

# MAKING MUSIC IN MUSCLE SHOALS

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Music.

Chapel Hill  
2014

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## **ABSTRACT**

Christopher M. Reali: Making Music in Muscle Shoals  
(Under the direction of Jocelyn R. Neal)

Muscle Shoals, Alabama, is a unique site for studying the complex intertwining of music, race, and the American South. Exploring this region reveals how and why the music recorded in Muscle Shoals became integral to the cultural framework within 1960s and '70s America. "Making Music in Muscle Shoals" utilizes an integrative framework that draws upon musicology, ethnomusicology, music theory, and complementary disciplines such as American and Afro-American studies as it examines this northwest Alabama music industry. By combining the musical analysis of key soul recordings, original interviews, and previously overlooked archival materials, this work constructs a multifaceted interpretation of the "Muscle Shoals sound" as a sonic product of time, place, and specific people, imbued with cultural meaning. The period considered, 1960 to 1975, includes the ascension, dominance, and decline of soul music on the pop music charts, as well as Muscle Shoals' transition from soul mecca to pop music hit factory. This dissertation relies upon two methodologies: (1) musical analysis, (2) ethnographic research, and two case studies. In the first I foreground the contributions of the all white studio musicians to identify the musical elements that characterize the so-called Muscle Shoals sound. My conclusions challenge the often narrowly-focused associations between race and soul music, and revise the place of Muscle Shoals within the narrative of an "authentic" (black) Southern musical past. This

dissertation, therefore, provides a model for the study of people, music, and place.

Ultimately, “Making Music in Muscle Shoals” fills lacunae within the larger narrative of popular music studies by assessing salient musical characteristics and interpreting the long-lasting cultural effects of this Alabama community.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over five years ago, my wife and best friend, Melissa Reali, encouraged me to pursue my Ph.D. Melissa was there through every step, and without her love and support, I could not have finished this dissertation. I dedicate this work to her.

I could have not completed this project without the help of numerous individuals and the support from a variety of institutions. Grants from the Center for the Study of the American South and the Institute for African American Research, both at UNC–Chapel Hill, generously supported my research in Alabama. While in Alabama, many individuals assisted my endeavors. I would like to thank the staff at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame: Dixie Connell, Ann Thompson, Patty Tompkins, Angie Hughes, Thomas Hayes, Heath Simmons, Janice Gilchrist, Beth Moore, Hank Adam Locklin. Other individuals including Anita Pace, Robert Palmer, Tori Bailey, Nancy Gonce, Judy Sizemore, Dr. Rob Garfrerick at the University of North Alabama, and Brian Rickman were extremely generous with their time during my stay in Alabama. I would like to single out Terry Pace, who spent an entire day driving me around the Shoals introducing me to many folks, and gave me a very rare print copy of the *Times-Daily* “Muscle Shoals Sounds: The Rhythm of the River” supplement. Terry knows more about the history of the Muscle Shoals music industry than I will ever hope to learn. Betty Dyer, director of the Local History room at the Sheffield Public Library, and Lee Freeman, reference librarian at the Florence Public Library, helped me in my archival endeavors. The Rock and Popular Music Institute located at Case Western University funded a two-week residency at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Library &

Archives that yielded a great many sources. Thanks to Rob Walser at Case Western University, and Andy Leach, Jennie Thomas, Anastasia Karel, Laura Moody, Diana Ford, and Amada Raab at the Rock Hall Library for all of their help. Several grants also supported my dissertation research: the American Musicological Society Professional Development Travel Award partially funded my presentation at their 2012 annual conference in New Orleans; the Center for the Study of the American South funded my trip to present at the 2012 Converse College Conference on Southern Culture; the Society for American Music awarded me a travel grant to present at their 2014 annual conference in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; the Kenan Graduate Student Activities Fund, distributed through the Department of Music at UNC–Chapel Hill, supported my presentation at the 2013 Society for Ethnomusicology annual meeting; Harold Glass donated the funds for the Lucas Miller Glass Summer Research Fellowship that allowed me to focus on research during the long, hot summer of 2012; A Dissertation Completion Fellowship from the Graduate School at UNC–Chapel Hill supported my final year as a graduate student.

I am grateful to have worked with an incredible university library system. The music library at UNC–Chapel Hill is an extremely valuable resource, and I wrote the vast majority of this dissertation while sitting in my carrel. I am extremely grateful to the help and advice of Phil Vandermeer, Diane Steinhaus, and Carrie Monette. Diane introduced me to Jill Shires, who played flute for the Tams in 1963, and who just also happened to work at UNC. Over my many years spent in the music library, Shaw Lentz has gone from a valuable member of the staff to friend. I found the kernel of this dissertation at the Southern Folklife Collection. Thanks to Steve Weiss and the staff at the SFC for all of their help.

I had the great honor of speaking in person with many people, all of whom made this dissertation a better project because they patiently sat through my questions. I would like to thank Bobby Denton, Jimmy Johnson, David Hood, Spooner Oldham, Norbert Putnam, Harvey Thompson, Charles Rose, Will McFarlane, Jerry Masters, Jerry Jemmott, Peanutt Montgomery, Tori Bailey, Noel Webster, Dick Cooper, and Jill Shires.

Many of the recordings that I analyzed for this dissertation came from my own collection. Finding those tracks, however, was made easier because of several record stores. In Chapel Hill, Ryan and the staff at CD Alley always seemed to have what I was looking for, or was able to order it. I purchased many 45s, LPs, and CDs for this project at Mr. Cheapo's on Long Island, New York. Eli Flippen at Pegasus Records in Florence, Alabama gave me great advice on the newly emerging Shoals music scene.

This work has benefitted from the advice, critique, and support from many scholars. Jocelyn Neal, my advisor, helped me to shape the questions that I needed to ask, and how to answer them. Mark Katz offered insightful comments while also showing me a good portion of the North Carolina countryside as we biked hundreds of miles over the past five years. In my first semester at UNC, I “discovered” my dissertation topic as a member of David Garcia's seminar; his guidance throughout the project has been invaluable. Phil Vandermeer, from his office in the music library, dispensed sage advice, and always had time to chat. Fitz Brundage, the “outside” member of my dissertation committee, provided vital commentary as I attempted to wrestle with the legacy of the South. Bill Ferris helped guide the project in its early stages. John Brackett, Andy Flory, and Travis Stimeling also gave advice, as well as encouragement. Andrea Bohlman helped me navigate the many tasks I faced in my final year at UNC.

Many “fellow travelers” enriched my five years as a graduate student at UNC. Kristen Turner read through paper drafts, and offered advice on many subjects, music or otherwise. I spent a wonderful summer working as a Pruett Fellow in the Library of Congress’ Music Division with Ryan Ebright and Catherine Hughes, where we formed a lasting friendship. Brian Jones, Josh Busman, and Christa Bentley—the SoDu crew—provided valuable commentary during our pop music lunches; Josh gave me the contact information for my first interview. Ben Haas guided me through my early days in the program. Members of MUSC 991, the dissertation colloquium, read drafts and sat through not-quite-finished paper presentations. Tim Miller, Will Boone, Matt Franke, Megan Egan, Gina Bombola, David VanderHamm, Chris Bowen, and many others gave advice, listened, and laughed with me when it all became too much.

Finally, making music, very loud music at times, with John Brackett and Allison Portnow made the process of writing tolerable during my last few years in Chapel Hill. Performing as part of our gnarl pop trio, Supercollider, reminded me why I got into this whole music thing in the first place.

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## INTRODUCTION

In September 2013, Magnolia Pictures released the documentary *Muscle Shoals*. The official press kit for the film includes the following statement:

At [the] heart [of Muscle Shoals] is Rick Hall who founded FAME Studios. Overcoming crushing poverty and staggering tragedies, Hall brought black and white together in Alabama's cauldron of racial hostility to create music for the generations. He is responsible for creating the 'Muscle Shoals sound' and The Swampers, the house band at FAME that eventually left to start their own successful studio, known as Muscle Shoals Sound.<sup>1</sup>

The documentary details Hall's life, which at times included truly horrific tragedies, from his days living in abject poverty through his ascendancy into a music industry powerhouse:

*Billboard* named Hall "Producer of the Year" in 1971. The portrait of Hall as the lone genius, however, is one painted with broad brush strokes. Many individuals including Hall, along with multiple events, contributed to the creation and flourishing of the Muscle Shoals, Alabama music industry.

During the mid-1950s, several individuals living in and around the Muscle Shoals region who had been amateur musicians made the leap into careers working within the music industry in some capacity. A few, no doubt, had ambitions fueled by dreams of stardom; others were interested in songwriting and publishing, while many were simply taken by the sounds of R&B and rock 'n' roll broadcast over the radio. After initially funneling songs written by Muscle Shoals natives through Nashville, the closest established, commercially-

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<sup>1</sup>Production Notes, <http://www.magpictures.com/presskit.aspx?id=827e9dcf-98b7-4b01-a504-81bdf2f9acb7>.

driven music scene, the fledgling Alabama music industry finally gained national attention in 1962, and then continued to grow in stature throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. Like many other regional recording centers, the multiple recording studios in Muscle Shoals relied on primarily homegrown session musicians. Two different musical groups formed and initially worked as the house band for studio owner and producer Rick Hall at the Florence Alabama Music Enterprise, known as FAME. FAME's first rhythm section, which lasted from 1961–1964, included Norbert Putnam, bass, David Briggs, keyboard, Jerry Carrigan, drums, and Terry Thompson and Earl “Peanutt” Montgomery, guitar. The next rhythm section, which worked for Hall from 1964–1969, included Jimmy Johnson, guitar, Roger Hawkins, drums, Albert “Junior” Lowe, bass (later replaced by David Hood), and Dewey “Spooner” Oldham, keyboard (later replaced by Barry Beckett). At times, other instrumentalists including guitarists Chips Moman, Eddie Hinton, Pete Carr, and Duane Allman, bassists Tommy Cogbill and Jerry Jemmott, and horn sections from Memphis recorded alongside the Alabama musicians. As the prestige of the Muscle Shoals recording studios grew through repeated chart success and with the help of music industry “insiders,” singers came to Alabama and recorded with the FAME studio musicians because the artists heard something—a riff or a groove—in the sound of the rhythm sections that appealed to them. The session musicians working at FAME and then the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section (aka, “The Swampers”) helped bring tracks to life that allowed a multitude of singers to maintain their musical individuality with a generous helping of the so-called “Muscle Shoals sound.” Ultimately, the hard work and determination of many musicians and music industry related personnel who hailed from this corner of Alabama helped to create and disseminate the “Muscle Shoals sound.”

With the release of Percy Sledge's "When a Man Loves a Woman" in 1966, the area known as Muscle Shoals quickly gained a reputation as *the* location to record black Southern soul. The following year, Aretha Franklin recorded her breakthrough track "I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)" at FAME, and by the late 1960s, the area had become a magnet for acts across the spectrum of popular music. Within this burgeoning Southern music industry emerged one particularly prominent group of homegrown musicians—The Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section (MSRS). The so-called "Muscle Shoals sound," a term that first appeared in the late 1960s, appealed to a diverse roster of contemporary artists including Cher, Boz Scaggs, Rod Stewart, and Paul Simon, all of whom enlisted the MSRS to perform on their own recordings after hearing the band backing soul singers such as Sledge, Franklin, and Wilson Pickett.

The MSRS consisted of Jimmy Johnson, guitar, Roger Hawkins, drums, David Hood, bass, and Barry Beckett, keyboards, all of whom were all born and raised in Alabama. Johnson, Hawkins, and Hood were from the Muscle Shoals area, while Beckett was from Birmingham, about 100 miles further south. These musicians, all of whom are white, had cut their musical teeth in the early 1960s working in the same and different rock 'n' roll and R&B bands that toured the college fraternity and sorority circuits in Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. When they were not on the road, Johnson and Hawkins frequently worked as session players, mainly backing black soul singers, at two local recordings studios, FAME, and Norala Studios; Hood began his tenure as a session musician a few years after Johnson and Hawkins. By the mid-1960s, the three local musicians became the in-house rhythm

section at FAME; Beckett completed the quartet in 1967.<sup>2</sup> In 1969, the four musicians left FAME to open their own studio, which they called Muscle Shoals Sound Studios (MSS). The new studio scored its first million-selling single that same year with R.B. Greaves' track "Take a Letter Maria." Within a few short years, MSS was attracting diverse bands and artists, all of whom were trying to capture for their own recordings and capitalize on the growing legend of a "Muscle Shoals sound" that those backing musicians, studio(s), and location had cultivated.

The region's storied musical history leads to one of the central questions for this dissertation: How did Muscle Shoals, known primarily throughout much of the twentieth century as the location for the TVA's Wilson Dam, become the self-declared "Hit Recording Capital of the World" in 1975?

Muscle Shoals, Alabama, is a unique site for studying the complex intertwining of music, race, and the American South. The period considered, 1960 through 1975, includes the ascension, dominance, and decline of soul music on the pop music charts, as well as Muscle Shoals' transition from soul mecca to pop music hit factory. This dissertation investigates four basic themes and questions. First, what are the distinctive musical and sonic elements of these recordings that define the "Muscle Shoals sound?" Second, how did the individual experiences of the musicians working within this industry influence the recording process? Third, how did sociocultural factors such as the racial turmoil of the 1960s South shape the music's production and reception? Finally, why and how did Muscle Shoals transform from a physical place, to a regionally identified sound, to a culturally revered

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<sup>2</sup>Barry Beckett replaced Spooner Oldham as the in-house keyboard player at FAME. Oldham was an extremely important musician in the development of the Muscle Shoals sound; he played keyboards on "When a Man Loves a Woman," "Mustang Sally," and many other tracks.

musical aesthetic? I rely on original interviews, archival work, and close listening and musical analysis to answer my primary research questions.

The analysis component provides the first in-depth musical and sonic investigation of songs recorded in Muscle Shoals, adding to a growing body of research that interprets and situates the output of regional production centers into the larger historical narrative of popular music. Recent interviews with Muscle Shoals industry personnel supported by materials found in archival sources help to foreground the musicians' transformation from amateurs into sought-after session players. This aspect of my research highlights an important but relatively under-studied element of popular music: the use of session musicians on recordings. Starting in 1961, Muscle Shoals-based recording studios produced numerous songs featuring black singers accompanied by white studio musicians that signified for many listeners the soundscape of black America. Therefore, the examination of the historiography for what I term the racialized sound barrier is fundamental to interpreting the relationship between ethnic and racial identities, and the soul music recorded in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Finally, positioning the songs recorded during the 1960s and early 1970s within larger cultural contexts that include the history, formation, and promotion of regional identity reveals how Muscle Shoals came to represent, for many, the continuation of an imagined South manifested in sound. This last component builds upon and furthers the study of relationships between music and place. Ultimately, my research on Muscle Shoals begins to fill lacunae within the larger narrative of popular music studies by assessing salient musical characteristics and interpreting the long-lasting cultural effects of this Alabama community.

## THE MUSCLE SHOALS REGION: A BRIEF HISTORY

Near the end of World War I, the Muscle Shoals region was already making headlines in the national press. The completion of the Wilson Dam, located in Muscle Shoals and begun in 1918, combined with the passing of the Tennessee Valley Authority Act in 1933, ended a congressional battle that kept the region in the public eye for over ten years. In the early 1930s, novelist T.S. Stribling published a set of novels collectively known as *The Vaiden Trilogy* that were set in and around Florence, Alabama.<sup>3</sup> When Stribling won the Pulitzer Prize for one of the three, it brought international attention to the region that balanced the notoriety caused by the political fight. Much of the mid-century press about Alabama focused on the Civil Rights struggle within the state. These historical events situate Muscle Shoals within a broader national context, which provide a baseline to compare the transformation that occurred with the formation and growth of the local music industry.

The region known as Muscle Shoals, Alabama, or simply the Shoals, includes the quad-cities of Florence, Tuscumbia, Sheffield, and Muscle Shoals. Nestled in the northwest corner of Alabama along both sides of the Tennessee River in Colbert and Lauderdale Counties, the Shoals are approximately twenty-eight miles east of Mississippi and eighteen miles south of Tennessee. Florence is located north of the river in Lauderdale County, the other three cities south of the river in Colbert Country. The abundant food and game, especially mussels, attracted the area's first settlers: the Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Creek tribes. Artifacts found in and near the 43-foot high "Florence Indian Mound" indicate that this land along the Tennessee River has attracted inhabitants for thousands of years.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>*The Forge* (1931), *The Store* (1932), and *The Unfinished Cathedral* (1934).

<sup>4</sup>Information about native tribes who inhabited the Shoals can be found in, William Lindsey McDonald, *Lore of the River: the Shoals of Long Ago*, 3rd ed. (Florence, AL: Bluewater Publications, 2007). The city of Florence

The somewhat peculiar spelling of the word “Muscle” has led to several popular theories about the name’s origin. The official website for the city of Muscle Shoals offers three options:

One theory is that at one time there were piles of mussel shells found along the shoals in the Tennessee River. Another theory is that the shape of the river looks like the muscle in a man’s arm, therefore, Muscle Shoals. The last theory comes from several booklets that were published before Muscle Shoals incorporated. This theory states: ‘Muscle Shoals, the Niagara of the South, derives its name from the Indians, who, attempting to navigate upstream, found the task almost impossible because of the strong current.’ Thus came the word muscle, symbolic of the strength required to ‘paddle a canoe up the rapids.’<sup>5</sup>

An early twentieth century interpretation of the unusual spelling bluntly stated “the correct spelling of the name was lost in the early days, probably due to the lack of proper educational advantages.”<sup>6</sup>

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, westward expansion brought the first white settlers to the Shoals. Historian Bernard Cresap, writing in 1956, noted,

From the very beginning of the nation the country about Muscle Shoals was considered a desirable place for settlement. Its land, timber, water resources, and location as to trade routes and transportation facilities marked it as a potential center of agriculture, commerce, and industry.<sup>7</sup>

The legislature of the Territory of Alabama created Lauderdale County on February 6, 1818.<sup>8</sup> That same year, a group of land speculators including Andrew Jackson and James Madison

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provides information about the Florence Indian Mound on their website: “Native American – Florence Indian Mound and Museum,” <http://www.visitflorenceal.com/attractions/native-american>, accessed 13 April 2011.

<sup>5</sup>“Muscle Shoals, Alabama: Main History,” <http://www.cityofmuscleshoals.com/Default.asp?ID=11>, accessed 20 November 2010.

<sup>6</sup>C.F. Adams, “Putting Muscle Shoals on the Map,” *The Nation*, 26 March 1924, 339; see also Laura Flynn Tapia and Yoshie Lewis, *Images of America: Muscle Shoals* (Charleston SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), 18.

<sup>7</sup>Bernard Cresap, “The Muscle Shoals Frontier: Early Society and Culture in Lauderdale County,” *Alabama Review* 9 (July 1956): 188.

<sup>8</sup>McDonald, *Lore of the River*, 167.

established the Cypress Land Company, which sold half-acre plots. Florence, named after the Italian city, was incorporated in 1826 and became the county seat.<sup>9</sup>

The arrival of white settlers has not entirely obscured the Native American history of the Shoals. The city of Tuscumbia, founded in 1820, takes its name from the Anglicization of Tashka Ambi, a Chickasaw Chief who settled near the present day location of Spring Park. Colbert County, named in honor of George Colbert, a Chickasaw who operated a ferry and an inn at the Tennessee River crossing of the Natchez Trace, was established in 1870. Tuscumbia is also the county seat.<sup>10</sup>

Located adjacent to the river and sharing a border, Sheffield and Muscle Shoals have similar histories. Both cities relied primarily on industry powered by the Tennessee River to support local populations. Sheffield, named for the English city and incorporated in 1885, attracted steel manufacturers due to iron and coal deposits. National attention came to the “Muscle Shoals region” in 1917 when President Woodrow Wilson selected Sheffield as the site for the nitrate plant provided for in the 1916 National Defense Act.<sup>11</sup> After the end of World War I and the completion of the plant, construction of Dam Number 2 (later renamed the Wilson Dam) began in 1918 and attracted thousands of workers to the Shoals. The promise of an economic boom, partially fueled by the numerous workers building the dam

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<sup>9</sup>Other sources that address the history of the Muscle Shoals region include: David Alsobrook, “From the Cotton Field to the Great Waterway: African Americans and the Muscle Shoals Project During World War I,” in *The Great War in the Heart of Dixie: Alabama During World War I*, ed. Martin T. Olliff (Tuscaloosa, Ala: University of Alabama Press, 2008); *The WPA Guide to 1930s Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2000); Tennessee Valley Historical Society, *Historic Muscle Shoals: A Guide to Places of Historical Interest in Colbert and Lauderdale Counties, Alabama* (Sheffield, AL: Tennessee Valley Historical Society, 1962); Nina Leftwich, *Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals, Being an Authentic History of Colbert County, 1700-1900* (Tuscumbia, AL: by the author, 1935).

<sup>10</sup>Ivy Green, Helen Keller’s 1870 birthplace and childhood home, is also located in Tuscumbia.

<sup>11</sup>*Sheffield: City on the Bluff 1885-1985* (Sheffield, AL: Friends of Sheffield Public Library, 1985), 60.

that lived in temporary structures, helped bring about the incorporation of Muscle Shoals in 1923.

Controversy surrounding the building of the dam brought about a protracted and passionate congressional battle. President Warren Harding's administration failed to appropriate the necessary funds for the dam's completion and work stopped in 1921. The federal government then offered to sell the dam to private interests. Industrialist Henry Ford offered to buy the dam on July 8, 1921 for five million dollars (the total cost of the dam exceeded forty million). Nebraska Senator George Norris, a progressive and conservationist, successfully opposed what became known as the "Ford plan" by proposing that Congress appropriate the necessary funds needed to complete the dam. Work resumed in 1922, and the dam was completed in 1925.<sup>12</sup>

Ford's interest in the dam and his promise to build a "75-mile long city," however, caused a flurry of national press coverage about Muscle Shoals. A January 1922 front-page article in the *New York Times* stated:

If Henry Ford obtains possession of the Muscle Shoals project in Alabama he will take immediate steps to make that part of the South one of the industrial centres of the country...Mr. Ford's proposal includes the building of a city seventy-five miles long in the Muscle Shoals region. It would be made up of several large towns or small cities...If the Government accepts Mr. Ford's bid, work at Muscle Shoals will be started at once...[followed by] rapid development...until within a comparatively few years an industrial centre greater than Detroit would have been built up.<sup>13</sup>

Knowledge of Ford's proposal stimulated real estate speculators to buy up parcels of land. Howell and Graves, from New York City and the most prominent firm involved in the development of Muscle Shoals, offered a "wonderful deluxe [four-day train excursion] to the

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<sup>12</sup>Preston J. Hubbard, "The Story of Muscle Shoals," *Current History* (May 1958): 265.

<sup>13</sup>"Ford Plans a City 75 Miles in Length," *New York Times*, 12 January 1922, A1.

sunny southland” from Manhattan to prospective buyers.<sup>14</sup> The interest in the region’s potential literally laid the foundations for the city of Muscle Shoals as crews constructed sidewalks in the cotton fields. The protracted congressional fight delayed Ford’s grand plan, despite the influx of 18,000 workers at the Dam’s constructions peak. By 1924 an article in *The Nation* proclaimed:

MUSCLE SHOALS is on the map. Not one of those small black specks that inhabit our maps by the thousands, but a large black circle indicating a highly important center...Gone is the “nigger” and the mule, gone is the cotton house and the old rail fence. In their place is a brisk young gentleman, a high-powered car, and a modern little office, where the typewriter clicks and the telephone rings and a general air of something-is-bound-to-happen-soon drapes itself over the scene. There is every essential of a big boom at Muscle Shoals except the boom.<sup>15</sup>

Ford withdrew his offer to buy Wilson Dam in October 1924.

The fight over the dam between private interests and Government supported public ownership continued for over a decade after Ford’s initial offer. Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover repeatedly vetoed bills that would have had the federal government take over the official operations of the Dam. The national debate over the Dam finally ended with Franklin Roosevelt’s 1932 election. The president-elect visited Sheffield in January 1933, and in a stump speech promised to put “Muscle Shoals back on the map.”<sup>16</sup> The passage of the Tennessee Valley Authority Act in May 1933 realized Senator Norris’ long-term vision of the Wilson Dam operated as a publically owned utility.

The Muscle Shoals region, Tennessee Valley, and Florence in particular gained further notoriety with the publication of author T.S. Stribling’s *Vaiden Trilogy* during the

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<sup>14</sup>“Pathways...A Walk Through the History of Muscle Shoals,” Muscle Shoals City Hall, visited 24 May 2011.

<sup>15</sup>Adams, “Putting Muscle Shoals on the Map,” 338-339.

<sup>16</sup>*Sheffield: City on the Bluff*, 82.

early 1930s. Stribling (c1883–1965), a native Tennessean and graduate of the Florence Normal School (now the University of North Alabama), spent his summers in Lauderdale County with his maternal grandparents, and used Florence for the setting of three novels: *The Forge* (1931), *The Store* (1932), and *The Unfinished Cathedral* (1934). These Southern Gothic tales recounted the tragic history of the Vaiden family during the Civil War through Reconstruction and according to Edward J. Piacentino, “Introduced a subject matter, themes, plot elements, and character types which parallel and at the same time anticipate those that William Faulkner, who owned copies of this trilogy, would treat in *Absalom, Absalom!* and in the Snopes trilogy.”<sup>17</sup> *The Store* received the 1933 Pulitzer Prize for fiction; the jury selected the work “because of its sustained interest, and because of the convincing and comprehensive picture it presents of life in an inland Southern community during the middle eighties of the last century.”<sup>18</sup> Contemporaneous reviews published in *Time*, *North American Review*, and *The New Yorker* praised Stribling for his “impartial observation,” the “ability not only to rebuild and vivify a period, but to people it with living human beings,” and like Mark Twain, the skill “to convey...the very life and movement of a small Southern town.”<sup>19</sup> The critical and popular acceptance of Striblings’ novels as accurate portrayals of Southern life reveals much about how outsiders viewed the region during the 1930s: audiences believed what they read about the South to be true. While assessing Striblings’ literary legacy, Piacentino wrote in 1981, “in the 1920s and early 1930s, his novels treating the Southern

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<sup>17</sup>Edward J. Piacentino, “T.S. Stribling,” In *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Volume Nine, American Novelist, 1910-1945, Part 3: Mari Sandoz-Stark Young*, ed. James J. Martine (Detroit, MI: Brucoli Clark Book, 1981), 76. Piacentino received his Ph.D. in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and his 1973 dissertation is titled “The Southern novels of T.S. Stribling.”

<sup>18</sup>Randy K. Cross, “Introduction,” *The Store*, T.S. Stribling, (University of Alabama Press, 1985), v. The quote original appeared in John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prize* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 92.

<sup>19</sup>Cross, “Introduction,” *The Store*, vi.

experience were well received by his contemporaries, and he was one of the earliest writers to apply iconoclastic social realism to previously unexamined segments of provincial Southern life.”<sup>20</sup> The work of Stribling and others is part of the fictionalized or idealized South portrayed in various forms of media as representative of “the South” that fans and critics graft onto their descriptions of the Muscle Shoals music industry during the 1960s and ‘70s.

### ***ALABAMA’S ECONOMIC & RACIAL CLIMATE***

When compared in economic terms to both other Southern states and the rest of the United States, Alabama ranked near the bottom for much of the twentieth century. Author Wayne Flynt noted in *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*:

Economists and historians favor comparative statistics in order to measure a state against national norms and peer state performance... The per capita income of Alabama citizens ranked 45<sup>th</sup> of 48 states in 1930, 46<sup>th</sup> in 1940, 46<sup>th</sup> in 1950, 47<sup>th</sup> in 1960, 47<sup>th</sup> (of 50 states) in 1970, 47<sup>th</sup> in 1980, 44<sup>th</sup> in 1990, and 44<sup>th</sup> in 2000. Combining such broad categories of economic growth as per capita income, personal income, population growth, unemployment, total sales, and gross state revenue, Alabama ranked 7<sup>th</sup> among 10 southern states between 1945 and 1985.<sup>21</sup>

Economic conditions in the Shoals paralleled those in the state. Musician and music publisher Buddy Killen (1932–2006) grew up in a single room, clapboard shanty on a farm located fifteen miles outside of town, then moved to Florence with his family during the 1930s. Moving to the city did not alter the plight of the Killen family. “Our first three years in Florence were dreadful,” recalled Killen in his autobiography. “I walked to school with inlaid cardboard as makeshift soles in my shoes. My clothes, and those of my brother and sisters, were scarcely more than glorified rags. Relentless poverty was a constant part of my

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<sup>20</sup>Piacentino, “T.S. Stribling,” 77.

<sup>21</sup>Wayne Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 111.

life. It was all I knew.”<sup>22</sup> For many in the Shoals, their living conditions improved in the early 1940s with prosperity brought on by the war. In 1941, the Reynolds Aluminum Company established a plant in Florence, and, according to the company website, remains “one of the largest single employers in the Muscle Shoals area” to this day.<sup>23</sup> Former Alabama State Senator Bobby Denton (1939– ), born near Cherokee, Alabama (located approximately twenty miles west of the city of Muscle Shoals), remarked in 2009:

Life was hard for the family when I was a young boy but we didn’t know it because most everyone we knew was like us...My daddy worked at the Reynolds Aluminum Plant in Muscle Shoals for a few years after World War II as we continued to maintain a small farming operation along with having the usual vegetable gardens, a cow, pigs, and chickens...One of the most exciting times in my life was getting electricity.<sup>24</sup>

As an example of the region’s poverty faced by Denton and others, Denton’s house first received electricity, based on his narrative, sometime in the mid-1940s.

Alabama became one of the fiercest battlegrounds during the Civil Rights struggle. Laws established by the state legislature and enforced by state and local police maintained segregation. Flynt, in his history of twentieth century Alabama, succinctly described the states’ policies:

The 1901 [Alabama] constitution not only stripped the ballot from black men but also prohibited interracial marriages and required separate schools for blacks and whites. Local custom as well as ordinances insisted that mental institutions, TB sanatoriums, prisons, reform schools, public transportation, and hospitals also be racially segregated. Local municipalities complied with these expectations by isolating blacks within their own neighborhoods. Industries and unions sometimes excluded them, and when they were allowed,

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<sup>22</sup>Buddy Killen, *By the Seat of My Pants* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 15.

<sup>23</sup>“About Wise Alloys,” <http://www.wisealloys.com/about/index.html>, accessed 17 February 2013.

<sup>24</sup>Bobby Denton, *Love Lifted Me: A Story of Life, Love and Tragedy* (Muscle Shoals, AL: Falling Star Publishing, 2009), 10–11.

generally separated from whites.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the turbulent racial climate found in Montgomery and Birmingham, the quad-cities of the Shoals remained comparatively peaceful throughout the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. Jazz musician and educator Willie Ruff (1931– ) grew up in a racially mixed neighborhood in Sheffield. “All the families on our side of the street were black,” claimed Ruff, “and on the other side they were all white.”<sup>26</sup> Arthur Alexander (1940–1993), a black singer from Sheffield who was raised in a mostly white neighborhood, recalled, “There wasn’t but one other black family in East Florence. All the kids I played with were white, and I didn’t really become aware of the whole race problem until I was about eight or nine.”<sup>27</sup> Tori Bailey, the current general manager of WZZA, a black-owned radio station in the Shoals, recently commented on the areas relative calm during the Civil Rights movement:

Economically, this area was doing OK. You had TVA, and Brown’s Ferry; most folks were working, black and whites, so white folks didn’t have any reason to be pissed off at black folks for taking their jobs. And therefore, you didn’t have this resentment against people who may be taking bread out of, or food out of their mouths. So it was more relaxed, everybody was pretty much OK. So nobody had a reason to be pissed.<sup>28</sup>

The 1940 Alabama census information reported the statewide population at 65% white and 35% black. The Shoals’ population, in contrast, was primarily white: Colbert County was 75% white and 25% black, and for Lauderdale County the breakdown was 84% white and

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<sup>25</sup>Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 319. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 gave power to federal examiners to supervise voter registration in states like Alabama that had previously denied such rights to black people.

<sup>26</sup>William Knowlton Zinsser, *Mitchell & Ruff: An American Profile in Jazz* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2000), 56.

<sup>27</sup>Richard Younger, *Get a Shot of Rhythm and Blues: The Arthur Alexander Story* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), 7. Alexander originally told this story to author Barney Hoskyns, *Say it One Time for the Brokenhearted: Country Soul in the American South* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 91.

<sup>28</sup>Tori Bailey, interview with the author, 9 June 2011. Brown’s Ferry is the site of a TVA operated nuclear plant located near Athens, Alabama. Bailey told me that her views on the Civil Rights era are distilled from conversations she has had with “people who were old enough to remember.” Carl Bailey, Tori’s father, started the radio station in July 1972.

16% black; or 80% white and 20% black between the two counties. The Shoals' demographics of less ethnic diversity certainly do not indicate, however, an area that was free of racial tension. Addressing the racial climate history of the Shoals, Alexander's biographer Richard Younger stated:

Compared to the more volatile cities in the southern part of the state, the Tri-Cities had long enjoyed a liberal climate. While it should be noted that Tusculumbia was home to a chapter of the Ku Klux Klan up until the 1980s, the five counties in northern Alabama (including Lauderdale and Colbert) supported the northern Democrat Stephen Douglas in 1860, and later voted against succession. In 1855, before Jim Crow laws enforced segregation, an ordinance was passed allowing blacks to attend all-white schools in Florence. Most of Arthur's contemporaries feel that "things weren't that bad around here." For the most part, blatant racism was restricted to the occasional midnight forays by drunken Klansmen, who'd motor down Atlanta Avenue [in Florence] shouting racial epithets and sometimes firing BB guns. If tensions didn't simmer on the surface otherwise, it was because everyone knew where the color lines were drawn.<sup>29</sup>

Journalist Isabel Wilkerson, in her moving account of the great migration *The Warmth of Other Suns*, retold the story of a white planter and a black tenant farmer in Sheffield that reinforced "where the color lines were drawn." Year after year the planter cheated the farmer by adding pounds of coffee, which the farmer did not drink, further increasing the tenants' debt. The sharecropper was helpless, bound by racial caste. "One year," Wilkerson writes, "the planter's son happened to come in during settlement and spoke up himself. 'Pa, you know Jack don't drink coffee.' And for once, the sharecropper didn't have to pay for something he had never consumed in the first place."<sup>30</sup> Wilkerson does not indicate the precise year of this interaction, but it likely took place in 1937 based on the way she

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<sup>29</sup>Younger, *Get A Shot*, 10. T.S. Stripling dramatizes the Ku Klux Klan's Shoals origin in his 1931 novel *The Forge*.

<sup>30</sup>Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: the Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010), 168.

organized her overall narrative. The blurring of the “color line,” as indicated by the actions of the white planters’ son, along with the local musicians who helped in their own way to break through the racialized sound barrier, becomes significant in Muscle Shoals’ development as one of the primary locations to record R&B and soul music during the 1960s.

### ***RHYTHM OF THE RIVER***

Many musicians born in or near Muscle Shoals have gone on to influential careers, and honored by the Alabama Music Hall of Fame, the Country Music Hall of Fame, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and the Musicians Hall of Fame. Why the Shoals, a relatively small geographic area, became a fountainhead for so many talented musicians remains something of a mystery.

“From the earliest days, when the American Indians filled the valley with their rhythmic sounds, the Shoals has been a land of music.”<sup>31</sup> So began a 1999 fifteen-page supplement printed in Florence, Alabama’s local paper, *Times Daily*, celebrating the sounds of Muscle Shoals. The sentiment that the excess musicality of the region had pre-Columbian roots continued in “Moved by the Spirit,” an article written by journalists Terry Pace and Robert Palmer:

It started with water rushing over rocky shoals — a sound the American Indians living along the banks of the Tennessee River said “sang” to them in the beautiful voice of a woman. They called the great inland waterway the “Singing River.” That musical rush of water has syncopated its melody into the souls of countless generations since the Choctaws, Cherokees, Chickasaws and Creeks populated this tiny corner of north Alabama. The sound they heard lingers still.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Kathy Silverberg, “Muscle Shoals Sounds: The Rhythm of the River,” *Times Daily*, 1 August 1999, 1.

<sup>32</sup>Terry Pace and Robert Palmer “Moved by the Spirit,” *Times Daily*, 1 August 1999, 2. I am extremely grateful to Terry Pace for providing me with a hardcopy of this supplement, which the *Times Daily* printed for a 1999 symposium on the music created in Muscle Shoals. The Shoals Chamber of Commerce reprinted on their website portions of the supplement. See “Muscle Shoals Music,” <http://www.shoalschamber.com/live/muscleshoalsmusic.html>, accessed 20 November 2010.

Others have echoed the lore of the “singing river” and musically adept native cultures; author Randy McNutt stated in 2002, “Legend has it that the music is in the soil somehow, and that the early inhabitants—Shawnee, Cherokee, Chickasaw—were more musical than other tribes.”<sup>33</sup> Despite claims by many that the region is inherently musical, a “fact” consecrated either by lineage or geography, Cresap’s 1956 study of the Shoals’ “frontier days” based on his examination of diaries and other historical documents makes no mention of music or musical instruments. He noted:

Religious literature seems to have been popular with all, although belles-lettres and the study of the English language were not neglected. At least a passing interest in the literature of mathematics, science, medicine, history, geography, and government was apparent, also. A scant concern for the fine arts may be attributed to crude frontier conditions, perhaps.<sup>34</sup>

Archival evidence, however, dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century indicates that Sheffield was home to a small orchestra and brass band.<sup>35</sup> The influence of either native cultures or the proximity to the Tennessee River upon the Muscle Shoals music industry remains debatable. The fact that these “influences” only manifested themselves in the 1950s is not.

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<sup>33</sup>Randy McNutt, *Guitar Towns: A Journey to the Crossroads of Rock 'n' Roll* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 126.

<sup>34</sup>Cresap, “Muscle Shoals Frontier,” 212.

<sup>35</sup>An untitled article that appeared in the July 27, 1891 *Sheffield Reaper* stated, “Sheffield is now on the verge of having a ‘sure ‘nuff” brass band.” A December 14, 1891 article, also printed in the *Sheffield Reaper*, exclaimed, “The Sheffield Orchestra is now ready to meet all engagement for music for any indoor occasion.” An article from the *Sheffield Standard* printed on February 27, 1904 announced that a brass band gave a successful performance at the “Opera House.” Another brass band formed over a decade later, which was reported on in an October 15, 1915 article in the *Sheffield Standard*. All of these articles, which are photocopies of the originals and had no page numbers, are located at the Sheffield Library, housed in the Local History room in the “Music Industry” folder. Other newspaper clippings and programs in this folder also indicate that touring groups such as orchestras and soloists performed in Sheffield during the early-to-mid twentieth century.

