriting, though some key figures were unavailable for first-hand interviews due to death or non-participation. This is better than the other biographies of substance on Redding, *Otis Redding: An Unfinished Life* and *Otis! The Otis Redding Story* (see listings below).

***Get a Shot of Rhythm Blues: The Arthur Alexander Story***, by Richard Younger (University of Alabama Press, 2000). Is there enough to the life of early soul singer Arthur Alexander to merit a book-length biography? Just about, though even at 200 pages it's stretched to the limit. Younger did get to talk to Alexander at some length before the singer's 1993 death, and also tracked down an impressive number of the people who worked with him, either briefly or extensively, at some point between the early 1960s and early 1990s. The thing is, Alexander did not record prolifically, and by 1966 had gotten his best work out of the way on his first dozen singles. Nor was he an especially loquacious or revealing interview subject. So the text is earnest in intent, and always thorough in research, yet sometimes mundane in content..It's a competent job, though, and certainly of use to those who want a glimpse into one of the more interesting secondary figures of 1960s soul and pop.

***In the Midnight Hour: The Life & Soul of Wilson Pickett***, by Tony Fletcher (Oxford University Press, 2017). A decent biography that interviews plenty of Pickett's associates, researches his recordings in depth, and gives more detailed description of the records and music than most soul biographers do (even of the turkey discs he cut after the early 1970s). Although he had a volatile personal life and temper, Pickett's life wasn't quite as interesting and dramatic as some of the legends he approached but didn't match in influence, like James Brown, Otis Redding, and Aretha Franklin. Yet if his story isn't as epochal, it's not apt to be told better than it is here.

***James Brown***, by James Brown with Bruce Tucker (Thunder's Mouth Press, 1990). *The One: The Life and Music of James Brown* (see below) is more objective and thorough, but this autobiography does have a lot of stories and reflections from the man himself.

***The One: The Life and Music of James Brown***, by R.J. Smith (Gotham Books, 2012). The only high-quality biography of Brown devotes a lot of time to both his musical

innovations and personal eccentricities, concentrating mostly on his most fruitful artistic years, the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s.

***Otis Redding: An Unfinished Life***, by Jonathan Gould (Crown Archetype, 2017).

Although there's a lot of overlap between this and the Redding biography *Dreams to Remember* (see previous listing), the depth (running about 500 pages) and very detailed, acute critical description of Redding's records ensures it has additional information of interest. However, the earlier parts of the book are overcontextualized, with a lot of passages about the general history of R&B, soul, and southern black life that don't refer to Otis at all, and could have been removed or trimmed way down.

***Otis! The Otis Redding Story***, by Scott Freeman (St. Martin's Griffin, 2002). For many years, the only biography of this major soul icon. It's since been surpassed by *Dreams to Remember* and *Otis Redding: An Unfinished Life* (see listings above).

***Respect Yourself: Stax Records and the Soul Explosion***, by Robert Gordon (Bloomsbury, 2013). Although some might have felt one big book on Stax Records (Rob Bowman's 1997 volume *Soulville U.S.A.*; see listing below) to be enough, this is also a very good history. Gordon was involved in the direction and production of the documentary *Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story* (see listing in DVD section), and draws upon many of the interviews he did for that project for this book.

***Sam and Dave: An Oral History***, by Sam Moore & Dave Marsh (Avon, 1998). Part of the short-lived *For the Record* oral history series, this is told entirely in the voice of the "Sam" half of Sam & Dave. It covers their origins, the peak of their career at Stax, and their tough post-Stax careers, including much tension between the pair. It's not that long (132 pages), but there might not be too much more to say about their legacy.

***Soulville U.S.A.***, by Rob Bowman (Schirmer, 1997). Lengthy history of Stax Records incorporating extensive research and investigative reporting.

***Sweet Soul Music***, by Peter Guralnick (Back Bay Books, 1999). Not everyone agrees with Guralnick's view of what qualifies as deep soul music, and some fans feel that he omitted some important figures in this overview. Nonetheless, this is a lengthy examination of the earthier side of 1960s soul, usually focusing upon artists from the South.

