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Soul: A Historical Reconstruction of Continuity and Change in Black Popular Music

BY ROBERT W. STEPHENS

THE SOUL TRADITION is a prime cultural force in American popular music; of that, there can be little doubt, although this musical phenomenon is sometimes vaguely defined. Born of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s, soul has provided a musical and cultural foundation for virtually every facet of contemporary popular music. More important than its commercial successes, however, are the messages and philosophies it has communicated and the musical influences which underlie its development.

In a broad sense, the philosophies and concepts of soul reflect the collective sensibilities of the black community. Civil Rights and Black Power exponents addressed the same concern: their unwillingness to endure adverse social, political, and economic conditions. Performers, musicians, and composers took up these topical problems in their music; they also offered solutions for improvement and change. Thus, through soul, black performers presented the qualities of a revitalized black consciousness, reaffirming destiny, and "a sense of unity and power." An active ideology, in short, soul speaks to a black aesthetic.

The soul concept is not new to American blacks of the diaspora, nor has scholarly research failed to document this fact.¹ Research has consistently reported similar, if not the same, findings: the concept is an integral part of a much larger infrastructure, which is grounded in complex African roots and disseminated through the spiritual consciousness of its practitioners.² This consciousness sustained its people through the cruel and inhuman conditions of "the middle passage," of slavery, and of present times.

The present essay examines the evolution and essence of this important tradition. More directly, it considers the musical phenomenon from three perspectives: (1) its evolution from secular and sacred traditions rooted in an African past; (2) the relationship of its cultural context to historical and socio-political events; and (3) its musical character and dissemination through emergent contemporary styles.

Generically, the term soul denotes a musical style derived from blues-based dance music and the black gospel tradition. Though

these styles are well documented elsewhere, the present discussion requires a cursory examination of their basic features.

THE BLUES: Country Blues

The blues, like many other musical forms in the black tradition, extracts its essence from the aesthetic of a socially isolated community during the antebellum. Conceptually, it arises from traditions that mirror its African heritage, as well as from the demographic shifts of Afro-Americans from a rural agricultural to an urban industrial people.

Like most black music, the blues is basically a vocal genre; that is, it emphasizes the vocal idiom. Textual themes in early blues often provide information and describe situations that echo African and Afro-American continuities. Love relationships are common themes. In some songs, improvisation follows the flow of spontaneous expression of feeling, and reflects a sociological view of the yearning, frustrations, attitudes, and beliefs that typify the bluesman's community. Many African societies consider social harmony analogous to harmonious relationships at home; while addressing the realities of their personal lives, performers in both traditions, in a larger context, address community concerns.

The blues derives from many sources. One cannot say with certainty that it evolved from field calls, urban cries, or one-verse songs. Rather, it is probably a combination of field hollers, ballads, and religious music, heavily influenced by African-inspired rhythms, performance practices, melodic constructions, and instrumentation. What is more important, each bluesman mixes these ingredients in varying proportions to develop an individual style while maintaining his status as a musical spokesman for his community.

Musically, the Mississippi Delta is significant with regard to blues development, since many innovators and performers came, and still come, from the area. While fluidity, personal styles, and innovative techniques characterize Delta music as a whole, one can also observe distinguishing features. A sense of place was a common theme. Cotton fields, sharecropping, love, and sex were familiar to the bluesman and his audience. Also, musical verses frequently stressed hard times, but only in an effort to reflect the realities of the day-to-day existence. Verses were frequently "formulaic," the performer shifting verse formulas at will within a given tune. In such cases, a typical performance might last from three minutes to an hour.³

Harmonically, instrumental forms varied in length and construction. Tunes comprised six, eight, or even twelve bars. The structure depended largely on the performer's desires: for example, six measures could be built around a I chord; or four mea-

tures, around the I; and two, around an implied IV or V. Often, accompanying harmonies centered around the I and IV chords. These tendencies probably reflect limited melodic range and lack of melodic movement.

Delta vocal styles were generally harsh and heavy. In comparison with other blues types, vocal delivery was coarse in manner and content. Melodic figures occurred repetitively, sometimes interspersed with falsettos and sounds reminiscent of field hollers, urban cries, and call-response patterns between voice and instrument. The relationship between voice and instrument in country blues forms encompasses a mixture of all these elements; it is also characterized by the use of bottlenecking and heterophony. The former is the practice of placing a broken bottleneck, jackknife, or metal slide against the guitar frets to produce a Hawaiian guitar-like effect; the latter is the occurrence of non-contrived harmonies between voice and instrument.⁴ In both cases the instrument accents and rarely functions independently of the vocal line.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Mississippi Delta and the South in general were fast becoming a funnel for blacks. Those who had moved into southern towns and those who remained on farms and plantations were finding Jim Crow and sharecropping systems virulently racist, duplicitous, and exploitative. Facing disenfranchisement and frustrated in their efforts to improve their condition, many migrated North in search of a more acceptable environment.