For many raised in or near the Shoals during the 1930s and '40s, music provided a way out or an escape from their small town existence.<sup>36</sup> In 1993, Buddy Killen recalled his impoverished childhood and reflected on the town he grew up in:

Florence was like the dying town in the movie *The Last Picture Show*. Its adolescents, many of them uneducated tough guys, congregated at the roller rink, which was a teenage social center in nearby Sheffield...Many boys were high school dropouts with idle minds. They had dirt under their fingernails and time on their hands. They didn't know what to do with themselves, so they did it together.<sup>37</sup>

Bobby Denton recalled similar memories:

The class of '57 continued to have fun enjoying our final years in school together with dreams and anticipation for the future. There was almost no talk among the class members about going to college. The way we were raised, getting a high school diploma would be about all we would ever need. It was easy to get a job around the area with all the large industrial plants and TVA employing thousands of people.<sup>38</sup>

While the prospect of graduating high school and then moving into a menial labor job appealed to many, others envisioned something more. Foreseeing what he perceived as a bleak future, Killen realized:

With high school graduation upon me, thoughts that I had postponed about the future were now unavoidable. I had to decide what I was going to do in a town where most boys my age either went to work for Reynolds Aluminum or moved north to the assembly lines in Detroit. Neither option interested me.<sup>39</sup>

Both Killen and Denton performed in semi-professional groups around the Shoals and on local radio broadcasts during their years in high school and developed reputations as

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<sup>36</sup>W.C. Handy (1873–1958) and Sam Phillips (1923–2003), two of American popular music history's most celebrated figures, were born in Florence, Alabama. Neither of them directly participated in the creation of the music industry in Muscle Shoals. For a brief biography of both men, see James Dickerson, *Mojo Triangle: Birthplace of Country, Blues, Jazz and Rock "n" Roll* (New York: Schirmer Trade Books, 2005), 182–188. Handy's Alabama legacy is celebrated each year during Florence's Handy Music Festival, which began in 1983.

<sup>37</sup>Killen, *Seat of My Pants*, 56.

<sup>38</sup>Denton, *Love Lifted Me*, 40.

<sup>39</sup>Killen, *Seat of My Pants*, 58.

competent, dependable musicians. Killen left the Shoals and moved to Nashville in the early 1950s to pursue a career in music that included songwriting, performing as Hank Williams' bass player, and ultimately as co-owner of Tree Publishing, one of the top music publishing houses. In December of 1956, James Joiner (1929–2007), owner of the Florence bus terminal and aspiring songwriter, contacted high school senior Denton to record a newly composed song. Joiner, along with partners that included Kelso Hurston, formed Tune Records in December 1956 followed later by Tune Publishing in July of 1957. A feature article on Joiner from the April 22, 1957 *Tri-Cities Daily* stated, "James Joiner...is president of the first record company in Alabama and is planning to launch his second business venture, a music publishing firm, soon."<sup>40</sup> Joiner's interest in recording, however, dates to at least January 4, 1956, when he received a Florence City License for the Shoals Recording Services, Inc., located at 123 East Alabama Street, the same address as the bus depot.<sup>41</sup> Although Denton's music career would be brief, the February 22, 1957, recording of "A Fallen Star" is the fountainhead for the modern day Muscle Shoals music and recording industry.<sup>42</sup>

The Shoals Recording Services was primitive, and Joiner's clientele were most likely individuals attracted to the novelty of hearing themselves on record; similar to Sam Phillips'

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<sup>40</sup>Lorene Frederick, "James Joiner: An All-Round Guy: Bus Driver, Student, Writer," *Tri-Cities Daily*, 22 April 1957. A photocopy of this article, no page number, is in the James Joiner file located at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame (AMHF). Another undated typed document printed on Tune Publishers Incorporated stationery found in the Joiner file located at the AMHF corroborate these dates. The individual documents housed in folders at the AMHF are not numbered or indexed. The subject files are organized simply by last name (i.e., Joiner, James), and the files within these folders haphazardly placed. Information found in Denton's autobiography support these dates. Other partners in Tune Records included Walter Stovall and Marvin Wilson.

<sup>41</sup>Dexter Johnson, uncle to Jimmy Johnson and future member of the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section, opened the first recording studio when he built a facility in his Sheffield garage in 1951. The April 1957 article on Joiner states, "Work was begun toward organizing Tune Record Company as long as two years but the company was not incorporated until last December."

<sup>42</sup>Denton retired from music by fall 1958. He would eventually become an Alabama state senator in 1978, and served for thirty-two years. His nickname was "the singing senator." Denton, among others, became one of the guiding forces in the establishing of the Alabama Music Hall of Fame.

Memphis Recording Services whose motto was: “We Record Anything, Anywhere, Anytime.” An undated picture found at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame shows a smartly dressed young girl, seated on a bench in front of some sort of mural, singing into a microphone, not exactly the proper setting in which to build a recording empire. In order to record “A Fallen Star,” Joiner needed a more modern facility. As Denton recalled:

[Joiner] and his associates decided that the only studio and tape recorder in the area that might do an acceptable job was at WLAY. Even with the good studio and recorder, the setup and conditions were very primitive...The recording session was done in about an hour or two using three musical instruments and a local gospel quartet for backup. Of course, we didn’t have the equipment to overdub mistakes, so the complete song had to be recorded all at the same time...Also, the engineer who was the radio station disc jockey, Joe Heathcock, had to do his work and carry on the regular programming of the station at the same time. In order to give his full attention to our recording, he had to play an extra long record in order to oversee the two minutes and fifty-one second record we were recording. The same process was followed for the song [“Carla”] going on the other side.<sup>43</sup>

The session cost a total of ten dollars: \$4 paid to WLAY for “recording serv[ices],” and \$6 to Benny Lott for “engineering recording.”<sup>44</sup>

Denton’s recording of “A Fallen Star” achieved regional success on the radio and made the singing teen a hometown star. More importantly, a network of musicians and music industry-related personnel began to develop between Muscle Shoals and Nashville because of this one session. “A Fallen Star,” published by Tree Music via Joiner’s Florence connection to Buddy Killen, was also recorded by country musicians Jimmy Newman, Ferlin

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<sup>43</sup>Denton, *Love Lifted Me*, 41.

<sup>44</sup>This information obtained from a photocopy of Tune Records’ check register, located in the “James Joiner” file at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame. The 1956 and 1957 Broadcasting Yearbook lists Bobby Lott as the chief engineer for WLAY. There is no record of Joe Heathcock. The yearbooks are accessible at the website, *American Radio History*, “Broadcasting Publications – Broadcasting Yearbooks: Directory of AM FM TV stations, regulations and suppliers from 1935 to 2010,” [http://www.americanradiohistory.com/Broadcasting\\_Yearbook\\_Summary\\_of\\_Editions\\_Page.htm](http://www.americanradiohistory.com/Broadcasting_Yearbook_Summary_of_Editions_Page.htm), accessed 21 February 2013. For 1956 see page 54, for 1957 see page 52.

Husky, the Hilltoppers, and the comedy duo Alonzo and Oscar. Denton's success attracted like-minded musicians to Florence as Rick Hall (1932– ) and Billy Sherrill (1936– ), both from nearby Phil Campbell, Alabama, and who performed together in a band called the Fairlanes, began to pitch their original songs to Joiner. Denton recorded “Sweet and Innocent,” written by Hall and Sherrill, and “Back to School” for Judd Records, owned by Jud Phillips (Sam Phillips' brother) at Owen Bradley's Nashville studio in 1958.<sup>45</sup> Killen produced the session that featured veteran studio musicians Boots Randolph on sax, Floyd Cramer on piano, with the Jordanares and Anita Kerr on backing vocals. The Hall and Sherrill song received wider recognition when RCA's Chet Atkins produced Roy Orbison's cover the same year. The members of the Shoals' fledgling music industry relied upon the multiple services provided by Nashville's established music scene to help the musical cohort from Alabama realize their potential.

A cottage music industry developed in Florence during 1958 and '59. According to Denton, he befriended Tom Stafford (1926–1977), the manager of the Shoals (movie) Theater located in downtown Florence, and they began to write songs together. “Much of my time was spent working with Stafford trying to put together a recording studio upstairs over [the City Drug Store] on Tennessee Street in Florence,” recalled Denton. He went on to state:

The studio would be for recording demo records of songs to pitch to record companies and other publishers...We went to Nashville and purchased a tape recorder and a few items for the studio...The City Drug Store...quickly became the number one hangout for all the boys around town who were aspiring to play music and write songs. We had fun experimenting with the equipment and being together.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>“Back to School” landed Denton a spot on Dick Clark's September 6, 1958 television broadcast. Denton retired from music after a few weeks on a fall tour sponsored by Clark.

<sup>46</sup>Denton, *Love Lifted Me*, 69–70.

With finances partially supplied by Joiner, Stafford formed Spar Records and Florence Alabama Music Enterprises (FAME) with Hall and Sherrill. The ad hoc studio attracted aspiring musicians who lived locally such as Earl “Peanutt” Montgomery, Dan Penn, Dewey “Spooner” Oldham, Norbert Putnam, Donnie Fritts, Arthur Alexander, and others. “Is a Bluebird Blue?” a song written by Dan Penn, provided one of the early Spar successes; Conway Twitty released the song as a single in 1960. That same year, Stafford and Sherrill parted ways with Hall and sold him the FAME name for one dollar.<sup>47</sup> By 1961, Sherrill left the Shoals for Nashville where he worked as a recording engineer for Sam Phillips’ studio, eventually becoming a top songwriter and producer. Hall remained in Alabama, and converted the Tri-Cities Candy and Tobacco Company located on Wilson Dam Highway in Muscle Shoals into a recording studio. Stafford approached Hall about a recording “You Better Move On,” a song written by Arthur Alexander, which became the first national Hall-produced hit recorded in Muscle Shoals during 1961.

“A Fallen Star” demonstrated the ability of Shoals musicians and businessmen to produce and record a popular song; “You Better Move On” validated the previous attempts of those same individuals to produce a national hit. The success of Alexander’s track cut at Hall’s FAME prompted others to open recording studios in the Shoals. In 1965 only two studios, FAME and Norala, were open.<sup>48</sup> Norala, located on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Sheffield and owned and operated by then-WLAY DJ Quin Ivy, is where Percy Sledge recorded “When a Man Loves a Woman” in 1966. Muscle Shoals Sound Studios opened its doors in 1969, although

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<sup>47</sup>Christopher S. Fuqua, *Music Fell on Alabama: The Muscle Shoals Sound that Shook the World* (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2006), 30.

<sup>48</sup>It remains unclear when Stafford closed Spar and the studio located above the drugstore. It seems likely, however, that the success of Alexander’s first hit recorded by Hall at his studio made Stafford’s less well-equipped studio obsolete.

the building had already housed a studio. By the mid-1970s, eight independently owned recording studios operated in the Muscle Shoals area, and the region adopted the self-titled slogan “Welcome to City of Muscle Shoals. Hit Recording Capital of the World.”

## THE MUSIC

This dissertation will be primarily concerned with two interconnected types of music: 1) Rhythm and Blues (R&B), and 2) Soul. Both musical descriptors are closely identified with the people, culture, and history of black America. R&B emerged mid-century as a distinct musical style with its own musical characteristics, which gradually became an umbrella term for a larger genre of music that included Soul. For much of the population, including insiders in the music industry and the press, the phrase rhythm and blues simply became code for black artists making music for a predominantly black audience.

R&B developed as an independent genre during the 1940s.<sup>49</sup> Black musicians from diverse musical backgrounds were attracted to various locations across the United States during the early 1940s such as Los Angeles, New York City, New Orleans, and Memphis. Many of these black musicians merged the “downhome” quality of rural blues with the instrumentation of stripped-down jazz big bands. The result, often described as “jump blues” and made famous by bandleader Louis Jordan, attracted a more urbane audience. These new developments relied heavily on 12-bar blues forms punctuated with horn stabs. Lyrics were rife with double entendres, a legacy of the music’s blues origins.

In 1949, the music industry trade magazine *Billboard* adopted the phrase “rhythm and blues,” reportedly coined by staff writer Jerry Wexler, to describe their chart that tracked the

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<sup>49</sup>According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the phrase “rhythm and blues” first appeared in print in 1933. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd edition, June 2010; online version September 2011, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/273621>, accessed 25 October 2011.

sales of recordings by black artists. In the 1950s, due to near seismic shifts affecting American popular culture, an increasing number of white teenaged listeners began to purchase R&B discs recorded by black artists. The fresh and exciting sound of R&B, which appealed to both white and black teenagers, included small combos like Louis Jordan's, Doo-Wop groups such as the Drifters, and blues "shouters" like Big Joe Turner. Consequently, black artists normally relegated to the R&B charts "crossed over" to the (white) pop charts due to increased demand and sales to a more diverse audience. These musical events that were closely connected to cultural shifts also helped give rise to rock 'n' roll.

The modern elements of soul coalesced in the mid-1950s around the same time as the emergence of rock 'n' roll. The term soul refers to a style and subgenre of secular music commonly associated with black Americans, particularly from the South during the 1960s, generally categorized by fans, critics, and the music industry as R&B. Musical characteristics of soul include a rhythm section consisting of an electric guitar, electric bass, keyboard (usually piano, Wurlitzer electric piano, and/or electric organ), and drum set. This rhythm section typically accompanies a male or female vocal soloist, although there are instances of duos and larger vocal groups, too. The vocal style of soul is often described as emotionally charged and confessional; a word that associates soul music with religion. In many recordings, a horn section, a combination of various wind (alto, tenor, baritone sax) and brass instruments (trumpet, trombone), is also present.

The soul singer emerged from an elision of the solo blues musician—a rural Black American performer, stereotypically male, who entertained in any number of profane settings—and the church preacher—who addressed an audience in a sacred setting with an engaging rhetorical style. Artists began combining secular stories and song texts, delivered

with a preacher's rhetorical cadence over the song structures of popular song, and the result was modern soul music.<sup>50</sup> This infusion of secular musical traditions with techniques commonly associated with sacred practices was a source of tension for many religious organizations during the nascent years of soul music. Simply stated, members of the black church believed that the secularization of religious music profaned the sacred tradition. Sam Cooke's leaving the Soul Stirrers, a famous gospel group, to pursue a solo career in pop music became the paradigm, and soul music became the commercial home for the results.

The primary musical characteristics that are now associated with soul music drew both from the rhetorical style of a church preacher and from the rich musical traditions of black gospel music. For example, along with Cooke, singers such as Clyde McPhatter, Ray Charles, and James Brown incorporated gospel techniques, such as the frequent use of melismas in slow tempos, into their vocal delivery. Charles also based his compositions on a gospel music framework mixed with the musical accompaniment of R&B.<sup>51</sup> Brown fused his pleading, confessional vocal expressiveness with tight-knit group harmonies common to gospel and made effective use of the traditional gospel practice of a vamp, all of which resulted in a classic soul recording.<sup>52</sup>

The 1960s saw an increase in the recording of gospel-infused popular songs by independent record labels such as King and Atlantic along with increased use of the term soul to identify the new style. By the mid-1960s, soul was a recognized style within the broad genre of R&B that carried strong geographic associations with the areas of Memphis, Muscle

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<sup>50</sup>Ian Hoare, "Might, Mighty, Spade and Whitey: Soul Lyrics and Black-White Crosscurrents" in *The Soul Book*, ed. Ian Hoare (Bungay, England: Richard Clay [The Chaucer Press] Ltd., 1975), 126.

<sup>51</sup>Charles' 1954 hit recording of "I Got A Woman" used the Gospel song "I Got A Savior" as a template.

<sup>52</sup>James Brown, a former Gospel singer, achieved national chart success in 1956 with "Please, Please, Please" and "Try Me" in 1958.

Shoals, Alabama, and the South in general.<sup>53</sup> Stax Records, located in Memphis, became one of the leading soul music record companies.<sup>54</sup> Not known for its record labels, Muscle Shoals instead gained a reputation as home to FAME, which served as a recording studio, publishing company, and a musical workshop where aspiring local musicians honed their skills. With the release of several hit tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals during the early-to-mid 1960s including “You Better Move On” and “A Shot of Rhythm and Blues” by Arthur Alexander, and “What Kind of Fool (Do You Think I Am)” by the Tams, this out-of-the-way region of north Alabama became a force within the soul music industry. The iconic soul tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals include “Land of 1000 Dances,” “Mustang Sally,” “Tell Mama,” and “I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You).”

Many fans, critics, and music industry insiders perceived Southern soul as grittier, “blacker,” and more authentic than tracks recorded in other places. A noticeable split between the sophisticated, slickly-produced northern style, represented by the Motown record label in Detroit, and the grittier Southern soul releases recorded in Memphis and Muscle Shoals occurred in the mid-1960s when critics and fans began to associate those different styles of R&B with different musical and aesthetic qualities. For example, critic Jon Landau titled a 1967 essay on Motown “A Whiter Shade of Black.”<sup>55</sup> Speaking about Aretha Franklin in 1968 Atlantic Records executive Jerry Wexler asserted, “There’s nothing new in what [she] does. Negro music has always been at the core of our music but always manicured and sanitized. Now, there has been a breakthrough. We are ready to accept the Negro

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<sup>53</sup>Many of the leading soul musicians including Otis Redding, Carla and Rufus Thomas, James Brown, Sam and Dave, and others were born in the South.

<sup>54</sup>By the end of the decade, Stax had built an impressive roster of soul artists: Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, Rufus Thomas, Carla Thomas, William Bell, Booker T. & the M.G.’s, The Staples Singers and Isaac Hayes were all recording for Stax or their subsidiary label, Volt.

<sup>55</sup>Jon Landau, “A Whiter Shade of Black,” *Crawdaddy!*, September/October 1967, 34.

performer without Caucasianizing.”<sup>56</sup> “The Rhythm & Blues Revival No White Gloved, Black Hits,” a 1969 *Billboard* article by journalist Arnold Shaw, furthered Wexler’s notion that fans of American popular music (Wexler’s “our music”) preferred Franklin’s brand of soul music to the “watered down” versions sung by The Righteous Brothers or Tom Jones.<sup>57</sup>

Soul, through paradigm shifts in cultural attitudes towards black America combined with the music’s broad appeal, was a firmly entrenched part of popular music by the mid-to-late 1960s. It was defined in the minds of both fans and the press based on hit recordings, by the region where the music was produced, and by a set of attributes and values that were inscribed on the music to reflect the social and cultural issues of the day. Soul music continued to be a force within popular music into the mid-1970s until new subgenres of R&B such as funk and disco emerged.<sup>58</sup>

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation enters into dialogue about soul music with authors from musicology, history, sociology, American studies, and African-American studies. Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach helps to achieve the broad range of scholarly objectives enumerated previously. This brief survey of extant literature is organized into five categories: sources about soul music, which includes the few accounts of Muscle Shoals’ history; sources concerning the analysis of recordings in general, and of R&B and soul music specifically; sources addressing sidemen; sources that focus on the relationship between soul

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<sup>56</sup>Jamake Highwater, *Rock and Other Four Letter Words: Music of the Electric Generation* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), no page number.

<sup>57</sup>Arnold Shaw, “The Rhythm & Blues Revival No White Gloved, Black Hits,” in “The World of Soul,” *Billboard*, 16 August 1969, S-3.

<sup>58</sup>The decline in popularity during the 1970s of soul music and R&B is a complex issue. Nelson George provides a penetrating assessment in, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988).

and African-American identity; and, sources concerned with the history of the mid-twentieth century South and its relation to music.

The sources about soul music divide into two categories: 1) monographs on the history of soul, and/or R&B music; and, 2) articles on soul music included in industry trade magazines. Journalists, scholars, and music critics have contributed to the literature devoted to the topic of soul music. While there is no monograph specifically addressing the history, music, or musicians of Muscle Shoals, authors have included large sections or chapters chronicling the rise of the music industry in Muscle Shoals and its relation to soul music within several of these sources.<sup>59</sup> For example, author Christopher Fuqua comments on the first section of his book *Music Fell on Alabama* by stating it is “only an overview of a rich and dynamic history of the Shoals music industry.”<sup>60</sup>

There are several excellent histories of R&B, which also include soul, written by journalists.<sup>61</sup> These sources primarily consist of oral histories focusing on broad historical aspects of R&B (Shaw and Hirshey), or more tightly constructed narratives that highlight particular aspects of the music’s history (Guralnick and Hoskyns). Peter Guralnick, for instance, presents the history of soul music as the product of black, mostly Southern

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<sup>59</sup>Fuqua *Music Fell on Alabama: The Muscle Shoals Sound that Shook the World*; James Dickerson, *Mojo Triangle: Birthplace of Country, Blues, Jazz and Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: Schirmer Trade Books, 2005); Peter Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986. Reprint, Boston: BackBay Books, 1999). As a point of comparison, the music library at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill holds eleven sources about the history of the Motown record label.

<sup>60</sup>Fuqua, *Music Fell on Alabama*, 10. The second half provides brief biographical information on famous musicians born in Alabama

<sup>61</sup>Peter Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music*. Page citations are to the reprint edition. Barney Hoskyns, *Say it One Time for the Brokenhearted: Country Soul in the American South* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998); Geri Hirshey, *Nowhere to Run: The Story of Soul Music* (New York: Times Books, 1984); Arnold Shaw. *Honkers and Shouters: The Golden Years of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: Macmillan, 1978).

musicians struggling to achieve personal and commercial success.<sup>62</sup> Guralnick's chapter "Fame and Muscle Shoals" currently serves as the definitive history of the Muscle Shoals, Alabama, soul music industry.

Trade publications also record a history of soul music, albeit one that is particularly complicated by inconsistent use of terminology. Over its long publication history *Billboard*, the trade magazine that tracks record sales for the music industry, has used the terms "race records," "rhythm and blues," "soul," "black music," and "R&B" to describe black popular music that was not jazz.<sup>63</sup> *Billboard* and other similar trade publications are useful sources for the history of soul written by critics and music industry insiders who traced the music's development.<sup>64</sup> By charting records, cataloging sales figures, and tracking regional trends of the soul music market through various weekly columns, these sources provide contemporary accounts of the development and flourishing of soul music viewed from the perspective of the music industry.

My analysis of tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals will build upon the work of ethnomusicologist Charles Keil and musicologist David Brackett, in particular. Keil, along with Lawrence M. Zbikowski and Anne Danielsen, have developed a methodological framework to analyze and discuss grooves; one of the central musical components to the "Muscle Shoals sound."<sup>65</sup> In his examination of James Brown's "Super Bad," Brackett deftly

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<sup>62</sup> Author and music philosopher Joel Rudinow has criticized this view of soul music as too restrictive. See Joel Rudinow, *Soul Music: Tracking the Spiritual Roots of Pop from Plato to Motown* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 11-13.

<sup>63</sup> See Joel Whitburn, *Joel Whitburn Presents Top R & B Singles, 1942-1999* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research Inc., 2000). *Billboard* abandoned the "rhythm and blues" chart from November 1963 until January 1965, instead combining popular musical styles, except country, under one chart heading.

<sup>64</sup> In June 1967 *Billboard* issued the first in a yearly series called "The World of Soul." This source is addressed in chapter 3.

<sup>65</sup> Matthew W. Butterfield "Race and Rhythm: The Social Component of the Swing Groove," *Jazz Perspectives* 4, no. 3 (2010): 301-335; Anne Danielsen, *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and*

explores what he called the “‘critical difference’ between African-American and Euro-American music and culture.”<sup>66</sup> Drawing from musicology, music theory, and literary criticism, Brackett provides a musical analysis of the Brown track that does not divorce it from the cultural forces that helped to create it. Ethnomusicologist Rob Bowman provides another useful model through his close analysis of “the Stax sound” by investigating nine areas of inquiry within the musical elements on the recordings.<sup>67</sup> Much of the music produced at Stax in Memphis and at FAME or Muscle Shoals Sound was contemporaneous; Bowman’s analytical model is largely applicable to the study of Muscle Shoals tracks as well. Richard Ripani presents a fifty-year overview of the musical and stylistic changes that occurred in R&B and soul music in his monograph.<sup>68</sup> The work of Bowman and Ripani will facilitate crucial points of comparisons in my research including 1) comparisons of sources in which to contrast the Muscle Shoals tracks under consideration with music recorded and performed in a similar style, and 2) consideration of the musical changes and trends that took place within Rhythm and Blues versus the musical changes that took place in Muscle Shoals. By using traditional music analysis techniques while also drawing from the fields of

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*Parliament* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006); Lawrence M. Zbikowski, “Modelling the Groove: Conceptual Structure and Popular Music,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 129, no. 2 (2004): 272-297; Charles Keil, “Motion and Feeling Through Music,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 24 no. 3 (Spring 1966), 337-349.

<sup>66</sup>David Brackett *Interpreting Popular Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 155.

<sup>67</sup>Robert M. Bowman, “The Stax Sound: A Musicological Analysis,” *Popular Music* 14, no. 3 (1995): 285–320. The nine areas are: “instrumentation; repertoire; structure; keys; aspects of harmonic construction; aspects of time including tempo, pulse and the arrangement and organization in time of the vocalists, the horns, drum patterns, bass lines and chordal instruments; melodic construction; ornamentation; and timbre/production considerations.” See Bowman, “The Stax Sound,” 289.

<sup>68</sup>Richard J. Ripani, *The New Blue Music: Changes in Rhythm & Blues, 1950-1999* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006).

linguistics and literature, these authors have established a relevant methodological framework for discussing soul music.

Within many genres of popular music, scholars have begun addressing musical recordings as the results of collaborative creative processes in the studio, of which session musicians are a critical part. While many of these sources address music beyond the boundaries of soul, they provide relevant methodological models applicable to, and engage with issues and ideas pertinent to the study of soul. For example, ethnomusicologist Ingrid Monson stated in the introduction to her work on the jazz rhythm section, “An imaginative rhythm section can inspire a soloist to project his or her most vibrant voice, while disinterested accompaniment can thwart even the strongest artist.”<sup>69</sup> The process used by Monson to interpret the jazz rhythm section, which utilized extensive interviews, is analogous to the exploration of sidemen in soul music incorporated into this dissertation.

Six sources are particularly relevant to this study of Muscle Shoals-based session musicians.<sup>70</sup> Sociologists Richard Peterson and Howard White documented the habits of session musicians working in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Nashville over a fourteen-year period.<sup>71</sup> Their 1979 article is one of the earliest “academic” studies of session musicians, and it provides insightful observations and conclusions applicable to research about Muscle Shoals. Ethnomusicologist Tracey Laird’s study of the Louisiana Hayride radio

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<sup>69</sup>Ingrid T. Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>70</sup>Much of the specific information regarding the session musicians who worked in Muscle Shoals can be found in specialty trade journals, and publications dedicated to one instrument or performance style (rock drumming, R&B bass, etc...). Interviews with the musicians themselves become the basis for the majority of these articles, which provide valuable insight into the recording process and the development of their individual styles.

<sup>71</sup>Richard Peterson and Howard White, “The Simplex Located in Art Worlds,” *Urban Life* 7, no. 4 (1979): 411-439.

program is the most germane to my examination of session musicians.<sup>72</sup> Laird suggests the mix of cultures in Shreveport and the fact that the producers of the Hayride were open to musical experimentation created a unique situation for the musicians performing in the scene: “the Hayride nurtured a group of influential sidemen, players who typify the postwar generation of young southern white musicians with one foot in country and the other in rhythm-and-blues.”<sup>73</sup>

Using extensive interviews, journalist Roben Jones details the rhythm section at American Studios in Memphis, Tennessee from 1964 through 1972.<sup>74</sup> While much of the music recorded at American Studios was arguably more pop oriented, many of the musicians who worked in Memphis also worked in the Shoals. Rob Bowman, in his 1999 exhaustive treatment of Stax Records, follows a narrative thread similar to Guralnick as he provides a richly detailed history of the creation, flourishing, and demise of a highly influential soul record company. These two sources provide a template for the examination of musicians and recording studios located in the South during the 1960s.

Roy Brewer has written the only musicological study that focuses on sidemen in soul music, “String Musicians in the Recording Studios of Memphis, Tennessee.”<sup>75</sup> His thesis, that “Memphis strings were not only an integral part of the local recording industry but also a major component of the overall sound of an era,” helps to underscore the important contributions made to this music by unknown, and in this case uncredited, musicians.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Tracey E. Laird, *Louisiana Hayride: Radio and Roots Music Along the Red River* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>74</sup>Roben Jones, *Memphis Boys: The Story of American Studios* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

<sup>75</sup>Roy Brewer, “String Musicians in the Recording Studios of Memphis, Tennessee.” *Popular Music* 19, no. 2 (2000): 201–215.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 202.

Concentrating on soul music recorded in Muscle Shoals, social anthropologist Les Back asserted that the racial differences between the participating musicians received too much emphasis.<sup>77</sup> In his opinion, this severely limits the understanding of the relationship among sound, culture, and race.<sup>78</sup> Back points to a musicians' ability, regardless of race, to aurally learn a style, and therefore transcend the idea of a black or white music.<sup>79</sup> Back is the only author included within this survey who questions the musical racial essentialism commonly found in histories of soul music, particularly those written during the 1960s. The dichotomy between the black public face of soul music and the hidden white or racially mixed supporting cast of musicians that assisted in the creation of the style is an area that deserves further research, and to which this dissertation contributes.

The literature devoted to soul culture and soul music in relation to black America is vast. In many of these sources, the term soul music represents all music, regardless of style, created by black musicians. Authors adopting this broad definition present soul music as a form of social and political capital for black Americans within a larger American culture. From the opposite perspective, a few scholars have called for more nuanced ideas between musical traditions and racial discourse, and have even challenged the notion of an independent black cultural world, especially concerning Southern music.

Much of the literature devoted specifically to soul music, especially sources that date from the late 1960s, address the relationship between soul and socio-political cultural

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<sup>77</sup>Les Back, "Out of Sight: Southern Music and the Coloring of Sound," in *Out of Whiteness: Color, Politics, and Culture*, ed. Vron Ware and Les Back (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>78</sup>Back "Out of Sight," 231.

<sup>79</sup>Research by linguist James Gee supports Back's conclusions. See James Gee, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

movements such as the Black Arts Movement and the Black Power Movement.<sup>80</sup> The historical narratives used by some authors build upon the work of Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and his 1963 text *Blues People* while incorporating the rhetoric of the Black Power Movement.<sup>81</sup> Writers working in the 1960s often separated soul music—meaning all music by black artists—from (white) popular music strictly based on the artists’ race, but did not differentiate between musical styles within that black popular music. Thus, Southern soul, Motown, jazz, and other musical styles were subsumed as one where these authors preferred to concentrate on the “message of soul” present in all of styles of black music.<sup>82</sup> According to many of these authors, soul music, particularly for the black listener, embodied the black experience.<sup>83</sup> Several authors including Rochelle Larkin and Portia Maultsby examine the social role of soul music and its expressive power to be an agent of social change to a broad range of the black American public.<sup>84</sup> Magazines that catered to a predominantly black

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<sup>80</sup> Authors that are more contemporary also address the connection between soul, soul music, and Black Power. See Monique Guillory and Richard C. Green, *Soul: Black Power, Politics, and Pleasure* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); William L. Van Deburg *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>81</sup> LeRoi Jones [Amiri Baraka], *Blues People: Negro Music in American* (New York: HarperCollins, 1963; reprint New York: Harper Perennial, 2002); Phyl Garland, *The Sound of Soul* (Chicago: H. Regnery Company, 1969). Arnold Shaw *The World of Soul: Black America's Contribution to the Pop Music Scene* (New York: Cowles Book Co., 1970).

<sup>82</sup> See Garland, *The Sound of Soul* and Shaw, *The World of Soul*. On August 23, 1969 *Billboard* magazine replaced the term “rhythm and blues” with “soul” to chart sales of black music. The decision was, “motivated by the fact that the term ‘soul’ more properly embraces the broad range of song and instrumental material which derives from the musical genius of the black American,” quoted in Portia K. Maultsby, “Soul Music: Its Sociological and Political Significance in American Popular Culture,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 17, no. 2 (1983): 58.

<sup>83</sup> See Garland, *The Sound of Soul* and Shaw, *The World of Soul*. In 1987 Amiri Baraka wrote, “It must be recognized, however, that what makes black music soulful is that it is an authentic reflection of those who created it, and an organic expression of their lives.” See Amiri Baraka and Amina Baraka, “The Phenomenon of Soul in African-American Music,” in *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues* (New York: Morrow, 1987), 275.

<sup>84</sup> Rochelle Larkin, *Soul Music: The Sound! The Stars! The Story!* (New York: Lancer Books, 1970); Rochelle Larkin, “The Soul Message,” in *The Sounds of Social Change: Studies in Popular Culture*, ed. R. Serge Denisoff and Richard A. Peterson (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1972); Portia K. Maultsby, “Soul Music: Its Sociological and Political Significance in American Popular Culture” *Journal Of Popular Culture*, 17 no. 2 (1983): 51–60.

readership including *Ebony* and *Jet* became the sites during the 1960s where authors who reached a broad segment of the public engaged in similar rhetoric. Collectively, these sources in which soul music is treated as an expressive arm of the Black Power Movement offered a political and sociological interpretation usually represented by a handful of famous recordings.<sup>85</sup> The positions expressed by these authors, however, do not account within the soul music narrative and its broader relationship to black America for the white, Southern musicians who helped create the music.

In a newly emerging field called Black Power Studies, historians including Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar and Peniel E. Joseph have begun to reassess the connection between the Civil Rights and Black Power movements.<sup>86</sup> The critical reevaluations provide nuanced interpretation of these historical periods and reveal what Joseph called a “complex mosaic rather than mutually exclusive and antagonistic movements.”<sup>87</sup> The perceptions by Ogbar and Joseph broaden the line of sight into this multifaceted period of American history that includes the complexities of race and musical meaning.

Historian Karl Hagstrom Miller uncovers the constructed associations between Southern music and race during the 1880s and the 1920s.<sup>88</sup> Through a process Miller terms

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<sup>85</sup>Historian Brian Ward is critical of Rochelle Larkin, Portia Maultsby, and the notion that soul music and musicians acted as cultural heralds. See Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Ward states, “The relative lack of artistic or political engagement with the early civil rights movement by most Rhythm and Blues singers makes rather a nonsense of casual claims that they were the philosophers or messengers of the Movement, community leaders who helped to create, shape and direct black protest in concrete ways,” 14. Ward, in his criticism, singles out Maultsby, see footnote on page 455.

<sup>86</sup>Peniel E. Joseph, ed., *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006); Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

<sup>87</sup>Joseph, *The Black Power Movement*, 8.

<sup>88</sup>Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

“segregating sound,” a myriad of cultural forces helped to classify Southern music on the basis of race. Miller demonstrates that in the not-so-distant past both black and white musicians in the South listened to and performed the same styles of music. Thus, his work helps to erode the hypothesized racial foundations that have distorted the history of Southern music in general and soul music in particular.

The South represents the crucible for three of America’s most significant cultural contributions: blues, country, and rock ‘n’ roll. Recently authors have begun to explore the socio-cultural causes and effects of rock ‘n’ roll and their impact upon the South.<sup>89</sup> As historian Pete Daniel noted, “During the middle decades of the twentieth century, an unlikely renaissance swept through southern society. Black and white musicians were part of a vibrant cultural exchange that produced jazz, blues, country, gospel, rhythm and blues, rock ‘n’ roll, and soul music.”<sup>90</sup> From this cultural exchange emerged the individuals responsible for the creation of the Muscle Shoals music industry and the dissemination of a musical product received by many as “purely” Southern.

Although Southern soul had its origins in Memphis, Muscle Shoals, and other locations, Northern-based record labels such as Atlantic Records ran the primary distribution networks for these products. This raises several questions for scholars about the notions of place and region, and their relationship to literal, physical locations. The first is how regional

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<sup>89</sup>Mark Kemp, *Dixie Lullaby: A Story of Music, Race, and New Beginnings in a New South* (New York: Free Press, 2004); Michael T. Bertrand, *Race, Rock, and Elvis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Robert C. Kloosterman, and Chris Quispel, “Not just the Same Old show on My Radio: An Analysis of the Role of Radio in the Diffusion of Black Music among Whites in the South of the United States of America, 1920 to 1960,” *Popular Music* 9, no. 2, (1990): 151-164.

<sup>90</sup>Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 122.

identity became an abstract “state of mind.”<sup>91</sup> Historian Jack Kirby first addressed what he called “Media-made Dixie” and the way in which historians, authors, playwrights, filmmakers, and musicians portrayed one image of the South for national consumption during the twentieth century.<sup>92</sup> In her 2011 monograph, historian Karen Cox builds on Kirby’s work by investigating the same phenomenon during the period from the 1890s through the 1940s.<sup>93</sup> Peering through the lens first crafted by Kirby and Cox, I examine the relationship of Northern-based record labels to Southern soul in general and the Muscle Shoals music industry in particular, which proposes the continuation of a long and complicated history.

Incorporating the work of musical geographers John Connell, Chris Gibson, and social anthropologist Sara Cohen, this dissertation investigates Muscle Shoals as a music scene and queries how the recordings made there came to represent an idealized South.<sup>94</sup> Connell and Gibson seek how notions of musical authenticity are bound within identities and place: “Regions of dynamism and creativity, places perceived to be the origins of novel sounds, become credible as sites of innovation, and subsequently become authentic, as they are increasingly depicted in media and imaginations in relation to music.”<sup>95</sup> Cohen, researching the Liverpool Sound stated, “The linking of particular artists with particular

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<sup>91</sup>In a 2009 article, Joshua Guthman included The Band, originally from Canada, on his list of top ten Southern Rockers. His justification was simple, “The South ‘tis but a state of mind.” See Joshua Guthman, “Top Ten: Southern Rockers” *Southern Cultures* (Fall 2009): 143. The Band placed third on the list, bested by the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section, and ultimately Elvis Presley.

<sup>92</sup>Jack Kirby, *Media-made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

<sup>93</sup>Karen L Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

<sup>94</sup>John Connell, and Chris Gibson, eds., *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity, and Place* (London: Routledge, 2003); Sara Cohen, “Identity, Place and the ‘Liverpool Sound,’” In *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 117.

