

## SOUL MUSIC

### Fromm Institute

#### Week Five: Soul in the Early 1970s

##### Recommended Listening:

**The Chi-Lites, *20 Greatest Hits*** (Brunswick, 2001). The biggest hits by Chicago's prime exponents of romantic harmony soul, including the huge singles "Have You Seen Her?" and "Oh Girl."

**Funkadelic, *Music for Your Mother*** (Ace, 1993). It's difficult to boil down the idiosyncratic music of this Detroit funk group to one disc, as they were more album-oriented than most soul acts. This is about as good an introduction as any to their eccentric mix of funk, psychedelic rock, and off-the-wall humor. Confusing matters more than neophytes, their membership often overlapped with their sister group Parliament, whose work can be sampled on *The Best of Parliament: Give Up the Funk* (Casablanca, 1995).

**Marvin Gaye, *What's Going On?*** (Motown, 1971). Arguably the first album by a soul star meant to be heard as an interconnected piece, rather than a collection of singles or even a collection of strong songs. Gaye brought social consciousness to the forefront of Motown soul as never before with the title song, "Inner City Blues," and "Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)." Of course he had plenty of other hits in the late 1960s and early 1970s (most notably "I Heard It Through the Grapevine") that can be heard on collections like *Anthology*, and delved back into romantic soul on 1973's *Let's Get It On*, whose title track gave him one of his hugest singles.

**Al Green, *Greatest Hits*** (The Right Stuff, 1995). The biggest songs by the Memphis romantic funk superstar of the early-to-mid-1970s, like "Let's Stay Together," "Tired of Being Alone," and "Here I Am (Come and Take Me)."

**Isaac Hayes, *Greatest Hit Singles*** (Stax, 1991). The biggest hits by the Memphis songwriter-turned-superstar whose sexy macho talking vocal style and bubbling funk rhythms anticipated disco, most notably on his monstrous smash "Theme From Shaft."

**The Last Poets, *The Last Poets*** (Fuel 2000, 1970). The most obscure album in this section turned out to be one of the more influential, as this group's talking-poetry style anticipated rap music. More rooted in soul and R&B than the rap of the 1980s, however, it was one of the most militantly political records to emerge from the black community during this era.

**Curtis Mayfield, *Superfly*** (Rhino, 1972). Though a soundtrack to a blaxploitation movie, this found Mayfield hitting a peak as a critical observer of drug use, crime, and death in the African-American community on hits like the title track and "Freddie's

Dead," as well as "Pusherman." The music was also innovative, making creative use of wah-wah guitar in a funk-rock context. Mayfield had other records of note in a similar groove in the early 1970s that can be found on greatest hit collections, like "Future Shock" and "(Don't Worry) If There's a Hell Below, We're All Going to Go."

**The O'Jays, *The Ultimate O'Jays*** (Columbia, 2001). The O'Jays had been around a long time before they finally became stars in the early 1970s by hooking up with the Gamble-Huff production team in Philadelphia. This has their dance-friendly socially conscious funk-soul from their 1972-75 prime, including "Back Stabbers," "Love Train," and "For the Love of Money."

**Ann Peebles, *The Best of Ann Peebles: The Hi Years*** (The Right Stuff, 1996). The most renowned singer to emerge from Memphis's Hi label except for Al Green, though she never had huge pop hits. This has material from her prime, including her most famous song, "I Can't Stand the Rain."

**Gil Scott-Heron, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*** (Bluebird, 1989). Though some critics would categorize Scott-Heron as a jazz musician, he did draw from R&B and soul to some extent. This has the recordings from the early 1970s on which he merged hip social commentary and poetry with music, most notably on the sardonic title track.

**Sly & the Family Stone, *There's a Riot Goin' On*** (Epic, 1971). Though a #1 album with a #1 hit ("Family Affair"), this is actually not all that musically accessible. It remains revered by critics, however, for capturing some of the downbeat disillusionment of the African-American community and the counterculture as its highest hopes died and drug use ran rampant. It is also one of the first albums, if not the first, to prominently use a drum machine.

**The Spinners, *The Very Best of the Spinners*** (Rhino, 1993). Along with the O'Jays, the Spinners were the most popular group to benefit from Philadelphia soul production. This has their 1970s hits, which were usually inclined toward the romantic ("I'll Be Around," "One of a Kind (Love Affair)"), but didn't ignore the outer world ("Ghetto Child").

**The Staple Singers, *The Best of the Staple Singers*** (Fantasy, 1990). A long-lived gospel-folk group, the Staple Singers achieved pop stardom in the early 1970s by going into all-out Southern soul music, though retaining a strong gospel feel. This has their hits "I'll Take You There" and "Respect Yourself," along with other music from the same period. A more extensive, expensive retrospective that traces their evolution from their 1950s gospel recordings is the four-CD *Faith & Grace: A Family Journey 1953-1976*.

**The Stylistics, *The Best of the Stylistics*** (Universal, 1996). The top romantic Philly soul harmony group, who hit big with "You Make Me Feel Brand New," "Betcha By Golly Wow," and "Break Up to Make Up."