URBAN BLUES FORMS: Dancehall Blues Bands

The first major migration of blacks into northern urban settings began during World War I (1914–1918), and a second began during World War II (1939–1945). Their expectations were that the North would provide opportunities for better housing, jobs, and education for their children. The migrants went in search of acceptance as full-time partners in realizing “the American dream.” Realities, however, fell short of expectations. Faced with subtler but equally effective discrimination, the new urban migrants had to create an environment which allowed them to maintain southern mores and values and, most importantly, their dignity and self-respect. Similarly, their musical traditions reflected their southern background recollected in their new environment, the northern ghetto.

Beginning in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and continuing through the 1960s, southern black migration to northern areas established a national ghetto system based on geographic lines. The first generation moved primarily into North Central regions and along the Eastern Seaboard—St. Louis, Cincinnati, Chicago, Pittsburgh, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington.

Migration patterns for the second generation were more expansive and extended further west; the third, with some exceptions, followed the lines of the second.

Musically, newly-arrived blacks in these areas showed a preference for "blues-derived dance music." Jazz bandleaders such as Todd Rhodes, Tiny Bradshaw, Lucky Millender and Buddy Johnson, created a type of dance music to meet the needs of their audiences; their bands are sometimes labeled dancehall blues bands.⁵ Their arrangements were emotional and often featured a saxophone—usually tenor—and a vocalist. The saxophonist provided intense solos that served variously as preludes, interludes, and postludes—often at infectiously rocking and incredibly fast tempos. Vocalists, too, generated frenzied excitement by shouting, crying, or screaming; but they were versatile enough to create another atmosphere, suitable for lovers, with their ballads.⁶

Jump Combos in the Southwest

Another style which influenced the development of the soul tradition arose in the combo blues bands. Typically, these groups included strong rhythm sections consisting of piano, guitar, bass, and drums and featured singers and "up-front" saxophones. Their most prominent feature, however, was the boogie rhythm established by the pianist's left hand. These rhythms provided the substance for accompanying horn lines.⁷ Louis Jordan and his Tympany Five established the patterns for the combo blues tradition. His stage act included witty lyrics and crisp rhythms that appealed to both black and white audiences. One of his biggest hits was the 1942 tune, "Choo Choo Ch' Boogie."

Among the West Coast, combo, blues stylists, perhaps the most prominent was Aaron ("T-Bone") Walker. Walker's style included a guitar technique that demonstrated an interest in jazz phrasing as much as a need for emotional expression. He also pioneered in the use of the electric guitar and developed a dazzling stage act that influenced Bo Diddley and Elvis Presley.

The contributions of these performers, and others like Professor Long Hair (Ron Byrd), Roy Milton, and Amos Milburn, are undeniable. Their importance stems from the influence of their styles on rhythm and blues, rock 'n' roll, and soul.

Bar Blues Styles

As stated above, the migrating blacks brought to the North Central States a decided preference for blues-based dance music, and many of the musicians who moved to Chicago were bluesmen of existing or soon-to-be-gained reputation. The music that they developed is called "bar blues," which actually was an amplified

form of country blues. Characteristically, it employed electric guitar bass, drums, harmonica, and sometimes piano. The performance style for both instrumentalist and vocalist was coarse and rough. This is epitomized in the recording of artists such as Muddy Waters, Elmore James, Little Walter, and Sonny Boy Williamson.⁸

Club Blues

During World War II, blacks migrated to California in numbers so large that separate entertainment facilities could not be built fast enough to accommodate them. As a result, for many years blacks and whites shared the same night clubs. This may account for the deemphasis of the blues content in the styles and repertoires of many of the black performers. In any case, the "club blues" that developed on the West Coast was characterized by cocktail-style piano playing accompanied by the subdued rhythm of brushed drums and bass.

Nat ("King") Cole was an originator of this style. His vocal style did not employ the coarse qualities of other blues styles, nor did he emphasize dance music. His style was not rhythm 'n' blues (also called R & B) but a mixture of jazz and popular styles reminiscent of Bing Crosby and Perry Como. As Cole's popularity grew and he moved out from the Los Angeles night-club circuit, his style influenced the later R & B groups. Other significant performers during this period included Charles Brown, Cecil Gant, Percy Mayfield, Jesse Belvin, Johnny Ace and Ivory Joe Hunter, many of whom would later adopt a strong gospel style.⁹

By 1946, the vocal and instrumental styles of blues-derived dance bands was being labeled "rhythm 'n' blues." By 1949, *Billboard* was using the term without comment to replace various terms previously used to apply to black music, such as "race music," "sepia," and "ebony." In any case, the relationship between voice and instrument, vocal practices, instrumentation, and a conceptual approach established during the 1930s and 1940s were part of the musical foundation upon which the soul tradition rests. As Portia Maultsby notes, "the essence of the blues tradition has remained the same. The addition of amplified instruments in the 1940s, a rhythm section in the 1950s, and horns in the 1960s are perhaps the only significant yet superficial change that the tradition has experienced." Moreover, "the melodic and percussive instrumental styles developed by blues performers provided the basis for the emergence of a twentieth-century religious music that was characterized by a rocking beat."¹⁰

GOSPEL STYLES

The primary repository and distributor of black cultural, spiritual, and musical values has been, and still is, the black church. This institution, through its ministers, services, song, and holy shouts, has for over three-hundred years been the agency through which blacks have maintained and transmitted the tenets of their culture and the aesthetic that embraces Afro-American musical traditions. Interestingly, while the church itself is conservative, it has spawned musical traditions characterized by continuity and change through reinterpretation and diversity of style.