<sup>95</sup>Connell, *Sound Tracks*, 44.

places identifies them with roots and presents them as people embodying artistic integrity and honesty, rather than glitzy stars representing an unreal world of glamour, commerce and marketing strategies.”<sup>96</sup> Many people within the popular music industry and the public received the local Alabama musicians and the sounds they created as continuing the lineage of an idealized Southern musical purity. What I call the “Muscle Shoals mystique” developed through hit recordings produced in and feature stories written about Muscle Shoals for newspapers and magazines during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The transformation of Muscle Shoals from a site associated with soul music to a site known for producing a characteristic sound desired in a broad range of musical genres becomes central to this dissertation. Therefore, the work of Connell, Gibson, Cohen, and others provide a methodological framework for interpreting the industry and public reception of music created in Muscle Shoals.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION**

The structure of the dissertation will follow the four themes laid out above: Analysis of the Muscle Shoals sound; Studio musicians at work in Muscle Shoals; Soul music recorded in Muscle Shoals and the relationship of that music with black America during the 1960s; and Music recorded in Muscle Shoals and the continuation of a Southern musical legacy.

The first chapter, “A Shot of Rhythm and Blues: Analyzing the Muscle Shoals Sound,” examines over seventy representative recordings, focusing on instrumentation and musical characteristics such as groove to demonstrate that there is a musical and sonically identifiable Muscle Shoals sound. I then assess the public reception of these recordings by interpreting data found on record sales charts and music industry awards.

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<sup>96</sup>Cohen, “Identity, Place and the ‘Liverpool Sound,’” 118.

The second chapter, “You’ve Got To Earn It: Studio Musicians in Muscle Shoals,” illuminates the frequently overlooked role session musicians performed during the recording process in Muscle Shoals by foregrounding their personal musical journeys and contributions. This chapter relies primarily on interviews I conducted with members of the MSRS, other session musicians, and industry personnel who worked in the Shoals, as well as archival sources.

Expanding upon the personal narratives established in the second chapter, “I’ll Take You There: Black and White Muscle Shoals Soul,” the third chapter, problematizes the often narrowly-focused associations between race and ethnicity and soul music by providing a close reading of the musical and cultural events that led Aretha Franklin to record “I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)” during January 1967 at FAME with the white, Alabama-born musicians.

The fourth chapter, “Land of 1000 Dances: The Muscle Shoals Mystique,” presents a case study of the real and imagined South in relationship to the Muscle Shoals music industry. This last chapter positions the songs recorded in the Shoals during the 1960s and early 1970s within larger cultural contexts that include the history, formation, and promotion of regional identity, which reveals how Muscle Shoals came to represent, for many, the continuation of an imagined South manifested in sound. A close reading of the musical and cultural events that brought Paul Simon to Alabama to record with the MSRS in 1972 provides the necessary framework for this chapter. A brief conclusion that addresses both Muscle Shoals’ slowdown in recording activity during the late 1970s and the regions twenty-first century “revival” follows the fourth chapter.

Ultimately, this dissertation reveals how music recorded in Muscle Shoals significantly impacted popular culture in America. This impact occurred in two distinct ways: first, the sound of tracks recorded in the Shoals initially reflected musical shifts that took place during the late 1950s and early 1960s, but by the end of the '60s, the "Muscle Shoals sound" came to represent one of *the* dominant forces in American popular music. Second, the critical and popular reception of tracks produced in the Shoals linked the recordings with both the American public's increasing acceptance during the late 1960s of African-American culture, even though black and white musicians performed on the tracks, and the continuing influence and legacy of Southern music.

## **CHAPTER 1: A SHOT OF RHYTHM AND BLUES: ANALYZING THE MUSCLE SHOALS SOUND**

R&B became so ubiquitous within the American popular music landscape during the mid-1960s that *Billboard* combined the pop and R&B charts into one chart. From November 1963 through January 1965, no difference existed, at least in sales terms, between the two styles to the *Billboard* editors as the magazine tracked R&B and pop recordings side by side.

During the 1960s, R&B and then soul music was an integral part of American popular culture—music or otherwise. Various independent record companies located across the country such as Atlantic in New York City, Motown in Detroit, Stax in Memphis, and King in Cincinnati produced R&B tracks. These companies, along with others, were responsible for stylistic variants that ultimately gave birth to a “Northern” style characterized by the tracks recorded by Motown, and a “Memphis” style as heard on tracks recorded by Stax, who often partnered with Atlantic. The music recorded in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, first at FAME, and then other studios including Norala and Muscle Shoals Sound Studios, became part of a broader sonic milieu known as “Southern” soul.

During the relatively short history of the modern recording industry in America, cities and regions throughout the country developed “sounds” that were closely associated with their locales. Across the country in the late 1950s and early 1960s, various regional “sounds” sprung up in an attempt to differentiate one from another. For example, the predominant description for mid-century country music became the “Nashville sound.” The “Bakersfield sound,” an alternative to the country-pop sound produced in the South, took root in

California. Record producer Phil Spector described the sonic signature he crafted in California that often featured a dozen or more backing musicians as the “Wall of Sound.” The Motown record label, home of the “Motown sound,” also used the marketing term “the Sound of Young America,” a phrase the company trademarked, to describe their R&B records produced in Detroit. Several sounds developed in the South: Stax records, a direct competitor of Motown, became known for the “Stax sound” or the more general descriptor, the “Memphis sound”; the phrase “Muscle Shoals sound,” first used in 1969, described the tracks produced in northwest Alabama.

This chapter closely examines over seventy representative recordings made in Muscle Shoals between the years 1962 through 1973, and proposes that there is a tangible set of musical and sonic properties that characterize a Muscle Shoals sound, which can be readily identified in the tracks themselves. The “Muscle Shoals sound” is constructed from two main components: 1) a sound aesthetic that primarily relied on the use of echo to create a multi-dimensional sonic environment that included over a dozen instrumentalists and vocalists, and 2) musical grooves built upon closely aligned rhythmic patterns. The budding “Muscle Shoals sound” initially borrowed from musical sources that included country recordings produced in Nashville and R&B tracks made in New York, but by the mid-1960s this sound sat firmly within a “Southern” R&B aesthetic. Despite the frequent use of two guitarists, two keyboardists, a drummer, a bass player, a horn section, and backing vocalists, tracks recorded in the Shoals retained a sparse sonic texture commonly associated with Southern soul. The use of backing vocalists *and* a horn section separated tracks recorded in the Shoals from tracks recorded by Stax in Memphis. Several other musical characteristics differentiated the “Muscle Shoals sound” from R&B or soul tracks recorded in other locations; tracks produced

at FAME or MSS were, on average, slower in tempo, and primarily utilized standard song forms such as AABA or verse-chorus structures over the increasing prevalence of cyclic form for R&B tracks, popularized by James Brown and others. All of these sonic and musical elements combined to form a unique branch of Southern soul known as the “Muscle Shoals sound.”

Starting with the 1966 release of “When a Man Loves a Woman,” tracks recorded in the Shoals consistently appeared on the *Billboard* and *Cash Box* R&B and pop sales charts. Quite a few of these tracks also garnered music industry recognition represented by Gold record status as well as Grammy nominations and awards. Throughout the late 1960s and continuing into the 1970s, the Muscle Shoals music industry produced numerous hit tracks that regularly charted in the top 20 while also winning awards. The chart positions of these tracks along with industry-related awards further demonstrate the impact Muscle Shoals’ music industry had upon American popular music.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The “Sound” and “Groove” sections examine many tracks in detail, and address specific sonic and musical characteristics inherent in the “Muscle Shoals sound.” I further divide the “Sound” section into subsections that explore the origins of the phrase “Muscle Shoals sound”; how Rick Hall and his musicians constructed that sound; the recording equipment used at FAME, Norala, and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio; and a musical exegesis into four areas: instrumentation, repertoire, form, and tempo, keys and time. The “Groove” section presents detailed musical analysis of select tracks in order to highlight this important element of the “Muscle Shoals sound.” The “Charts & Awards” section synthesizes data from industry magazines *Billboard* and *Cash Box*,

Grammy nominations and awards, and certified Gold Record status to examine the mid-to-late 1960s reception of the seventy plus recordings.

There is no discography for the thousands of tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals. Unlike the Motown and Stax labels that employed multiple in-house producers and many staff songwriters, which regularly released tracks by their own artists, the music industry in Muscle Shoals primarily operated as a “for hire” business.<sup>1</sup> Any record label, musician, or producer could rent FAME, Muscle Shoals Sound, or one of the other recording studios located in the area, and hire musicians to record on the tracks. Information obtained in personal interviews and the relatively few print sources on Muscle Shoals first alerted me to many of the tracks considered for analysis.<sup>2</sup> After compiling the initial list, I selected 73 tracks for analysis, which form the core “texts” for this chapter, based on their position on the *Billboard* and *Cash Box* R&B or pop music charts, their certified gold status by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), and nominations for Grammy Awards.<sup>3</sup> Each of the 73 tracks appeared on the top twenty in either the *Billboard* or *Cash Box* (usually both) R&B or pop chart (sometimes both) for at least one week between 1962 and 1973 (Table 1.1).

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<sup>1</sup>Rick Hall operated his own label, FAME, which released a number of records when other companies would not release the tracks. Muscle Shoals Sound also operated a short-lived vanity label.

<sup>2</sup>See Sebastian Danchin, *Muscle Shoals: Capitale Secrète du Rock et de la Soul* (Boulonge–Billancourt: Autour du Livre, 2007); Michel Ruppli, *Atlantic Records: A Discography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); Bob McGrath, *The Soul Discography* (West Vancouver, BC: Eyeball Productions, 2012).

<sup>3</sup>The discography I have compiled to draw information from for the basis of this is by no means complete.

Artist	Song Title	Year	1st Date on Billboard Chart	Billboard R&B	Billboard Pop	Cash Box R&B	Cash Box Pop	Label
Arthur Alexander	You Better Move On	1962	2/24/62		24	13	27	Dot 16309
Tommy Roe	Everybody	1963	10/12/63		3		5	ABC- Paramount 10478
<b>The Tams</b>	<b>What Kind of Fool</b>	1963	12/14/63	9	9	<i>1 (3 wks)</i>	9	ABC- Paramount 10502
Jimmy Hughes	Steal Away	1964	6/20/64		17	2	12	Fame 6401
<b>Joe Tex</b>	<b>Hold What You've Got</b>	1964	12/19/64	2 (1 wk)	5	<i>1 (2 wks)</i>	5	Dial 4001
Joe Simon	Let's Do It Over	1965	8/21/65	13		6		Vee-Jay 694
Bobby Moore	Searching for My Love	1966	3/5/66	7	27	7	25	Checker 1129
<b>Percy Sledge</b>	<b>When A Man Loves A Woman</b>	1966	4/16/66	<i>1 (4 wks)</i>	<i>1 (2 wks)</i>	<i>1 (5 wks)</i>	<i>1</i>	Atlantic 2326
Jimmy Hughes	Neighbor, Neighbor	1966	5/28/66	4	65	6	54	Fame 1003
Percy Sledge	Warm and Tender Love	1966	7/30/66	5	17	2	16	Atlantic 2342
<b>Wilson Pickett</b>	<b>Land of 1000 Dances</b>	1966	8/6/66	<i>1 (1 wk)</i>	6	2 (2 wks)	9	Atlantic 2348
<b>James &amp; Bobby Purify</b>	<b>I'm Your Puppet</b>	1966	9/24/66	5	6	<i>1 (2 wks)</i>		Bell 648
Percy Sledge	It Tears Me Up	1966	11/5/66	7	20	11	14	Atlantic 2358
Wilson Pickett	Mustang Sally	1966	12/3/66	6	23	3	16	Atlantic 2365
Jimmy Hughes	Why Not Tonight	1967	2/11/67	5	90	20	82	FAME 1011
Wilson Pickett	Everybody Needs Somebody to Love	1967	2/18/67	19	29	10	40	Atlantic 2381
<b>Aretha Franklin</b>	<b>I Never Loved A Man (The Way I Love You)</b>	1967	3/11/67	<i>1 (7 wks)</i>	9	<i>1 (7 wks)</i>	10	Atlantic 2386
<b>Arthur Conley</b>	<b>Sweet Soul Music</b>	1967	3/11/67	2 (5 wks)	2 (1 wks)	<i>1</i>	4	Atco 6463
Wilson Pickett	I Found a Love—Pt. 1	1967	4/8/67	6		14	38	Atlantic 2394
Percy Sledge	Out of Left Field	1967	4/15/67	25	59	10	53	Atlantic 2396
Oscar Toney, Jr.	For Your Precious Love	1967	5/27/67	4		<i>1</i>	28	Bell 672
Wilson Pickett	Soul Dance Number Three	1967	6/24/67	10	55	29	87	Atlantic 2412
Arthur Conley	Shake, Rattle, & Roll	1967	7/1/67	20	31	18	47	Atco 6494
<b>Wilson Pickett</b>	<b>Funky Broadway</b>	1967	8/12/67	<i>1 (1 wk)</i>	8	<i>1 (2 wks)</i>	10	Atlantic 2430
Laura Lee	Dirty Man	1967	9/16/67	13	68	4	55	Chess 2013
Etta James	Tell Mama	1967	11/18/67	10	23	2 (3 wks)	27	Cadet 5578
Laura Lee	Uptight, Good Man	1967	12/30/67	16	93	21	90	Chess 2030
Clarence Carter	Looking For A Fox	1968	1/20/68	20	62	23	91	Atlantic 2461
Etta James	Security	1968	3/9/68	11	35	13	37	Cadet 5594
Percy Sledge	Take Time to Know Her	1968	3/30/68	6	11	2 (3 wks)	13	Atlantic 2490
<b>Clarence Carter</b>	<b>Slip Away</b>	1968	7/6/68	2 (2 wks)	6	<b>1</b>	11	Atlantic 2508

Clarence Carter	Too Weak To Fight	1968	11/16/68	3	13	3	13	Atlantic 2569
Wilson Pickett	Hey Jude	1969	1/4/69	13	23	12	20	Atlantic 2591
Clarence Carter	Snatching It Back	1969	3/8/69	4	31	8	17	Atlantic 2605
Candi Staton	I'd Rather Be An Old Man's Sweetheart	1969	6/14/69	9	46	9	43	Fame 1456
Clarence Carter	The Feeling Is Right	1969	7/5/69	9	65	16	39	Atlantic 2642
Clarence Carter	Doin' Our Thing	1969	10/4/69	9	46	6	52	Atlantic 2660
R.B. Greaves	Take A Letter Maria	1969	10/18/69		2 (1 wks)	7	3	Atco 6714
Candi Staton	I'm Just A Prisoner	1969	1/3/70	13	124	10	73	Fame 1460
Clarence Carter	I Can't Leave Your Love Alone	1970	4/25/70	6	42	8	49	Atlantic 2726
Candi Staton	Sweet Feeling	1970	5/9/70	5	60	10	44	Fame 1466
Paul Kelly	Stealing in the Name of the Lord	1970	6/20/70	14	49	5	54	Happy Tiger 541
<b>Clarence Carter</b>	<b>Patches</b>	1970	7/25/70	2 (1 wk)	4	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	Atlantic 2748
Candi Staton	Stand By Your Man	1970	8/29/70	4	24	2 (2 wks)	21	Fame 1472
Clarence Carter	It's All In Your Mind	1970	11/21/70	13	51	8	39	Atlantic 2774
Candi Staton	He Called Me Baby	1971	1/2/71	9	52	8	48	Fame 1476
<b>The Osmonds</b>	<b>One Bad Apple</b>	1971	1/2/71		<b>1 (5 wks)</b>		<b>1(3 wks)</b>	MGM 14193
The Staple Singers	Heavy Makes You Happy	1971	2/6/71	6		7	24	Stax 0083
Candi Staton	Mr. And Mrs. Untrue	1971	4/17/71	20	109	14	63	Fame 1478
<b>Wilson Pickett</b>	<b>Don't Knock My Love</b>	1971	5/1/71	<b>1 (1 wk)</b>	13	2 (2 wks)	7	Atlantic 2797
Clarence Carter	The Court Room	1971	5/8/71	12	61	21	49	Atlantic 2801
Jackie Moore	Sometimes It's Got to Rain	1971	5/22/71	19		40	91	Atlantic 2798
Wilson Pickett	Call My Name, I'll Be There	1971	8/28/71	10	52	17	41	Atlantic 2824
The Staple Singers	Respect Yourself	1971	10/9/71	2	12	4	10	Stax 0104
Bobby Womack	That's the Way I Feel About 'Cha	1971	12/4/71	2 (2 wks)		2	22	United Artists 50816
Wilson Pickett	Fire and Water	1972	1/1/72	2 (2 wks)	24	3	17	Atlantic 2852
<b>The Staple Singers</b>	<b>I'll Take You There</b>	1972	4/1/72	<b>1 (4 wks)</b>	<b>1 (1 wk)</b>	<b>1 (3 wks)</b>	<b>1 (2 wks)</b>	Stax 0125
<b>Luthar Ingram</b>	<b>If Loving You Is Wrong</b>	1972	6/3/72	<b>1 (4 wks)</b>	3 (2 wks)	2	3	KoKo 2111
Candi Staton	In the Ghetto	1972	6/24/72	12	48	11	36	Fame 91000
<b>Mac Davis</b>	<b>Baby Don't Get Hooked On Me</b>	1972	7/1/72		<b>1 (3 wks)</b>		<b>1</b>	Columbia 45618
Mel & Tim	Starting All Over Again	1972	7/8/72	4	19	7	18	Stax 0127
Leon Russell	Tight Rope	1972	8/26/72		11		10	Shelter 7325
Candi Staton	Do It In The Name of Love	1972	11/18/72	17	63	9	63	Fame 91009
Bobby Womack	Harry Hippie	1972	12/16/72	8			25	United Artists 50946

<b>The Dells</b>	<b>Give Your Baby A Standing Ovation</b>	1973	4/14/73	3	34	<b>1</b>	20	Cadet 5696
Paul Simon	Kodachrome	1973	5/19/73		2 (2 wks)		2	Columbia 45859
Clarence Carter	Sixty Minute Man	1973	6/16/73	17	65	12	51	Fame 250
<b>Johnnie Taylor</b>	<b>I Believe in You</b>	1973	6/23/73	<b>1 (2 wks)</b>	11	<b>1 (3 wks)</b>	5	Stax 0161
Don Covay	I Was Checkin' Out	1973	6/30/73	6	29	2	28	Mercury 73385
<b>Paul Simon</b>	<b>Loves Me Like A Rock</b>	1973	8/4/73		2 (1 wks)		<b>1</b>	Columbia 45907
Millie Jackson	Hurts So Good	1973	8/11/73	3	24	3	18	Spring 139
<b>The Staple Singers</b>	<b>If You're Ready</b>	1973	10/20/73	<b>1 (3 wks)</b>	9	<b>1 (2 wks)</b>	9	Stax 0179
Clarence Carter	I'm The Midnight Special	1973	11/10/73	15	101	21	87	Fame 330

**Table 1.1** – 73 tracks analyzed for this chapter.<sup>4</sup> Items in bold represent tracks that reached the number one position on either the *Billboard* or *Cash Box* R&B or pop charts.

## SOUND

This section examines the development and realization of the sonic signifiers that became known as the “Muscle Shoals sound.” Initially Rick Hall liberally utilized sonic elements drawn from country music production techniques found in Nashville while also integrating musical characteristics heard on R&B recordings made by Atlantic Records in New York and Stax Records in Memphis. With the chart success of Jimmy Hughes’ “Steal Away” in 1964, Hall demonstrated that his recording and production techniques could achieve results on a national level. As the 1960s progressed and the tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals became firmly entrenched in an R&B musical aesthetic, Hall stripped away most of the pop sounds that he had borrowed from Nashville. By the mid-1960s, Hall consistently released tracks that featured what I would characterize as the mature “Muscle Shoals sound.”

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<sup>4</sup>*Billboard* and *Cash Box* data, and record label information taken from: Joel Whitburn, *The Billboard Book of Top 40 Hits* (New York: Billboard Publications, 1983); Joel Whitburn *Presents the Billboard Hot 100 Charts: The Sixties* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research Inc., 1990); Joel Whitburn *Presents Top R & B Singles, 1942–1999* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research Inc., 2000); George Albert, *The Cash Box Black Contemporary Singles Charts, 1960–1984* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1986).

### ***ORIGINS OF THE PHRASE “MUSCLE SHOALS SOUND”***

It is difficult to trace the exact origins of the phrase “Muscle Shoals sound.” The first attributed use of the phrase is not likely the first time someone uttered those words precisely. Ownership of the phrase itself became a contentious issue between FAME and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, rival studios in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Interviews and contemporaneous print sources such as the Shoals area newspaper, *Florence Times–Times Daily*, as well as *Billboard* and *Newsweek* provide necessary background information to help determine the phrases’ origin.

The widespread use of the phrase “Muscle Shoals sound” beginning in 1969 helped to promote the recording industry located in northwest Alabama. In a 2011 interview, bassist David Hood told me:

Before we left [FAME], nobody called it “the Muscle Shoals sound.” We were the FAME Gang when we were here. But when we got our place, we were trying to think of a name for our studio. And as a joke I said what about Muscle Shoals Sound? Because [our] studio is [located] in Sheffield...you had to live here to know that there was a difference between Sheffield and Muscle Shoals...I made that suggestion, and we all laughed, and then let it go. But the next day, we got back together and said that’s not a bad idea. And so we named our studio that.<sup>5</sup>

Hood, along with MSRS guitarist Jimmy Johnson and drummer Roger Hawkins, contend that the naming of their studio in 1969 gave birth to the phrase “Muscle Shoals sound.” Hawkins was quoted in 1974 newspaper article, “The studio was named Muscle Shoals Sound because we felt we had played a large part in creating the sound that had become known as the Muscle Shoals Sound.”<sup>6</sup> Several years later Johnson noted, “[Hall] never used Muscle Shoals as a geographic thing; we did that. We put Muscle Shoals on the map when we named our

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<sup>5</sup>David Hood interview with the author, 24 May 2011.

<sup>6</sup>Dick Cooper, “Shoals Music,” *Florence Times–Tri-Cities Daily*, 30 June 1974, 40.

studio. The identifying sound came with us.”<sup>7</sup> The ownership claims by Hood, Johnson, and Hawkins seem plausible as the phrase “Muscle Shoals sound” does not appear in print before 1969. The naming of their studio quickly branded all of the music recorded in Muscle Shoals with an identifiable catchphrase.

The first printed use of those three words to describe a distinguishable sound appeared in a May 17, 1969 article from *Billboard*.<sup>8</sup> “Cap. Fete for Hall, Singer” detailed the joint release of a single by Candi Staton by Capitol records and the FAME label. Characterizing Staton the author remarked, “Candi exemplifies the new Muscle Shoals sound, which is not really new, according to Hall. He says this because he’s been working it out with top recording stars in the Muscle Shoals studios for over a decade of recordings that spawned seven gold singles platters...” The author went on to state, “What might be called the new Shoals Soul sound is carving out its own hall of fame in the Nashville-Memphis area, and competing with the north’s Detroit soul sound.” It is clear from the previous sentence that in 1969 at least three regional “sounds”—Memphis, Detroit, and Muscle Shoals—were vying for a share of the broader R&B and soul music market. *Newsweek* ran an article on the Muscle Shoals music industry several months later titled “Muscling In” during the week of September 15, 1969 (examined in further detail in chapter 4). The unnamed author wrote, “Rick Hall described the Muscle Shoals Sound as, ‘funky, hard, gutty, down to earth. It’s warm and heartfelt with a dance beat. No gimmicks or sound tricks.’”<sup>9</sup>

In 1970 FAME and the newly formed Muscle Shoals Sound Studio (MSS) waged a battle in the pages of *Billboard* over claims to rightful ownership of the phrase “Muscle

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<sup>7</sup>Fuqua, *Stars Fell* 61-62.

<sup>8</sup>“Cap. Fete for Hall, Singer,” *Billboard*, 17 May 1969, 6.

<sup>9</sup>*Newsweek*, “Muscling In,” 15 September 1969, 90.

Shoals sound.” On September 26, 1970, MSS ran a full-page ad that declared, “They chose the name Muscle Shoals Sound because they were instrumental in creating the unique sound.”<sup>10</sup> In a series of full-page ads that Hall ran in *Billboard* during March and April 1971, he described FAME as “the original home of the Muscle Shoals sound.”<sup>11</sup> As early as 1970, the newly christened “Muscle Shoals sound” had already split into its component parts: the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section, owners of Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, claimed ownership of the “sound” element, while Rick Hall and FAME asserted ownership of the “sounds” physical location and birthplace.

By the time Hall ran his five *Billboard* ads in 1971, the phrase “Muscle Shoals sound” had already become part of the music industry and public vernacular. Regardless of who coined the phrase, either it carried with it an association that described certain musical characteristics imbedded within tracks as the owners of MSS claimed, or a storied history of recording practices as Hall alluded to. Nonetheless, after 1969 the phrase and the idea of a “Muscle Shoals sound” meant something.

### ***CONSTRUCTING THE MUSCLE SHOALS SOUND***

Rick Hall, as the principle architect for what became known as the “Muscle Shoals sound,” literally designed and constructed the studio where he realized his production concepts on the closest model: the recording studios and production techniques found in Nashville. For the second building block in the construction of the nascent “Muscle Shoals sound,” Hall drew from the early 1960s R&B recordings made by the New York-based Atlantic Records. After achieving some early recording successes by 1963, particularly in R&B, Hall incorporated

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<sup>10</sup>*Billboard*, 26 September 1970, 72.

<sup>11</sup>*Billboard*, 20 March 1971, 25. Hall placed similar ads that all used the phrase, “FAME recording is the original home of the Muscle Shoals sound,” in the April 3, 10, 17, 24, 1971 issues of *Billboard*.

production techniques that originated from Memphis and Stax, a city and label known for the R&B tracks produced there, into his toolkit of sonic resources.

Hall's connection to Nashville and the music industry housed there pre-dates his attempts at record production in Muscle Shoals. A 1967 *Billboard* tribute to country music producer and guitar wizard Chet Atkins described Hall's initial connection to one of the masterminds behind the "Nashville sound:"

Hall used to drive to Nashville from where he lived in Muscle Shoals, Ala., sleeping all night in a car, then spruce up the next day in a filling station to look presentable when he took a song to Atkins. One of those early songs Chet recorded, which FAME Published, was "Middleage Teenager," the flip side of the [April 1959] "On Top of Old Smokey" record by Homer and Jethro... One of the next FAME tunes Atkins used was "Sweet 'n' Innocent," recorded [in 1958] by Roy Orbison on RCA Victor, the first session he cut for Sun Records. [Billy] Sherrill and Hall wrote it... When [Hall] built his new studio in the Muscle Shoals area, Atkins was one of the people who advised him on what and how to do it... Atkins, whose advice was instrumental in creating the especial "sound" for which Hall's studio is noted, has never been inside the place.<sup>12</sup>

When Hall constructed FAME studios on Avalon Avenue in Muscle Shoals, he incorporated design aspects from several Nashville studios including the echo chamber from RCA's studio, which provided the "especial 'sound'" mentioned in the *Billboard* article.<sup>13</sup> In 2011 Hall recalled, "We followed the dimensions that Owen Bradley gave me, for the CBS studio in Nashville. We used that as the model, but I didn't know for sure how it would come out. The initial board was built by a local engineer to my specifications. Everything was mono to start off."<sup>14</sup> It is likely that Hall consulted with many producers, and visited several Nashville

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<sup>12</sup>Claude Hall, "Fountain Head of the Nashville Sound," *Billboard*, 3 June 1967, CA-13.

<sup>13</sup>Although the author does not use the phrase "Muscle Shoals sound," this *Billboard* article does indicate that by 1967 the music industry (and possibly the public, too) recognized that tracks recorded at FAME had distinguishable sonic characteristics.

<sup>14</sup>Alec Palao, "The Sound of Fame" notes to *The Fame Studios Story: 1961–1973* (ACE Records, Kentbox 12, 2011), 16.

studios to gather technical and room specifications before he constructed his studio in Muscle Shoals. Bassist David Hood also commented on the Nashville and Muscle Shoals connection stating,

The FAME Studio, Studio A, was patterned after RCA Victor, the studio in Nashville. Rick had gone up there and gotten measurements, dimensions of the building, because that was such a successful studio, and at the time Rick was aspiring to get work done in Nashville. So when he built that studio he based the dimensions and the echo chamber, which was our live chamber, on what was at the RCA Studio in Nashville.<sup>15</sup>

During Hall's frequent trips to Nashville in the mid-to-late 1950s he became aware of particular tracks produced there, especially those produced by Atkins, whom he clearly knew. Each of the two Hall-published or written tracks exhibit sonic characteristics associated with Atkins and the "Nashville sound" such as the liberal use of echo and saccharine-sounding backing vocals. These Atkins-produced tracks served as sonic templates for the fledgling Muscle Shoals music mogul when Hall began his work with Arthur Alexander in late 1961. The success of RCA's and Atkins's "Nashville sound" recordings, as well as the successes of other country music producers, had a profound influence on Hall's own production ideas.

In brief, the term "Nashville sound" referred to a period beginning in the late 1950s lasting up through the 1960s when producers such as Chet Atkins, Owen Bradley, and Don Law introduced elements drawn from pop music into country music.<sup>16</sup> Each of these producers developed the "sound" of the "Nashville sound" by using a small group of influential session musicians that included guitarists Hank Garland and Grady Martin,

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<sup>15</sup>Carl Wiser and Nicholas Tozier, "Aretha to Black Keys: The Muscle Shoals Story," [http://www.songfacts.com/blog/writing/aretha\\_to\\_the\\_black\\_keys\\_the\\_muscle\\_shoals\\_story/](http://www.songfacts.com/blog/writing/aretha_to_the_black_keys_the_muscle_shoals_story/), accessed 19 June 2012.

<sup>16</sup>See Jensen, *The Nashville Sound*, 76-83.

pianists Floyd Cramer and Hargus “Pig” Robbins, bassist Bob Moore, and two background vocal groups: the Anita Kerr Singers or the Jordanaires. In this regard, the term “Nashville sound” described a particular method to produce a country music track, and not a particular sound. For many critics, fans, and musicians, the term “Nashville sound” described recordings that were lush and complex. Historian Joli Jensen defined the term stating, “The sound was not rural or corny or amateur. The Nashville Sound was, without a doubt, uptown. The tinkling piano, the bank of violins, the smooth, rich vocals offered sophisticated and subtle backgrounds for the vocal ‘stylists’ who were rendering country material.”<sup>17</sup>

Rick Hall, FAME studios, and Muscle Shoals became known during the 1960s for R&B and not country.<sup>18</sup> I do not contend that a direct stylistic relationship existed between Nashville country music and Muscle Shoals R&B. While many authors have addressed the similarities between country and soul music based on geography (Muscle Shoals is approximately 125 miles south of Nashville), none have made any direct connections, musical or otherwise.<sup>19</sup> There is, however, a striking similarity, especially concerning the overall sound aesthetic of Hall’s early productions, between the tracks Hall produced in Muscle Shoals and the sounds that emanated out of early 1960s Nashville. As Hall assembled a mixture of sonic characteristics for his work starting with Arthur Alexander, tracks

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<sup>17</sup>Jensen, *Nashville Sound*, 134.

<sup>18</sup>From the mid-1970s through the 1980s, Hall produced numerous hits for country acts such as Shenandoah, Alabama, and others.

<sup>19</sup>See Hoskyns, *Say It One Time for the Broken Hearted* and Guralnick *Sweet Soul Music*. Rob Bowman, in his Stax analysis states, “It is often claimed that soul music and the ‘Stax sound’ are in one way or another influenced by country music, but how this is manifested is addressed nowhere in the literature. I contend that one way a country and western influence comes into play is through these harmonized fills on the high end of the guitar. One can hear examples of this type of playing using diads at the interval of a sixth in any number of Chet Atkins or Jerry Reed sessions,” see “The Stax Sound,” 303.

recorded in Nashville such as Faron Young's "Hello Walls" from 1961 that incorporated lush backing vocals drenched in echo likely influenced his productions.<sup>20</sup>

It is also not surprising that "You Better Move On" sounds remarkably similar to tracks cut during and around 1961 by Atlantic Records, the leading R&B label at that time. The similarity in production between Alexander's 1962 track and The Drifters 1960 number one hit for Atlantic "Save the Last Dance For Me" is uncanny. The sound and production of the 1961 number one hit "Stand By Me" by Ben E. King influenced Hall as well. Hall told Alexander's biographer, "It was my conception that ["You Better Move On"] should have a groove similar to 'Stand By Me,' which was a big record at the time. But I didn't want to cop it to the point where people would recognize it was a cop...So we used the bass line and modified it just a little bit..."<sup>21</sup> Recounting the details forty years after the actual recording, it is likely that Hall did not accurately recall which Atlantic hit influenced the production of the Alexander track.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, tracks recorded by Atlantic featured a bass line that utilized rhythms inspired from Latin music (Example 1.1).<sup>22</sup> The Drifters 1959 hit "This Magic Moment," as well as their 1960 track "Save the Last Dance for Me," both incorporate this rhythm performed by an acoustic bass. The bass line heard on Ben E. King's 1960 track "Spanish Harlem" and King's 1961 "Stand By Me" perform variation 1 or 2, respectively, as shown in Example 1.1. Tracks released by Atlantic such as Ruth Brown's 1954 "Oh What a

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<sup>20</sup>Singer Ray Charles achieved tremendous popular and commercial success with his 1962 album *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music*, which blended R&B with elements inspired by the "Nashville sound" such as lush orchestral strings and a large backing chorus.

<sup>21</sup>Younger, *Get A Shot*, 41.

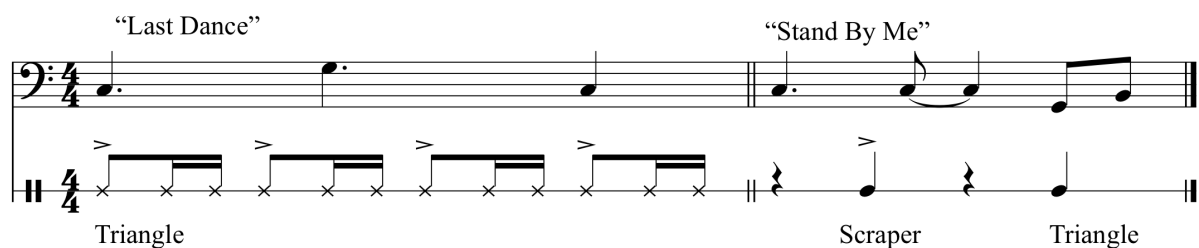
<sup>22</sup>Atlantic's use of rhythms inspired by Latin music is likely due in part from the popularity of the "Mambo craze" during the 1950s.

Dream,” Ivory Joe Hunter’s 1957 “Empty Arms,” and others incorporated variation 3, also known as the *habanera*.



**Example 1.1** – Standard “Atlantic” bass lines, inspired by Latin music.

Closer scrutiny of Alexander’s track reveals, however, that Hall drew musical elements from “Save the Last Dance for Me” and “Stand By Me,” which included copping a “typical” Atlantic bass line. Both “Save the Last Dance for Me” and “Spanish Harlem” included a prominent triangle part as well; “You Better Move On” incorporated a similar rhythmic pattern, also performed on triangle. Contrary to Hall’s claim about only modifying the famous “Stand By Me” bass line for the Alexander track, he actually copped the prominent auxiliary percussion part of the King track (performed by on a Guiro) for inclusion on “You Better Move On” (Example 1.2).



**Example 1.2** – Bass line and auxiliary percussion for two Atlantic tracks.

The scraper performed on beat two during “Stand By Me” provides the “backbeat” for the track. When Hall completed working on “You Better Move On,” he produced a musical composite of tracks previously recorded by Atlantic records (Example 1.3).

♩ = 118

The musical score is arranged in six staves, all in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 118. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Piano:** The top staff features a melodic line with eighth-note runs, each group of four notes beamed together and marked with a breath mark (a curved line with a vertical tick).
- Acoustic Guitar:** The second staff shows a dense, rhythmic accompaniment consisting of continuous eighth-note chords.
- Triangle, doubled by the acoustic guitar and piano:** The third staff, which uses a percussion clef, shows a steady eighth-note pattern marked with 'x' symbols.
- Electric guitar:** The fourth staff contains a series of chords, each marked with a 'z' (for a grace note or similar articulation) and a '7' (for a seventh chord).
- Acoustic bass:** The fifth staff features a simple bass line with dotted half notes.
- Hi-hat (only on beat 2):** The bottom staff, also using a percussion clef, shows a single eighth note on the second beat of each measure, marked with an 'x'.

### Example 1.3 – Opening measures to “You Better Move On”

Just as in “Stand By Me,” the snap of the hi-hat on beat two heard on “You Better Move On” figured prominently and provided the “backbeat” for the track. The crack of the hi-hat, enhanced by the copious use echo, became one of the distinguishing sonic features heard throughout “You Better Move On.”

Hall utilized the specific timbres of individual instruments to help shape the overall form of the track (Figure 1.1). The musical arrangement for “You Better Move On,” therefore, builds over the course of the entire track as Hall introduces new instruments with each section (Table 1.1).

**Key: E      Tempo: c. 118      Meter: 4      Form: AABA**

**Intro** | I | | | ||

**A** | I | I | V | | | | I | | | I<sup>7</sup> | IV | iv |  
| I | | V | | I | V<sup>7</sup> ||

**A** | I | | V | | | | I | | I<sup>7</sup> | I<sup>7</sup> | IV | iv |  
| I | V | I | I<sup>7</sup> ||

**B** | IV | | I | I<sup>7</sup> | IV | | I | I<sup>7</sup> | IV | | I | vi |  
| V/V | | V | | ||

**A** | I | | V | | | | I | | | I<sup>7</sup> | IV | iv |  
| I | V | I | ||

**Outro** |: V | I | V | I | :|

**Figure 1.1** – “You Better Move On” song form. Note the different length for each A section.

Time	Instruments	Form
0:00	Acoustic guitar, acoustic bass, hi-hat	Intro
0:03	Add triangle	
0:08	Add lead vocal	Verse 1
0:47	Add electric guitar, backing vocal	Verse 2
1:18	Add piano	Bridge
1:53	All the above instruments	Verse 3

**Table 1.2** – Additive song form for “You Better Move On”

Hall acknowledged that country music also influenced this type of additive production. In 1986, he told author Barney Hoskyns:

My country background had an influence, because I was quite melodic-thinking, and Hank Williams records, for instance, had a lot of melodic fill on them—the arrangements would answer the vocal. I never believed in records being stock to the extent that the rhythm pattern just went along and you changed the melody without being led there by strings or voices. In other words, we used pick-up notes: I wanted to be led there and not just planted.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Hoskyns, *Say it One Time*, 103.