### **Recommended DVDs:**

***James Brown, Mr. Dynamite*** (Universal, 2014). Mostly devoted to Brown's prime from the early 1960s to mid-1970s, this blends lots of interviews done specifically for this documentary (including many with musicians in his bands) with generally splendid vintage performance footage. It's a little strange in that there's not nearly as much on his earlier career and nothing on his later career, but by 1975 he'd done all of his important records anyway. Co-produced by Mick Jagger, who talks about the Rolling Stones

following James Brown on *The T.A.M.I. Show* concert film in 1964 during his interview segment.

**Otis Redding, *Dreams to Remember: The Legacy of Otis Redding*** (Reelin' in the Years, 2007). A 90-minute DVD built around 1965-67 performance clips culled from a variety of sources, interspersed with interviews with noted Redding accompanists Steve Cropper (guitarist in Booker T. & the MG's) and Wayne Jackson; Stax Records founder Jim Stewart; and Redding's wife.

**Otis Redding, *Respect Live 1967*** (Shout Factory, 1989). Though there isn't that much performance footage of Otis Redding as he was cut off in his prime, this nearly hour-long DVD has about a dozen performances (some from the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival), with backing by Booker T. & the MG's and the Mar-Keys.

**Sam & Dave, *The Original Soul Men*** (Hip-O, 2008). A rather surprising wealth of vintage Sam & Dave clips, mostly from 1966-70, are featured on this two-hour DVD, along with interviews with Sam & Dave and some of their close associates.

***Muscle Shoals*** (2012, Magnolia Home Entertainment). Fine documentary about the small Alabama town responsible for recording much top Southern soul music in the 1960s and 1970s. Though centered around FAME Studios owner Rick Hall, it also includes quite a few interviews with key session musicians and songwriters from the area, as well as stars who recorded in Muscle Shoals like Aretha Franklin, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Gregg Allman, Jimmy Cliff, Percy Sledge, and Clarence Carter.

***Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story*** (Concord Music Group, 2007). Two-hour PBS documentary on the hugely influential, successful, and ultimately troubled Memphis soul label of the 1960s and early 1970s.

***Stax/Volt Revue: Live in Norway 1967*** (Concord Music Group, 2007). Footage of several top Stax Records artists – Otis Redding, Sam & Dave, Booker T. & the MG's, the Mar-Keys, Eddie Floyd, and Arthur Conley (the last of whom was technically not on Stax, though he had some Stax affiliations) – in concert in Oslo, Norway on April 7, 1967.

#### **Notable Figures (Excluding Star Musicians):**

**Estelle Axton:** Co-founder of Stax Records with her brother Jim Stewart, though she left the company in 1970.

**Rick Hall:** The owner of FAME Studios, the noted southern soul studio in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. He was also a producer and songwriter.

**Isaac Hayes & David Porter:** Stax Records' foremost production and songwriting team, working with Sam & Dave, Carla Thomas, Johnnie Taylor, and other artists. "Soul Man"

is their most famous collaboration. Isaac Hayes was the same Isaac Hayes who rose to funk stardom in the 1970 with "Shaft."

**Jimmy Nolen:** Guitarist in James Brown's band in the last half of the 1960s, and notable for developing the percussive rhythmic style, sometimes called "chicken scratch," that became a big part of funk music.

**Maceo Parker:** Saxophonist in James Brown's band in the mid-to-late 1960s, and another important cog in Brown's evolution from soul to funk. Other important players in Brown's band during this period were trumpeter **Pee Wee Ellis**; drummer **Clyde Stubblefield**; and long-suffering trombonist **Fred Wesley**.

**Dan Penn/Spooner Oldham:** Southern white songwriters responsible for numerous soul hits, together and separately, for the likes of Aretha Franklin, the Boxtops, and James Carr.

**Jim Stewart:** With his sister Estelle Axton, co-founder of Stax Records, important not just for its music, but for creating an environment in racially tense Memphis where blacks and whites could work closely together as musical collaborators.