Yet, as Ronald Wellburn notes, "the fact that black music has changed in its various way . . . is not because it has been searching for an aesthetic ideal based on Plato's *Republic*," but rather the changes have been "caused by economic, social, and spiritual pressures." Thus, soul of the 1960s was an attempt "to keep the music of black people in a black idiom."¹¹ In no contemporary musical idiom has this attempt met greater success than in black gospel.

Black gospel music originated in the Holiness and Pentecostal Churches. Its religious musical traditions "reflect the traditional values of black folk life as it has evolved since slave days, and is a cumulative expression of the black experience."¹² Though emerging as an identifiable form around the turn of the twentieth century, gospel song, until the 1930's, was the almost exclusive domain of its folk church practitioners.¹³ Musically, gospel is as diverse in style as it is pervasive in influence. Yet, one can offer some broad generalizations about the genre that are important to an understanding of its relationship to soul.

Body rhythms, that is, foot stamping and hand clapping, are quite common; texts are varied and rich; frequent use is made of call-and-response techniques; short melodic motives are developed through repetition. Despite the primarily vocal orientation of gospel, instrumental ensembles have assumed increasing importance. Because style determines the number of performers, a typical performance may include forces that vary in number from a soloist to 500 voices. Of particular importance to our consideration of soul are those stylistic elements that representative performers have borrowed freely from gospel.

Perhaps the most unusual feature of gospel singing is the vocal timbre, that is, the quality of sound which distinguishes one voice or musical instrument from another. In a study of the vocal qualities of gospel singers from Sister Sallie Sanders and Arizona Dranes to James Cleveland and André Crouch, Horace Boyer notes that "the timbre which has attracted the greatest number of admirers, and influenced the largest number of imitators is the strained, full-throated sound."¹⁴ Terms such as "hoarse," "raspy,"

“gravelly,” “shrill,” and “coarse,” commonly describe this quality. It is readily observable in the performances and recordings of Ray Charles, James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Solomon Burke, Little Richard, Sylvester Stone, Billy Preston, Wilson Pickett, and many others.

Another gospel element used freely by many soul performers is rhythmic improvisation, which emphasizes accents between the strong and weak pulse, thereby producing syncopation. James Brown developed a brand of rhythmic improvisation which features polyrhythmic interplay between himself and his band, as well as between the instruments. This practice is a clear example of an African conceptual approach to music making that is multi-layered and multi-rhythmic.

Another practice that appears frequently in both gospel and soul is text interpolation and melismatic variation, the practice of singing many notes to one syllable. Sometimes interpolations are related to the original text, at other times they are not. In any case, the performers are free to use space that otherwise would be occupied by rests to enhance the performance emotionally or to underscore his/her personal involvement in the performance.¹⁵

Maulsby notes that “in increasing the emotional intensity of their performances, gospel singers ‘often use’ sudden changes in vocal register or dynamics, breathing between words or in the middle of phrases, and the production of breathiness or airy tones.”¹⁶ Pearl Williams Jones, in emphasizing the importance of the latter two of these devices, observes that “the audible breath intake and expulsion of air acts as a rhythmic factor and is an essential part of black timing and rhythmic pacing.”¹⁷

There can be little doubt that black gospel, beginning with the Dorsey era (1920s–30s), through quartets of the 1940s, groups of the 1950s, traditional choirs of the 1960s, and contemporary choirs and ensembles of the 1970s and 1980s, has been one of the most pervasive influences in popular music in the United States. The performers who attest to this influence comprise a Who’s Who in urban popular music. Perhaps its greatest impact, however, was on secular performers who emerged during the 1950s and 1960s.

RHYTHM ‘N’ BLUES: North & South

In the 1950s, rhythm ‘n’ blues emerged as a viable style within the black community. Like soul, it was primarily associated with two groups of performers: second generation blacks in the North, especially those who recorded for the Motown label; and southern blacks, principally associated with the Memphis and Muscle Shoals (Alabama) sounds. Both developments were rooted in: (1) the country blues, (2) black gospel traditions, and (3) dancehall blues bands.

Generally, southern R & B styles drew more directly on gospel and blues roots, and performers were free to use these elements at their discretion. Thus, the gospel- and blues-derived vocal styles were emotional and harsh; piano, guitar, bass, solo sax, and assorted horns placed primary emphasis on dance rhythms. Performers who best epitomize this style include Wynonie Harris, James Brown, Joe Turner, and Ruth Brown.