Despite Hall's appreciation for Hank Williams, the sonic evidence heard on "You Better Move On" points towards more pop-oriented Nashville productions commonly associated with the "Nashville sound" era of country music. Although the quote above does not reference "You Better Move On" directly, that particular track certainly included elements as Hall described. At 1:18 on the recording, as the song moves into the bridge, the piano and background vocals provide a melodic pick-up that "leads" into the new section.

That Hall modeled the arrangement for "You Better Move On" on previously successful tracks was not surprising considering that at that time Atlantic was one of the leading R&B record companies. As bassist Norbert Putnam and others noted, the FAME rhythm section had little experience making up "original" instrumental parts (discussed further in chapter 2). The studio musicians at FAME were performing the current radio and chart hits at fraternity parties and dances on a weekly basis. It is not surprising that they, along with Hall, would turn to those same tracks as exemplars for tracks they would create in the studio. Utilizing specific musical elements drawn from several Atlantic tracks, Hall assured that he did not "cop to the point where people would recognize 'You Better Move On' was a cop." Merging a sonic aesthetic borrowed from Nashville that included the use of echo and smooth backing vocals with a musical "formula" constructed from a design developed by Atlantic records, Hall laid the foundations for what became known as the "Muscle Shoals sound."

"The Muscle Shoals Sound was born when I cut 'Steal Away,'" recalled Hall in 2011. "The chambers sounded so great, with a seven second delay on the echo, everything was just so big sounding, especially on the background [vocal]. It sounded big, wide, huge."<sup>24</sup> The

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<sup>24</sup>Palao, "The Sound of Fame," 16.

instrumentation on “Steal Away” included the lead vocal, the accompanying instruments (electric guitar, electric bass, drum set, electric organ, piano), and backing vocalists. Similar to “You Better Move On,” Hall also made use of an additive arrangement for “Steal Away” (Table 1.3). In using echo to varying degrees on each of the three “groups” (the lead vocal, the instruments, and the backing vocals), Hall created a multi-dimensional track. In terms of depth, the track has three distinct sonic layers. The lead vocal sounds nearest to the listener (least echo), followed by the accompanying instruments (a small amount of echo), then the backing vocalists (drenched in echo). Hall described his general approach of creating depth on a track stating, “I also used the echo chambers to get the three dimensions. I usually cut the singer somewhat dry, and then the band a little wetter, and then the horns or backgrounds considerably wetter, so that you had layers, you didn’t just get everything up in front of your face.”<sup>25</sup> A clear example of this three-dimensionality occurs near the end of “Steal Away” at 2:07 when Hughes and the background vocals participate in a call-and-response while singing the vocal refrain. Due to the amount of echo, the background vocals sound as if Hall recorded them in a cavernous environment when compared to the presence of Hughes lead vocal; the accompanying instruments fit neatly between the two vocal “groups” filling in the third sonic level of the track. Despite Hall’s 1969 claim that the “Muscle Shoals sound” did not rely on “gimmicks or sound tricks” as stated in the *Newsweek* profile, the use of echo on these tracks results in a blatant “sound trick” as the added effect manipulates the original sound source.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>26</sup>Considering the year that Hall made his remarks, it is possible that his comment to *Newsweek* is a response to the psychedelic-sounding records produced by bands such as Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, or Jimi Hendrix that clearly relied upon studio technology and “sound gimmicks” such as delay, and stereo panning.

Time	Instruments	Form
0:00	Electric bass, electric rhythm guitar, drums, piano	Intro
0:05	Add lead vocal	Verse 1
0:08	Add electric organ	
0:41	Add solo electric guitar, background vocals	Verse 2
1:11	No backing vocals, piano and organ fills	Bridge
1:41	Add backing vocals	Verse 3
2:06	All of the above	Outro

**Table 1.3** – Additive song form for “Steal Away”

The first verse of “Steal Away” sounds sparse, although it included all of the instruments heard on the track except the background vocals. Hall achieved this sparse sound by having the bass line and bass drum perform a unison rhythmic pattern, and the electric guitar and the snare drum each accent what most listeners would perceive as beats two and four (the meter is 12); see Example 1.4. The tightly knit rhythmic patterns performed by the accompanying musicians align “Steal Away” with musical aesthetics closely associated with Southern soul as heard on tracks recorded at the Stax label in Memphis. Describing the “Stax sound” Rob Bowman noted, “The one overall phrase that best categorizes this music might be that ‘less is more’ [and the] governing aesthetic is quite clearly a sparse, open texture.”<sup>27</sup> Hall continued to produce tracks throughout the 1960s that made effective use of sparse sonic textures.

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<sup>27</sup>Bowman, “The Stax Sound,” 308.

Pno.  $\text{♩} = 62$   
 E. Org.  
 E. Gtr.  
 Bass  
 Dr.  $\text{♩} = 62$

**Example 1.4** – A composite of the “sparse” sounding instrumentation heard on “Steal Away.” Note the rhythmic alignment of the snare drum and the rhythm guitar (indicated only in the first measure), and the bass and bass drum (indicated only in the second measure).

Besides the use of echo, how Hall positioned the musicians in the recording studio also affected the overall sound of this and other tracks. As keyboardist Spooner Oldham recalled, “It seems like the drums were usually in a booth of some sort. But, that’s about it. The guitars were open floor, the piano, organ were open floor. Vocalist, sometimes, was on the floor.”<sup>28</sup> Extant pictures (Figure 1.2) taken during the 1960s clearly show the “open” arrangement of the instrumentalists with little or no separation. Hall utilized the lack of sound baffles or isolation for the individual players to his advantage. “I wanted some ambience, some microphone sound,” recalled Hall, “because then it became a little harder and a little more cutting. It was big, we believed in leakage. Microphone leakage gives you a

<sup>28</sup>Spooner Oldham, interview with the author, 2 June 2011.

perception of depth: you make it 3D. When you hear the piano or the drums leaking in a little, it adds echo, it's an ambient sound.”<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 1.2** – The inside of FAME circa late-1960s, depicting the limited separation between musicians. Note the microphone for a vocalist, located in the center of the photograph. The drum booth is on the left. (Used by permission.)

While the overall sound of “Steal Away” might be the first clear manifestation of what became known as the “Muscle Shoals sound,” the track is a hybrid in terms of musical styles. “Steal Away” is unmistakably an R&B track, but it retains a musical connection to the “Nashville sound” aesthetic with the inclusion of the “syrupy” backing vocalists and the Floyd Cramer-like piano fills. The thin texture, as exemplified by the tightly arranged musical accompaniment, affiliate the track with R&B produced in Memphis.

The 1964 Joe Tex track “Hold What You’ve Got” represents a turning point for the development of the “Muscle Shoals sound” for two reasons. First, the arrangement of the Buddy Killen-produced track, recorded at FAME, included a horn section that replaced the

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<sup>29</sup>Palao, “The Sound of Fame,” 17.

saccharine-sounding backing vocals that Hall preferred.<sup>30</sup> Second, the track peaked at the number one spot on the *Cash Box* “Black Contemporary Singles Chart,” and number two and number five on the *Billboard* R&B and Hot 100 charts respectively, becoming the most successful FAME-recorded track up to that time.<sup>31</sup> The Tex hit also became the first track recorded in Muscle Shoals to receive Gold status by the RIAA.<sup>32</sup> The FAME house band at that time—Norbert Putnam (bass), Jerry Carrigan (drums), David Briggs (piano), and Terry Thompson (guitar)—however, did not perform on this track. Killen described the session that produced “Hold What You’ve Got” in his 1993 autobiography, *By The Seat of My Pants*.

I called Rick Hall, who owned Fame, and set up some studio time. Rick agreed to act as engineer on the session. From Nashville, I took Kelso Herston to play rhythm guitar. Ronnie Wilkens, a Tree writer...went along to play piano. Joe South came up from Atlanta to play guitar...Tex brought his own drummer, Clyde Lee, and his own bass player, whose name escapes me, but whose “licks” I’ll never forget since he never made it through a take without making a mistake...[I said] ‘Kelso, hit me just a straight country G chord.’ In the early 1960s no one would have dared to use the country sound of an open string acoustic guitar on a funky R&B record...I explained to the other players the feeling that I would like to have on the song. We worked on it till almost daylight. It seemed we could never get a decent cut. Finally, we got two takes that were full of mistakes but we were running out of time. I decided that we would do some overdubbing on them... We overdubbed everybody at one time, since these were just the beginning of the stereo days and Fame Studios had not converted. I directed Ronnie to play harmony to an arpeggio that he had played on the original track. I told Kelso to play a second harmony on the acoustic guitar.<sup>33</sup>

Tex also overdubbed his own voice, which provided the vocal harmony. The success of “Hold What You’ve Got,” released on Killen’s Dial label and distributed by Atlantic

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<sup>30</sup>The Tex track includes a self-harmonized lead vocal, but not any backing vocalists performing in a similar fashion that Hall previously produced.

<sup>31</sup>George Albert, *The Cash Box Black Contemporary Singles Charts, 1960-1984* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1986), 491.

<sup>32</sup>See Murrells, *The Book of Golden Discs*, 267.

<sup>33</sup>Killen, *Seat of My Pants*, 163-65. The inclusion of “outside” musicians becomes a significant aspect within the Muscle Shoals production process, a theme further explored in chapter two.

Records, certainly would have given record executives such as Jerry Wexler and possibly others reason to either become aware of FAME for the first time, or give them cause to watch the recorded output from Muscle Shoals more closely. Songs recorded at FAME after this session suggests that Killen's arrangement of the Tex track influenced Hall's future production aesthetic.

Another key characteristic of the "Muscle Shoals sound" is the ability of a track to retain a sparse musical texture while utilizing a rather large number of accompanying musicians. Based on my analysis of the 73 tracks, a typical session recorded in Muscle Shoals would incorporate fourteen musicians, including the lead singer, an electric bass player, two guitar players, two keyboardists, a horn section, and backing vocalists. The use of a horn section and backing vocalists was one of the fundamental differences between tracks produced at FAME and tracks produced at Stax. Tracks recorded at FAME typically utilized both a horn section and backing vocalists; for Stax, the horns replaced the backing vocalists, revealing what Stax historian Rob Bowman characterized as a "preference for sparse textures [that] limit[ed] the use of...background vocalists."<sup>34</sup> By combining elements drawn from country, pop, and R&B, Hall created an Alabama branch of Southern soul that had its own distinguishable sonic and musical characteristics, separate from the other regional R&B production centers such as Stax.

Hall's sonic aesthetic also differed from Motown. Motown's now famous "assembly line" hit making process proved successful as tracks by their artists dominated both the R&B and pop charts.<sup>35</sup> The Motown "sound" first came to life in 1964 when the Supremes released

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<sup>34</sup>Bowman, "The Stax Sound," 291.

<sup>35</sup>For more information see Andrew Flory, "I Hear a Symphony: Making Music at Motown 1959-1979," Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2006, 270.

“Where Did Our Love Go” and “Baby Love;” two consecutively released tracks that reached the number one position on the *Billboard* pop charts. The Motown “sound,” like the Muscle Shoals “sound,” is multifaceted. There is one feature of the Motown “sound,” however, that was instantly recognizable to many fans of R&B. The “Motown beat,” typically anchored by the drummer hitting the snare drum on every beat and often accompanied by auxiliary percussion, became, in the words of music critic Jon Landau, “the key to public identification of the Motown sound.”<sup>36</sup> Throughout much of the 1960s, tracks recorded at Motown featured this exact beat or a variation of it (Example 1.5). As musicologist Robert Fink noted, “by 1965, this pounding beat was recognized by Motown sound engineers as one of the ‘standard Motown sounds,’ the particular calling card of [Holland-Dozier-Holland], Detroit’s most famous producing team.”<sup>37</sup> FAME and the tracks produced by Rick Hall had no such readily identifiable rhythmic signature.



**Example 1.5** – The Motown “beat” features four snare hits per measure. The “x” indicates the closed hi-hat; the next note below is the snare drum; the lowest note on the staff is the bass drum. The introduction to “Uptight” by Stevie Wonder from 1965 provides a clear example of this beat.

A brief comparison of two tracks released within a few months of each other during 1965 reveals the competing R&B production and musical aesthetics between Motown and FAME. “I Can’t Help Myself (Sugar Pie Honey Bunch)” by the Four Tops, released by Motown in May 1965, rested firmly atop the R&B charts from June through August.

<sup>36</sup>John Landau, “A Whiter Shade of Black,” *Crawdaddy!*, September-October 1967, 37.

<sup>37</sup>Robert Fink, “Goal-Directed Soul? Analyzing Rhythmic Teleology in African American Popular Music,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 1 (2011): 201.

Beginning with a repeated instrumental riff performed in perfect rhythmic unison, the recording launched into the signature Motown drumbeat accompanied by tambourine. Bassist James Jamerson repeats the instrumental riff throughout the entirety of the track. A string section enters before the lead vocal, and a vibraphone after Levi Stubbs starts to sing. These instruments, along with the rest of the musical accompaniment, provided multiple counter melodies that drenched the track with a lush sonic texture.

Joe Simon's 1965 track "Let's Do It Over" reflects the influence of the Tex record on Hall. In my opinion, the Simon track embodies the first mature example of the "Muscle Shoals sound" produced by Hall and performed by the FAME house band to appear on the charts. Within the first fifteen seconds of the track, the listener hears nearly all of the sonic signifiers that come to represent the "Muscle Shoals sound." The track utilizes eleven musicians, yet retains a decidedly sparse texture. The instrumentation includes two electric guitars, electric bass, drum set, piano, electric organ, horn section (tenor sax, baritone sax, trumpet), and lead vocalist. Simon's track includes backing vocalists, but only two male voices instead of a mixed-gender chorus. In addition, throughout the track the two backing vocalists perform a call-and-response with Simon while they all sing the words "let's do it over." This is a decidedly different use of backing vocalists than previously heard on Hall's productions; Hall's productions often featured a mixed-gender chorus adding wordless vocal accompaniment to a track. The opening guitar riff is answered by a horn section and backing vocalists. The "splashy" sound of the hi-hat accents the back beat. An electric organ playing sustained chords and a piano performing triplet figures support Simon's lead vocal. The frequent use of an electric organ on tracks recorded at FAME or Stax is one of the primary distinctions between the Southern soul aesthetic and the Motown "sound." Similar to the

earlier described Hall productions, “Let’s Do It Over” utilized a tripartite approach in terms of the amount of echo. In order to achieve the three-dimensionality first heard on “Steal Away,” Simon’s lead vocal has the least amount of echo followed in turn by the horn section and finally the backing vocal. The use of echo is not as obvious on the Simon track when compared to “Steal Away,” or even “Hold What You’ve Got.”

“I Can’t Help Myself (Sugar Pie Honey Bunch)” and “Let’s Do It Over” provide just one example of the different “sounds” produced at Motown and at Muscle Shoals: a frenetic, relentless beat combined with multiple counter melodies that create a dense sonic texture marks the Four Tops’ track. In contrast, a subdued rhythmic accompaniment accented by the heavy back beat set within a sparse sonic texture that practically isolates the lead vocal characterizes the Joe Simon track.

From the years before Arthur Alexander’s “You Better Move On” in 1961 through the 1965 Simon recording, Rick Hall had drawn upon musical elements and production techniques from tracks recorded in Nashville, New York, and other sources.<sup>38</sup> Hall has spoken about his interest in county music influencing his musical ideas, but sonic elements associated with the “Nashville sound” become apparent on his early productions. The direct influence of R&B tracks recorded for Atlantic records is also clearly audible on the early 1960s FAME productions. The sonic aesthetic achieved on Jimmy Hughes’ “Steal Away”—the varying amount of echo used for each different instrumental or vocal “group”—became the blueprint for Hall’s future productions. The 1964 arrival of Buddy Killen and Joe Tex provided Hall with a working model for how to arrange R&B tracks recorded at FAME.

“Let’s Do It Over” codified all of Hall’s previous attempts. By the time a large segment of

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<sup>38</sup>“I Do,” recorded by June Conquest at FAME in the mid-1960s but unreleased until 2012, successfully mimics musical characteristics associated with the Motown Record company. *Hall of Fame: Rare and Unissued Gems from the FAME Vaults* (Kent CDKEND 372, 2012).

the American population first became aware of the sounds emanating from Muscle Shoals in 1966, it was not because of a Hall produced track, ironically, but for a track recorded in a studio that attracted the artists who could not afford to work at FAME.

Percy Sledge's 1966 track "When a Man Loves a Woman" reached the number one position on the *Billboard* Hot 100 on May 28. When it did, the track represented none of the sonic and musical benchmarks previously developed by Rick Hall at FAME during the early-to-mid 1960s. Of course, Hall did not produce the Sledge track; Quin Ivy and Marlin Greene did at Ivy's Norala studio in Sheffield. The sound quality, production, arrangement, and performance heard on "When a Man Loves a Woman" more closely aligns this Ivy and Greene-produced track with Hall's nascent tracks such as "You Better Move On," and others.

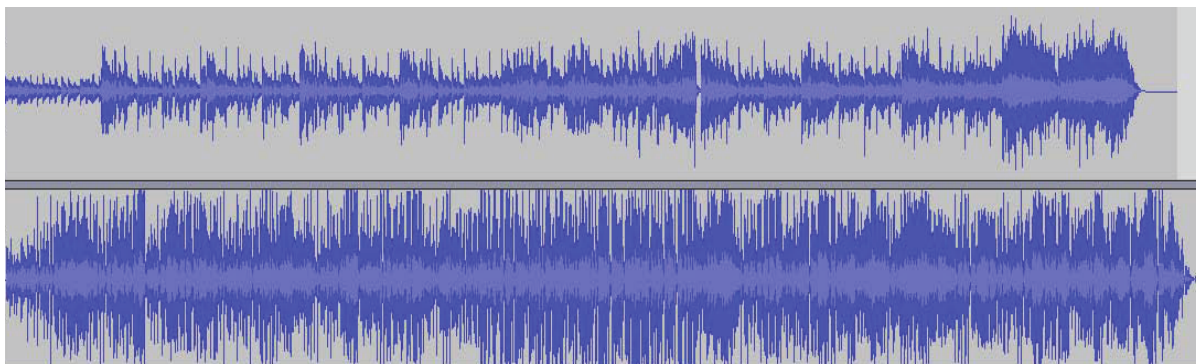
A side-by-side comparison between two tracks (Figure 1.3) recorded in Muscle Shoals and released during 1966, "When a Man Loves a Woman," and Jimmy Hughes' "Neighbor, Neighbor," reveals the limited overall dynamic range of the Ivy and Greene production due to the piecemeal recording equipment at Norala studio. Hall remarked recently, "I didn't put a lot of compression on a lot of my records. I've got all my [equalization] on, there's no further to go. All I'm giving you is the best I got. I never squeezed the sound much, I made just it as ballsy and as kick-ass as I possibly could, kept it warm on the bottom."<sup>39</sup> Jimmy Johnson, the engineer for "When a Man Loves a Woman," recalled the Sledge session during a 2010 interview:

I had five inputs, mono...But, [the mixing board] was so prone to distortion that if you got over into the red with that one VU meter, that needle, you were in dire straits; you had break-up all through the record.... Well, not having any [compression], especially on [Sledge's] vocal, [who was an] unschooled singer... [and] didn't know where to hit it hard and where not to. Well I had to learn and anticipate by wrist, almost robotically, to get [the VU meter] out of

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<sup>39</sup>Palao, "The Sound of Fame," 18.

any danger of going over. [“When A Man Loves A Woman”] was done only live with the drums, and the bass, and the Farfisa organ that had *no* Leslie.<sup>40</sup>



**Figure 1.3** – The top wave represents the left and right channels of “When a Man Loves a Woman.” The bottom wave represents the left and right channels of “Neighbor, Neighbor.” Note the more dynamic wave of “Neighbor, Neighbor” compared to the thin wave of “When a Man Loves a Woman.”

These two tracks were contemporaries as each first appeared on the *Billboard* R&B chart in April and May, respectively. The instrumentation for each track is similar; “When a Man Loves a Woman” includes an acoustic bass, electric guitar, drum set, electric organ, horn section (trumpet, trombone), lead vocal and backing vocalists. “Neighbor, Neighbor” includes two electric guitars, electric bass, drum set, piano, electric organ, and lead vocal. Although these two tracks charted during spring 1966, Hall recorded the Hughes track nearly two years before Ivy and Greene recorded *Sledge*, which indicates Hall’s level of technical and recording studio mastery as early as 1964.

“When a Man Loves a Woman” also departed from Hall’s, and perhaps the Southern soul, sound aesthetic as drummer Roger Hawkins performed the majority of the track on the ride cymbal. Bowman discussed the role of cymbals in the Stax sound as follows,

The use of the closed hi-hat for virtually all the cymbal work [at Stax] is significant... If the suspended crash or ride cymbals were used instead of the closed hi-hat, their acoustic properties would fill up a much larger portion of

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<sup>40</sup>Jimmy Johnson, interview with the author, 10 June 2011.

the pitch spectrum and duration continuum...To complement this [sparse] aesthetic further, the hi-hat was often played so quietly that its presence was nearly subliminal.<sup>41</sup>

All of the tracks produced by Hall that charted up through 1965 featured a closed hi-hat cymbal.<sup>42</sup>

A comparison of the introduction to the remainder of the track clearly indicates what “When a Man Loves a Woman” might have sounded like if Ivy and Greene followed the governing principles of Southern soul music production. During the introduction (0:00-0:14), the decay of the notes plucked on the acoustic bass is extremely apparent (Figure 1.4). This is due, in part, to Hawkins marking time on the closed hi-hat. When the vocal enters (0:14), Hawkins switches to the ride cymbal and, by virtue of that instrument, fills the previously empty frequency range with the “swoosh” sound made by the cymbal. During the bridge (1:14-1:41), Hawkins doubles his ride cymbal stroke filling even more the sonic space (Example 1.6). Although Hawkins’ ride cymbal pattern directly opposed the Southern soul aesthetic as practiced at FAME and Stax, the sound of the track, had he only performed on the hi-hat, would have been remarkably thin. Hawkins utilized the ride cymbal in an effort to conceal the extremely sparse instrumentation and arrangement. (“When a Man Loves a Woman,” after all, reached the number one position on all major R&B and Pop charts. Something a track recorded at FAME and Stax had yet to achieve.)

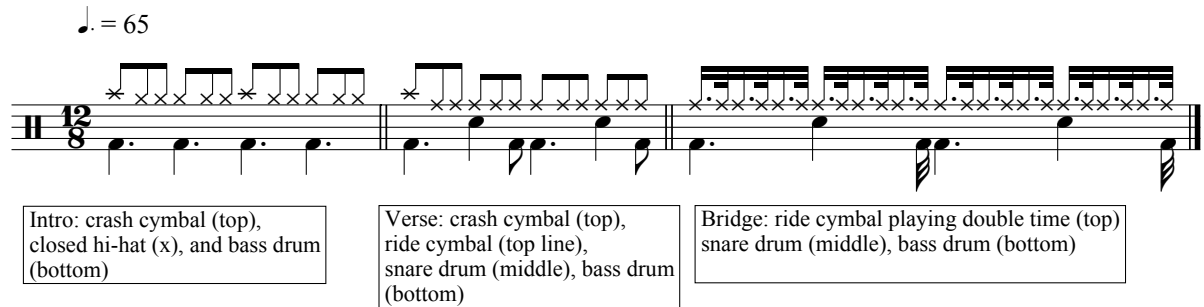
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<sup>41</sup>Bowman, “The Stax Sound,” 308.

<sup>42</sup>Joe Tex’s “Hold What You’ve Got” featured a ride cymbal. The drummer, however, performed with brushes thus limiting the overall presence of the cymbal on the track.



**Figure 1.4** – Detail of the sound wave for the first 14 seconds of “When a Man Loves a Woman.” The arrows indicate selected attacks of notes performed on the acoustic bass; the dotted box indicates the moment Sledge’s vocal begins.



**Example 1.6** – Roger Hawkins’ drum patterns during “When a Man Loves a Woman” depicting how much of the “pitch spectrum and duration continuum” the ride cymbal occupies.

The success of the Sledge track did not alter Hall’s production techniques. Despite the inclusion of the syrupy-sounding mixed chorus that cooed vocables heard on “When a Man Loves a Woman”—a sound favored by Hall on his early recordings—tracks recorded at FAME after the mid-1960s that charted in the top 20 never included a mixed chorus performing in that style again.<sup>43</sup> The fact that Quin Ivy and Marlin Greene produced and recorded “When a Man Loves a Woman” does not indicate the creation of an alternate “Muscle Shoals sound” either. In many ways, the success of “When a Man Loves a Woman” memorialized and validated Hall’s earlier attempts to hybridize the sound of Atlantic’s R&B records with the “Nashville sound” in an effort to create a “Muscle Shoals sound.”

<sup>43</sup>Wilson Pickett’s 1966 hit “Land of 1000 Dances” features a mixed chorus during the drum break. The manner of performance and overall sound of the chorus is decidedly “edgier” than tracks produced by Hall that previously featured background vocalists.

### ***RECORDING EQUIPMENT & PRACTICES IN MUSCLE SHOALS: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION***

After the recording of “You Better Move On” in 1961, the physical location of FAME at Avalon Avenue in Muscle Shoals and the size of its primary studio remained the only constant element throughout the entire development of the so-called “Muscle Shoals sound.” The layout of FAME’s studio A and the gear used to capture the sound produced by the musicians became a significant (unseen, but heard) element during the creation and flourishing of the “Muscle Shoals sound.”

Before moving to Avalon Avenue, Hall recorded Alexander’s first hit in a remote location of Muscle Shoals. “The [Wilson Dam] room was an old tobacco and candy warehouse,” recalled Hall. He went on to describe the makeshift studio stating:

I put egg cartons up, put some old carpet on the floor, and the theatre in Florence gave me some old drapes, so I used those on the walls. We bought our first 350 Ampex recorder, our first Telefunken microphone, and the board was an Altec mixer, four [input] channels. I mixed on a big A7 Voice of The Theater speaker, and made an echo chamber out of the bathroom, so when you hear “You Better Move On,” you’re hearing the bathroom. Because we only had four microphones total, I had to move the musicians around to get the right sound. It was recorded in mono, and then I played it back on a Wollensack machine, and did the overdub of the background vocals, ping-ponged it over.<sup>44</sup>

Hall’s Altec mixer is now located in the Alabama Music Hall of Fame (Figure 1.5). With the funds Hall made from the success of “Your Better Move On,” he constructed the studio located on the current site of FAME.

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<sup>44</sup>Palao, “The Sound of Fame,” 15.



**Figure 1.5** – The Altec mixer used by Rick Hall in 1961 to record “You Better Move On.” (Photograph by Chris Reali.)

Both studio “A” and “B” at FAME are the same size: 25 by 50 with 20-foot ceilings. In 1970, *Billboard* reported, “the control room has a Universal console, 12 input, 4 output. There are four electronic and four acoustic echo chambers.”<sup>45</sup> Along with FAME’s echo chamber, the drum sound Hall achieved on record is distinctive. Mickey Buckins, a former engineer at FAME, remarked:

Studio A—the room was like holy ground. Rick had scoped out every square inch of it: he knew what sound was what, where. One [Neumann U–] 87 [microphone] overhead on the drums, right on Hawkins’ head, and that’s it. And anyone who touched those mics was dead. There was no mistaking the echo chamber. When you hear a vocal on that tube mic and that chamber, you know it’s FAME. It has a sound like no other sound.<sup>46</sup>

Roger Hawkins also felt that the use of a single mic allowed the drum sound to achieve a certain sonic presence, and give him the ability to perform dynamically. In 1984, Hawkins told fellow drummer Max Weinberg:

The intensity in those days was much lighter, whereas now, in terms of dynamics, you have to play really hard. Back then [in the 1960s], you played real soft...At first it was one mike over the drums and a mike on the bass

<sup>45</sup>Bill Williams, “FAME Studio Musicians Average \$25-35,000 a Year,” *Billboard*, 5 December 1970, 48.

<sup>46</sup>Palao, “The Sound of Fame,” 19-20.

drum. Now they put a mike on everything. You can't hardly start out from a whisper and go very loud. The drums just don't speak that way when they're miked really close.<sup>47</sup>

By not placing microphones close to each individual drum (a decision Hall initially based on the lack of enough mics and inputs more than any other sonic consideration), Hawkins did not have to restrain his performance; he could pound the drum set as loud or soft as the track required, with the dynamic results captured on tape.

Like many producers who came of age during the early 1960s, including Phil Spector and Stax's Jim Stewart, Rick Hall preferred to record in mono. Before the music industry-wide adoption of the stereo format in the late 1960s, record labels that produced R&B tracks relied on hit singles broadcast over the airwaves and listened to by audiences in mono on their transistor radios. The punchy sound achieved on mono recordings intensified one of R&B's strengths: the often-close synchronization between the bass drum and the bass line. Building the overall mono mix of a track on top of the bass drum and bass guitar sound could then heighten the affective power of the music's groove. Even after the mono format became *passé*, Hall resisted the change to stereo. "I didn't want to go stereo," Hall insisted. "I've got one speaker to mix on and I'm in control and the guys are playing great and I was having hits, so I don't want to change things."<sup>48</sup> Hall's reluctance in switching to mono suggests that up through the late 1960s, he relied on a particular production formula that included the studio musicians and a specific recording technology to generate hits for himself and FAME clientele.

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<sup>47</sup>Max Weinberg, *The Big Beat: Conversations with Rock's Great Drummers* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1984), 51.

<sup>48</sup>Palao, "The Sound of Fame," 20-21.

Norala, a recording studio located in Sheffield and FAME's only "competition" in the mid-1960s, had equipment that was makeshift at best. According to owner Quin Ivy, the room itself left much to be desired: "It had been a shoe store at one time and it was just one big room. It really didn't look anything like a studio inside; it [still] looked like a big empty store [but] with a drum kit set up and some mikes [sic] here and there."<sup>49</sup> Describing the gear Ivy noted, "I got a used 351 Ampex [tape recorder], and old [Berlant] for a second overdub recorder, plus an RCA console from [local radio station] WLAY, and we built a classic spit'n'balin' wire studio across the street from Tune Town [Ivy's record store]. Total investment was \$7,000."<sup>50</sup> Jimmy Johnson, who engineered sessions at Norala, recalled the gear by stating, "The board came out of a radio station; a Gates console. The local guy [Paul Kelley] that maintained the radio station took some old board parts and made this thing; just kind of invented the circuitry his-self."<sup>51</sup> The set-up at Norala in 1965 and early 1966, regardless of which type of mixing console Ivy purchased, was low budget when compared to FAME. Ivy would later move to a newly-built studio, 20 by 40, located at 1307 Broadway in Sheffield sometime during the spring or early summer 1968.

Muscle Shoals Sound Studio opened for business in 1969, but the building, located at 3614 Jackson Highway in Sheffield, had already been a recording studio. Fred Bevis, with

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<sup>49</sup>Pete Nickols, "Quin Ivy And His Norala And Quinvy Studios, Part 5 – 1968 – Atco Drop South Camp But Ivy Opens His New Studio Plus a Nashville Office." [http://www.sirshambling.com/articles/quinvy\\_5/index.php](http://www.sirshambling.com/articles/quinvy_5/index.php). Accessed 15 May 2013.

<sup>50</sup>Hoskyns, *Say It One Time*, 107. Pete Nickols, a British journalist, has written a multi-part essay about Quin Ivy and the two studios he owned. The first essay, "Quin Ivy and His Norala and Quinvy Studios, Part 1—the Early Years" describes the making of Sledge's "When a Man Loves a Woman," and the studio gear; see <http://www.sirshambling.com/articles/quinvy/quinvy1.html>. Nickols described the Norala studio gear as follows, "Ivy bought an old RCA control console from WLAY for \$150 and had the station's engineer, Paul Kelley, rewire and paint it for him. An equally old 351 Ampex recorder and a couple of A7 speakers were added and that gave Ivy all he needed for demo work." There is no attribution for this, although it likely came from the Hoskyns book as well.

<sup>51</sup>Jimmy Johnson, interview with the author, 10 June 2011.

help from Peanutt Montgomery, originally built a four-track studio at the same location in 1967. Atlantic Records financially helped Johnson, Hawkins, David Hood, and Barry Beckett purchase of the studio, and the label was likely responsible for the upgrade in equipment. The studio was small, 35 by 25, with 15-foot ceilings, and the musicians who owned it called it the “burlap palace.” In 2010, Johnson described the gear used for the 1969 Rolling Stones’ session, which also provides a concise studio inventory for the then newly-upgraded facility.

We had a Universal Audio [mixing] console with tube modules, the one with the big rotary knobs, knobs as big as your hand. We had ten inputs. There was some fixed EQ on it, a fixed low end at 100Hz, and you could go two clicks of boost at two and four dB, and you could roll back to minus three. But that’s all it was. It also had an echo send on it. Back then, we were using a live chamber... We had a Scully [Recording Instruments] eight track, a one-inch [tape machine].<sup>52</sup>

Similar to sessions at FAME, Johnson used a limited number of mics on the drum set with very little separation from the other instruments in the studio. “We only had three mics on the drums,” recalled Johnson.

We ran a [Neumann] U47 up over the top up over the top, about nose high to the drummer... So it gave a good overview of the whole kit, so you could play with a lot of dynamics and you could get an incredible sound... On the bass drum we used the [Electro Voice] 666, a fantastic dynamic mic for the time. Then I had a hi-hat mic, which I think was another [Electro Voice] RE-15, though it could have been a little [Electro Voice] 635A, that remains in question... Actually, if not the RE-15 it might have been a [Shure] SM57, more likely than the 635A.<sup>53</sup>

Johnson used an SM57 for Mick Taylor’s guitar amp, an RCA 77DX for Keith Richard’s guitar amp, and an RCA 44 for Billy Wyman’s bass amp. Mick Jagger sang into a Neumann U47 microphone. Except for a 20dB pad on the Universal Audio console, the studio at that time had no compressors.

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<sup>52</sup>Bruce Borgerson, “Recording the ‘Brown Sugar’ Sessions: Jimmy Johnson on Recording the Rolling Stones,” [http://www.prosoundweb.com/article//the\\_brown\\_sugar\\_sessions/](http://www.prosoundweb.com/article//the_brown_sugar_sessions/), accessed 5 May 2011.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

The owners for each of the three Muscle Shoals recording studios profiled above faced technical challenges based on the limitations of their gear. For Rick Hall, his limited resources in the early 1960s forced him (and other independently-owned recording studios located across the country) to think creatively in order to achieve results acceptable to the public and music industry alike. Quin Ivy followed a similar path as Hall when he opened Norala in 1965, relying on second-hand equipment and personal ingenuity. When Muscle Shoals Sound opened it had a (possibly) slight advantage compared to when Hall and Ivy opened their first studios: MSS had the financial backing of an influential record company as well as Jimmy Johnson's years of prior experience working in ad-hoc studios. Although each studio varied in their physical shape, the working methods and even some of the microphones in each was similar. Whether it was FAME, Norala, or Muscle Shoals Sound, once each studio produced a viable hit the owners and engineers returned to the same gear set-up time-and-time again seeking a way to recapture that often-elusive sonic moment.

### ***INSTRUMENTATION***

The use of in-house musicians at either FAME or Muscle Shoals Sound resulted in nearly every track recorded at each respective studio having similar instrumentation. A significant element of the "Muscle Shoals sound," therefore, became the use of the same musicians performing on their respective instruments and heard on multiple recordings. The standard instrumental line-up for tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals, regardless of the studio, consisted of drums, electric bass, electric guitar, and keyboards. Rick Hall and other producers, however, frequently augmented the core instrumentalists (discussed further in chapter 2).

The drummers in Muscle Shoals, primarily Jerry Carrigan and Roger Hawkins, performed a similar function to their counterparts at Stax and Motown: they kept the basic

beat. “You Better Move On” was the only track analyzed where the drummer did not perform a “typical” backbeat. Tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals during the 1960s utilized a drum set that included a snare drum, bass drum, one rack-mounted and one floor tom, a high-hat, ride and crash cymbal. A 1981 *Modern Drummer* feature on Hawkins reported that he used a Ludwig *Hollywood* set with a 20” bass drum, a 8” x 12” mounted tom, a 13” tom, a 16” x 16” floor tom and a 5 1/2” x 14” chrome snare.<sup>54</sup> Extant pictures of Hawkins in the studio during the 1960s show, however, that he only used one mounted tom, and video of Hawkins performing live in 1972 with the band Traffic also show him using a set with only one rack-mounted tom. Hawkins used Zildjian cymbals: a 20” medium ride, 18” light-weight crash, and 13” medium hi-hats.

Every track that charted in the Top 20 featured an electric bass with the exception of four: “You Better Move On,” “Everybody,” “What Kind of Fool (Do You Think I Am),” and “When a Man Loves a Woman,” which used an acoustic bass. Norbert Putnam purchased a Fender Precision bass in 1958, which he used on sessions at FAME up through the mid-1960s. David Hood used a variety of basses up through the mid-1970s including a 1954 and 1957 Fender Precision bass and two 1972 Fender Jazz basses, but later switched to an Alembic bass. To monitor his sound, a 1998 profile of Hood stated that he used “a miked open-back 4 x 10 Fender Concert amp and then [Fender] Bassman piggybacks; later he went direct with a 60-watt 2 x 12 Bassman as a monitor.”<sup>55</sup> Tommy Cogbill, who performed on several Wilson Pickett hits, played a 1965 Fender Precision bass.

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<sup>54</sup>Robyn Flans, “Roger Hawkins: The Drums of Muscle Shoals,” *Modern Drummer*, May 1981, 60. Both Hawkins and Carrigan switched to Pearl drum sets in the mid-1970s.

<sup>55</sup>“United We Stand: David Hood and Roger Hawkins,” *Bass Player*, June 1998, 48.