**Allen Toussaint:** The top New Orleans soul producer and songwriter of the 1960s and 1970s, working with Irma Thomas, Aaron Neville, Ernie K-Doe, Lee Dorsey, the Meters, Dr. John, and others.

### **Notable Places:**

**FAME Studios:** Other than the in-house studios for famed labels like Motown, Stax, and Chess, this was probably the most important soul recording studio. Located in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, it generated hits by Arthur Alexander, Wilson Pickett, Aretha Franklin, Joe Tex, and others.

**Motown Historical Museum:** Open for the past 25 years, and located at the original building, 2648 West Grand Boulevard in Detroit, where Motown was headquartered when it rose to glory in the early-to-mid-1960s. Studio A, the most renowned of the studios Motown used, is here and part of the museum.

**Stax Museum of American Soul Music:** Although the original building in which the Stax label and studio were headquartered was sadly demolished at the end of the 1980s, this museum was constructed on the site at 926 E. McLemore Avenue in Memphis and opened in 2003.

### **Important Record Labels:**

**Atlantic:** As much as it had been important to R&B and rock'n'roll in the 1950s, so Atlantic was to soul in the 1960s, with artists like Aretha Franklin, Solomon Burke,

Wilson Pickett, and Percy Sledge. It also distributed Stax, assuming control of its pre-1968 catalog when Stax ended their deal with Atlantic.

**Minit:** New Orleans-based home of early soul records by Irma Thomas, Aaron Neville, Ernie K-Doe ("Mother-in-Law"), and others.

**Stax:** The only label to rival (though it was a fairly distant second) Motown in influence and popularity, specializing in earthier Southern soul, often produced at its Memphis headquarters. Some of its records appeared on its subsidiary, Volt, which is why Stax is occasionally referred to as Stax/Volt.

AV Clips:

James Brown: Out of Sight (DVD)  
Arthur Alexander: You Better Move On (CD)  
Arthur Alexander: Anna (CD)  
Arthur Alexander: You Don't Care (CD)  
Jimmy Hughes: Steal Away (CD)  
Booker T. & the MGs: Green Onions (DVD)  
Booker T. & the MGs: Soul Dressing (CD)  
Rufus Thomas: Walking the Dog (DVD)  
Wilson Pickett: Midnight Hour (DVD)  
Wilson Pickett: Land of a Thousand Dances (CD)  
Otis Redding: Respect (DVD)  
Otis Redding: I've Been Loving You Too Long (DVD)  
Otis Redding: Satisfaction (DVD)  
Sam Cooke: Yeah Man (CD)  
Arthur Conley: Sweet Soul Music (DVD)  
Sam & Dave: Hold On, I'm Coming (DVD)  
Sam & Dave: Soul Man (DVD)  
Carla Thomas: B-A-B-Y (CD)  
Otis Redding & Carla Thomas: Tramp (DVD)  
Percy Sledge: When a Man Loves a Woman (DVD)  
Irma Thomas: Ruler of My Heart (CD)  
Otis Redding: Pain in My Heart (DVD)  
Irma Thomas: Time Is On My Side (CD)  
Irma Thomas: Breakaway (CD)  
Irma Thomas: Anyone Who Knows What Love Is (DVD)  
Benny Spellman: Fortune Teller (CD)  
Lee Dorsey: Working in the Coal Mine (CD)  
Lee Dorsey: Ride Your Pony (DVD)  
Aaron Neville: Tell It Like It Is (CD)  
Gloria Jones: Tainted Love (CD)  
James Brown: Papa's Got a Brand New Bag (CD)  
James Brown: Papa's Got a Brand New Bag (DVD)  
James Brown: I Got You (DVD)

James Brown: It's a Man's Man's Man's World (DVD)  
Ike & Tina Turner: Can't Believe What You Say (DVD)  
Ike & Tina Turner: I Think It's Gonna Work Out Fine (DVD)  
Ike & Tina Turner: River Deep Mountain High (DVD)  
Aretha Franklin: Won't Be Long (DVD)  
Aretha Franklin: I Never Loved a Man (DVD)  
Aretha Franklin: Respect (DVD)