In contrast, northern R & B performers presented a style marketable to broader black and white audiences. The groups produced homophonic textures and displayed considerably less emotion in their delivery styles; they made conscious efforts to avoid traditional blues elements. This may be due in part to two facts: (1) The blues and gospel, to some extent, were not sanctioned musical styles of the black middle class at that time. (2) The earliest groups appealed to white audiences as well as black ones, and quite successfully.

These factors relate also to the pronounced role of the record producers. Those who worked with black performers faced the problem of producing "emotional" and "exciting" music while at the same time producing arrangements that were palatable to white radio-station owners and disc jockeys. In short, their intention was to create an effect rather than to allow the singers full freedom in expressing their own experience.¹⁸ This was true of groups as far back as the Mills Brothers and Ink Spots, who served as the original models for northern, black vocal groups, and including Sunny Till and the Orioles and the more gospel-oriented Dominoes.

The textural content of both southern and northern rhythm 'n' blues reflected values and philosophies peculiar to their environments. Southern performers projected images and implied acceptance of the reality of their day-to-day existence. Northern performers deemphasized the daily realities and their heritage and experiences in favor of images of an environment free of familiar and undesirable conditions.

Although these styles grew from the same or similar idioms, their thrust, focus, and world views were quite different. To summarize, the styles differed in regard to:

1. source of musical influences
2. nature of vocal and delivery style
3. melodic orientation
4. instrumentation
5. function of instruments
6. characteristic rhythms
7. organization of singers
8. harmonic structures
9. themes of text

In both cases, the popularity and styles of R & B singers were subject to many variables: fluctuating taste of the audiences, the demands of record companies and producers, and trends established by other groups. Yet these musical forces and philosophies reached their zenith with the Motown and Memphis sounds.

Motown

In 1959, Berry Gordy formed Motown, a company destined to be a dominant force in popular music. Gordy and his associates were to become one of the most successful black businesses in America. Motown's musical history falls generally into four rather distinct phases: 1959–64; 1965–68; 1968–71; and 1971–present.

The first phase may be characterized as eclectic. The songs, instrumentation, and style of the music recorded during this period defy standardization. This eclecticism may reflect the fluctuation of taste, alluded to earlier, that pervaded popular music. Stars were not nearly as important as they had been; rather, "the achievement of a distinctive sound became more and more important, because in a period of unstable consumer loyalties it [distinctiveness of sound] could prove to be the 'X' factor which changed failure to success." As a result, producers were more concerned with maintaining listener attention by manipulative arrangements, multi-track mixing, use of echo effects, over-dubbing, and added resonances.¹⁹

It is not surprising that groups contracted to Motown during this period maintained separate musical identities. As a result, this phase had a little of everything. For example, the Miracles' "Mama Done Told Me" and "I Love You, Baby" are basically rock 'n' roll; Martha & the Vandellas' "There He Is" reflects a Latin tinge; The Contours' "Do You Love Me" is reminiscent of the "twist"; and the Miracles' "Way Over There" is representative of gospel.

In spite of eclecticism, Motown artists made consistent use of southern-based gospel, vocal, and rhythm 'n' blues styles. This is apparent in Barret Strong's 1959 recording of "Money" and Marvin Gaye's 1963 performance of "Can I Get A Witness." But the one example that synthesized this early phase, and foreshadowed the next, was Martha & the Vandellas' "Love Is Like A Heatwave."

In 1964, Eddie Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Bryan Holland joined the company as writer-producers and developed the "Motown sound." They reinforced the earlier emphasis (1960–62) on musical qualities common to gospel. Thus, use of tambourines, steady four-beats-to-a-bar rhythms, call-and-response structures, and advisory or moralizing songs contributed to their "patented sound."²⁰ In conjunction with Gordy's disciplined approach to business, marketing and the Holland-Dozier-Holland sound, Motown produced seventy-nine, "top-ten" single records from 1965 to

1969.²¹ The group that epitomizes this period is the Supremes.

By this time the Motown sound was widespread; the company had succeeded on an unprecedented scale. It attracted and maintained a large white following through skillful use of "pop" music elements, and remained equally popular in the black community by using gospel elements and driving R & B rhythms.

The third phase of Motown's history began in 1968 when Holland, Dozier, and Holland left the company. During this period, the company returned to producing eclectic stylistic music. Individual performers and composers conceived and developed lyric themes and distinctive musical structures, and collectively finalized them through the input of group members. As this diversified sound developed, the lyric themes began to reflect ghetto life, and the music, contemporary electronic practices and gospel vocal styles.

In 1971, Motown moved to California; since then it has expanded to include top-name, night-club acts and has produced films while remaining a force in the record industry. The styles representative of this phase range from the smooth lyrical ballads of Lionel Richie and The Commodores, through the earthy "funk" of Rick James, to the ever popular music of the Jacksons.

The Memphis Sound

While Motown was developing sophisticated and pop-oriented styles highlighted by tight horn and string arrangements, another form of rhythm 'n' blues, created in Memphis, was appealing solely to a black audience.