Tracks cut at FAME generally featured two guitar players, which differed from the recordings that came out of Stax that utilized only one guitarist. The majority of the Muscle Shoals tracks featured an electric rhythm guitar and a solo electric lead guitar. In some of Hall's early productions such as Alexander's "You Better Move On" and "Everybody" by Tommy Roe, he also used an acoustic guitar to provide rhythm accompaniment. The lead guitarist rarely performed a guitar solo.<sup>56</sup> Instead, the lead guitarist often provided instrumental fills behind the lead vocalist or played an accompanying riff. Photos of Duane Allman recording at FAME and Pete Carr recording at Muscle Shoals Sound show each lead guitarist performing with a Fender Stratocaster and Gibson Les Paul, respectively. Jimmy Johnson, during his period recording at FAME, used a Gretsch Chet Atkins, model 6120, with two Sho-Bud steel guitar pick-ups as his main guitar, and a variety of Fender amps. Johnson would later switch to a 1967 Fender Telecaster, and then in the 1970s to a Music Man Sabre I with a built-in pre-amp and humbucking pick-ups played through a Fender Vibrolux amp with two ten-inch speakers. Johnson also used a Martin D-28 acoustic guitar on R.B. Greaves' "Take a Letter Maria" and "Kodachrome" by Paul Simon. Besides his guitar and amp preferences, Johnson's personal sound, according to him, was "a combination of heavy stings [.013-.052] and heavy picks."<sup>57</sup>

A keyboard instrument appeared on every track examined for this chapter with the exception of four: "Land of 1000 Dances" (1966), "Everybody Needs Somebody to Love" (1967), both by Wilson Pickett, Clarence Carter's 1971 track "The Court Room," and Paul Simon's "Loves Me Like a Rock" (1973). 24 out of 73 tracks, or nearly one third, recorded in

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<sup>56</sup>Solos, regardless of the instrument, were not common for the Muscle Shoals tracks. This musical trait is common at Motown and Stax as well.

<sup>57</sup>Stan Soocher, "Muscle Shoals Sound Studios: Where the Hits are Made," *Grooves*, September 1979, 17.

Muscle Shoals featured two, and sometimes three keyboards: the most common pair being the acoustic piano and electric organ. The sound of a Farfisa electric organ is prominently heard on “When a Man Loves a Woman,” and in the background during Aretha Franklin’s 1967 track “I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You).” After 1967, an electric piano, initially a Wurlitzer and then a Fender Rhodes, can also be heard on recordings; Franklin’s “I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)” features one of the most famous examples in popular music of the Wurlitzer, which Spooner Oldham played. Hall commonly paired the electric keyboard with an acoustic piano or electric organ.<sup>58</sup> A synthesizer is heard on the Staple Singers’ 1971 track “Respect Yourself.” By the late 1970s, Barry Beckett’s keyboard set-up included a Yamaha Grand, Fender Rhodes, Hohner Clavinet, Arp String Ensemble, mini-Moog, maxi-Korg, and a Hammond B3 organ.<sup>59</sup>

Hall and producers at Muscle Shoals Sound occasionally utilized additional pitched instruments such as flute, strings, or harmonica (Table 1.10). During the 1960s, orchestral stings appeared on only one track recorded at FAME; Oscar Toney, Jr.’s 1967 “For Your Precious Love” featured one solo violin, drenched in echo, which produced the effect of a string “section.” The string parts for most of these tracks were overdubbed later and in another studio.

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<sup>58</sup>During 1972, no track recorded in Muscle Shoals that appeared on the charts used an acoustic piano.

<sup>59</sup>Soocher, “Where the Hits are Made,” 19.

<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Track</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Artist</b>
Flute	What Kind of Fool (Do You Think I Am)	1963	The Tams
Glockenspiel	I'm Your Puppet	1966	James and Bobby Purify
Vibraphone	The Feeling is Right	1969	Clarence Carter
	I Was Checkin' Out, She Was Checkin' In	1973	Don Covay
Tympani	The Feeling is Right	1969	Clarence Carter
Harmonica	Patches	1970	Clarence Carter
	I'll Take You There	1972	The Staple Singers
	In the Ghetto	1972	Candi Staton
Strings	For Your Precious Love	1967	Oscar Toney, Jr.
	Patches	1970	Clarence Carter
	It's All in Your Mind	1970	Clarence Carter
	Stand By Your Man	1970	Candi Staton
	The Court Room	1971	Clarence Carter
	He Called Me Baby	1971	Candi Staton
	Mr. & Mrs. Untrue	1971	Candi Staton
	One Bad Apple	1971	The Osmonds
	That's The Way I Feel About 'Cha	1971	Bobby Womack
	In The Ghetto	1972	Candi Staton
	Baby Don't Get Hooked on Me	1972	Mac Davis
	Harry Hippie	1972	Bobby Womack
	I Believe In You	1973	Johnnie Taylor
	It Hurts So Good	1973	Millie Jackson
	I Was Checkin' Out, She Was Checkin' In	1973	Don Covay
	If You're Ready (Come Go With Me)	1973	The Staple Singers

**Table 1.4** – Other pitched instruments used on Muscle Shoals recordings

Over a quarter of the tracks that charted in the top 20 featured auxiliary percussion. Hall incorporated a triangle in only a few of his early 1960s productions. The tambourine became the most prominent auxiliary instrument during the later 1960s. Bongos or congas are occasionally heard, too.

Although this chapter is primarily concerned with the overall sonic aesthetic and instrumentation heard on tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals, a brief discussion about the vocals is in order. With the exception of five vocal groups, the Tams, the Osmonds, the Staple Singers, Mel and Tim, and the Dells, all of the artists who recorded in Muscle Shoals were solo vocalists. (For the purposes of this chapter, I treat James and Bobby Purify, and

Mel and Tim as solo vocalists; the two members of each duo sing lead equally for their recordings of “I’m Your Puppet” and “Starting All Over Again,” respectively.)<sup>60</sup> The lead vocalist harmonized with themselves on three tracks; Joe Tex’s “Hold on to What You’ve Got” (1964), Aretha Franklin’s “I Never Loved A Man (The Way I Love You)” (1967), and Clarence Carter’s “Snatching It Back” (1969). Laura Lee’s 1967 track “Dirty Man” features a male vocal harmony during the refrain.

The use of backing vocals was one of the significant musical distinctions that separated Muscle Shoals tracks from those recorded at Stax or other Southern soul production centers. In Bowman’s analysis of the Stax sound, he stated, “Background vocals were used sparingly on Stax recordings...In general, on Stax recordings the horn section took the place of background vocals.”<sup>61</sup> In contrast, three-quarters (55 out of 73) of the Muscle Shoals tracks surveyed for this chapter featured background vocals.<sup>62</sup> Rick Hall incorporated background vocals starting with his first track to chart, “You Better Move On,” and continued with that practice for years to come. Tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals utilized background vocalists in a variety of ways. On recordings dating from the early 1960s, the background vocalists provided another musical texture different from the instrumentalists as they often performed wordless accompaniment, “You Better Move On” or “Steal Away,” for example. Towards the ends of tracks, the vocalists often repeated a vocal refrain, which was usually the title of the song. Although it is often hard to hear how many backing vocalists were used on any given track due to the mono recording technology and Hall’s use of echo,

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<sup>60</sup>Rob Bowman, in his musical analysis of Stax Records, makes the same classification of the vocal duo Sam and Dave. See “The Stax Sound,” 291.

<sup>61</sup>Bowman, “The Stax Sound,” 291.

<sup>62</sup>Harmonized vocal parts such as the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph are not considered. In total, 61 of the 73 tracks surveyed, or 83%, of the tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals featured some type of accompanying vocal part.

based on my analysis I suggest that tracks averaged four background singers. The consistent use of background vocals was one of the musical signatures of the “Muscle Shoals sound.”

The use of horns on R&B tracks had been quite common since the 1950s, but Shoals-produced tracks did not incorporate horns until the mid-1960s. The first Rick Hall-produced track recorded in Muscle Shoals to achieve chart success that featured a horn section occurred in 1965 with Joe Simon’s “Let’s Do It Over.” Tracks recorded at FAME generally relied on a three-piece horn section that consisted of a trumpet, and two saxophones (two tenors, or a tenor and a baritone). Many of the Percy Sledge tracks produced by Ivy and Green at Norala studio featured a trombone, as well as a trumpet and sax. Musically speaking, the horn arrangements heard on tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals were simple, often outlining the chord progression, similar to Stax horn arrangements.<sup>63</sup> 80 percent of the tracks (59 out of 73) recorded in Muscle Shoals featured a horn section, and 69 percent (51 out of 73) featured both horns and background vocalists. The use of horns *and* backing vocals helped to sonically distinguish Muscle Shoals from Stax.

Based on my analysis of the 73 tracks, a typical track recorded in Muscle Shoals would include fourteen musicians:

1. Lead vocalist(s)
2. Electric bass
3. Drummer
4. Electric rhythm guitar
5. Electric lead guitar
6. Acoustic or electric piano
7. Organ
8. Trumpet
9. Tenor Sax
10. Baritone Sax
11. Background vocalist
12. Background vocalist

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<sup>63</sup>The horn players who recorded in Muscle Shoals were often the same players who recorded for Stax; discussed further in chapter 2.

13. Background vocalist
14. Background vocalist

The use of fourteen musicians on a track suggests that there was a dense sonic landscape heard on the recordings from Muscle Shoals, and after 1970 tracks also included numerous string players thus adding to the total musicians per track. While the number of musicians used on recordings in Muscle Shoals suggests a “wall” of sound, the result of these tracks differs from Phil Spector’s 1960s “Wall of Sound” productions.

The “Wrecking Crew”—the name of the studio musicians who frequently recorded for Spector—regularly included about fourteen or fifteen musicians. Hal Blaine, the long-time drummer for the “Wrecking Crew,” described the typical session band that worked for Spector in his autobiography:

The Wall of Sound was literally that. Remember, these were the early days of recording, and echo was about the only special effect that studios had...The band typically consisted of Carol Kaye and Ray Pohlman on Fender basses; Lyle Ritz and Jimmy Bond on upright basses; Tommy Tedesco, Barney Kessel, Howard Roberts, Glen Campbell and Bill Pittman on guitars; Don Randi, Leon Russel, Larry Knechtel, Michael Melvoin and Al Delory on pianos. There was always a host of percussionists, and at various times different piano players, guitarists, drummers and horn men. Jack Nitzsche usually did the chord charts, and I was usually on drums.<sup>64</sup>

In an effort to create a “dense” sound, Spector typically doubled, and even tripled every instrument, as well as adding a horn section and assorted percussionists. This became the principal difference between Spector’s “Wall of Sound” productions and Hall’s use of a dozen or more backing musicians: Spector’s productions created a massive sound block by incorporating the simultaneous performance of fifteen or more musicians. By contrast, tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals, initially by Hall but then later at Muscle Shoals Sound, typically

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<sup>64</sup>Hal Blaine, *Hal Blaine and the Wrecking Crew: The Story of the World's Most Recorded Musician*, 3rd ed (Alma, MI: Rebeats Publications, 2010), 48-49.

included fourteen musicians, but they rarely performed simultaneously. One of the key characteristics of the “Muscle Shoals sound” was the ability to retain a sparse musical texture while utilizing a rather large number of accompanying musicians.

The preference in Muscle Shoals for a large backing band seemingly stands in direct opposition to the “Stax sound” aesthetic that I claimed influenced Hall. Rob Bowman remarked that the “Stax sound,” a sound that for many defined Southern soul, relied on a “preference for sparse textures. [And that] such an aesthetic naturally would severely limit the use of strings and background vocalists...”<sup>65</sup> In the burgeoning years of the “Muscle Shoals sound” Hall borrowed sonic and musical elements from the Atlantic and Stax record companies, and tracks produced in Nashville. This included a preference for sparse textures *and* backing vocalists. One of the features he retained from the early years during what I have characterized as the mature “Muscle Shoals sound” was a fondness for a large accompanying ensemble that included horns and backing vocalists. In doing so, Hall created an Alabama branch of Southern soul that had its own distinguishable sonic characteristics, separate from the Stax or Memphis “sound.”

### ***REPERTOIRE, SONG FORM & TEMPO***

Although FAME and then Muscle Shoals Sound employed in-house songwriters, the 73 tracks analyzed for this chapter reveal a diverse group of composers. Up through 1967, the FAME song writing team of Dan Penn and Spooner Oldham were the only writers to

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<sup>65</sup>Bowman, “The Stax Sound,” 291. In 2000 Roy Brewer examined the use of string musicians in Memphis recording studios and concluded, “Memphis strings were not only an integral part of the local recording industry but also a major component of the overall sound of an era.” Brewer went on to state, “Whether the addition of strings to the Stax sound [after 1967] is viewed delusionary or simply an attempt to remain in contention for the ever-changing popular R & B market, local strings, nevertheless, became a regular part of all the styles being recorded in Memphis.” Brewer’s research suggests that by the late 1960s, Stax began to augment their originally sparse sound aesthetic.

have more than one track appear on the charts.<sup>66</sup> George Jackson, a staff writer at FAME during the late-1960s, often co-wrote with various partners and was the most successful in-house writer overall with seven tracks charting between 1968 and 1971.<sup>67</sup> The numerous songwriters used for tracks indicate that the many producers who worked in Muscle Shoals did not rely on any one particular “formula” related to any one writer. Only a few of the singers that recorded in Muscle Shoals wrote their own tracks. Arthur Alexander, Tommy Roe, Jimmy Hughes, Joe Tex, R.B. Greaves, Don Covay, Mac Davis, and Paul Simon are the only singers listed as single authors.<sup>68</sup> Wilson Pickett, Clarence Carter, and Bobby Womack received credit as co-authors on several of their respective tracks.<sup>69</sup> The lack of R&B singer-songwriters in Muscle Shoals is consistent with the practices that took place at Stax and Motown.

Historian Richard Ripani compiled song form data for the top-selling R&B and soul music tracks spanning nearly 50 years, and analyzed it for his 2006 monograph *The New Blue Music: Changes in Rhythm & Blues, 1950-1999*. Ripani described the trajectory of R&B song form during the 1960s as follows:

Based on our data, it is apparent that some significant changes took place in rhythm & blues during the 1960s. The statistics on the cyclic form typify just how deep these changes really were. The songs...that were hits in the 1961 through 1965 period exhibit an average of 21 percent incidence of the cyclic form, while those from 1966 onward show a 43 percent use of the same structural element. Similarly, there is not one single song listed...after 1965 that uses the twelve-bar blues form. Thus, not only were there significant changes in R&B during the entire decade of the 1960s, but also it appears that

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<sup>66</sup>“Let’s Do It Over,” 1965; “I’m Your Puppet,” 1966; “It Tears Me Up,” 1966; and “Out of Left Field,” 1967 (the last two tracks recorded by Percy Sledge at Quin Ivy’s Norala studio).

<sup>67</sup>“Too Weak to Fight,” 1968; “Snatching It Back,” “I’d Rather Be An Old Man’s Sweetheart,” “I’m Just A Prisoner,” “The Feeling Is Right,” 1969; “I Can’t Leave Your Love Alone,” 1970; and “One Bad Apple,” 1971.

<sup>68</sup>Don Covay and Mac Davis were both songwriters before they became recording artists.

<sup>69</sup>Womack, too, had a career as a successful songwriter, having his tracks recorded by the Rolling Stones and Wilson Pickett, to name but a few.

the process was ongoing and perhaps even accelerating in the second half of the period.<sup>70</sup>

In compiling the tracks for his analysis, Ripani relied upon *Billboard* chart positions and examined the top 25 rhythm and blues songs from 1960 through 1969. The twenty-five tracks represent the products of nine different record companies: Mercury, Vee-Jay, Motown (also Tamla, Gordy, and Soul), Beltone, ABC-Paramount, King, Atlantic, Par-lo, and Stax.<sup>71</sup> Ripani analyzed each song in terms of tempo, chord type (the total number of different chord types), the frequency of I, IV, V or “other” chord types, the use of blues form, the use of “blue” notes, cyclic form, and evidence of triplet swing.<sup>72</sup> Ripani’s findings, which represent general stylistic and harmonic trends in R&B and soul music during the 1960s, therefore provides an excellent point of comparison with tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals.<sup>73</sup> For my analysis, I concentrated on tempo, and the use of two forms: 12-bar blues and cyclic.<sup>74</sup> The comparison of Ripani’s findings with my analysis (Table 1.5) indicates how closely the tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals conform to or differs from the 1960s trends in R&B and soul.

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<sup>70</sup>Ripani, *New Blue Music*, 99-100. The term cyclic form describes tracks that make use of or relies on (nearly) static harmonies. The late 1960s funk music of James Brown, such the 1968 track “Say It Loud (I’m Black and I’m Proud),” is an example of cyclic form.

<sup>71</sup>See Ripani, “Table 3,” *New Blue Music*, 98.

<sup>72</sup>See Ripani, “Table 4,” *New Blue Music*, 100-101. Ripani defines his category headings (measures, tempo, etc...), on pages 10-11.

<sup>73</sup>“I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)” is the only track recorded in Muscle Shoals to appear in Ripani’s analysis.

<sup>74</sup>Ripani defined cyclic form as, “a section of music that generally features the use of a repeating musical phrase, or ‘cycle.’ The cycle...is usually one to four measures in length...[and] are generally composed of riffs [that] involves a cessation of harmonic movement,” *New Blue Music*, 44.

	Average Tempo <sup>75</sup>	Use of 12-Bar Blues Form	Use of Cyclic Form
<b>Ripani's Analysis 1960-1969</b>	116	12 %	33 %
<b>Muscle Shoals Tracks 1962-1973</b>	101	0	9.5 %

**Table 1.5** – Comparison between Ripani's analysis and Muscle Shoals tracks<sup>76</sup>

Three song form types, AABA, Simple Verse, and Contrasting Verse-Chorus, were the most used forms in Muscle Shoals.<sup>77</sup> AABA was the most prevalent, utilized in over 20 tracks, while only 7 tracks, all recorded by either Wilson Pickett or the Staple Singers, relied on cyclic form.<sup>78</sup> Pickett's 1966 "Land of 1000 Dances" and two tracks from 1967, "Soul Dance #3" and "Funky Broadway," are all textbook examples of cyclic form.<sup>79</sup> In the early 1970s, the Staple Singers found chart success with "Respect Yourself," "Heavy Makes You Happy," (both 1971), "I'll Take You There," (1972), and "If You're Ready (Come Go With Me)," (1973). The four tracks by the Staples are not as harmonically static as the three Pickett tracks, but each makes use of a limited harmonic palette and therefore adheres to Ripani's definition of cyclic form.

<sup>75</sup>The range of tempi for all of the 1960s Muscle Shoals tracks varied from Percy Sledge's 1967 cut "Out of Left Field" at 42 beats per minute to 189 beats per minute for Wilson Pickett's "Everybody Needs Somebody to Love," also from 1967. 27 out of the 38, or over 70 percent, of the tracks recorded in the 1960s and analyzed for this project were below the 116 average.

<sup>76</sup>According to Ripani's analysis, the use of 12-bar blues during the 1970s decreased to 0%, while the use of cyclic form increased to 53%. See Table 6, *New Blue Music*, 122.

<sup>77</sup>Simple verse is defined as a song that does not include a chorus, which uses the same harmonic progression throughout. Contrasting verse-chorus is defined as a song where the harmonic progression for the verse is different than the harmonic progression for the chorus.

<sup>78</sup>James Brown popularized the shift away from standard song forms towards cyclic form during the mid-1960s, which would become the basis of funk music.

<sup>79</sup>Chris Kenner originally wrote and recorded "Land of 1000 Dances" in 1962. Kenner's version is a one chord song built over a New Orleans rumba beat. The group Cannibal and the Headhunters re-recorded the song in 1965 adding the now-famous "Na, na-na-na-na" vocal line. Pickett's 1966 arrangement is adapted from the Headhunters track. The group Dyke and the Blazers originally recorded "Funky Broadway" in 1967 as a one-chord groove.

None of the tracks analyzed for this project relied on 12-bar blues form. Four tracks recorded in and after 1965, however, do make use of blues form, albeit in extended form. Jimmy Hughes' "Neighbor, Neighbor" (1965) is a 16-bar blues form; Wilson Pickett's "Mustang Sally" (1966) is a 24-bar blues; Candi Staton's "I'd Rather Be An Old Man's Sweetheart" (1969) is a blues that incorporates a bridge, resulting in an overall AABA form (each A section is a 12-bar blues, the bridge is 5 measures long), and Staton's "Sweet Feeling" (1970) also incorporates a 12-bar blues within an overall AABA form. The remainder of tracks utilized other song forms including: simple verse–chorus, contrasting verse–chorus, and compound forms.<sup>80</sup>

### ***KEYS & TIME***

The Muscle Shoals recordings include tracks in all twelve keys, and therefore do not indicate a preference. The predominant factor in deciding which key to choose for a track was likely determined by the particular comfort level and ability of the vocalist. E-natural and B-flat represent the two most utilized keys with twelve tracks in E major, one in E minor, and nine tracks in B-flat. The frequency of these two keys is not surprising as E, either major or minor, is commonly referred to as "guitar" key just as B-flat is known as a "horn" key. Similar to Bowman's analysis of the Stax sound, only four of the tracks analyzed here were in a minor mode.<sup>81</sup>

The analysis of time (track length) compared my findings to those of Bowman's Stax analysis; Ripani did not include this data in his survey. The length of the Muscle Shoals tracks analyzed ranged from 1:58 (Tommy Roe's 1963 "Everybody,") to 5:14 (Bobby

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<sup>80</sup>Simple-verse chorus is defined as a song that uses the same harmonic progression for both the verse and chorus.

<sup>81</sup>Bowman found that 10 out of 95 tracks were in the minor. See "The Stax Sound," 296.

Womacks' 1971 "That's The Way I Feel About 'Cha"). Much like Bowman's findings, tracks recorded in the Shoals during the early-to-mid 1960s were typically three minutes or less.<sup>82</sup> On average, tracks recorded at FAME or MSS between 1970 and 1973 were longer than three minutes. This increasing preference for longer tracks commonly found on LPs, but not typical of R&B or soul music during most of the 1960s, also took place at Motown. In musicologists Robert Fink's 2011 article, he stated, "Motown was exceptionally slow to adapt to the LP, but by 1968 it had unbent enough to allow [producer Norman] Whitfeld to cut ten- and twelve-minute album tracks, which were then edited down to single length."<sup>83</sup> The preference in Muscle Shoals by the early 1970s to record longer tracks conformed to the overall trends taking place in the R&B market.

Overall, two key elements surface and become central to the "sound" component in the creation of the "Muscle Shoals sound": Hall's liberal use of echo during the recording process to create a three-dimensional sonic space, and the ability to arrange a large backing band in such a way as to conform to the thin musical textures common to contemporaneous R&B and soul music. How Hall shaped the sonic environment with echo became his signature, and in using echo to varying degrees, he created spacious, multi-dimensional tracks. Using as many as fifteen musicians per track was common for both R&B and pop recordings. The way in which first Hall and then producers working at Muscle Shoals Sound mixed and matched multiple instruments that included horns and backing vocalists became another sonic hallmark. Other characteristics emerged such as an overall preference for slower tempos, and an eschewing of the late-1960s R&B trend for cyclic musical forms. When combined, all of these elements formed half of the Muscle Shoals sonic signature.

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<sup>82</sup>Bowman, "The Stax Sound," 295-296.

<sup>83</sup>Fink, "Goal Directed Soul," 206.

## GROOVE

Groove, that often-elusive musical quality, is one characteristic heard on nearly all of the tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals. Regardless of the accompanying musicians, establishing a musical groove became an essential component to the hit making process in Muscle Shoals. “The groove was what we aimed for,” Rick Hall recently stated.<sup>84</sup> The ability to create a groove was one of the calling cards for the members of the FAME rhythm section and the MSRS as they drew their inspiration from diverse sources that included the music of James Brown and Jamaican Ska. There was no signature Muscle Shoals guitar riff, bass line, or drum beat. Instead, the rhythm section’s mark became their ability to create a groove assembled from what Anne Danielsen called a “rhythmic patchwork” that was firmly entrenched within an R&B/soul musical aesthetic.

Despite efforts by writers from various disciplines, none have established a metric that can measure the amount of groove in a particular song. Listeners might commonly remark “I know a good groove when I hear it.” Lawrence Zbikowski, however, asked in 2004 “what is it that listeners know when they know a good groove?”<sup>85</sup> The concept of groove, regardless of the musical style or genre, becomes an extremely important musical characteristic.

The examination into grooves and how they occur has mainly taken place by authors wishing to further explore some of the intangible factors of jazz. In 1966, ethnomusicologist

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<sup>84</sup>Palao, “The Sound of Fame,” 19.

<sup>85</sup>Zbikowski, “Modelling the Groove,” 272.

Charles Keil examined what he termed “vital drive” in his essay “Motion and Feeling Through Music.”<sup>86</sup> Keil described vital drive saying:

[It] may be generated in a number of different ways... The best starting point is probably rhythm section attack: the interplay between bass and drums. By attack I mean simply the type of contact the player makes with his instrument in the initial production of a note... For the primary goal of [the drummer’s] characteristic and internally consistent tap is to create as much vital drive as possible, to build a groove or track for the soloist to get into and this is done by pulling against the pulse.”<sup>87</sup>

Keil spent time conducting research into the ways certain jazz bass players and drummers attacked their respective instruments. He noted that jazz drummers who play “on top” of the beat “tend to keep the stick close to the cymbal, arm fairly stationary with the stroke moving perpendicular to the cymbal, such that each beat lands on the cymbal in the vicinity of its predecessor.” While drummers who “lay-back” behind the beat “seem to attack horizontally, so to speak, placing each beat on a different part of the cymbal as the arm moves back and forth slightly.”<sup>88</sup> Keil’s observations, however, are not entirely representative of R&B drumming.

While R&B drummers may perform “on top” of the beat with their cymbal arm, it is their hitting of the snare drum (typically with the left hand for a right-handed drummer) that more accurately indicates how “laid back” the feel or groove may be. For example, video from 1972 of drummer Roger Hawkins performing live with the band Traffic shows his right arm (ride cymbal) moving in a similar manner described by Keil indicating an “on top” of the

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<sup>86</sup>Charles Keil, “Motion and Feeling Through Music,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24, no. 3 (1966): 337-349.

<sup>87</sup>Keil, “Motion & Feeling,” 341.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 342.

beat drummer.<sup>89</sup> Yet, Hawkins tended to play “behind-the-beat” on the snare. Keyboardist Barry Beckett, who performed with Hawkins for years, once remarked:

The Muscle Shoals feel came from layin’ back behind the beat a little bit. Nashville would play right on the beat, but if you divide your beat up into increments, say a hundred increments to a beat, and you lay back the bass drum, say two increments, and the backbeat [the snare drum], say, four increments, it doesn’t mean you’re playing out of time, it means you’re playin’ on the backside of the beat.<sup>90</sup>

Beckett described, in his own terms, what Keil referred to as “pulling against the pulse.”

David Hood, speaking about the “behind-the-beat” feel of Hawkins’ style, simply stated, “Well, that’s the way Roger plays.”<sup>91</sup> It is the rhythmic “tension” caused by differing perceptions of the beat, a difference that is nearly inaudible, that often results in a groove; a musical task that tested the abilities of many musicians, but one where the FAME rhythm sections and the MSRS frequently excelled. Ethnomusicologist Paul Berliner, in his monumental 1994 study *Thinking In Jazz*, stated, “Among all the challenges a group faces, one that is extremely subtle yet fundamental to its travels is a feature of group interaction that requires the negotiation of a shared sense of the beat, known, in its most successful realization, as striking a groove.”<sup>92</sup>

The interplay between the bass player and drummer is central to the formation of a groove. As Berliner noted, “Although potentially involving all band members, the groove depends especially on the rhythm section’s precise coordination, the relationship between

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<sup>89</sup>*Traffic, Live at Santa Monica Auditorium*, dir. Allan Muir (Basing Street West, 1972). As far as I know, this is the only video footage of Roger Hawkins performing live. The entire concert is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocjSc7v83pk>, uploaded 27 August 2013.

<sup>90</sup>“Soul Provider: Muscle Shoals Keyboard Legend Barry Beckett in His Own Words,” *Rock’s Backpages*, originally published 15 June 2009. <http://www.rockbackpages.com/Library/Article/soul-provider-muscle-shoals-keyboard-legend-barry-beckett-in-his-own-words>, accessed 11 May 2012.

<sup>91</sup>David Hood, interview with the author, 24 May 2011.

<sup>92</sup>Paul Berliner, *Thinking In Jazz: the Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 349.

drummer and bass player usually being the most critical.”<sup>93</sup> Nowhere is the “precise coordination” between the drummer and bass player more apparent than the interlocking rhythmic patterns performed by the bass drum and the bass. “I used a lot of kick drum with the bass [on the final mix],” Rick Hall stated, “and they had to be right in sync, they had to play exactly the same thing. It was the groove, it was the foundation, and that’s what people loved...”<sup>94</sup>

There is, however, an important distinction between music that grooves, and groove-based music. In jazz, as Berliner observed, a groove *might* involve everyone in the ensemble. In musical styles such as R&B, soul, and especially funk, the interplay between all of the musicians is crucial to establishing a groove. As Rob Bowman noted:

The rhythm section is very commonly aligned with the prevalent pattern in most rhythm and blues and popular music, where a constant dialectic is maintained between the bass guitar and bass drum, emphasizing beats one and three while a back beat on beats two and four is being hammered out by the snare drum, often in consort with a tambourine, guitar, piano and/or organ.<sup>95</sup>

The transcription of the opening measures of “Neighbor, Neighbor” (Jimmy Hughes, 1966) illustrates the “rhythm section’s precise coordination” as described by Berliner, Hall, and Bowman (Example 1.7).

Throughout the 1960s, many R&B and soul musicians, particularly James Brown, further developed the “art of the groove.” In Anne Danielsen’s detailed analysis of funk music, she described Brown’s 1967 track “Cold Sweat” stating:

All of the instruments, including vocals, work more or less in the same way, forming small but significant rhythmic gestures that are linked in every direction. The groove has become an intricate fabric of sharp percussive sounds in which one sound brings on the next: the texture of the music has

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<sup>93</sup>Berliner, *Thinking In Jazz*, 349.

<sup>94</sup>Palao, “The Sound of Fame,” 18.

<sup>95</sup>Bowman, “The Stax Sound,” 307-308.

changed from horizontally divided layers of sound to a rhythmic patchwork.<sup>96</sup>

**Example 1.7** – The opening six seconds of “Neighbor, Neighbor” highlighting the rhythmic precision of the bass drum, electric bass and piano (as shown by the squiggly line), and the snare drum and electric guitar (as shown by the straight line). For the purposes of visual clarity, the snare drum has been removed from the fourth measure of the example.

It is nearly impossible to overstate the impact that the musical and rhythmic innovations created by Brown and his band had upon R&B and soul, or pop music in general. Brown recorded “Cold Sweat” in 1967, but he, along with his band, had been developing a vertical concept of groove beginning in the early 1960s. The session musicians working in Muscle Shoals were not immune to the rhythmic advances that Brown helped bring about in R&B. From the mid-1960s onward, tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals by the house band incorporated their own variations of the “rhythmic patchwork” described by Danielsen.

<sup>96</sup> Anne Danielsen, *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 40.

While the groove may rest firmly upon the bass player and drummer in soul music, it is the responsibility of the remainder of the band (guitars, keyboards, horns, vocalists) to help perpetuate the groove throughout the entirety of the track. The composite of the opening 9 seconds of Wilson Pickett's 1966 track "Mustang Sally" (Example 1.8) reveals a complex "rhythmic patchwork," which also destabilizes the overall rhythmic organization of the measure as beat 4 becomes the goal. Drummer Roger Hawkins performs the strongest destabilizing function by accenting beat 4 when he opens the hi-hat on the "and" of beat 3, and then closes it again on beat 4. Hawkins continues this for the duration of the track. The lead guitar performed by Chips Moman, notated at the top of the example, further disrupts the rhythmic organization of the measure by anticipating every other downbeat. The offbeat phrases performed by rhythm guitarist Jimmy Johnson, what he called "rhythmic tick-tacks and chinks," fit neatly between the rhythms of Hawkins and Moman, but provide no clear indication as to where beat 1 may fall.<sup>97</sup> The bass line, performed by Tommy Cogbill, nearly fulfills the role of providing a solid downbeat, but that too is slightly weakened as he plays two eighth notes on beat 1 followed by a syncopated rhythm that propels the line forward. The baritone saxophone provides the only clear indication of the downbeat. This occurs, however, every other measure indicating an overall hypermetric organization to this 24-measure blues song. Pickett's vocal melody for the first verse (not shown) also assists in displacing a strong sense of beat 1 as his phrases stretch across multiple barlines.

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<sup>97</sup>Dan Forte, "Jimmy Johnson: Rhythm Guitar Artistry at Muscle Shoals," *Guitar Player*, April 1982, 82.

0:00-0:09

♩ = 110

Lead Guitar  
Chips Moman

Rhythm Guitar  
Jimmy Johnson

Baritone Sax

Electric Bass  
Tommy Cogbill

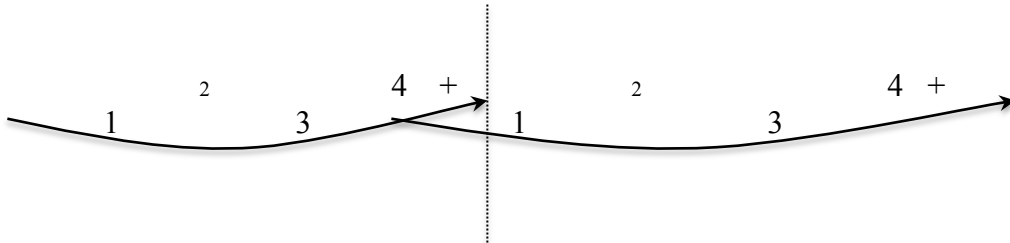
Drum Set  
Roger Hawkins

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 +

**Example 1.8** – A composite of the first 9 seconds of “Mustang Sally” with hypermetric counting beneath. The dashed barlines mark the quadruple meter, while the lines between staves indicate the hypermetric organization. The boxes show all of the rhythmic forces that help to destabilize the measures.

The strongest beats in quadruple meter are, typically, beats 1 and 3. In popular music, regardless of genre or style, the accenting of beats 2 and 4 is extremely common. Along with the snare drum, one other member of the rhythm section, usually the rhythm guitar, accents beats 2 and 4. This does not happen during “Mustang Sally.” Instead, only the snare drum accents beat 2. The absence of this second instrument in support of beats 2 and 4, and beat 2 in particular for “Mustang Sally,” frees the overall metric flow and drives the groove towards the end of each measure “pulling against the pulse,” urging the track onward. The graphic representation of the “Mustang Sally” groove (Figure 1.6) depicts an instance where beat 4 becomes the most accented part of the measure resulting in a groove that propels itself forward, and ultimately never rests since the recording fades out. Placing beats 1 and 3 and 2 and 4 at different heights, as shown in the example, represents the two levels of beat organization commonly found in quadruple meters. Beat 2 is slightly smaller in the example than beat 4 since the energy of the groove moves towards the end of the bar, as indicated by

the arrows. As Danielsen noted, “A groove does not stand still...even though the groove is not proceeding toward a definite goal, it is—to the last second—in motion.”<sup>98</sup>



**Figure 1.6** – Graphic representation of the “Mustang Sally” groove.<sup>99</sup>

“Tell Mama,” recorded by Etta James at FAME in 1967, closely conformed to the “rhythmic patchwork” groove exemplar Danielsen described. During the song’s introduction, guitarist Jimmy Johnson performed staccato rhythmic jabs on the downbeat, as David Hood’s bass line placed the rhythmic emphasis at the eighth note subdivision of the beat. Both the drums and keyboards, performed by Roger Hawkins and Barry Beckett respectively, pound the backbeat. The rhythm of the horn melody unfolds across the entirety of introduction, initially poking through during the second measure (Example 1.9). In a 2013 interview, David Hood told me Rick Hall insisted that the bass part outline the one and four chords (F and B-flat), despite the fact that the guitar and keyboard accented only the one chord.

“When we cut this on Etta,” Hood recalled, “I was playing the bass line that Tommy Cogbill played [on the original Clarence Carter song demo], which was a slightly different bass line.”

Hood continued:

<sup>98</sup>Danielson, *Presence and Pleasure*, 155. Also quoted in Fink, “Goal-Directed Soul,” 193.

<sup>99</sup>Lawrence M. Zbikowski’s 2004 article “Modelling the Groove: Conceptual Structure and Popular Music” inspired this type of graphic representation. See page 294.

And Rick said, “What are you playing? No, man. Don’t play that. I want you to play [sings the bass part] doom-doom do-do, doom-doom do-do.” Which is what I ended up playing. And I said, “Well, Rick, that’s not even the chord changes.” That’s a one-to-four change, where the original version just stayed on the one chord. And so I played the changes...’cause Rick made me. I argued with him about it, but he was right.<sup>100</sup>

The harmonic motion outlined by Hood’s bass lines helps propel the groove forward.

♩ = 120

Horns

Electric Bass

Rhythm Guitar

Organ

Drum Set

**Example 1.9** – “Tell Mama” intro reduction & “rhythmic patchwork.” The drum set only indicates the snare drum, which hits on beats 2 and 4.

The “rhythmic patchwork” of “Tell Mama” is re-stitched during the chorus. A tambourine reinforced the now emphatic backbeat instead of the organ; Hood continued the steady eighth-note bass line, now supported by an ascending keyboard figure. The horn section, which further subdivided the pulse into syncopated sixteenth and eighth note groupings, replaced Johnson’s staccato jabs. James’ vocal melody filled in the space between the horn stabs to complete the rhythmic quilt (Example 1.10).

<sup>100</sup>David Hood, interview with the author, 16 June 2013. In the discussion, Hood also pointed out the chord changes in this song where not symmetrical; some verses were longer than others. Clarence Carter originally wrote the song “Tell Daddy.”

♩ = 120

Horns

Vocal

Organ

Electric Bass

Drum Set & Tambourine

Tell ma ma

all a bout

The keyboard is nearly inaudible

it

3 Tell ma (ma)

**Example 1.10** – “Tell Mama” chorus reduction & “rhythmic patchwork”

Many of the grooves heard on tracks recorded at FAME and MSS relied on previously recorded tracks as a starting point, just as Hall constructed the “Muscle Shoals sound” on building blocks extracted from other sound sources. In a 2011 interview, David Hood remarked:

I would buy records...Stax records or Motown records and listen to them since we were doing mostly rhythm and blues. I would listen to what the bass player was doing on that and started figuring out what my role was within the rhythm section...I loved the music by Booker T. and the MG’s, and Sam and Dave, I *loved* Otis Redding. And I loved the Temptations, and the Four Tops. I loved all that music. I had no idea who was playing on those records at that time. But I was very aware of Stax, and Motown, and [that] style of music was what we were emulating.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>101</sup>David Hood, interview with the author, 24 May 2011.