**War, *The Very Best of War*** (Rhino, 2003). Let's hear it for another two-CD best-of, this one documenting the funk band that came closer to rock than most. Includes their famous

hits "The World Is a Ghetto," "The Cisco Kid," "Slippin' into Darkness," and "Low Rider," as well as their 1970 hit backing ex-Animals singer Eric Burdon, "Spill the Wine."

**Bill Withers, *Lovely Day: The Very Best of Bill Withers*** (Sony, 2005). The best of the star who bridged soul with folk and the singer-songwriter movement, including the hits "Ain't No Sunshine," "Lean on Me," and "Use Me."

**Stevie Wonder, *Original Musiquarium I*** (Motown, 1982). Two-CD compilation of his 1970s hits, including such well-played numbers as "Higher Ground," "Superstition," "Living for the City," and "You Are the Sunshine of My Life." Of course, as one of soul's most popular album-oriented artists, his albums of the time also have music worth checking out, especially the four he made in 1972-76 after changing his contract with Motown to assure artistic freedom (*Talking Book, Innervisions, Fulfillingness' First Finale*, and *Songs in the Key of Life*).

**Betty Wright, *The Very Best of Betty Wright*** (Rhino, 2000). This soul singer is best known for the 1972 hit "Clean Up Woman," which like some other Miami soul was distinguished by a slight tropical/reggae influence in the rhythms and arrangements.

**Various Artists, *Can You Dig It? The '70s Soul Experience*** (Rhino, 2001). Extraordinary six-CD box set (packaged like an eight-track tape tray) with hits and obscurities from a huge range of '70s soul performers, emphasizing the first half of the decade.

**Various Artists, *Hi Times: The Hi Records R&B Years*** (Capitol, 1995). Three-CD box set overview of the standout recordings in the Hi Records catalog starts way back in the late 1950s, but properly concentrates on the funky Memphis soul recordings the label was famed for by Al Green, Ann Peebles, Otis Clay, Syl Johnson, and others.

**Various Artists, *Invictus Soul Box Set*** (Castle, 2006). Three-CD box set of music on the label the Holland-Dozier-Holland songwriting/production team founded after leaving Motown, including notable tracks by hitmakers like Freda Payne, the Chairmen of the Board, Honey Cone, and Parliament.

**Various Artists, *Love Train: The Sound of Philadelphia*** (Sony/Legacy, 2008). Four-CD box set of Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff Philadelphia soul productions from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, including hits by all the stars associated with the sound: the O'Jays, the Delfonics, the Spinners, the Stylistics, Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes, MFSB, and others.

### **Recommended Books:**

***Brothas Be Yo, Like George, Ain't That Funkin' Kinda Hard on You?***, by George Clinton with Ben Greenman (Atria, 2015). A pretty straightforward memoir of the Parliament-Funkadelic man's career, told in straight-up language that avoids

sentimentality and droll humor that avoids cheap yuks. There are lots of stories about his strange career path from his New Jersey adolescence and young adulthood, where he spent as much time working at the barbershop as on his music, to the hard-to-define weird mixture of funk and rock he masterminded with P-Funk.

***Gil Scott-Heron: Pieces of a Man***, by Marcus Baram (St. Martin's Press, 2014). Solid biography of a pioneer in mixing soul, jazz, and socially conscious poetry. Includes looks at his literary beginnings and his sad, long struggle with the kinds of drug addiction he examined in some of his songs, leading to stretches of homelessness, imprisonment, and little new music in the final quarter-century of his life.

***I'll Take You There: Mavis Staples, The Staple Singers, and the March Up Freedom's Highway***, by Greg Kot (Scribner, 2014). Good straightforward biography of the Staple Singers, concentrating on their 1950s-1970s prime, when no other act made the transition from gospel to socially conscious soul and funk on a similar scale. Though one of their singers (Mavis Staples) is emphasized in the title, it's more a book about the group as a whole, Staples giving the author by far the most interview material.

***Soul Survivor: A Biography of Al Green***, by Jimmy McDonough (Da Capo). Green's life is daunting to research given his enigmatic behavior; the proliferation of murky incidents dotting his history; and the inaccessibility of the still-living Al himself, who did not grant interviews for this volume. McDonough did speak with many people who's worked and known Green, however, including many involved in the Hi record label for which he cut the hit records for which he's most famed. A very interesting and deeply researched book, this also covering his move into gospel and preaching, and his complicated relationships (including comprehensive coverage of the incident in which a woman scalded him before shooting herself).

#### **Recommended DVDs:**

***Parliament Funkadelic, Live 1976: The Mothership Connection*** (Shout Factory, 1998). October 31, 1976 Houston concert by this goofy and colorful bunch, whose costumes and staging were as oddball as their music.

***Ike & Tina Turner, The Legends Live in '71*** (Eagle Vision, 2004). February 1971 concert that documents their move toward covers of popular rock songs, including "Proud Mary," "Come Together," and "Honky Tonk Women."