The concept which governed artistic creations on the Stax Label pervades all Afro-American folk idioms: it is spontaneity. The influences of southern "down home" gospel and country blues were particularly pronounced. Unlike their northern rhythm 'n' blues counterparts, the Stax producers welcomed performers, producers, custodians, secretaries, and executives to play important roles in developing a finished product. This cooperation and spontaneity contributed to the textual contents of the Stax sound. Steve Cropper, guitarist for the M. G.'s, once noted: "Fifty percent to seventy-five percent of all songs we cut come from a conversation."²²

Spontaneity also played a major role in the shaping of recording sessions, as Booker T notes: "When there is an accent we just look at each other."²³ Under these circumstances it was not unusual for a song based on one or more concepts to emerge as a completely different entity. This system would have been totally inappropriate at Motown, where directors attended to every detail of production and performance.

It should be noted that spontaneity, as it is used here, defies the traditional western concept of monotonous disorganization. To view it in such a light only highlights "the difficulties in perceiving complexities in the rhythm . . . and in recognizing one's relationships to the music as event." As John Chernoff notes, "this is what scholars call the 'functional integration' of music," a concept that is African and should be considered a formal and general musical characteristic in its own right.²⁴

Thus, the Memphis sound addressed social and functional values of black consumers on two levels: On one hand, it represented attitudes, philosophies, and experiences engendered by sacred and secular musical idioms; on the other hand, it provided entertainment according to time-honored traditions and standards.

Musically, additional identifying characteristics are discernible as follows:

1. a conscious fusion of gospel and blues styles
2. the use of gospel harmonies and blues progressions
3. the extensive use of gospel vocal inflections accompanied by the shouting style
4. an emphasis on solo singers interpreting the text according to their experiences
5. short accentuated horn riffs to complement and embellish solo vocal lines
6. the use of the organ as standard instrumentation
7. heavy emphasis on the black beat
8. rhythmic emphasis built around the lines of the bass

In sum, the Memphis sound represents the realities of the past and the present. Its creators used musical elements and social values indigenous to their consumer/audience in order to maintain cultural validity and social relevance. In so doing, it provides the bridge to the new social, political and ethnic consciousness of soul.

SOUL MUSIC

By the 1960s soul music, responding to changes in the social, political, and philosophical views of the black community, had established itself as a dominant force.

Though it resulted from changes in musical and social needs, historically soul is rooted in the vocal styles of gospel music and instrumental styles of blues-derived dance music. Through skillful combination of melodic formulas, harmonic progressions, ornamentation, and rhythmic patterns, performers created a style that reflected, defined, and directed the expectations and aspirations of black Americans. Unlike blues performers, soul artists presented strategies that were the antithesis of acceptance and

accommodation and projected a determination to create a better future.

The term soul emerged during the 1960s. By 1967, the media had begun to use the term when discussing matters related to blacks "in the wake of Ghetto riots." Arnold Shaw suggests that "as both a racial and esthetic term," soul gained currency when "Station WOL of Washington, D.C., programming for black listeners, made its initial use of the phrase 'Soul Radio' in July of 1965."²⁵

Musically, soul denotes styles performed by and for black audiences according to past musical practices reinterpreted and re-defined. During its development, three performers played significant roles in shaping its sound, messages, and performance practice: Ray Charles, James Brown, and Aretha Franklin. If one can pinpoint a moment when gospel and blues began to merge into a secular version of gospel song, it was in 1954 when Ray Charles recorded "My Jesus Is All the World to Me," changing its text to "I Got A Woman." The following year, he changed Clara Ward's "This Little Light of Mine" to "This Little Girl of Mine."

In each case, the performers substituted words deemed appropriate to the new secular versions. Perhaps the best example of this practice is Charles's "What'd I Say?" Using a twelve-bar blues structure, he used techniques commonly associated with the gospel singer. He highlighted emotional intensity with shouts, screams, cries, and moans. Typically, the listener can perceive call-response techniques between the accompanying female trio, horns, and the lead vocalists.²⁶

While Ray Charles is credited with having successfully combined sacred and secular idioms, soul reached its maturity with James Brown. Like Charles, he incorporated gospel elements in his performances. A recording of 1956, "Please, Please, Please," clearly illustrates this in the call-response play between Brown and the back-up group. He also makes extensive use of short repetitive phrases, sometimes in the form of three-line verse structures characteristic of the country blues. Often Brown uses devices characteristic of the emotional preaching style of black ministers.