Motown's influence was not limited to studios located in the South. New York session bassist Jerry Jemmott, who also recorded in Muscle Shoals, told me in a 2011 interview:

I admired what [Motown bassist James] Jamerson did; loved what he did. The only thing I copied from Jamerson was "Shotgun." I said, "I like that!" It was very basic, it gave me a foothold into rhythm and blues... That was my *entre* in to rhythm and blues; playing "Shotgun." I still play "Shotgun"...it works!<sup>102</sup>

As tracks either floated across the musical ether into the ears of players like Hood and Jemmott or artists brought cover songs into their recording sessions, the studio musicians at FAME and MSS found inspiration for their individual parts from a variety of sources.

Many tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals, including hits "Land of 1000 Dances" and "Funky Broadway," were covers.<sup>103</sup> Chris Kenner released "Land of 1000 Dances" in 1963, which Cannibal and the Headhunters covered in 1965, followed by Wilson Pickett in 1966. Musically speaking, not much connects the Kenner original and the two subsequent covers. I contend that James Jamerson's bass line for Jr. Walker's 1965 number one Motown hit "Shotgun," a song built on cyclic form, strongly influenced Tommy Cogbill's bass line for Pickett's "Land of 1000 Dances" cover (Example 1.11).

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<sup>102</sup>Jerry Jemmott, interview with the author, 20 April 2011.

<sup>103</sup>Recording and releasing cover versions of songs that were still charting for the original artists was an extremely common practice by R&B and pop artists during the 1950s and 1960s. See Bob Leszczak, *Who Did it First? Great Rhythm and Blues Cover Songs and their Original Artists* (Lanham, UK: The Scarecrow Press, 2013).

"Land of 1000 Dances"- Chris Kenner

♩=137

Bass

Drms

"Land of 1000 Dances" - Cannibal & the Headhunters

♩=143

Bass

Drms

"Shotgun" - Jr. Walker

♩=120

Bass

Drms

"Land of 1000 Dances" - Wilson Pickett

♩=170

Bass

Drms

**Example 1.11** – The drum beats and bass lines origins for the “Land of 1000 Dances.” Note the use of the “Motown beat” for the Cannibal and the Headhunters version.

Just as the riffs created by the Stax and Motown musicians influenced David Hood and Jerry Jemmott, it is likely that a few of the same tracks inspired other R&B session musicians, including Cogbill. The Jamerson and Cogbill bass lines are not identical. Each track, however, relied on cyclic form, and both bass lines are built on one-bar, repetitive melodic

patterns. Cogbill's bass line in "Land of 1000 Dances," similar to his line in "Mustang Sally," also de-emphasizes beat 1.

Roger Hawkins' drum break during Pickett's "Land of 1000 Dances" bears an uncanny similarity to the drum beat from James Brown's 1965 track "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag, pt. 1" (Example 1.12). Hawkins has remarked that Pickett "gave" him the drumbeat for "Land of 1000 Dances" (discussed further in chapter 2). "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" signaled to all those paying attention that the music of James Brown was heading into fresh territory. Brown remarked about his track stating, "I had discovered that my strength was not in the horns, it was in the rhythm. I was hearing everything, even the guitars, like they were drums."<sup>104</sup> Hawkins' or Pickett's "copping" of the "Papa" drumbeat demonstrates the influence that Brown had upon the world of Alabama-recorded R&B.

The image shows two musical staves for a drum set, both in 4/4 time. The left staff is labeled "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag, pt. 1" and has a tempo of 128. The right staff is labeled "Drum break during 'Land of 1000 Dances'" and has a tempo of 170. Both staves show a snare drum pattern with cross-sticks marked by 'x' on the fourth line. The left staff has a steady 4/4 beat, while the right staff has a more complex, syncopated pattern.

**Example 1.12** – Drum beat for "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag, pt. 1" compared to the drum break during "Land of 1000 Dances." Melvin Parker, Brown's drummer, performs the backbeat by hitting the snare drum "cross-stick," indicated by an "x" on the fourth line of the transcription.

Despite the similarity to "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag, pt. 1," Hawkins' typical rhythmic accompaniment when he worked at FAME tended toward the straight-ahead as he eschewed the complex rhythms performed by Brown's and other drummers.<sup>105</sup> The simplicity of Hawkins' drumbeat on Pickett's "Funky Broadway," for instance, compared to the beat performed on Dyke and the Blazers' original 1967 version provides a clear example

<sup>104</sup>James Brown with Bruce Tucker, *James Brown: The Godfather of Soul* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 157.

<sup>105</sup>Neither Hawkins nor his predecessor, Jerry Carrigan, was particularly flashy in his drumming style.

of this (Example 1.13). Hawkins' understated drumbeat on "Funky Broadway" (also see the drum transcription for "Land of 1000 Dances" above) counter balanced Tommy Cogbill's creative and highly syncopated bass line.<sup>106</sup> Cogbill's active bass line was likely a result of his guitar background, and his work on this particular track, in the words of Nashville session bassist Michael Rhodes, "creates the definitive movement of the song, using a push-pull rhythmic phrase and down-up melodic motion."<sup>107</sup>

"Funky Broadway" - Dyke & the Blazers

♩ = 121

"Funky Broadway" - Wilson Pickett

♩ = 114

"Cold Sweat" - James Brown

♩ = 112

**Example 1.13** – The original bass line and drumbeat for "Funky Broadway" and Pickett's version performed by Hawkins and Cogbill. Hawkins performs on the ride cymbal, which fills of a greater portion of the time continuum. I have included a transcription of the highly syncopated bass and drum part for James Brown's "Cold Sweat" for comparison. All three tracks were recorded in 1967.

<sup>106</sup>For these two tracks by Wilson Pickett, Hawkins reserves his "funkiest" playing for the drum breaks.

<sup>107</sup>Bill Leigh, ed. *The Funky Bass Book* (Milwaukee, WI: Backbeat Books, 2010), 30.

Not long after Etta James' "Tell Mama" sessions, the members of the FAME rhythm section left Rick Hall and opened their own studio. Changing musical tastes during the late 1960s and early 1970s caused tracks recorded at Muscle Shoals Sound or FAME to move towards a much more pristine pop sound. Barry Beckett commented on how the changing sound of late 1960s pop music affected the MSRS:

By the end of the '60s, there was a new sound coming out of California, which involved a lot of echo and a particular type of playing. We thought the best musicians in the world were in California at that time: Johnny Rivers' stuff, for instance. Everything out there was very clean, a lot of presence, warm, and it hit hard. What we were doing still hit hard, but it didn't have the sheen to it, the pop sound. We couldn't get a pop sound, and we wanted to be able to do that. We didn't want to be tied to R&B for the rest of our lives.<sup>108</sup>

The newly christened Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section, however, continued to create R&B-inflected grooves for both R&B and pop artists alike.

Over the course of many sessions first at FAME and then MSS, Hawkins and Hood became an extremely musically competent, tight rhythmic unit. The groove established on the Staple Singers 1972 number one pop and R&B hit "I'll Take You There" demonstrates their musical simpatico. Similar to the other Muscle Shoals tracks previously addressed, the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section lifted the groove heard on "I'll Take You There" from a 1969 ska track by the Harry J. Allstars. David Hood reproduced the original bass line with only minor rhythmic and melodic alterations (Example 1.14). It is Hawkins' performance, however, that lends this groove an ineffable quality. The steady eighth-note pattern on the closed hi-hat propels this groove forward. The cross-stick snare drum hits in the first measure of the Staples' example that are joined by the syncopated bass drum figure in the second measure weave in-and-out of Hood's two-measure bass line to create a groove that masks

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<sup>108</sup>Hoskyns, "Soul Provider."

Hawkins dutiful adherence to the backbeat. “My most creative part is probably on the Staple Singers’ ‘I’ll Take You There,’” commented Hawkins, “where I overlap the bars and put the bass drum on beats one and three for a mixture of R&B and reggae.”<sup>109</sup>

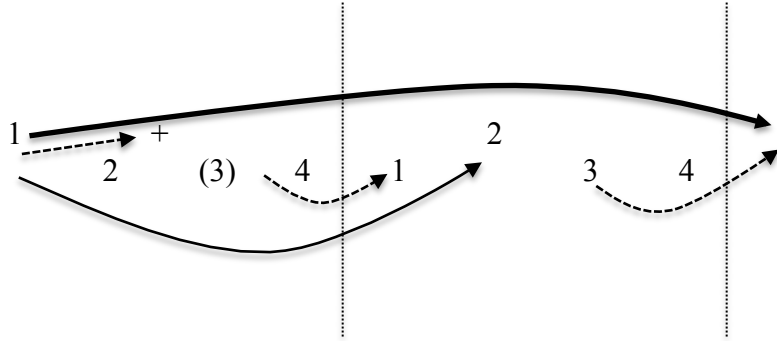
The image displays two musical examples. The first example, titled "Liquidator" - Harry J. Allstars, has a tempo of 87. It features a bass line in 4/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The bass line consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some measures containing beamed eighth notes. The drum line is shown on a separate staff with 'x' marks indicating hits on beats 1, 2, and 3. The second example, titled "I'll Take You There" - The Staple Singers, has a tempo of 102. It also features a bass line and a drum line. The bass line includes eighth and quarter notes, with some measures containing beamed eighth notes. The drum line shows hits on beats 1, 2, and 3, with some measures containing beamed eighth notes. Both examples use a 4/4 time signature.

**Example 1.14** – “Liquidator” as performed by Harry J. Allstars, and “I’ll Take You There” as performed by Hawkins and Hood.

The two-measure groove for “I’ll Take You There,” as seen in a graphic representation (Figure 1.7), propels itself forward in several ways including multiple intermediate goals contained within the recurring pattern. The accenting of beat 1 and the “and” of beat 2 in the first measure is the initial intermediate goal, as indicated by the elevated 1, +, and the dotted straight line. The rhythmic motion begun in the first measure builds towards the secondary intermediate goal, as indicated by the elevated 2, and the solid curved line moving from the first to the second measure. David Hood’s bass line, as indicated by the curved dotted lines, provides another element of intermediate motion. The solid line extending from beat 1 in the

<sup>109</sup>Soocher, “Where the Hits are Made,” 19.

first measure that moves across the top of the graphic depicts the overall forward motion of this cyclic groove.



**Figure 1.7** – A graphic representation of the groove heard on “I’ll Take You There.”

A reduction of the overall groove (Example 1.15) heard during “I’ll Take You There” reveals the vertical “rhythmic patchwork” as the combined instruments create a complex interlocking pattern. The “I’ll Take You There” groove is far more intricate than the groove heard on “Tell Mama,” which indicates that by 1972 the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section had completely absorbed the rhythmic ideas pioneered by James Brown and could apply them to any musical style. As singer Mavis Staples recalled, “The Muscle Shoals guys were just a funk band...[Those] guys were a rhythm section that a singer would just die for.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Back, “Out of Sight,” 258.

♩ = 102

Horns

Vocal

Help me Come on Come on Some bod y help me now (I'll take you there)

Lead Guitar

Keyboard

Electric Bass

Rhythm Guitar

Snare Drum

**Example 1.15** – “I’ll Take You There” – reduction, “rhythmic patchwork” and complex interlocking pattern.

In Charles Keil’s discussion of “vital drive,” he proposed that how individual musicians generated specific sounds (for drummers he called this “taps”) was a crucial element in the production of a groove.<sup>111</sup> The specific sounds made by the individual musicians, therefore, assist with the production and continuation of the groove. During “I’ll Take You There,” the sound of Hawkins’ drumstick hitting the rim of the snare drum shell does just that. Despite Hawkins’ playing on beats 2 and 4 (see Example 1.14), the difference in sound production between the “click” of his cross-stick compared to his typical snare drum “thwack,” as heard on tracks such as “Land of 1000 Dances,” “Funky Broadway,” “Tell Mama” allows the groove of “I’ll Take You There” to float across the time continuum.

A review of the Staples’ album *Beatitude: Respect Yourself* appeared in a June 1972 issue of *Rolling Stone*. Much of the review centered on “I’ll Take You There,” and Vince Aletti also remarked on the songs’ groove: “With the bass line providing the spine of the

<sup>111</sup>See Keil, “Motion and Feeling through Music,” 341-42.

arrangement, drums, horns, guitar and a tasty bit of harmonica are all jumbled in there, jostling each other along in the sort of shared excitement rarely communicated in a studio session.”<sup>112</sup> Describing groove, ethnomusicologist Ingrid Monson once noted:

The use of the term *feeling* as a synonym for *groove* underscores the emotional and interpersonal character of groove—something negotiated between musicians that is larger than themselves. Good time in this sense produces not only the physical patting of the feet but an emotional response as well.<sup>113</sup>

The feeling engendered by “I’ll Take You There” no doubt helped the track achieve the number one position on both the *Billboard* and *Cash Box* R&B and pop charts during April, 1972.

## CHARTS & AWARDS

In September 1975, the Muscle Shoals Music Association (MSMA) erected a few signs along several roads that read “Welcome to City of Muscle Shoals. Hit Recording Capital of the World.”<sup>114</sup> When the MSMA erected these signs, the organization had only been in existence for a brief period of time, and the recording industry in Muscle Shoals had enjoyed about thirteen years of success.<sup>115</sup> While one of the goals of the MSMA was to promote the local music industry, their slogan may seem a rather audacious statement to someone not familiar with music business during the 1970s. In a relatively short time, however, the music industry developed from this backwater region of northwest Alabama had already left a lasting

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<sup>112</sup>Vince Aletti, “Records: Beatitude: Respect Yourself, The Staple Singers,” *Rolling Stone*, 22 June 1972, 62.

<sup>113</sup>Monson, *Saying Something*, 68.

<sup>114</sup>Brad Fisher, “Music Industry Mounts Public Relations Effort,” *Florence Times—Tri-Cities Daily*, 14 September 1975, 35.

<sup>115</sup>The first print mention of the MSMA appears in Dick Cooper, “Shoals Music,” *Florence Times—Tri-Cities Daily*, 14 January 1973, 38. Two weeks later, Cooper reported that the MSMA held its first meeting at Singleton’s Restaurant and elected a board of directors; see Dick Cooper, “Shoals Music,” *Florence Times—Tri-Cities Daily*, 2 February 1973, 40.

impression upon popular music. Although the claim by the MSMA cannot be verified using any exact quantitative methods, the rise and overall impact of the Muscle Shoals music industry upon the American popular music landscape from the 1962 through the early 1970s can be explored through an examination of record chart data and music industry-related awards.

Inconsistencies existed between the *Billboard* and *Cash Box* record buying charts; for example, tracks appeared on the top-ten for one chart, but not on the other. Addressing problems with the *Billboard* charts, Richard Ripani noted:

Since the sales and radio airplay data were collected by surveying sales outlets and radio stations selected by *Billboard*, the results do not always reflect the true success of a song.<sup>116</sup>

Musicologist David Brackett stated a similar concern in a 2003 essay:

A cautionary word is in order here: [this article] does not endorse the idea of *Billboard's* charts as transparent windows through which the popularity of recordings may be viewed in an absolute sense; rather, the charts are particular representations of popularity that circulated and thereby affected public notions of what was popular.<sup>117</sup>

The warnings by both Ripani and Brackett are insightful in that they reveal the need for chart data as printed in *Billboard* and *Cash Box*, but advise the use of that information as *only* a representation of a particular moment in time and not an absolute.

For many people, including music industry insiders, chart data and awards are a way to monitor the success of a given artist, label, or in the case of this dissertation, a regional recording center. Country music producer Chet Atkins once described the “Nashville sound”

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<sup>116</sup>Richard J. Ripani, *The New Blue Music: Changes in Rhythm & Blues, 1950–1999* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 9.

<sup>117</sup>David Brackett, “What A Difference a Name Makes: Two Instances of African-American Popular Music” In *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed., eds. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, Richard Middleton (New York: Routledge, 2012), 133.

as the “coins jingling in his pocket.”<sup>118</sup> This metaphor does little to describe any sonic characteristics of tracks recorded in Nashville. It does provide, however, a glimpse into the reception of the “Nashville sound”; many tracks produced with the “Nashville sound” resulted in numerous hits for the musicians, songwriters, and producers who recorded these tracks. The *Billboard* and *Cash Box* charts monitor those successes in terms of the number of records sold, based on reports from select retail outlets and radio stations. The 73 tracks analyzed here that appeared on the various R&B and pop charts become a barometer for the successes of the Muscle Shoals music industry.

The chart success of an individual track by a particular artist can also have a profound influence on the production of other tracks recorded by different artists. This is certainly the case in Muscle Shoals as producer Rick Hall mimicked the sound and aesthetic of several hit tracks released in the early 1960s by Atlantic Records. Once Hall found chart success with a track he produced, he repeatedly tried to duplicate that success by following a particular sonic blueprint on future tracks.

Over the history of the Grammy awards, especially awards for popular music, musicians and critics alike have derided them as a representation of a self-serving music industry and commented that the awards often do not indicate quality or musical artistry. From 1958, the first year of the Grammy’s, through 1965, the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences (NARAS), the organization that sponsors the Grammy’s, had one award for R&B recordings.<sup>119</sup> NARAS struggled throughout the 1960s, arguably R&B and

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<sup>118</sup>See Joli Jensen, *Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), 83.

<sup>119</sup>From 1958 to 1960, the award was for best R&B performance; from 1961 to 1965, the award was for best R&B recording.

soul music's most popular decade, to include representative performers.<sup>120</sup> During the early-to-mid 1960s, R&B record executives including Ahmet and Nesuhi Ertegun and Jerry Wexler from Atlantic Records, and Berry Gordy, Motown label chief, lobbied NARAS to expand the R&B awards. Only after Wexler openly criticized NARAS in 1965 for their lackluster treatment of R&B music and musicians did the organization expand their R&B nominations.<sup>121</sup> In 1966, NARAS offered three R&B Grammy awards: best recording; best solo vocal performance, male or female; best group, vocal or instrumental. Despite the success of the Supremes and other female R&B vocalists during 1966, the members of NARAS failed to nominate a female R&B singer or "girl" group for an award that year. Also, the Motown record label, a leader in musical style, artistic quality, and chart position, only received one award during the 1960s for the Temptation's track "Cloud Nine" (1968).

The chart data and industry related awards were inconsistent, and I acknowledge the limitations to what information they present. The 73 tracks analyzed here, however, embody the most significant characteristics that listeners identify or associate as the so-called "Muscle Shoals sound." R&B-oriented record labels based their success on hit singles.<sup>122</sup> David Brackett warned against relying too heavily upon the charts, but he also realized that the data contained in them could reveal information not directly monitored by *Billboard* or *Cash Box*. As he noted:

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<sup>120</sup>See Henry Schipper, *Broken Record: The Inside Story of the Grammy Awards* (New York: Carol Publishing, 1992). See "Respect: R&B," 70-78.

<sup>121</sup>Schipper, *Broken Record*, 72-73. In 1968, Wexler remained disillusioned with the Grammy process. He commented to *Rolling Stone* "The Grammy tastemakers—they voted certain artists in, who happen to be black artists, who have nothing to do with Rhythm and Blues; I don't want to mention any names, but there's been some tragic miscarriages of justice. I'm not pleading my case: I think it would be very fair if James Brown would win the award quite often, as well as Wilson Pickett, a Joe Tex or an Otis Redding." Sue Clarke, "Wexler: A Man of Dedication," *Rolling Stone*, 28 September 1968, 8. Wexler's comments are likely directed towards the 1967 Grammy Awards when jazz pianist Ramsey Lewis won an award for "best R&B group, vocal or instrumental" over James and Bobby Purify, Sam and Dave, King Curtis, and the Capitols.

<sup>122</sup>Robert M. Bowman, "The Stax Sound: A Musicological Analysis," *Popular Music* 14, no. 3 (1995): 288.

[T]o dismiss the information contained in popularity charts is to believe in the possibility of an unmediated means of conveying popularity. If we can relinquish the vision of a perfect re-creation of a historical moment, then a space is opened where analyzing the charts as a symbolic mediation of that period becomes plausible.<sup>123</sup>

Record chart analysis illuminates a particular historical period, and as Brackett's comments suggest, become a representation of that particular historical period. This section examines the space that Brackett described where chart data, and I would also add Grammy and RIAA awards, become tools used to assess the growth and general acceptance of the "Muscle Shoals sound" into the sonic fabric of American popular music.

A brief word is in order about Motown, Stax, and Atlantic, the three dominant R&B labels of the 1960s. Both Motown and Stax operated their own production facilities in Detroit and Memphis, respectively, that included in-house songwriters, musicians, producers, and engineers. Atlantic owned a recording studio in New York City, but by the mid-1960s the label recorded their R&B artists first at Stax, and then in Muscle Shoals. In some instances, the tables and charts included below indicate both the studio and the label where the tracks were recorded; for example, "Muscle Shoals (Atlantic)" represents a track recorded in Muscle Shoals released by Atlantic, or "Atlantic (Stax)" represents a track released by Atlantic recorded in Stax's Memphis studio.

1966 was the breakout year for the Muscle Shoals music industry. During that year, eight tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals charted in the top twenty on either the *Billboard* or *Cash Box* R&B or pop chart.<sup>124</sup> As a point of comparison, from 1962 through 1965, a total of only six tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals entered the top twenty on either chart. The

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<sup>123</sup>Brackett, "What A Difference a Name Makes," 133

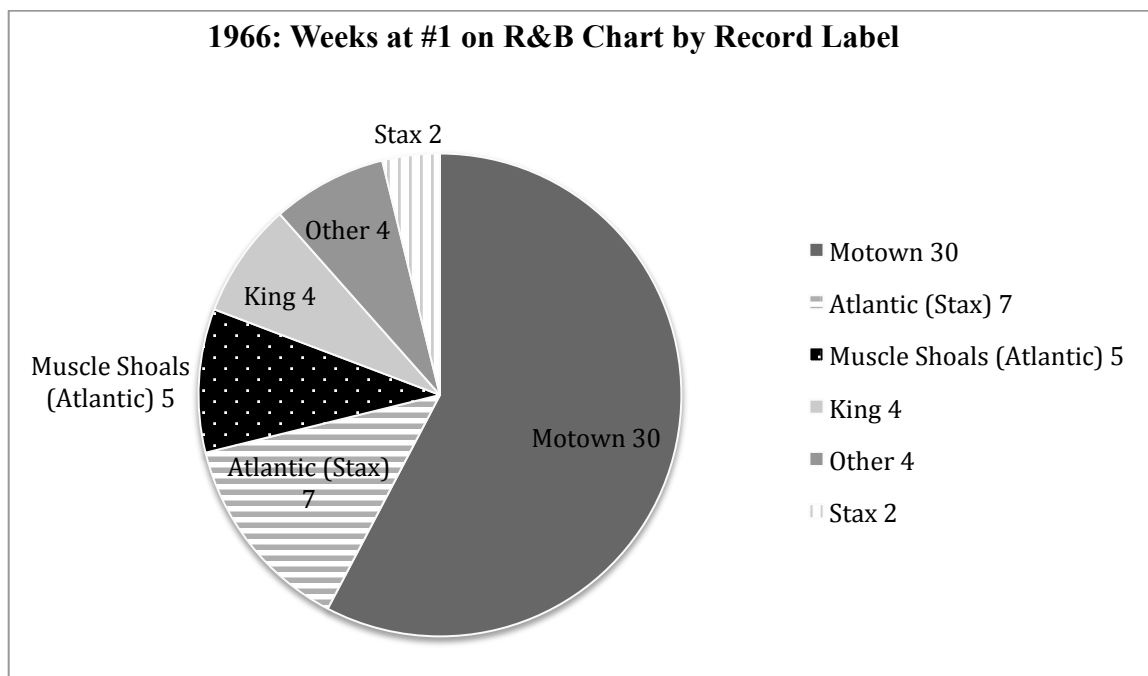
<sup>124</sup>Although my research into chart data utilizes the listings by both *Billboard* and *Cash Box*, I have primarily relied on the *Billboard* data throughout this section.

watershed moment for the Alabama industry came in May 1966 when Percy Sledge’s “When a Man Loves a Woman” simultaneously achieved the number one spot on both the *Billboard* and *Cash Box* R&B and pop charts. This track first appeared on the charts during the week of April 16, 1966, and RIAA awarded the track certified gold status on July 16, 1966. In order to achieve gold status (500,000 copies sold) by July 16 (93 days), the track sold an average of approximately 5376 copies per day. In total, three tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals also reached the number one position on either the *Billboard* or *Cash Box* R&B or Pop chart during 1966 (Table 1.6).

Song Title	Chart	Peak Position	Weeks at Peak Position
When a Man Loves a Woman	<i>Billboard</i> R&B	1	4
When a Man Loves a Woman	<i>Billboard</i> Hot 100	1	2
Land of 1000 Dances	<i>Billboard</i> R&B	1	1
Land of 1000 Dances	<i>Billboard</i> Hot 100	6	2
I’m Your Puppet	<i>Cash Box</i> R&B	1	2
I’m Your Puppet	<i>Billboard</i> Hot 100	6	2

**Table 1.2** – Top tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals during 1966

While attaining such crossover success is significant, the chart and sales data represent only numbers (albeit important numbers) when not put into perspective alongside other R&B tracks from the same year. In just a year’s time, Motown went from owning a dominant share of the number one R&B hits (Table 1.7) to less than half of that, while recordings from Muscle Shoals nearly doubled their presence. Beginning in 1967, the sound of Southern soul in general and tracks produced in Muscle Shoals in particular vied for the top chart positions with releases by Motown.

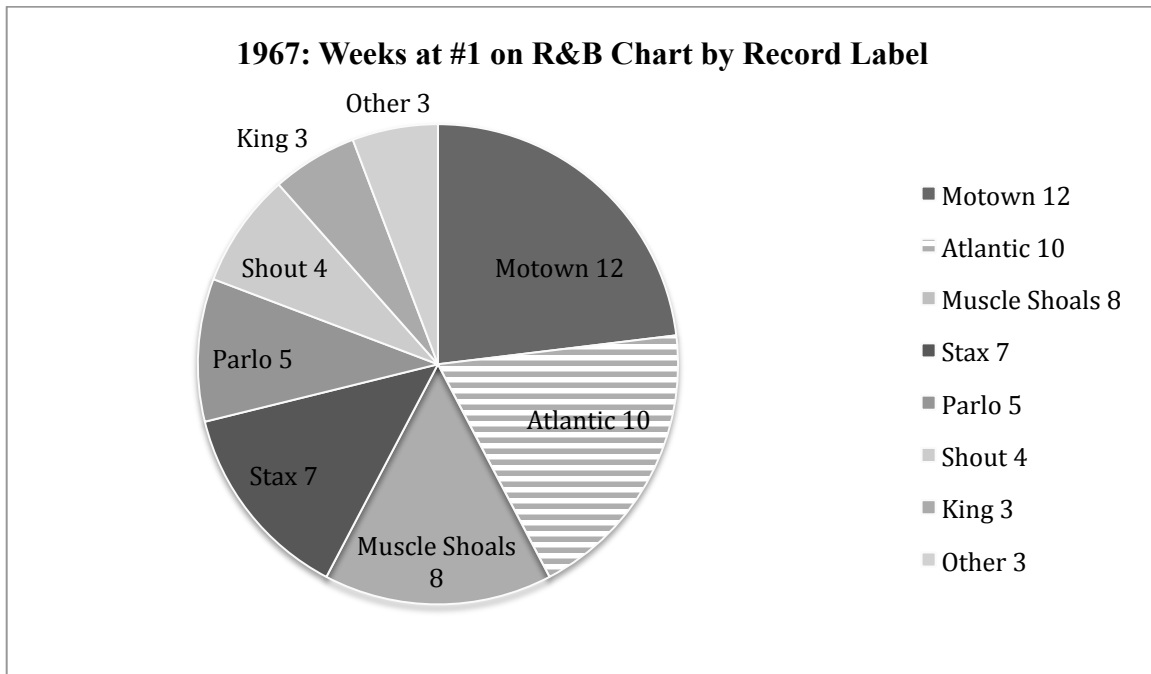


**Table 1.3** – Weeks at #1 on 1966 R&B Chart, organized by record label.<sup>125</sup>

1967 was the year Southern soul “arrived” upon the national pop music scene. Thirteen tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals appeared in the top 20 R&B charts.<sup>126</sup> Three tracks recorded in the Shoals, Aretha Franklin’s “I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You),” Arthur Conley’s “Sweet Soul Music,” and Wilson Pickett’s “Funky Broadway,” occupied the top-spot on the *Billboard* R&B chart for a total of 8 weeks (Table 1.8). The same three tracks also achieved crossover success by appearing in the top ten on both the R&B and pop charts in *Billboard* and *Cash Box*. Franklin’s breakout track became the most successful Muscle Shoals recorded track during 1967 as it held the number one position for seven weeks on both *Billboard*’s and *Cash Box*’s R&B chart.

<sup>125</sup>Twenty different tracks by thirteen artists recording for eight labels held the number one position on the *Billboard* R&B chart during 1966. The Temptations had three number one hits in 1966, Stevie Wonder, Wilson Pickett, and the Supremes each had two. Two different James Brown recordings on the King label held the top spot for a total of four weeks. The Stax label held the number one spot with tracks by two different artists for a total of two weeks. Atlantic Records held the top spot for seven weeks. Wilson Pickett recorded “634-5789 (Soulsville, USA)” at the Stax studio in Memphis, but Atlantic records released the track on their label.

<sup>126</sup>Only two tracks, Wilson Pickett’s “Soul Dance #3” and Laura Lee’s “Uptight Good Man,” did not crack the top twenty on both the *Billboard* and *Cash Box* R&B chart.



**Table 1.4** –Weeks at #1 on 1967 R&B Chart, organized by record label.<sup>127</sup>

Between 1966 and 1967, tracks recorded in the Shoals made modest gains in terms of chart position, but as we shall see, the overall impact of the Alabama recording industry upon popular music was significant. In both 1966 and 1967 eight record labels had tracks that reached the number one position on the *Billboard* R&B chart. The three most dominant R&B labels for those two years were Motown, Atlantic, and Stax. The Motown recording studio produced eleven number one R&B tracks in 1966, the Stax studio produced three number one tracks, and two separate studios in Muscle Shoals (Norala, and FAME), produced two number one tracks. In 1967, Motown's studio produced five number one R&B tracks, Atlantic's New York studio produced two, FAME in Muscle Shoals also produced two, and the Stax studio produced one. In total, thirty-five tracks held the number one position on the

<sup>127</sup>Fifteen different tracks by thirteen artists held the number one position on the *Billboard* R&B chart during 1967. Tracks by Aretha Franklin held the number one spot three times.

*Billboard* R&B chart between 1966 and 1967. The recording studio industry in Muscle Shoals produced four of those tracks, or over 11 percent.

The year-end top 50 R&B singles for both 1966 and 1967 reflect the listening trends represented by the number-one tracks for the same years; the sound of Southern soul invaded the sonic landscape once dominated by Motown. The significant difference between the 1966 and 1967 year-end charts, however, was in the overall chart positions of tracks recorded at FAME compared to the placement of tracks recorded at other studios located across the country that also produced R&B tracks. In 1966, Motown held four of the top ten spots for the year-end R&B results, “When a Man Loves a Woman” placed eighth, while two tracks recorded at Stax placed in the top ten.<sup>128</sup> In 1967, two tracks recorded at FAME were in the year-end top ten, while every other major R&B label only held one (Table 1.9).<sup>129</sup> One R&B track recorded at FAME, Motown, Stax, and Atlantic also charted on the 1967 year-end *Billboard* Hot 100 list.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> The other tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals that placed on the 1966 year-end Top 50 R&B Chart were “Searching For My Love” by Bobby Moore & the Rhythm Aces, #29; “Land of 1000 Dances” by Wilson Pickett, #40; while “Neighbor, Neighbor” by Jimmy Hughes, “Warm and Tender Love” by Percy Sledge, and “I’m Your Puppet” by James and Bobby Purify held the #47 through #49 spots respectively.

<sup>129</sup> FAME produced three tracks in the top twenty-five, “I Never Loved a Man,” “Sweet Soul Music,” and “Funky Broadway,” while Motown and Stax each had five tracks.

<sup>130</sup> “Respect” (Atlantic) #13; “I Was Made to Love Her” (Motown) #14; “Sweet Soul Music” (ATCO, recorded at FAME) #17; “Soul Man” (Stax) #19. *Billboard*, 30 December 1967, 58.

### 1966 Year-End Top Ten R&B Singles:

<i>Song Title</i>	<i>Artist</i>	<i>Label</i> <sup>131</sup>
1. Hold On, I'm Comin'	Sam & Dave	Stax
2. Cool Jerk	Capitols	Karen
3. Baby Scratch My Back	Slip Harpo	Excelllo
4. Ain't Too Proud to Beg	Temptations	Gordy (Motown)
5. Barefootin'	Robert Parker	Nola
6. 634-5789	Wilson Pickett	Atlantic (Memphis)
7. Up Tight	Stevie Wonder	Tamla (Motown)
<b>8. When a Man Loves a Woman*</b>	<b>Percy Sledge</b>	<b>Atlantic (Muscle Shoals)</b>
9. What Becomes of the Brokenhearted	Jimmy Ruffin	Soul (Motown)
10. Beauty is Only Skin Deep	Temptations	Gordy (Motown)

\* #31 on year-end Top Singles (pop)

### 1967 Year-End Top Ten R&B Singles:

<i>Song Title</i>	<i>Artist</i>	<i>Label</i> <sup>132</sup>
1. Respect	Aretha Franklin	Atlantic (New York)
2. Soul Man	Sam & Dave	Stax
<b>3. I Never Loved A Man (The Way I Loved You)*</b>	<b>Aretha Franklin</b>	<b>Atlantic (Muscle Shoals)</b>
4. Make Me Yours	Bettye Swann	Money
5. I Was Made to Love Her	Stevie Wonder	Tamla (Motown)
6. Cold Sweat	James Brown	King
7. Are You Lonely For Me	Freddie Scott	Shout
8. Tell It Like It Is	Aaron Neville	Parlo
<b>9. Sweet Soul Music**</b>	<b>Arthur Conley</b>	<b>Atco (Muscle Shoals)</b>
10. (Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Higher & Higher	Jackie Wilson	Brunswick

\* # 2 on year-end *Top R&B* LP's

\*\* #17 on year-end *Hot 100*

**Table 1.5** – 1966 and 1967 Year-End Top Ten R&B Singles

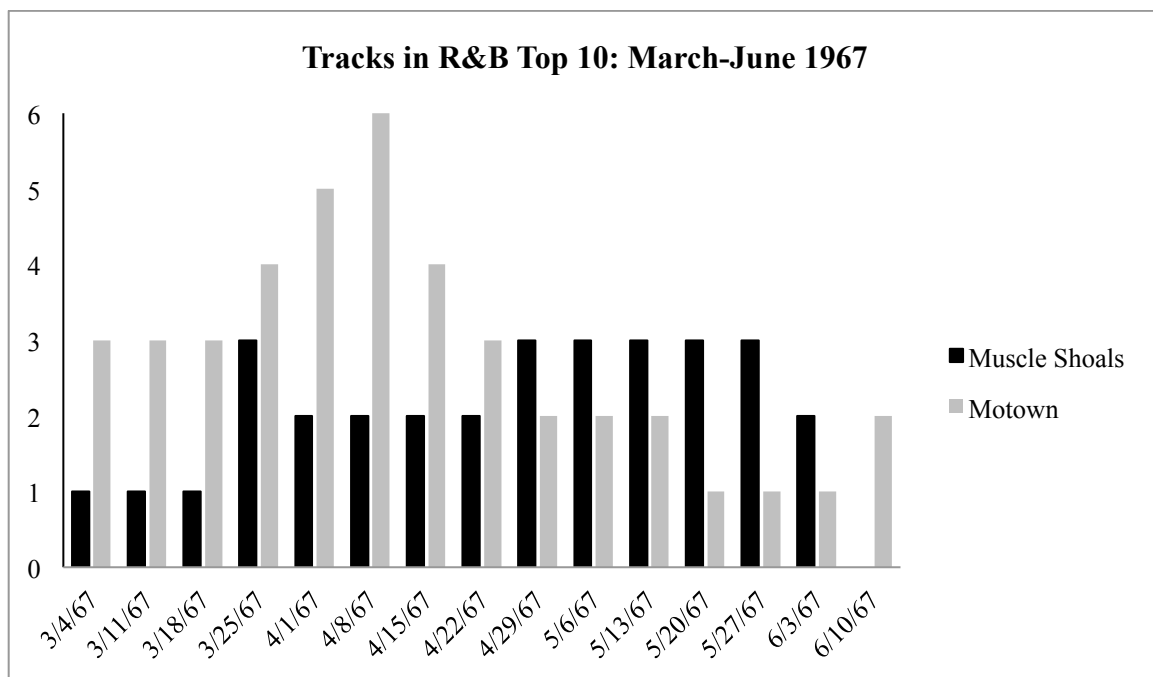
A closer look at a three-month period from 1967 reveals the prominence of tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals in terms of chart success. From March 4 through June 3, 1967, at least one track recorded at FAME remained in the top ten on the *Billboard* R&B chart.<sup>133</sup> Motown was the only other label/studio to achieve equal (and slightly greater) chart success

<sup>131</sup>*Billboard*, 24 December 1966.

<sup>132</sup>*Billboard*, 30 December 1967.

<sup>133</sup>From March 25 through June 3, two and sometimes three tracks recorded at FAME appeared in the top 10.

during the same period.<sup>134</sup> For six consecutive weeks, April 8 through May 13, 1967, two tracks recorded at FAME charted in the top five; Motown also had two tracks in the top 5 from April 15 through May 6. Franklin’s “I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)” remained at the top of the *Billboard* R&B chart for seven consecutive weeks. For two weeks, April 29 through May 6, the Franklin track along with Arthur Conley’s “Sweet Soul Music”—tracks recorded at FAME during the same week in January 1967—held the number one and number two chart positions, respectively (Table 1.10).



**Table 1.6** – The left column represents the number of tracks per week that appeared on the chart.

<sup>134</sup>During this nine-week period, FAME averaged 2 tracks in the top ten, while Motown averaged nearly 3 tracks. Stax, the only other label/studio to consistently place tracks on the charts during this same period, averaged 1 track. The most tracks recorded at FAME to appear in the top ten during this time was three. For the week ending April 8, 1967, Motown held 6 of the top 10 spots on the R&B chart, but not the number one spot, which was held by “I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You).”