***The Best of Soul Train*** (Time-Life, 2010). Mammoth nine-DVD set of performances from the long-running popular national soul music TV program. Though spanning the early 1970s to the early 1990s, the emphasis is on clips from the early-to-mid-'70s, seemingly encompassing almost every star of note from the period.

***Soul to Soul*** (Rhino, 2004). March 1971 soul concert in Ghana, West Africa, with performers including Wilson Pickett, Ike & Tina Turner, the Staple Singers, and Santana.

**Wattstax** (Warner Brothers, 2004). One-day Los Angeles soul festival from 1972 (in a football stadium holding 100,000 people) has exciting performances from several artists on the Stax roster, including the Staple Singers, Isaac Hayes, Rufus Thomas, Johnnie Taylor, and the Bar-Kays.

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

**Malcolm Cecil & Robert Margouleff:** The pair behind the electronic music group Tonto's Expanding Headband, who influenced Stevie Wonder to start using synthesizers in his music in the early 1970s, and worked with him on his most popular '70s albums.

**Don Cornelius:** Host and creator of *Soul Train*. Committed suicide February 1, 2012.

**Hi Rhythm Section:** The house band for the soul records issued on the Hi label in Memphis, including hitmaker Al Green.

**MFSB:** The name for the sessions musicians who worked out of Philadelphia's Sigma Sound Studios. They often played on productions by Thom Bell and Gamble-Huff, and had hits of their own, most notably 1974's early disco hit "TSOP (The Sound of Philadelphia)."

**Willie Mitchell:** Owner of, and frequent producer of records on, Hi Records in Memphis.

**Notable Places:**

**Full Gospel Tabernacle Church:** Memphis church where Al Green became pastor in 1976, concentrating on gospel and religion since that time.

**Los Angeles Coliseum:** Site of the Wattstax soul festival on August 20, 1972.

**Royal Studios:** Memphis studios where much of the output of Hi Records was recorded.

**Notable Labels:**

**Curtom:** Formed by Curtis Mayfield, who was naturally the label's most successful artist, his hits for the company including the *Superfly* album.

**Hi:** Home of Al Green, and the Memphis label also issued respected 1970s soul discs by other artists, particularly Ann Peebles.

**Invictus/Hot Wax:** Run by the Holland-Dozier-Holland songwriting/production team after they left Motown, issuing hits by Freda Payne, the Chairmen of the Board, and Honey Cone, among others, though it never approached the iconic status of Motown.

## AV Clips

Edwin Starr: War (DVD)  
The Temptations: Ball of Confusion (DVD)  
The Temptations: Just My Imagination (DVD)  
The Temptations: Papa Was a Rolling Stone (DVD)  
Marvin Gaye: What's Going on (DVD)  
Marvin Gaye: Inner City Blues (DVD)  
Marvin Gaye: Let's Get It On (DVD)  
Gladys Knight & the Pips: Friendship Train (DVD)  
Stevie Wonder: Superstition (DVD)  
Stevie Wonder: Higher Ground (DVD)  
Stevie Wonder: You Are the Sunshine of My Life (DVD)  
The Miracles: Tears of a Clown (DVD)  
Diana Ross: Reach Out and Touch Somebody's Hand (DVD)  
Curtis Mayfield: Pusherman (DVD)  
Curtis Mayfield: Superfly (DVD)  
Gil Scott-Heron: The Revolution Will Not Be Televised (CD)  
The Last Poets: Wake Up Niggers (CD)  
The Lumpen: Free Bobby (CD)  
Joe Tex: I Gotcha (DVD)  
Tami Lynn: Why Can't I Run Away from You (DVD)  
Cissy Houston: Midnight Train to Georgia (CD)  
Gladys Knight & the Pips: Midnight Train to Georgia (DVD)  
B.B. King: The Thrill Is Gone (DVD)  
Bill Withers: Ain't No Sunshine (DVD)  
War: Low Rider (DVD)  
Ike & Tina Turner: Proud Mary (DVD)  
Chairmen of the Board: Give Me Just a Little More Time (CD)  
Freda Payne: Band of Gold (DVD)  
Honeycone: Want Ads (DVD)  
Isaac Hayes: Shaft (DVD)  
The Bar-Kays: Son of Shaft (DVD)  
Jean Knight: Mr. Big Stuff (DVD)  
The Staple Singers: I'll Take You There (DVD)  
Al Green: Tired of Being Alone (DVD)  
Al Green: Let's Stay Together (DVD)  
Ann Peebles: I Can't Stand the Rain (CD)  
Aretha Franklin: Don't Play That Song (DVD)  
Betty Wright: Clean Up Woman (DVD)  
The Pointer Sisters: Yes We Can Can (DVD)  
The Main Ingredient: Everybody Plays the Fool (DVD)  
The Stylistics: You Make Me Feel Brand New (DVD)  
The O'Jays: Back Stabbers (DVD)  
The Spinners: Ghetto Child (DVD)  
Sly Stone: Family Affair (DVD)

Sly Stone: If You Want Me to Stay (DVD)  
Stevie Wonder: Living for the City (DVD)