Falsetto screams, shouts, melismatic variations, and parodies of the pentecostal and holiness practice of testifying frequently characterize Brown's performances. To point up these effects, he often sustains one or two chords in his accompaniment for long periods in order to generate intensity, excitement, and feeling. By 1961, "gospel-styled" records were gaining in popularity. Ray Charles' "What'd I Say?," Jackie Wilson's "Lonely Teardrops," and The Isley Brothers' "Shout," are all examples of this trend.²⁷

From the 1950s on, James Brown pursued the new direction for R & B that evolved into soul in the 1960s. This new direction used the instrumental and vocal elements basic to black gospel. By 1965, Brown was recording songs in which the entire instrumental ac-

companiment reinforced and supported his vocal style. Instrumental arrangements accentuated the vocal lines; emphasis was placed on the backbeat (beats 2 & 4); horn parts had short repetitive lines; there was greater polarity and emphasis between the voice and bass line; bass, drums, horns, and voices added polyrhythmic, multi-layered effects; and horn solos featured short, rhythmic phrases punctuated by spontaneous vocal lines. Overall, the musical structure was decidedly rhythmic and percussive.

Besides being responsible for many musical innovations, James Brown was in the vanguard of those who addressed social and political issues in their music. Despite considerable personal wealth at that time, Brown never forgot his pre-success experiences. As a result, he "personifies the belief that the soul singer has to experience what he is singing about: the experience of poverty and hardship and of being black is seen as essential apprenticeship for the soul singer."²⁸ Maultsby suggests that, as a sixth-grade dropout, Brown realized and communicated the importance of education to black youth. After a 1966 tour of San Francisco's ghetto, he recorded the million-record seller "Don't Be a Drop Out."²⁹

Other Brown recordings have similarly addressed social concerns. Those encouraging black pride include "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" (1968) and "I Don't Want Nobody To Give Me Nothing" (1969). Those encouraging community action include "Soul Pride" (1964), "Get Up, Get Into It, Get Involved" (1971), "Soul Power" (1971), "Talking Loud and Saying Nothing" (1972), "King Heroin" (1972), "Down and Out In New York City" (1973), "The Payback" (1974), "Funky President" (1974), and "Reality" (1975).³⁰

James Brown's significance as a performer and artist has not been limited to the United States. His moral and philosophical advice in song has made him a top-selling artist among Africans. "In African musical idioms, one aspect of the musician's specialization involves insight into deep issues and the consequent fulfillment of certain moral codes which our society delegates to other professions."³¹ This African tradition that expresses philosophical, satirical, and ethical themes in song is best exemplified in Brown, whose music is laden with proverbs comparable to philosophical, West African popular music. In his album, *The Payback*, when singing "shoot your shot before you get the shot shot out of you," he is perceived as acting with clarity and confidence at the right moment.

Africans may view "Mind Power" in the same album as a discourse on a mental attitude and a demonstration of the power of the will. More important, however, Brown's African popularity may rest on musical arrangements which "bear close comparison with African arrangements." In Brown's songs, all instruments generally come together at the bridge, then return to their former



JAMES BROWN

relationships, with a series of verbal and physical cues initiated by Brown guiding the transitions. To an African ear, this makes sense, particularly "in terms of the relationship between African music and dance."³²

Through musical relevance and identification with the needs and philosophies of his community, James Brown earned the title Soul Brother Number One. During the relatively short period of 1959–71, twelve of his records made the No. 1 spot on the music trade-journals charts, surpassing those of any other black performer both in rhythm 'n' blues and in soul. From 1956 to 1971, sixty-two of his recordings made the charts, and from 1972 to 1975, twenty-one were charted. His commitment to black consciousness is indicated by the fact that from 1964 to 1975, seventeen of his recordings addressed black needs and problems.³³

If one individual stands out as the female personification of soul, it is Aretha Franklin. Her style, like that of Ray Charles and James Brown, originates in the vocal tradition of black gospel song, and she freely admits the influence of Clara Ward's style on her musical development.

Analysis of Aretha's music suggests that her central thematic focus is "bi-symbolic." On the one hand, most of her texts examine the nature of relationships through graphic circumlocution, while at the same time responding to a situation, often with suggestions for resolving or coping with adversity. Audiences identify with this approach; Aretha, like James Brown, represents in song what they have experienced in everyday life. On the other hand, Aretha's music symbolized the black movement in that her stylings and delivery exhibited the drive and force of the black consciousness of the day.³⁴

There is little doubt that Aretha's music reflects an important part of the soul ideology, the expression of "faith or love, hope for love, as well as the joys and anguish of love."³⁵ In 1967, for example, eight of her singles made the charts—not a small triumph. All of them examined aspects, or the realities, of love relationships. This also happened in 1968, when eight more recordings made the charts, and in 1969, when six did.

In short, although the content of Aretha Franklin's recordings focuses primarily on personal relationships, her music also exemplifies the moral and emotional fiber of blacks during this period. By so doing, these implicit messages that enabled the listener to see his dilemma clearly, also served as a sustaining and encouraging force in the face of struggle.³⁶ Thus, through music Aretha Franklin projected an ideology based not on retrenchment, but on affirmation.

Other performers of this tradition similarly shifted the focus of their music from the blues-oriented acceptance and survival of imponderables to emphasis on an ethos of serving a common good.