The awarding of Gold record status (500,000 sales) by the RIAA also provides a metric that indicates another level of acceptance for the “Muscle Shoals sound.”<sup>135</sup> These awards represent overall sales, a similar standard used by *Billboard* or *Cash Box* to determine chart position. Up through 1965 only one track recorded in Muscle Shoals, Joe Tex’s 1964 “Hold What You’ve Got,” received a Gold award. In both 1966 and 1967, the RIAA awarded Gold status to three tracks recorded in the Shoals for a combined six gold records.<sup>136</sup> Tracks by Wilson Pickett received three of those awards, followed by one each for Sledge, Franklin, and Conley. Motown, as a point of comparison, received twenty-one awards between 1961 and 1965, and eleven awards during 1966 and 1967.

The expansion of Grammy awards for R&B partially reflect the music’s increasing popularity and chart dominance throughout the 1960s. Two tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals during 1966, Sledge’s “When a Man Loves a Woman” and James and Bobby Purify’s “I’m Your Puppet,” received Grammy nominations in all three categories; best rhythm and blues recording (“When a Man Loves a Woman”); best rhythm and blues solo vocal performance, male or female (Sledge); best rhythm and blues group, vocal or instrumental (Purify’s).<sup>137</sup> Overall, each category included five artists or tracks for consideration. Neither Sledge nor the Purify’s won an award.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>The Recording Industry Association of America provides a brief history of their awards on their website. See: “History of the Awards,” [http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinum.php?content\\_selector=historyx](http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinum.php?content_selector=historyx). Accessed 2 June 2012.

<sup>136</sup>See Joseph Murrells, *The Book of Golden Discs* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1978). The RIAA maintains a searchable awards data on their website. See “Searchable Database,” [http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?content\\_selector=gold-platinum-searchable-database](http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?content_selector=gold-platinum-searchable-database). Using this database, however, proves extremely frustrating.

<sup>137</sup>Thomas O’Neil, *The Grammys: For the Record* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993) provides a list of all Grammy nominees and winners between 1958 and 1991, as well as commentary on the award.

<sup>138</sup>Ray Charles’ “Crying Time” won best R&B recording and Charles won best vocalist. Pianist Ramsey Lewis’ “Hold It Right There” won the Grammy for best R&B group, vocal or instrumental.

The popularity and success of Aretha Franklin's 1967 breakout album *I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)* likely caused the NARAS members to add a separate award for best male *and* female R&B vocalist. Along with Franklin's "Respect," Etta James' "Tell Mama," recorded in Muscle Shoals, received a nomination in the new category. NARAS also nominated Wilson Pickett's "Funky Broadway" for best R&B vocal performance, male.<sup>139</sup> Although not recorded in Muscle Shoals, "Respect," which used members of the FAME house band on the track, won best R&B recording, and earned Franklin two of her many Grammy Awards.<sup>140</sup> Franklin also received nominations in the best vocal performance, female category for "Respect", and best contemporary female solo vocal performance for "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman." Although industry insiders had exerted pressure on NARAS to acknowledge the achievements of R&B artists by expanding the nominations, by 1967 the growing popularity of R&B and soul musicians such as Percy Sledge, Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, Stevie Wonder, and many others could no longer be disregarded by the recording academy.

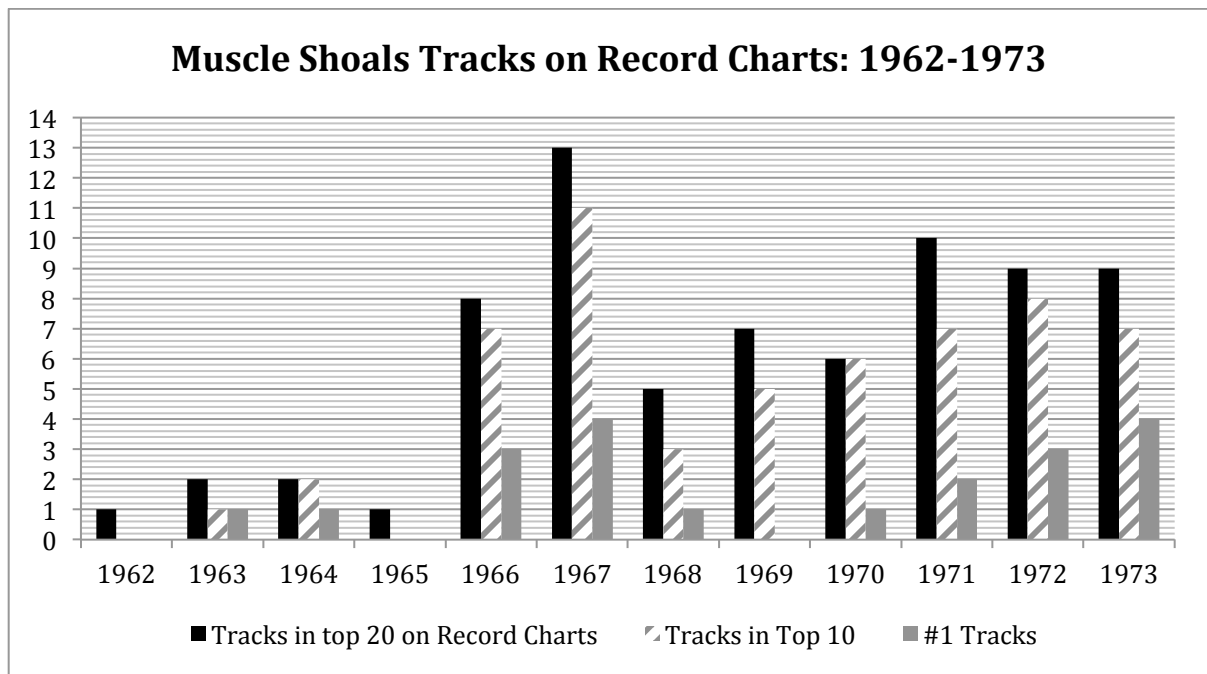
Analyzing the *Billboard* and *Cash Box* chart positions and the RIAA and NARAS awards for tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals represent one way to view the growth of Muscle Shoals music industry into a major force within the American popular music landscape. There is little doubt that the Motown record label produced *the* dominant R&B sound during 1966 and 1967, and did so for the remainder of the 1960s. But, the emergence of the Muscle Shoals music industry onto the national popular music scene in 1966 with the success of "When a Man Loves a Woman" followed by a sustained presence on the *Billboard* and *Cash Box* charts during 1967 and thereafter indicates that this grassroots production center could

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<sup>139</sup>Lou Rawls' won for his performance on "Dead End Street."

<sup>140</sup>Franklin won the award for best R&B solo vocal, female.

challenge the “assembly line” methods utilized by some of the large-scale competition. The findings also reveal a significant shift beginning in the mid-1960s with the general acceptance by a large portion of the American public for the music produced from Muscle Shoals. Beginning in the mid-to-late 1960s, the “Muscle Shoals sound” permeated rather deeply into the sonic consciousness of pop music listeners as exemplified by the number of tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals to appear in the top twenty *Billboard* and *Cash Box* R&B and pop charts, the Grammy award nominations and victories, as well as RIAA certified gold records. Despite the claim by the Motown record label that they produced “The Sound of Young America,” from 1966 through the mid-1970s and beyond the R&B and then pop music heard by many Americans, young or old, included a roughly ten percent mix of the “Muscle Shoals sound” (Table 1.11).



**Table 1.7** – Muscle Shoals Tracks on Record Charts (R&B or pop) 1962-1973

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Examining the musical and sonic signifiers of the “Muscle Shoals sound” combined with analysis of record chart data and industry-related awards helps, in part, to explain how this region of northwest Alabama became one of the premier recording centers during the 1960s and ‘70s. A sound that initially started as “gimmicky”—the heavy use of echo on “Steal Away,” for example—quickly developed into a groove—“Let’s Do It Over,” for example—that was further developed and honed—“Mustang Sally” or “Tell Mama,” for example—and culminated with the crisp rhythmic alignment performed by in-demand session musicians heard on “I’ll Take You There.” Tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals further distinguished themselves from the “Memphis sound” by incorporating both a horn section and backing vocals. The sparse musical textures also distanced Muscle Shoals from Motown, but kept the tracks recorded at FAME aligned with the sonic principles associated with Southern soul. Although subtle, slower tempos and preferences for standard song form allowed Shoals-produced tracks to retain their individuality in the crowded R&B field. Other musical examples exist, but the tracks highlighted here that also appeared in the *Billboard* and *Cash Box* top twenty, along with Grammy nominations and RIAA certified sales status, indicate that Rick Hall and the studio musicians working in Muscle Shoals produced an identifiable sound.

## CHAPTER 2: YOU'VE GOT TO EARN IT: STUDIO MUSICIANS IN MUSCLE SHOALS

Since the early 2000s, a trend has emerged where historically important studio and back-up musicians are receiving wider public recognition, and the accolades have come from a variety of sources. During the past ten years a limited number of documentary films have been made that focused on the contributions of highly influential but relatively unknown musicians. *Standing in the Shadows of Motown*, released theatrically in 2003, chronicled the story of the Funk Brothers, the group of studio musicians who performed on nearly every track recorded in the 1960s for the Detroit-based label. In 2008, *The Wrecking Crew*, a film about the Los Angeles studio musicians known by the same name and who appeared on hundreds of pop, rock, and jazz records, appeared in major film festivals across the globe.<sup>1</sup> More recently, 2013 saw the release of *20 Feet From Stardom* that highlights the stories and musical contributions of several backup singers who perform and are featured on many iconic pop and rock tracks.<sup>2</sup> Collectively, these films shine a spotlight on individual musicians who do not generally stand at center stage.

The music industry has also helped to raise the profile of accompanying musicians. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame created an award for sidemen, now known as the “Award for Musical Excellence,” in 2000. Musicians honored in this category include Bill Black and Scotty Moore, both of whom backed Elvis Presley; Hal Blaine, the drummer for the

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<sup>1</sup>Due to legal complications over the music rights in this film, *The Wrecking Crew* has not been released theatrically. For more information see the film’s website, <http://wreckingcrew.tv/>.

<sup>2</sup>*Twenty Feet from Stardom*, <<http://twentyfeetfromstardom.com/synopsis>>, accessed 10 July 2012.

Wrecking Crew; Chet Atkins, guitarist; James Jamerson, Funk Brothers' bass player; King Curtis, a saxophonist who appeared on numerous hit records; and others. Only in 2012, however, did the Rock Hall induct the backing bands the Blue Caps, the Comets, the Crickets, the Famous Flames, the Midnighters, and the Miracles long after their leaders, Gene Vincent, Bill Haley, Buddy Holly, James Brown, Hank Ballard, and Smokey Robinson, respectively, had been enshrined. Among the numerous studio musicians that worked in Muscle Shoals and performed on hundreds of hit records, only keyboardist Spooner Oldham is officially honored by the Rock Hall: he was inducted in 2009. The Musicians Hall of Fame, located in Nashville, opened its doors in 2006 and inducted the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section (MSRS) and friends in 2008.<sup>3</sup>

The value and importance of studio musicians has long been accepted among music industry insiders. The majority of the public, however, is likely unaware of who exactly, besides the star singer, also performs on the songs they have been listening to. Both the films and awards elevate the public status of these musicians, and may even intensify people's curiosity about their personal histories. But the snapshots offered on film and brief biographies that accompany awards cannot adequately explain the journey taken by these musicians as they developed from novices into seasoned studio veterans.

This chapter details how a group of men born and raised during the 1940s and '50s in-and-around Muscle Shoals, Alabama became session musicians—the accompanying musicians who play on recordings. I am primarily concerned with the process these Southern-born men went through on their way to extremely successful careers in the music

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<sup>3</sup>The MSRS are Jimmy Johnson (guitar), David Hood (bass), Barry Beckett (keyboards), Roger Hawkins (drums); their friends are Spooner Oldham and Clayton Ivey (keyboards), Randy McCormick, Pete Carr, and Will McFarlane (guitar). See <<http://www.musicianshalloffame.com/2008-mhfm-inductees/the-muscle-shoals-rhythm-section-friends/>>, accessed 28 June 2013.

industry. How did these individuals transform from teen-aged amateurs into world-class session musicians? Using recent interviews with many of the session players and industry personnel who worked in Muscle Shoals and drawing from archival sources, this chapter follows the development and maturation of these individuals within this relatively isolated musical community.

The musical journeys of these musicians began during the 1950s, a moment in American history that gave rise to a teen culture that bonded, particularly in the South, over the sounds of R&B and rock 'n' roll; the careers of the Alabama musicians ultimately flourished in the 1960s and '70s. Chronicling the often-elaborate series of transformative musical events reveals how these individuals developed from eager young musicians from northwest Alabama into seasoned music industry professionals. Also examined here are the roles these individual musicians filled during the recording of select tracks associated with star performers such as Arthur Alexander and Wilson Pickett. In order to address the process of becoming session musicians, I closely scrutinize the recording studio-practices utilized in Muscle Shoals in general and at FAME in particular. Rick Hall, the owner-chief engineer-producer of FAME, relied upon practices modeled after major studios located in Nashville and New York, but often took liberties, especially regarding the length of sessions, to achieve his desired results. As FAME began to produce a steady stream of successful recordings by the mid-1960s, music industry "outsiders" including veteran producers and "imported" session musicians from New York and Memphis became a frequent part of the Muscle Shoals hit-making process. Ultimately, this chapter details Muscle Shoals' musical transformation from a 1950s cultural backwater of the South into a worldwide music industry

leader by the late 1970s as seen primarily through the lens of multiple studio musicians who helped make that change occur.

The initial sections of this chapter provide necessary framework for comparing sessions in Muscle Shoals to other locations such as Nashville and New York City. The sections that follow chronicle and examine the progression of the Muscle Shoals musicians (Table 2.1) from musical novices to seasoned professionals by offering an account of the Shoals music industry during the late 1950s and early '60s, and how some musicians became involved in studio work. Next, I examine a few of the musical challenges faced by Hall's first rhythm section, followed by an account of the first national hit recorded at FAME. I then chronicle the formation of Hall's second house band. After that, I scrutinize Rick Hall's rather unique recording practices. Finally, the last two sections address the working relationships between Muscle Shoals studio musicians and two different record producers, Hall and Jerry Wexler, and provide a detailed account of several historically important recording sessions, many of which included non Muscle Shoals-based session musicians.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Instrument/Position</b>
Tommy Cogbill (1932-1982)	Electric Guitar/Electric bass
Chips Moman (1936– )	Guitar
Jerry Masters* (1939– )	Engineer; Electric Bass
Marlin Green	Guitar
Albert “Junior” Lowe (1940– )	Acoustic & Electric bass; Guitar
Earl “Peanutt” Montgomery* (1941– )	Guitar
Terry Thompson (1941–1965)	Guitar
Harvey Thompson* (1941– )	Sax
Donnie Fritts (1942– )	Drums
Norbert Putnam* (1943– )	Acoustic & Electric Bass
David Briggs (1943– )	Piano
Jerry Carrigan (1943– )	Drums
Dewey “Spoonster” Oldham* (1943– )	Keyboard

Barry Beckett (1943–2009)	Keyboard (MSRS); Producer
Jimmy Johnson* (1943– )	Guitar (MSRS); Engineer, Producer
David Hood* (1943– )	Electric Bass (MSRS); Trombone
Eddie Hinton (1944–1995)	Guitar
Roger Hawkins (1945– )	Drums (MSRS); Producer
Jerry Jemmott* (1946– )	Electric Bass
Duane Allman (1946–1971)	Guitar
Tippy Armstrong (1947–1979)	Guitar
Charles Rose*	Trombone
Pete Carr (1950– )	Guitar
Randy McCormick (1952– )	Guitar
Will McFarlane* (1952– )	Guitar

**Table 8.1** – A partial list of studio musicians that worked in Muscle Shoals.  
\* indicates persons interviewed for this project.

## THE RECORDING PROCESS & SESSION MUSICIANS

The recording of the most basic, elemental-sounding track often involves a complicated process that includes many participants. This process, along with the many contributors, typically remains completely hidden from the listener. Albin Zak, in the introduction to his seminal work *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records*, summarized the roles of those involved with the recording process as follows:

It is also clear that everything the team [those participating in recording a track] does is part of an inclusive process and that all involved are contributors to the compositional project in some way, for all have some effect on its outcome. All employ both intuition and deliberation in a collective effort to produce the record, and all are responsible in some way for the sonic inscriptions that form the record's essential identity. While their roles vary considerably, all of them fall under the rubric of "recordist," a term whose original meaning has been extended in common usage to include the work of songwriters, arrangers, performers, engineers, and producers and to account for the frequent overlaps among roles. For in

a production process that is complex and often unpredictable, roles that start out discretely defined may become quite fluid.<sup>4</sup>

Session musicians would typically be placed within the performer category. As the term recordist implies, an individual often moved between these five categories throughout the recording process.<sup>5</sup> The hierarchical structure of the recording studio, particularly during the 1960s with the emergence of brand-name session producers such as Phil Spector and others, would have limited lateral movements among the five categories, but not entirely censured participating session musicians from making valuable suggestions.

In 1979, sociologists Richard Peterson and Howard White published a study on session musicians.<sup>6</sup> Peterson and White intermittently gathered fieldwork over fourteen years between 1965 through 1979 at recording sessions in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Nashville; their work coincides with the period under consideration for this dissertation. The authors likened working session musicians to members of “craft associations,” and defined session musicians as follows:

[O]rdinarily contracted to play for a three-hour engagement to augment the sounds of performers on phonograph records, TV and radio advertising jingles, and TV or movie sound tracks. Like movie or television production personnel, photographers, and most workers in the performing arts as well, session musicians function as one among a number of linked crafts which combine their different talents in producing artistic works. And as in the case of these other sorts of linked craft arrangements, the diverse efforts are coordinated by a charismatic figure or entrepreneur who melds their work in ever-novel ways. Among orchestra musicians this is the conductor; in

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<sup>4</sup>Albin Zak, *Poetics of Rock: Making Tracks, Cutting Records*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), xii.

<sup>5</sup>In the case of the Muscle Shoals music industry, a very select few individuals profiled in this chapter would also be considered songwriters. Dewey “Spooner” Oldham wrote songs and performed as a keyboardist. Dan Penn, a vocalist, primarily wrote songs with his partner, Oldham, but did not record as a session musician. Earl “Peanutt” Montgomery became a songwriter after he worked as a studio musician in Muscle Shoals.

<sup>6</sup>Richard Peterson and Howard White, “The Simplex Located in Art Worlds,” *Urban Life* 7, no. 4 (1979): 411-439.

the theater, television, and movies it is the director; in the phonograph record industry it is the producer.<sup>7</sup>

Peterson and White provide an almost clinical characterization of session musicians. Their viewpoint, however, discloses a few of the interwoven complexities regarding the work of session musicians, including their relationship to producers and the relationship of the session musician to the many others involved in the realizing of a particular track.

A network is formed between the individual musicians and between the musicians as unit and the producer while working on any given recording session, which is typically the case within the recording industry regardless of location. The “linked crafts” that combined different talents within the Muscle Shoals music industry became very tight-knit as members within this group (practically) grew up together.

The descriptions of studio musicians addressed above do not accurately account for a group of musicians that repeatedly worked together as a distinct unit within the same recording studio. In the case of Muscle Shoals, two different groups of men (there were no women) formed musical units and initially worked for Rick Hall at FAME. These groups acted as translucent musical filters for the artists who came to record in Muscle Shoals. As the symbolic capital of the Muscle Shoals music industry grew through repeated success indicated by hits on industry sales charts, artists came to Alabama and recorded with these studio musicians in general and the MSRS in particular because the artists’ heard something in the sound of the rhythm sections that appealed to them. The session musicians working at FAME and the MSRS served as a conduit for the artists’ ideas while at the same time providing the artist with enough space to retain their own musical identity with more than a hint of the “Muscle Shoals sound.” As MSRS guitarist Jimmy Johnson stated in 1982, “We

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<sup>7</sup>Peterson and White, “The Simplex Located in Art Worlds,” 417-418.

are a band. When we play on someone's record, we become that person's band... We've been called chameleons, because we blend in with the artist we're working with; we don't outshine them. We try to become his own band."<sup>8</sup> Star singers such as Wilson Pickett, Etta James, or Paul Simon utilized the particular talents of the in-house rhythm sections from Muscle Shoals in order to realize the potential of a given track.

Throughout the late 1950s and into the mid-1960s, the members of the various FAME house rhythm sections developed their craft. These musicians accrued cultural capital through their countless hours of live performances in bars and at fraternity parties as well as their session work, and became integral in the development and success of the Muscle Shoals music industry. Exposed to numerous musical scenarios, many of the individual Shoals musicians acquired other music production talents on their way to embodying the term recordist; individual skill sets that would help convert this north Alabama region from a one-studio town in 1962 into a locale that boasted multiple studios by the mid-1970s.

#### ***A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF RECORDING CENTERS: NASHVILLE & NEW YORK***

Several cities including New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Nashville had established themselves by the mid-1950s as centers for the recording industry. New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles were home to the major record labels and their production operations; Nashville was home to the country music industry.<sup>9</sup> Other cities including Cincinnati, Memphis, and New Orleans were home to independent record labels that produced recordings in locally

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<sup>8</sup>Dan Forte "Jimmy Johnson: Rhythm Guitar Artistry at Muscle Shoals," *Guitar Player*, April 1982, 83.

<sup>9</sup>New York had 21,036 members in the American Federation of Musicians in 1942, while Chicago had 9,685, and Los Angeles had 6,465. Twenty-eight percent of AFM members lived in these three cities by 1942. By comparison, Memphis had only 236 AFM members in 1942. See, James P. Kraft, *Stage to Studio: Musicians and the Sound Revolution, 1880-1950* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 196. Kraft only includes select cities for his table, and Nashville is not one of them.

operated studios as well.<sup>10</sup> The protocols established at New York and Nashville studios in conjunction with local musicians union will provide the necessary framework to interpret recording practices used in Muscle Shoals during the 1960s and '70s.

During the 1940s through the 1960s, New York City remained the center of the national recording industry. The numerous studios, including the Columbia 30<sup>th</sup> Street studio, RCA's Webster Hall, Atlantic Records 57<sup>th</sup> Street studio, A&R studio, and others located across the city cut classical, jazz, pop, country, and R&B tracks for many major and independent record labels.<sup>11</sup> The abundance of recording studios also attracted many musicians seeking work, as New York would become home to the largest local union of the American Federation of Musicians (AFM). Recording sessions in New York typically lasted three hours. It is likely that the policy determining the length of recording sessions originated in New York, with other recording centers including Nashville quickly adopted the rules established by the New York local.

The recording industry of 1950s Nashville was relatively young compared to the same industry at the same time located in New York City. It took root in a substantial way after the end of World War II, when three engineers at Radio WSM (home of the Grand Ole Opry) established the Castle Recording Company.<sup>12</sup> The Castle Recording Company, like many other independent studios, leased their studio to any interested label. By the mid-to-

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<sup>10</sup>For more information see, Rick Kennedy and Randy McNutt, *Little Labels–Big Sound: Small Record Companies and the Rise of American Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup>For an overview of New York City as a recording center, see David Simons, *Studio Stories* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2004).

<sup>12</sup>John W. Rumble, "The Emergence of Nashville as a Recording Center: Logbooks from the Castle Studio, 1952-53," *The Journal of Country Music* 6, no. 3 (1978): 22.

late-1950s several other recording studios opened in Nashville, including one built by RCA.<sup>13</sup>

The growth of the Nashville recording industry during the late 1950s and '60s gave birth to the "Nashville Sound"; a sound that utilized the talents of a small group of elite studio musicians, known as "The 'A' Team," and a handful of producers such as Chet Atkins and Owen Bradley.

The early 1950s music industry in Nashville did not initially follow the three-hour session format.<sup>14</sup> After hits were repeatedly produced using the "Nashville Sound" musical formula, studios adopted the New York session model. In an article detailing the activities of studio musicians during the "Nashville Sound" era, Morris Levy described a standard recording session:

A typical recording session in Nashville lasted three hours. It was expected that four songs would be completed by the end of the session. The songs were chosen by the producer and the artist beforehand, but the studio musicians only heard them for the first time at the session. Sometimes the songs were played for the musicians on demonstration discs or tapes supplied by the publishing companies controlling the rights to the song or by the artist on the guitar or piano. The players would then sketch out the melody and song structure on scraps of paper and work out an arrangement between themselves, sometimes with input from the artist or producer. After a few run-throughs of the song to solidify the arrangement and allow the engineers to balance the sound levels, the song would be recorded. For most of the 1960s and certainly before then, Nashville's studios did not have the equipment necessary to do a lot of overdubbing, so any mistakes that were too big to be ignored would require the song to be redone...Sessions were held at 10:00 A.M., 2:00 P.M., 6:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M. every day, and an in-demand session player scheduled fifteen to twenty sessions a week.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Morris S. Levy, "Nashville Sound-Era Studio Musicians," *Country Music Annual 2000*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky), 23.

<sup>14</sup>See Rumble "The Emergence," 30-34. It is clear from the reproduction of the logbooks that the "typical" 3-hour session had yet to be established in the early 1950s as the session times in the book are not standardized.

<sup>15</sup>Levy, "Nashville Sound-Era Studio Musicians," 23.

The established procedures of regulated three-hour sessions helped streamline production methods in Nashville and turn the city into a music industry powerhouse.

When James Joiner, Kelso Hurston, Tom Stafford, Rick Hall, and others sought to establish a music industry in Muscle Shoals during the 1950s, they looked to the nearest recording center for guidelines, and the proximity of Nashville to Muscle Shoals, a distance of about 125 miles, made Nashville the ideal choice. Rick Hall, along with the studio musicians he employed, did not adhere very closely to the “conventional” practices found there or in other centers for record production. Instead, Hall adopted a learn-as-you-go attitude in which he was willing to do whatever he thought necessary to produce a hit record, even if those practices were not typical in other studio environments, and his approach had a profound influence on the musicians who worked for him.

#### **DOING GIGS, LEARNING PARTS, AND TRYING TO MAKE ENDS MEET**

One of the initial steps taken by individuals within the late-1950s fledgling Muscle Shoals music community during their transformative process was working as semi-professional musicians. Initially attracted to the sounds of rock 'n' roll and R&B during the 1950s, the young Alabama musicians performed locally. Playing dances at high schools or colleges, talent contests, or parties acted as a gateway into their careers as studio musicians. While these various gigs initially served to supplement incomes, they also provided a space where these musicians could further develop their individual musical talents.

The majority of the studio musicians who worked in Muscle Shoals, similar to their contemporaries working in Shreveport, Louisiana, for the Louisiana Hayride radio program,

spent years honing their musical skills by performing live.<sup>16</sup> “Rock music is *learned* to a much greater extent than it is ever *taught* by teachers,” wrote H. Stith Bennett in the introduction to *On Becoming a Rock Musician*. “The career of *becoming a rock musician* is simply *being* in a local rock group, (original emphasis).”<sup>17</sup> Many of the Muscle Shoals session musicians had experience performing live in front of an audience, occasionally in bands that featured several future members of the various FAME house rhythm sections. While the members of the Muscle Shoals music industry highlighted here did not become what many critics or fans might consider rock musicians, their experiences performing in local bands was a vital component within the process of becoming session musicians.

Due to the talent of the individual members within these groups and the lack of musical competition, a few of the bands based in and around the Shoals began to tour regionally throughout the southeast United States. The members of FAME’s first rhythm section (1961-1964)—Norbert Putnam, bass; David Briggs, keyboard; Jerry Carrigan, drums; and Terry Thompson, guitar—or the next house band (1964-1969)—Jimmy Johnson, rhythm guitar; Roger Hawkins, drums; Albert “Junior” Lowe, bass (later replaced by David Hood); and Dewey “Spooner” Oldham, keyboard (later replaced by Barry Beckett)—continually developed their skills as players on their respective instruments while they earned a living by moving between live gigs and studio work.

The story of how Norbert Putnam initially became involved in music typifies many within his generation of Alabama musicians:

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<sup>16</sup>See Tracey Laird, *Louisiana Hayride: Radio and Roots Music Along the Red River* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Laird chronicles the stories of D.J. Fontana, James Burton, Joe Osborn, and Jerry Kennedy, who all went on to work as sidemen and session musicians.

<sup>17</sup>H. Bennett, *On Becoming a Rock Musician* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 4.

This is the late '50s. I was fifteen years old. And I start slapping bass with Glen Pettis and the Rhythm Rockers. Part of those boys were across the [Tennessee] border in St. Joseph. Glen lived there in Green Hill. My buddy David Briggs, who later becomes my business partner, is down in Killen, Alabama, and he goes to Rogersville High School. And so David and I become friends in the rock-a-billy band, and that's pretty exciting. But a year later, we meet young Jerry Carrigan, who is going to Coffey High School [in Florence, Alabama]. And Jerry is putting together an R&B band to play James Brown music, and Ray Charles, Bobby Blue Bland. And I'm thinking I need a Fender bass. So I talk my parents into helping me finance a Fender bass rig. And I get a 1958 Precision, and bass amp, and join up with the Carrigan's. And I went from playing rockabilly music to playing the cool music that all the college kids liked. Anybody could dance to James Brown, you know? It's kind of hard to dance to rock-a-billy, you know? It's more like country music. And so, we love *this* music, and we make the transition.<sup>18</sup>

Putnam, like many of the Muscle Shoals musicians, developed an interest in music originally performed by black musicians that profoundly influenced his career (discussed further in chapter 3). The perspective provided by Putnam also indicates that by the late-1950s, at least for him, the sound of rockabilly had become *passé*; "it's more like country music," which was the sound he associated with his parents. Putnam's generation were overtaken by the frenetic and danceable R&B rhythms. The national music industry did not initially beat down the door to schedule recording sessions for what was to become the first FAME rhythm section; the musicians had to play gigs and do session work. Putnam told *Rolling Stone* in 1971, "For three years we played maybe three or four studio gigs each week and then did combo work two nights a week."<sup>19</sup> It is not clear if the combo work performed by Putnam was with Briggs and Carrigan, or in another group.

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<sup>18</sup>Norbert Putnam, interview with the author, 10 June 2011. Unless indicated, all quotes by Putnam are from this interview.

<sup>19</sup>Quoted in Richard Younger, *Get a Shot of Rhythm and Blues: The Arthur Alexander Story* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2000), 50.

Several other groups served as the launching point for the future session musicians. Hollis Dixon (1935-2010) led one of the most influential Shoals-based bands, Hollis Dixon and the Keynotes from 1956 through 1982, that provided a training ground for many. As Dixon recalled in 1987, “Just about everyone played with me, and at one time we were the hottest thing going in the colleges. We played every frat house from Tulane in Louisiana to the University of Georgia in Athens.”<sup>20</sup> Drummer Jerry Carrigan recalled his performing during the early 1960s with a group called The Mark V:

This band included David Briggs, Norbert Putnam, Marlin Greene, Dan Havely, Charlie Campbell, and Jerry Saylor. We were extremely popular with the college Fraternities, playing every weekend at the big southern universities. Later on Dan Penn assumed Jerry Saylor’s duty as lead vocalist. I must tell you that was a big turn for the good. Jerry was a great singer, but he lacked the southern black soulfulness of Dan. Later on David, Norbert, Dan and me started another band Dan Penn & The Pallbearers. We bought a 1956 Cadillac Hearse to travel in, and travel we did.<sup>21</sup>

The Carrigan quote, similar to Putnam’s above, indicates a preference for the sound of R&B music that emanated from the south. In some cases, the members of different bands were interchangeable as the guitarist or bassist from one outfit frequently performed with another.

Like the original FAME rhythm section, the next generation of Muscle Shoals session musicians including Jimmy Johnson, Roger Hawkins, Spooner Oldham, David Hood, and Barry Beckett, all performed in rock ’n’ roll, R&B, or country music cover bands. While only 13 or 14 years old, Hawkins met Oldham at a talent show in Florence. “When he tells it, he asked me,” Oldham recalled. “When I tell it, I asked him. But nevertheless, the [question

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<sup>20</sup>Barney Hoskyns, *Say it One Time for the Brokenhearted: Country Soul in the American South* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 95.

<sup>21</sup>“Jerry Carrigan Interview,” [http://gracelandranders.dk/default.asp?page\\_id=166](http://gracelandranders.dk/default.asp?page_id=166), accessed 3 January 2012.

asked was], ‘You want to be in a rock ‘n’ roll band?’”<sup>22</sup> Hawkins and Johnson also performed together in a group called the Del Rays; a group Johnson formed while still attending high school in Sheffield. Hawkins became a professional musician while still in his teens. “By age 15,” Hawkins recalled, “I was ready to split the whole scene and go make my fortune.” Hawkins went on to say:

I left and went all up and down the East Coast—I went to New York City, Brunswick, Maine, playing Air Force bases. I was playing with a [Florence-based musician] named Autrey Inman, a country artist. I grew up listening to country music... When I was about 17, I moved to Atlanta and lived over there in an apartment with the band that we were gonna strike it rich with.<sup>23</sup>

A life as a gigging musician initially intrigued Barry Beckett as well. “I got tired of going to college,” he remarked in 1999. “I knew a band I’d been working with in Birmingham, [Alabama] and they got some work down in Florida, so I went with them.”<sup>24</sup>

Examining the musical lives of these musicians outside their studio careers reveals that, for many of them, the prospects of becoming a studio musician far outweighed the short-term benefits of performing night after night with bar bands. The Shoals musicians needed the live gigs to supplement their income, but the allure and financial potential of working in the recording studio was strong. “I never did do a lot of road work when I was doing sessions in Muscle Shoals,” stated David Briggs. “Sometimes, we’d play for \$40 or \$50 a night at the University of Alabama or we’d play for Fraternity parties. I knew I could

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<sup>22</sup>Spooner Oldham, interview with the author, 2 June 2011. Unless indicated, all quotes by Oldham are from this interview.

<sup>23</sup>Jim Payne, *The Great Drummers of R&B, Funk & Soul*, ed. Harry Weinger (New York: Face the Music Publications, 1996), 114.

<sup>24</sup>Allen Cackett “Barry Beckett-Nashville Cat,” *Country Music International*, January 1999, 22. In 1967, after recording the James and Bobby Purify track “I’m Your Puppet” at FAME, Beckett inquired about the possibility of him doing session work for Rick Hall.

make more money doing sessions than I could doing road work.”<sup>25</sup> Roger Hawkins, not finding success as a touring musician or the lifestyle that suited him, envisioned a depressing future:

One night I was in Macon, Georgia. I was eighteen and had a vision of myself at forty years old playing in a nightclub. Well, I didn’t like what I saw. I knew that Rick Hall had a studio back in Florence called Fame Recording Studio. I felt that if I could just get back there and hang out, maybe I could learn what to do in the studio. So I quit the band and moved back to Florence and hung out at the studio.<sup>26</sup>

For both Briggs and Hawkins, working as a session musicians presented greater prospects for earning a living than performing at clubs, dances, or fraternity parties.

David Hood was one of the few individuals who waited until the money made from performing on recording sessions became more lucrative than the money made from performing live to make the switch to full-time session work. Hood performed with a group called The Mystics. In 1982, Hood told *Guitar Player*,

We did the frat circuit for four years. It was like [the movie] *Animal House*, really and truly. I played with that band from ‘62 through ‘66. We made a lot of money. That kept me from getting into recording sooner, because I was making more money playing these weekend fraternity parties than Roger was trying to get some recording dates... We were really popular... It seems really low now, but in ‘62 through ‘66 we’d be making anywhere from \$75 to \$150 apiece in the group, and that was pretty good, you know, two or three nights a week. So there was just no way I would quit that. I was working part-time at my father’s tire store, but I would not quit the band, because that’s how I was making my living. Plus I loved it. It was a lot of fun.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Jennifer Ember Pierce, *Playin’ Around: The Lives and Careers of Famous Session Musicians* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 170.

<sup>26</sup>Max Weinberg, *The Big Beat: Conversations with Rock’s Great Drummers*, ed. Robert Santelli (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1984), 49-50.

<sup>27</sup>Dan Forte, “Bassist David Hood. Muscle Shoals: The Band Attitude,” *Guitar Player*, November 1982, 38.

The minimum wage, which did not apply to all jobs, increased from \$1.00 to \$1.25 per hour between 1962 through 1966.<sup>28</sup> Hood and his fellow band mates earned more in one performance than had they worked all week at a full-time job.

For the many musicians who performed in the various FAME rhythm sections, playing live gigs served two purposes: first, the shows at clubs and fraternities provided a supplemental, or in David Hood's case, a primary source of income. Second, the live shows allowed the individual members to develop their musical chops on their respective instruments; a necessary skill required for the demanding recording studio environment. Since many of the individuals within the different incarnations of the FAME rhythm sections performed in the same bands, those musicians also developed a musical *simpatico* between one another, which became an intangible yet invaluable element of the Muscle Shoals sound. Part of the process of becoming session players for many of the Muscle Shoals musicians included the adaptation of their skills learned from years of performing live to the recording studio environment.

### **LEARNING HOW TO BECOME SESSION MUSICIANS**

The formation of the Muscle Shoals music industry was ad hoc. There was no roadmap for the songwriters, producers, or musicians to follow. Similar to other American success stories, the Muscle Shoals music industry rose from little more than personal ambition, determination, hard work, and the song "A Fallen Star," which the introduction to this dissertation detailed. The regional success of that song further complicated the situation: that minor hit attracted local musicians to the area seeking their fame and fortune, and the Shoals'

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<sup>28</sup>United States Department of Labor, "History of Federal Minimum Wage Rates Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, 1938 – 2009," <http://www.dol.gov/whd/minwage/chart.htm#footnote>, accessed 23 September 2013.

music industry in the mid-to-late 1950s had very little infrastructure apart from the makeshift studio at Spar Music. Norbert Putnam, Jerry Carrigan, David Briggs, Earl “Peanutt” Montgomery, Donnie Fritts, Spooner Oldham, and Terry Thompson were among the musicians attracted to Spar. With the encouragement of Tom Stafford (1926–1977), the local teenaged musicians served as the “house band” on demo sessions for James Joiner’s (1928–2006) Tune Publishing.

The future professional session musicians further developed their craft while working on demo sessions at Spar. Yet, the majority of the area’s studio musicians had learned their instruments (and songs) by copying parts from recordings. Performing original parts on original songs, however, was something entirely different. As bassist Norbert Putnam recalled:

[We were trying to figure out] how to become players, and of course, playing on demos, we’re playing on original songs. Well, I never played on an original song. “You mean, I’m supposed to invent a bass part from scratch?” This is a major problem. And so, it started us thinking in that direction.