ARETHA FRANKLIN

Again, performance styles rooted in gospel traditions and performed in a quasi-religious manner realized the musical and social goals. "Freedom Train" (1968) by James Carr and Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come" (1969) are examples of how artists used imagery or direct allusions to define the future and to "encourage their audience to translate (their message) into reality." Similarly, many of the recordings made by the Impressions offered hope, enthusiasm, and anticipation in a typical gospel manner; among them, "People Get Ready" (1965), "We're a Winner" (1968), "We're Rolling On" (1968), "This Is My Country" (1968), and "Check Out Your Mind" (1970).³⁷

To summarize, soul

1. extended a continuity of structure and feeling found in all black music, past and present
2. allowed performers to serve as quasi-political representatives
3. provided cathartic relief through the performer's recogni-

tion, understanding, and appreciation of the listeners' problems

4. advocated familial stability and parental responsibility
5. projected ways to realize desired conditions
6. affirmed belief in conventional morality
7. emphasized communal working toward a common good
8. posited blackness as a state of consciousness and a positive ideal
9. redefined ethnic consciousness and black culture
10. provided community-based humor

Thus, while serving social needs, soul became the secular counterpart of contemporary gospel, expressing solidarity in belief and the will to survive in changing times.

Whither Soul?

By the late 1970s, soul had become a catch-all term to describe all black popular music. Social conditions and the political astuteness of the black community during the 1960s had begun to effect economic change. It manifested itself in better living conditions for some, better education for others, and better job opportunities for still a few more. Musically, record companies assumed a more direct role in shaping the artistic efforts of their performers. Producers, in particular, evolved from "faceless executives" to stars, a development that coincided with industry efforts to improve marketing. Generally, from the late seventies until today, at least three factors seem to have affected soul: (1) greater competition for fewer dollars; (2) the emergence of the producer as artist; and (3) new trends in black radio formats that reflect changes in audience taste.

The recent emphasis on money-making may have resulted from the increasingly complex and costly process, and the gamble, involved in trying to make a hit record. Just twenty years ago, the two- to four-minute single was still the primary economic unit of the record industry. Today the principal unit is the album. Producers rarely record live performances, which capture the essence of soul as a musical event. Instead, they rely on a computerized console with twenty-four or more tracks to achieve meticulous mixdowns in a step-by-step process.³⁹ In such cases, it is not uncommon for studio time to cost close to \$200 an hour. Couple these facts with the fact that producers' salaries range from \$25,000 to \$200,000 per album, plus a royalty rate of eight percent, and the concern for musical style usually becomes secondary to cost.

Together, high technology and minimal black-executive input have had a deleterious effect on the continued development of soul. What was once a tradition defined by blacks and recorded on

many independent labels is now directly affected by the taste of larger audiences, cost-benefit analysis, and increasing dominance of the major record companies.

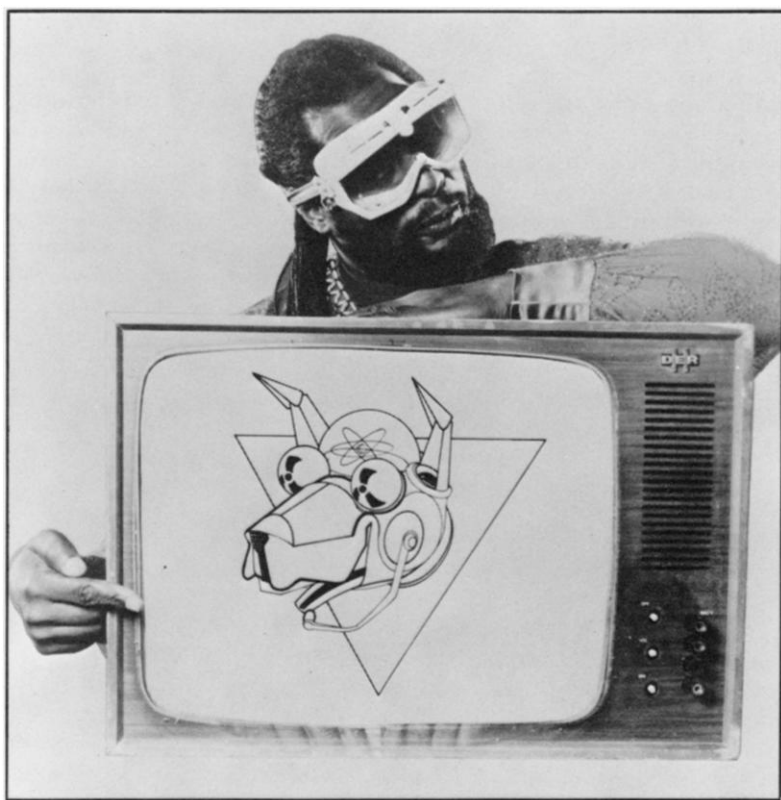
In spite of these developments, some performers and record companies today are still innovating concepts and trends based on the soul tradition. Stevie Wonder, Earth, Wind, and Fire, Kool & the Gang, The Gap Band, and self-contained acts like The Whispers and Shalamar are but a few of such acts. Still other groups addressing subject matters that are broader in appeal and content have begun to record albums variously described as "universal," "uni-racial," and "underground." Artists such as Prince and the Bus Boys have established very broad audiences through their "concept" albums.

Some black companies have managed to survive in the highly competitive market; among them, Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff, who have created, along with Thom Bell, a style of soul faithful to Southern traditions but not as pop-oriented as Motown. Identified as the "Philadelphia sound," it expands the traditional soul instrumentation to include strings and horns of various types.

During the five-year period beginning with the inception of Philadelphia International label, these producers sold 30 million singles. In 1968 alone, twenty-two of their records made the charts.⁴⁰ These figures support the assertion that "on a per capita basis, blacks, regardless of income, buy more records and record playing equipment . . . than anyone else in the major markets."⁴¹ DeWayne Wickham contends that in 1978 black music or soul accounted for nearly 25% of the record industry's \$4 billion in sales.⁴²

Among the more popular black producers who have adjusted to changing trends in marketing and technology are Quincy Jones, who has produced such performers as Michael Jackson; Rufus and The Brothers Johnson; Maurice White, who is affiliated with Earth, Wind, and Fire and also writes for the Three Degrees, among others; Nick Ashford and Valerie Simpson, who write for many artists, including Diana Ross; Gamble and Huff from Philadelphia International; the master of funk, George Clinton; and the prolific Freddie Perren.

The third factor to affect the legacy of soul is black radio. Recently, two things have affected the direction and role of black radio: economics and shifts in audience taste. Traditionally, black radio was a vehicle for apprising black audiences of current recordings by black performers. Black artists enjoyed valuable airplay, which gave them much-needed exposure. However, crossovers—that is, black artists selling and appealing to white audiences and vice versa—forced black stations to reconsider their broadcast formats. As a result, many major black-oriented radio stations are



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adopting “urban contemporary formats” in order to compete with general market stations for advertising dollars and audience shares.⁴³

The urban contemporary format is the result of changing musical trends. The most significant factor in its development has been disco. This format blends traditional black music forms with styles that are often black-derived and use a “rhythmic base.” Thus pop, rock, and black musical styles provide the tripartite focus of the urban contemporary format.⁴⁴

This development has caused concern among black professionals. Some see it as resulting in reduced airplay for black artists; by softening or deemphasizing blackness they fear there will be little room for groups like Parliament/Funkadelic and the Bar-Kays. As an effort to make play lists more palatable to the taste of non-white audiences, some believe the urban contemporary format



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to be “the way of the future” and that “the all black format may be a thing of the past.” We will have to wait and see.⁴⁵

Collectively these trends have introduced some rather noticeable changes into the soul tradition. A variety of styles have emerged whose characteristics reflect the influence of soul in varying degrees. Those most reflective of continuity and change in soul include two types of funk—one established and popularized by Larry Graham and the other, by George Clinton. Musically, Graham’s funk is distinctive for the following:

1. phrase-length melodic bass lines
2. combinations of patterns played by rhythm and horn sections for a polyrhythmic effect

3. shouted and percussive group-style singing
4. gospel-voiced harmonies sung by mixed groups
5. use of a wide range of vocal techniques for varying tone color

Clinton's style displays these characteristics:

1. emphasis on group singing
2. percussive vocal quality and prominent use of voice distortion
3. melodic lines of the rhythm and horn sections based on stratified repetitive melodies
4. light-textured overall instrumental sound

We mentioned above that another genre exhibiting soul influences is disco, which is primarily a producer's art form. It achieves its effect through technological manipulation as much as through the accuracy and quality of the performer's rendition. Yet it is a distinctive style whose primary function is dance and entertainment. Characteristically, it consists of two types, funk-soul-disco and European-based disco. The former is distinguished by its "polyrhythmic nature, and funk-styled arrangements that are generally limited to the use of horns." The latter emphasizes "solo leads, [in which] bass lines are centered around the root position of chords, arrangements are orchestral in style, and polyrhythmic activity is limited to solo sections of percussion instruments."⁴⁵

A third genre is represented by the ballad. In this style, the primary focus and lyrical content involve love and/or personal relationships; ballads are sung in a lyrical style personalized by the performer. In most cases, performers choose formats that complement their voices and their general approaches to music. Some ballads are lyrical and smooth, as in the case of Peabo Bryson; emotional, as in Teddy Pendergrass' case; or "rapping" as in Barry White's. All in all, ballad performances represent the diversity and spontaneity that has characterized black popular music since its inception.

In summary of this discussion, it is evident that the soul tradition conceived and developed during the 1960s no longer exists. Rather, other styles have emerged which reflect the reinterpretation of the black musical aesthetic and which offer instrumental and vocal diversity. In its earliest form, soul spoke to more than purely musical ends. When examined in the context of its cultural parameters, early soul reveals the themes of unity, ethnic consciousness, self-acceptance and awareness. From this philosophical model evolved a secular tradition rooted in past practices, but modified to fit current conditions. The aesthetic governing the essence, evolution, and legacy of soul was culture-specific; it celebrated blackness defined in its own terms.

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