These young, soon-to-be professional studio musicians were eager to play, but there were very few promising musical prospects wanting to record. “I have to tell you, for the most part, not a lot of talented people were coming up [the] steps [to Spar Music],” Putnam remarked. “A lot of interesting people came up the steps, and didn’t come back.” When Arthur Alexander (1940-1993) walked up the steps, the musicians hanging around Spar became excited.

Alexander, a black teenager who worked as a bellhop at the Muscle Shoals Hotel in Sheffield, arrived at Spar with his voice, lyrics, and melodic ideas. “[T]he one who really came up the steps, who really did it for Muscle Shoals, was Arthur Alexander,” reminisced

Putnam. “Arthur had something....Big, tall, handsome, [a] Harry Belafonte-looking young guy; about six-two, six-three. And, he had some lyrics that sounded good.” This description is multi-layered as Putnam’s assessment of Alexander’s talent conflates racial identity with lyric writing and singing abilities, which speaks to the affective power of “black” music for the young, white Alabama teens (further discussed in chapter 3).

Alexander had already performed with a local group, the Heartstrings, and been writing lyrics before arriving at Spar. He needed help, however, with conveying the overall musical vision for his song ideas. With the assistance of pianists David Briggs and Spooner Oldham, Alexander’s songs took shape. In the mid-1990s David Briggs recalled:

My end [at Spar] was to help with the talent, work with the writers, and do the physical work of playing on the sessions...I worked with Arthur on everything he had, on dozens of songs. He had a lot of great little song ideas and knew how they should go. He just couldn’t play an instrument. You could point him in a direction or help him try to find chords.<sup>29</sup>

Putnam recounted a similar story:

[Arthur] couldn’t write music. My friend David Briggs found the chords to most of those songs. I can remember many times David and Arthur were out there at the upright piano (which was always out of tune by-the-way), and Arthur would be singing the melody, and David would be playing chords. And Arthur [would say] “No, no, that’s...that’s it! That’s the one. What’s that?” David would write that down. It’s a six minor chord. And it would take ’em a couple of hours. And then we’d all go out there, and try to play with the music David has just come up with Arthur.

Spooner Oldham, another keyboard player who hung around Spar, also assisted Alexander with the writing of his songs. “And on ‘Anna [Go To Him]’ I know Arthur and I sat down at Spar, upstairs over the drug store, and he would sing,” Oldham told me. “He’d write songs, but he didn’t play an instrument. He would sing to me that song, and I just sort of knew

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<sup>29</sup>Younger, *Get a Shot*, 36-37.

where it went. You know, play it, and we did a little demo. But I noticed that [the piano player on Alexander's recording], copied my [original] riff.”<sup>30</sup>

In 1960, Alexander co-wrote “Sally Sue Brown” with Tom Stafford and Peanut Montgomery.<sup>31</sup> Recorded at Spar and backed by Pig Robbins on piano, who came from Nashville, Ray Barger on acoustic bass, Terry Thompson on guitar, and Jerry Carrigan on drums, the Judd label released the song along with the B-side, “The Girl That Radiates Charm,” during the summer of 1960.<sup>32</sup> In 2000, Carrigan detailed the recording of these tracks:

We used very primitive equipment, even for those times. The mics were cheap Shure and E. V. models. I believe the tape machine was a Roberts 1/4 track stereo. We had egg crates on the walls of the room, which was about 14'x18'. There were some old red carpet scraps from the Princess Theater [where Stafford was the manager], which we used as baffles and other deadening devices. The piano was an upright grand and in those days I was not allowed a bass drum! [...] Tom got Hargus “Pig” Robbins to come from Nashville to play piano for the day. We cut a few more tunes other than “Sally Sue [Brown]” & “The Girl [that Radiates Charm]”.....including some instrumentals written by Terry Thompson. As I recall Pig played piano, Terry Thompson was on his Gretsch “Chet Atkins” model guitar, Forrest Riley was probably on acoustic guitar, but now that I think about it, Terry might have also played acoustic on “Sally Sue Brown”.....that was along time ago.....I was probably around 16 or 17 [...] Ray Barger was on bass and Peanut Montgomery engineered. Back then we listened for vocal performance, feel, groove and of course instrumental performance. If we found a cut that we felt had the feel & groove, even if it had a few little weird places, we kept it. Equipment, or lack of was such that everything had to be accomplished at one time. There was no overdubbing, punching in, or remixing, so we would keep 3 or 4 takes on everything and take a poll for the “best”. The mixer was a Bogen p.a. mixer. It had no master gain pot, so to fade, you picked a spot, turned off the power and as the tubes cooled it would literally “fade out.” If

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<sup>30</sup>Oldham speculated that Floyd Cramer played the piano on Alexander's Nashville recording of “Anna (Go To Him),” and exactly reproduced Oldham's piano riff.

<sup>31</sup>Younger, *Get a Shot*, 34.

<sup>32</sup>“Sally Sue Brown,” Judd S-878, 1020, 1960.

you'll notice, the last thing to go is the bass.<sup>33</sup>

Briggs', Putnam's, and Oldham's comments about Alexander's songwriting process underscore the collective method of song production during the Shoals' nascent years as a music industry and emphasize the fluid nature of the word recordist. In Alexander's case, he relied on Briggs and Oldham for their knowledge of music harmony to complete songs. Stafford, along with the rest of the musical cohort at Spar, needed Alexander's words and voice to create a hit. Carrigan's description of Alexander's 1960 session highlights the ad-hoc approach in Muscle Shoals towards recording: the studio was makeshift, and the gear was sub-par. As had happened when Bobby Denton recorded "A Fallen Star" in 1957, the two Alexander tracks garnered a great deal of local attention but not much else outside the Shoals.

#### **RECORDING "YOU BETTER MOVE ON"**

The building of the Muscle Shoals music industry was a slow, steady project that began in the mid-1950s. Shoals-based songwriters including James Joiner, Rick Hall, and Billy Sherrill had successfully placed songs with established music publishing firms that well-known artists recorded; tracks recorded by Shoals-based musicians Bobby Denton and Arthur Alexander had received limited national attention. The release of "You Better Move On" in 1962 put Muscle Shoals on the musical map.

When Alexander returned to Spar with the "You Better Move On" lyrics, the musicians recognized the song's potential. After recording a demo, Stafford realized that the primitive two-track recorder at Spar would not be suitable for the project so he contacted

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<sup>33</sup>Jerry Carrigan, July 11, 2000 email sent to the Southern Soul Yahoo Group. Print copy of this email included in the Jerry Carrigan folder located at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame. The lengthy ellipses included in original email.

Rick Hall, who had assembled a recording studio in an old warehouse across the Tennessee River in the city of Muscle Shoals. Hall recalled, “I don’t think I was personally flipped out by any of Arthur’s earlier songs before ‘You Better Move On.’ I told Tom [Stafford] that it was an absolute runaway smash, and he wanted to know if I felt I could produce a hit on it. I said ‘I do. I absolutely do.’”<sup>34</sup>

For Hall, recognizing the hit potential of “You Better Move One” was the easy part. The challenge, at least according to Hall, was to find the musicians to create the musical accompaniment. “In those days,” Hall recalled in 1979, “you had to go out and find yourself a group of musicians to put a band together, because I was the only studio in town and musicians weren’t hanging around the studio wanting to play on sessions. Nobody knew what a session was first of all. We’d go out and take the best drummer in this band, the best guitar player in this band, bring them in and call them the house band.”<sup>35</sup> Hall is giving himself too much credit. There were capable musicians hanging around Spar making demos, and Alexander had already recorded “Sally Sue Brown” for the Judd label using several of the same local musicians who eventually performed on “You Better Move On.” The only thing in question was if Hall and the Alabama teenagers had the ability to produce a hit record that attracted widespread national attention.

The details surrounding the recording of “You Better Move On” vary depending on who retells the story; it took either a few days, a few weeks, or even a few months to produce the final track. In a recent interview, Norbert Putnam recalled, “In the early days, we weren’t [proficient at recording]. We had to learn it. When we did Arthur’s first three songs, I think it

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<sup>34</sup>Younger, *Get a Shot of Rhythm and Blues*, 40.

<sup>35</sup>Margie Barnett, “Fame Studio’s Rick Hall Remembers When,” *Record World Salutes the Tenth Anniversary of Muscle Shoals Sound Studios*, 19 May 1979, 26.

took a day-and-a-half. We probably did thirty, forty takes.” According to Alexander, “We worked on [“You Better Move On”] for what seemed like a year. We were doing take after take and when we got through, Rick would study the tapes and come up with something to enhance it.”<sup>36</sup> In a recent interview, Spooner Oldham recalled, “I played on Arthur’s first recording ‘You Better Move On.’ I overdubbed organ on it. I wasn’t there live, but I overdubbed with the background singers.” Hall stated, “I recall we put in two months on the whole vocal for whatever reasons.”<sup>37</sup>

The varying perspectives on the recording process for “You Better Move On” reveal the complex and unpredictable process previously described by Albin Zak. Putnam’s involvement might have only been “a day-and-a-half;” he completed his role as bassist after the process of recording thirty or forty takes, one of which became the master. Alexander’s role as the lead singer would have been far more substantial than Putnam’s, and account for the singer’s memory of the recording process taking “for what seemed like a year;”

Alexander, at the prodding of Hall, repeatedly returned to the studio to shape his vocal to the producers liking. Oldham’s recollection of the session uncovers a layered production process, likely caused by the technological limitations of the studio gear. Hall’s comment indicates that recording Alexander’s vocal part took two months to complete. “You Better Move On” was the first Hall-produced track, and he meticulously crafted all aspects of the arrangement and recording of the song to the best of his abilities, taking as long as he needed to insure the

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<sup>36</sup>Younger, *Get a Shot*, 41.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

highest quality product. “Rick Hall lived with that song like a hermit,” Alexander recalled. “He wouldn’t quit until he knew it was right.”<sup>38</sup>

Since there are few sources that reliably document the “You Better Move On” sessions, disputes abound between the musicians about who performed on the track. Hall’s repeated editing and overdubbing of the original tape make it extremely difficult to account for which musician is heard on the track and who recorded for the sessions but did not make the final mix.<sup>39</sup> By most accounts, the performers included Alexander on vocal, David Briggs on piano, Norbert Putnam on bass, Jerry Carrigan on drum set, Randy Allen on percussion, Terry Thompson on electric guitar, Forrest Riley on acoustic guitar, Spooner Oldham on organ, and Peanutt Montgomery on acoustic guitar. Montgomery recalled in 2011,

I played the up-and-down rhythm [straight 8<sup>th</sup> notes] in the early days because Rick taught it to me on “You Better Move On.” Rick said, “Peanutt, I want you to go up-and-down on the rhythm.” So I had to learn how to get it the same up-and-down so I started doing that, and I said “yeah, that does sound good, you know?” But, that’s on the record... And Terry, all he did was chop, he just chopped. He did [sings in time] a-chick, a-chick, a-chick. He just chopped at it.

Hurshel Washington and several others performed the backing vocals, which Hall added at a later recording session.<sup>40</sup> The B-side was “A Shot of Rhythm and Blues” written by Terry Thompson. Hall eventually placed the tracks with Dot Records in Nashville, and “You Better Move On” peaked at number 24 on *Billboard’s* Hot 100 in 1962.<sup>41</sup> The release of “You

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<sup>38</sup>Terry Pace and Robert Palmer, “A Taste of Fame,” *Times Daily*, special section, “Muscle Shoals Sounds: The Rhythm of the River,” 1 August 1999, 5.

<sup>39</sup>Peanutt Montgomery’s performance role on the track has been disputed. Montgomery told me in a 2011 interview, “And I played rhythm in it, and there’s a guy named Forrest Riley. And Rick told me, he said, ‘Peanutt, I cut them tapes so much I don’t really know what, where you were playing or where he’s playing.’” Peanutt Montgomery, interview with the author, 27 May 2011. Unless indicated, all quotes by Montgomery are from this interview.

<sup>40</sup>Younger, *Get a Shot*, 41-42.

<sup>41</sup>Joel Whitburn, *The Billboard Book of Top 40 Hits* (New York: Billboard Publications, 1983), 22.

Better Move On” certainly alerted others beyond Alabama to Arthur Alexander, and possibly to Rick Hall, FAME, and Muscle Shoals.<sup>42</sup>

The chart success of “You Better Move On” signaled to nearly all those involved in the recording of the track that the Muscle Shoals music industry could indeed produce a national hit. “‘A Fallen Star’ didn’t bring industry to Muscle Shoals” recalled Putnam in 2011. He went on to say:

It might have kept some local people interested, but when Arthur’s song gets in the *Billboard* charts and starts climbing... Now at this point, you have to understand, David Briggs and I had just started college over at what was Florence State [now University of North Alabama]. We were eighteen, nineteen years old. And, when we make this demo for Rick Hall, that becomes the hit record, it was a major force. Here’s Arthur on the Dick Clark show in Philadelphia...In the afternoon! We’re going, ‘Is this really a career opportunity? Or is it just a flash in the pan?’

Alexander’s hit had an immediate effect on Hall, “With the money I made from Alexander I built the studio I’m in today, got some better equipment and hired myself group of musicians including David Briggs, Norbert Putnam, Jerry Carrigan and a couple more.”<sup>43</sup> According to Hall’s wife Linda, the first royalty check received by Hall for “You Better Move On” totaled \$1900.00.<sup>44</sup> In 1986, Hall told author Peter Guarlnick, “I made something like \$10,000 [from “You Better Move On”], which was phenomenal to me with my meager beginnings and the kind of money I’d been used to making. I took that \$10,000 and built the first section of [FAME], my first real studio and the start of the whole Muscle Shoals sound.”<sup>45</sup> Putnam and Briggs dropped out of Florence State to become members of the first house band, along with

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<sup>42</sup>Chapter Four details what I call the “Muscle Shoals Mystique.” The Rolling Stones released “You Better Move On” in 1964, and the Beatles released “Anna (Go To Him)” in 1965. Bob Dylan recorded “Sally Sue Brown” in the 1980s, making Alexander the only songwriter to have ever had his songs covered by the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, and Bob Dylan.

<sup>43</sup>Barnett, “Fame Studio’s Rick Hall Remembers When,” 26.

<sup>44</sup>Fuqua, *Music Fell on Alabama*, 34-35.

<sup>45</sup>Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music*, 192.

Carrigan, Terry Thompson, and Peanut Montgomery for the new FAME studios located at 603 East Avalon Avenue in Muscle Shoals (Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1** – FAME studios circa 1962. (Photo by Jimmy Johnson. Used by permission.)

***“ONE MORE TIME” & “THREE-HOURS PER SONG”: RECORDING SESSIONS IN MUSCLE SHOALS***

David Briggs, Norbert Putnam, Jerry Carrigan, and Terry Thompson became the house band for Rick Hall’s newly opened recording studio. Peanut Montgomery occasionally added an acoustic guitar to supplement the core quartet. It was Hall’s studio and he served as the chief engineer and producer, but the musicians initially took their musical direction from the gifted electric guitar player. “[Terry Thompson] was Sargent Pepper,” recalled Putnam.

He was the leader of the band. He taught David and I a lot about music theory. Not that he knew any formally. But he had perfect pitch...he was so far ahead of us. There wasn’t anything he couldn’t do. If he heard a guitar solo by anyone, he’d just go and pick it up and flawlessly play it. It could be R&B. It could be jazz.

“Peanutt” Montgomery fondly remarked about Thompson, “Terry was a great guitar player...he was much more advanced than all of us. He could play with his fingers like Chet Atkins, he could also play some jazz, he could play pop, rock. He could play the licks that Scotty Moore played with Elvis Presley.” Jimmy Johnson, who at that time during the early 1960s worked as a self-described “gopher” for Hall, recently recalled Thompson’s role, which echoed Putnam’s remarks: “This guy was an extraordinary guitar player. He had a lot of influence on those early players. Basically, he was their mentor. And as much as Rick was the producer, he was the guy that really told them how to play, [and] what to play.”<sup>46</sup> Thompson died tragically at the age of twenty-four in 1965 while struggling to overcome his addiction to alcohol.

Despite the chart success of “You Better Move On,” or perhaps because of it, the process of learning to produce tracks continued for the FAME studio musicians and Hall. Norbert Putnam recalled his days as a beginning session player in Muscle Shoals by stating:

[There was] no rehearsal. The way it works on record dates...let’s say the session is set at ten o’clock. Well, you’re there and you’re in tune and you’re ready and they play you the first song...In the beginning, we didn’t know how to do this, but after a year or so, we learned the Nashville method of writing out the numbers so we didn’t have to learn the song. So if you don’t have to learn the song, you don’t have to rehearse. That becomes your roadmap. Now you’ve got the key, you know where [the song is] going. And now you’re just listening to everything around you. You listen to the timbre of the voice of the singer, and you respond to that. Now, you can get it happening really fast. And we became very proficient at that.

While the process of recording was slow going during the early days of FAME, Putnam, Briggs, and Carrigan were only teenagers. “Rick was trying to teach us to think like creative people,” remarked Putnam. “[H]ere’s a man, who’s [in his] late twenties, working with a

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<sup>46</sup>Jimmy Johnson, interview with the author, 8 November 2010. Unless indicated otherwise, all quotes by Johnson from this interview.

bunch of teenaged musicians, and he can hear in his head a world-class record, and he's trying to get them to create it."

Hall further developed his unique approach to production on sessions during the early days of the Shoals recording industry. In interviews with Norbert Putnam discussing the early-to-mid 1960s, or with David Hood, Spooner Oldham, and Roger Hawkins describing sessions at FAME during the mid-to-late 1960s, one thing is clear: Rick Hall was demanding. "Every demo in the studio was asskicking time," Hall asserted in 1976.<sup>47</sup> "Rick took Jerry Carrigan, David Briggs and myself through his FAME recording studio sweatshop and made musicians out of us," Putnam remarked.<sup>48</sup> "[Hall] was a stern taskmaster," Putnam told me in 2011.

He'd come out and say, "I want something *different!*" And we'd say, "Well, how different?" "A *lot* different." "Well, could you give us any example? Would it be like...?" And, of course Rick, not being a trained musician, not that it would have mattered or helped, I suppose, couldn't, in musical terminology, describe what he was hearing in his head. So, we'd just keep trying different things. Hour, after hour. Until he either gave up and took it, or we got it better.

Keyboardist Spooner Oldham recalled, "Rick was tough, and he'd say 'one more time.' We never knew exactly what he was looking for. He didn't say 'it was too slow, or too fast, or you know, but one more time'... We did many takes, a lot of times." Hall's style of repeatedly recording take-after-take quickly became his working production methodology.

The extended process for recording "You Better Move On," whether it was days, weeks, or months, provided the initial blueprint for producing records in the Shoals. "We took time, there was no set pattern to how we recorded," recalled Montgomery. "We might

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<sup>47</sup>Barnett, "Fame Studio's Rick Hall Remembers When," 26.

<sup>48</sup>"The Nashville Musician Interview with Norbert Putnam," <http://nashmusicians.wordpress.com/2011/07/26/the-nashville-musician-interview-with-norbert-putnam/>, accessed 12 February 2012.

record all day; go eat a hamburger and record 'til midnight. I mean we didn't have no three hour sessions. No such thing." Over the next several years, and up through the late 1960s, tracks cut at FAME took longer to produce than tracks cut in New York or Nashville. While a typical 1960s recording session in a major production center lasted three or four hours (a time length reached through an agreement with the recording labels and local musicians union), during the same era in Muscle Shoals, it was not uncommon to spend nine hours producing one track, or conversely, record many tracks in the course of one day for a flat fee.<sup>49</sup> Hollie West, in a 1970 feature newspaper article on Muscle Shoals, wrote, "From most accounts, it is common for artists to work on a recording session 14 or 16 hours a day and come back the next day and do the same thing. That's the way they polish the songs that eventually become hits."<sup>50</sup> Hall reflected on his approach by stating "We had longer hours than Nashville, where you were in trouble if you didn't get four sides in three hours. I don't believe anybody can cut four hit records in three hours. I spend a minimum of three hours per song, and I don't think *that's* enough [original emphasis]."<sup>51</sup> In 2000, drummer Jerry Carrigan recalled one of his early-1960s sessions:

I spent many hours [in Florence and Muscle Shoals] doing recordings. I remember one time we did thirteen sides for Huey Meaux for sixty-five dollars. Isn't that pitiful? I don't think we had a going rate. We were kids and we were starving to be in the business and make a living playing

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<sup>49</sup>Norbert Putman recalled that when he, Briggs, and Carrigan moved to Nashville in 1964, the head of the AFM in Nashville, George Cooper, called the Alabama musicians "chiselers." According to Putnam Cooper said, "'Well, we know what these boys been doing down there in Alabama. They been *chiselin'* down there in Alabama. Goddamn, I'll tell you one goddamn thing, if anything like that every happens up here.' And he's got this cigarette, and he smoked it down around [the butt]. 'Anything like that every happens up here, I personally will...' And he reached out, and he snuffed out all of the flame in his fingertips, and *threw* it at our feet. 'I'll rub them out personally (original emphasis).'"

<sup>50</sup>Hollie I. West, "The Stars are Falling on Alabama, They Dig Muscle Shoals," *Washington Post*, 15 February 1970, K1.

<sup>51</sup>Hoskyns, *Say It One Time*, 106.

music. That's all we wanted to do but we had to figure out how to make a living doing it. I was in college at that time.<sup>52</sup>

In the early-to-mid 1960s, the musicians at FAME had very little to guide them in regards to the process of recording. "We were just guessing," Carrigan told journalist Barney Hoskyns. "Rick learned hands on! We didn't have any other studios to spy on."<sup>53</sup> The longer hours for less pay in Muscle Shoals ultimately contributed to Carrigan, Briggs, and Putnam leaving for Nashville. Briggs recalled, "I found out that I'd been working three days in Muscle Shoals for what I could make in Nashville in three hours."<sup>54</sup> The trio left in late 1964, and would go on to become members of the "A-list" session musicians in Nashville during the mid-to-late 1960s and 1970s performing on and producing numerous tracks.<sup>55</sup>

In the early 1970s, Hall continued to produce records at FAME in a similar way to his "one more time" method initially begun in the early 1960s. Hall hired bass player Jerry Masters for a 1970 Clarence Carter session at FAME. Describing the session that produced Carter's hit "Patches," Masters wrote in his 2010 autobiography:

We started cutting the track on Monday morning. Once we had the track sheet and all the musicians in place, we ran through the song a few times, and then we recorded the track for the first time...After about fifteen cuts, my fingers were starting to get very sore...We finally took a dinner break about 5 p.m., and when we came back we were all so tired, we decided to come back and try again the next day...We cut the track for three days and ended up using the very first track. That's the way it usually works.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Allen Smith, "Jerry Carrigan: Bama-Lam! Alabama's Drumming Legend," [http://swampland.com/articles/view/title:jerry\\_carrigan](http://swampland.com/articles/view/title:jerry_carrigan), accessed 25 February 2012. The interview originally posted in July 2000. In late 1963, Arthur Lee Maye recorded in Muscle Shoals for the Jamie-Guyden label. Huey Meaux, known as "The Crazy Cajun," produced the sessions. Information about Maye's Muscle Shoals session from, Marv Goldberg, "Arthur Lee Maye & Crowns," <http://www.uncamarvy.com/ArthurLeeMaye/arthurleemaye.html>>, accessed 25 February 2012.

<sup>53</sup>Hoskyns, *Say It One Time*, 101.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>55</sup>Putnam and Briggs, along with several other elite Nashville session musicians, released two records in the late 1960s under the name Area Code 615.

<sup>56</sup>Jerry Masters, *Hanging From a Tree By My Knees: The Jerry Masters Story "Let it All Hang Out"* (Pearl, MS: Crossover Publications, 2010), 72-73.

Hall's method of production, although unconventional by most music industry standards, yielded tangible commercial results: "Patches" became a top 10 hit for Carter and received the 1971 Grammy for Best R&B Song.

After the Carter session, Masters began full-time work at FAME as a recording engineer. After about a year-and-a-half, Masters left FAME and became the engineer for Muscle Shoals Sound, home of the MSRS. During the early 1970s, Masters witnessed as Muscle Shoals Sound blossomed into a world-class studio, and his vantage point from behind the mixing console provides a unique perspective on MSRS' recording process. "The thing that was so great about Barry, Roger, David and Jimmy, as a rhythm section, was the fact that they weren't clock-watchers," Masters recounted.

They were there for one reason, and that was to cut a hit record for that particular artist, no matter who it was. They really cared. They would spend ten or twelve hours a day cutting a song and only charge two sessions in some cases. A session was only supposed to be three hours, but they didn't care. They wanted to cut a hit as badly as the artist. However, [the rhythm section] began to realize that they were cutting hits for others, and they wanted their share, so they began to demand a percentage of the royalties on every record they cut. They were willing to negotiate, but they always got a piece of the action, or they wouldn't play.<sup>57</sup>

As Masters' comments indicate, the MSRS utilized a similar work ethic in their own studio during the early 1970s that Hall first developed at FAME during the early 1960s. The MSRS's insistence on receiving royalties from the artists they worked for, however, indicates an increased sense of business acumen.

The difference between sessions cut in the Shoals and sessions cut in other locations continued into the late 1970s. In 1977 Al Cartee, president of Music Mill Studios,

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<sup>57</sup>Masters, *Hanging From a Tree*, 96-7.

commented in a nationally syndicated newspaper article about why he felt artists preferred recording in Muscle Shoals over cities like New York or Nashville:

It's the relaxed atmosphere, the willingness of musicians to come in and work until they get the sound they want that's made the industry here. None of the studio musicians who lives here ever comes in and says, 'Oh, God, I've got to cut a session.' That just doesn't happen here like it does some places. They come in ready and willing to work. We don't work by a clock. We work all hours of the day and night until we get the sound we want.<sup>58</sup>

Cartee's statement discloses that by the mid-1970s the do whatever-it-takes to produce a hit attitude first adopted by Rick Hall became the preferred Muscle Shoals music industry method, regardless of the studio. In a 1979 interview, MSRS keyboardist Barry Beckett compared recording sessions in Alabama to recording sessions in Los Angeles.

We had a lot of acts that had really tight budgets. Not only that, but we all—I don't know how everybody else looks at it—we looked at it from the point of view that it's business. Cut it as fast as possible, keep it proper, do a good job: that's all we were concerned about. Because we heard that's the way it's supposed to be done. So we never slacked from that. I went to California [circa 1972]—the others had gone out on a Traffic tour—to play sessions. And I was appalled, absolutely amazed. And I'm thinking, 'You know, if we worked like these guys, we'd triple our income in a year.' I mean they're great musicians, don't get me wrong. But I have never seen such flagrant use of money in my life, as far as wasting time goes.<sup>59</sup>

Beckett's observation about the recording practices in early-1970s Los Angeles offer two competing perspectives on record production. Sessions in Muscle Shoals lasted longer than the accepted music industry standards, and the Alabama studio musicians frequently undercharged for their services. Beckett learned this first hand while working for Hall at

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<sup>58</sup>Glenn Stephens, "Watch Out Nashville, Muscle Shoals Says," *Florence Times-Tri-Cities Daily*, 20 February 1977, 43. An editors note at the top of this article stated, "A United Press International writer recently toured and assessed the Muscle Shoals music industry at the invitation of the Times-Daily. Here is his report, which is being nationally distributed."

<sup>59</sup>Walter Campbell and Sam Sutherland, "MSS Ensemble: 13 Years of Enthusiasm and Success," *Record World Salutes the Tenth Anniversary of Muscle Shoals Sound Studios*, 19 May 1979, 4, 22.

FAME. In Los Angeles, the musicians' union strictly regulated recording sessions. While Beckett's observations lack specific detail, the obvious amazement that his California counterparts would take more time for a session *and* also charge for that time indicate how little record production methods had changed in Alabama from the 1960s.

Collectively, these comments reveal that during the early 1960s the Muscle Shoals music industry was a long way from declaring itself "The Hit Recording Capitol of the World," a slogan adopted in 1975. Despite the proven chart success of tracks such as "You Better Move On" (1961), "Everybody" by Tommy Roe (1963), "What Kind of Fool (Do You Think I Am)" by the Tams (1964), and "Steal Away" by Jimmy Hughes (1964), the production process at FAME up through the late 1960s remained a work-in-progress. The comment by Carrigan about recording for Meaux speaks to the naïve, and frequently common nature of young musicians eager for a music career. The previous comments by Putnam and Alexander about the length of recording "You Better Move On" speak to another. Briggs, Carrigan, and Putnam worked as the FAME rhythm section for roughly a three-year period. During that time, they, along with Hall, learned the process of recording tracks. When they left, Johnson, Hawkins, and others replaced them. The second FAME rhythm section had to learn for themselves the process of recording tracks. In New York, Nashville, and the other major production centers like Los Angeles, cutting three or four tracks in a three-hour session was the industry standard and had been for quite some time. Hall's insistence on multiple takes, as noted by Oldham and Masters, and West in her *Washington Post* feature, accounted for the prolonged recording process that took place in the Shoals. After the MSRS opened their own studio in 1969, they continued the practice of long hours in the studio, but also became aware of the financial potential for themselves as

tracks they recorded resulted in lucrative hits for others. Royalty payments and the business of time management had become one of the driving concerns for the MSRS in completing a recording session, as expressed in the observations of both Masters and Beckett.

Also emerging from these comments, especially considering Carrigan's remarks about recording with Huey Meaux who traveled from New Orleans to record at FAME, is the theme of Muscle Shoals as a destination to produce records (explored in detail in chapter four), often for significantly reduced costs. It may appear contradictory to suggest that the production process at FAME in the mid-1960s continued to develop while at the same time outside producers sought out the same production team based on their chart successes. This dichotomy, however, discloses stratification within the 1960s world of R&B record production. At the same time that Hall and the FAME rhythm section were learning from and teaching each other about the "complex and often unpredictable" recording process, the tracks they cut that charted in *Billboard* or *Cash Box* signaled to others within the music industry a level of professionalism many in the business of cutting R&B records sought to mimic.

#### **HIT RECORDS MADE HERE: BECOMING THE SECOND FAME RHYTHM SECTION**

The community of musicians in the Shoals was small, particularly during the early-to-mid-1960s. The first generation of Muscle Shoals musicians, which included Briggs, Putnam, Carrigan, Montgomery, Oldham, and vocalist and songwriter Dan Penn, hung around Spar Music and the City Drug store in Florence. The second generation—Johnson, Hawkins, Lowe, and Hood—gravitated to FAME *after* it had already opened for business. The opening of Hall's studio on Avalon Avenue in Muscle Shoals, similar to the opening of Spar Music in the 1950s, became a beacon for would-be musicians.

The business of music publishing was integral to the musical development of the second-generation FAME studio musicians. Owning a recording studio can be quite lucrative, especially if you own the only recording studio in Alabama. Recording studios, however, often charge for their services based on hourly rates. Without owning a portion of the songwriting copyright, even the most wildly successful track recorded at FAME would only yield what Hall charged for the rental of his studio, which, according to Jimmy Johnson, was \$17.50 an hour in 1966. By establishing a song-publishing arm of FAME with staff or for-hire songwriters, Hall could provide his recording studio clients with material for upcoming sessions while at the same time generate revenue for himself as publisher.

Rick Hall's interest in music publishing began during his short-lived time as a partner in Spar Music. "It wasn't producing records I was interested in at the beginning," Hall remarked in a 1970 *Washington Post* article. "I really went into the publishing business. I wanted to make an extra penny as a songwriter. I found out that it didn't cost anything to become a publisher. All you needed was a license and you were on your way. But I had to get into demo record operation if I wanted to sell songs, so there I was. I had always been infatuated with recording techniques."<sup>60</sup> After leaving Spar, Hall continued to seek out anyone interested in writing songs. "I moved in [to the studio], I slept there, ate in restaurants," recalled Hall. "I began to write songs, bring in the troops, would be songwriters...anybody that thought about music. I brought them in and signed them up playing the guitar, sat up all night with them to write songs and try to put them together."<sup>61</sup> Pianist David Briggs also wrote songs, and he retained portions of the copyrights to several

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<sup>60</sup>West, "The Stars are Falling on Alabama," K1.

<sup>61</sup>Josh Pettus, "The Sound of the Shoals Part 3: The Birth of Rock and Roll and Rhythm and Blues," <http://activerain.com/blogsview/1340700/the-sound-of-the-shoals-part-3-the-birth-of-rock-and-roll-and-rhythm-and-blues>, accessed 14 February 2012.

top-selling tracks. “We owned a lot of huge copyrights,” recalled Briggs. “And all of this led me to my first publishing experiences...I owned one-third of the publishing on ‘You Better Move On.’”<sup>62</sup> When Hall became the sole proprietor of FAME in the early 1960s, he signed Dan Penn to a songwriting contract, and Spooner Oldham frequently collaborated with Penn.<sup>63</sup>

After writing a song, Penn and Oldham would often cut a demo so Hall could pitch it to an artist.<sup>64</sup> By performing on Penn and Oldham song demos for FAME publishing, Jimmy Johnson and the next group of Muscle Shoals musicians to work for Hall including Roger Hawkins developed their skills as session players. “[Hall] had them on salary, and they were gettin’ cuts,” recalled Johnson.

Penn was a fantastic singer...and Spooner was this keyboard guy, extraordinary. They were a great team. We woodshed in [Hall’s] demo rooms [at FAME] with Dan and Spooner and that’s how we learned to play sessions. The next band coming up: me and Roger, Dan and Spooner...[By recording demos with Penn and Oldham], we learned to work up a song. [In the] early days, it’d take us two days to cut one. And later on, it got to where we could cut four songs or five in a day, and never have heard the song before.

Roger Hawkins recounted a similar story in the early 1990s: “I started hanging around with [Oldham and Penn] as they would write songs. When they completed a song, Dan had the keys to the studio and knew how to operate the console, so I got to play on the demo...I played on demos for free and did anything I had to do [at FAME]; run errands, whatever.”<sup>65</sup> Johnson’s comment indicates the lengthy amount of time it would take the Alabama

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<sup>62</sup>Pierce, *Playin’ Around*, 169.

<sup>63</sup>The writing partnership between Penn and Oldham would go on to create numerous songs including “Let’s Do It Over,” “I’m Your Puppet,” “Sweet Inspiration,” “Cry Like a Baby,” and many others.

<sup>64</sup>ACE Records released several collections of tracks written by Penn or Penn and Oldham. *The Fame Recordings*, Ace CDCHD 1353, 2012, is a collection of song demos featuring Penn on vocals; *A Road Leading Home: Songs by Dan Penn and Others*, Ace CDHCD 1370, 2013, features tracks written or co-written by Penn and sung by others.

<sup>65</sup>Payne, *Great Drummers of R&B*, 114.

musicians to complete four or five song demos, which, by their nature, were incomplete works. Hawkins' recollection of doing "anything I had to do" recalls Carrigan's remarks and the eagerness of young, inexperienced musicians.

In the mid-1960s, the up-and-coming members of the FAME production team were paying attention to the current hit tracks and using them as musical guides. Johnson described in a 2011 interview one way the young studio musicians and songwriters came up with "new" ideas:

We did all kinds of stuff. We would take a song like "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" and put a new song to it, and make [the new song] sound like that. It wouldn't be the same song but it have some similar, if nothing else, bass lines. You could tell it was that style.

In late 1964, the "blue-eyed soul" duo The Righteous Brothers released the track "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling," which reached the number-one position on the *Billboard Hot 100* during the week of February 6, 1965.<sup>66</sup> "That style" Johnson referred to was likely the soul-inflected quality of the Righteous Brothers' singing—a vocal style that Dan Penn was also known for—tinged with musical elements drawn from pop music, rather than the sonic quality of something like the "Wall of Sound" technique utilized by producer Phil Spector on the Righteous Brothers' track.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Sheffield native Jimmy Johnson had been playing guitar at dances and college parties after initially exposed to music through his father and uncle. Johnson frequently assisted his uncle Dexter at his makeshift studio in Sheffield. The news that a recording studio opened in the area excited Johnson. As he recalled, "[Rick Hall] had just opened a studio in Muscle Shoals. That's how we first got our knowledge of [him].

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<sup>66</sup>Joel Whitburn, *Joel Whitburn Presents the Billboard Hot 100 Charts: The Sixties* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research Inc., 1990), np.

And so, we made a bee-line.” After recording at FAME in 1962 with the Del Rays, Hall asked Johnson to work for him. Not needing a guitar player because of the existing rhythm section, Hall had Johnson do all of the “busy work” associated with running a recording studio and publishing company; tasks that included typing lyrics, clearing songs for copyright, and the general day-to-day duties of running a small but growing company. As recording sessions picked up at FAME, Hall gave Johnson the opportunity to work as an audio engineer. Quin Ivy also utilized Johnson’s nascent skills as an engineer in his Sheffield studio, Norala, which catered to a talent pool that lacked the funds necessary to record at FAME. The sessions that Johnson worked as a recording engineer, at both FAME and Norala, provided the Sheffield native with valuable production experience. When Johnson took over the guitar duties for the FAME rhythm section in the mid-1960s, performing was one of the few things he had not already done while working for Rick Hall.

Jimmy Johnson literally embodies the fluid nature of the term “recordist” described by Albin Zak. Johnson had many duties while working at FAME during the early 1960s. “I was an assistant to the assistant,” Johnson recalled in his affable style. “I was a kind of the number one gopher...I was going to UNA at the time, and I’d work a half-a-day. I’d come in about 12 and work until about 6 or 7 for so little an hour that it would embarrass you to me if I told you. [A]t that time I was typin’ lyrics. I was publishing [Hall’s] songs; clearing the stuff through BMI and ASCAP...I did it all.”<sup>67</sup>

Johnson’s initial professional exposure to national record chart success came while working as a recording engineer. “I had cut two or three hits over a FAME...normally Rick would not have let that happen. But, he thought that nobody could cut those acts and get

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<sup>67</sup>Jimmy Johnson, interview with the author, 10 June 2011. All Johnson quotes in this paragraph from this interview.

anything. He gave me the dregs, which is OK. I'd take anything. I cut a group called The Gants; I was the engineer." The Gants' track "Road Runner" charted for twelve weeks and peaked at number 46 in December 1965.<sup>68</sup> Johnson's next chart success as an engineer came in 1966 with the Bobby Moore and the Rhythm Aces track "Searching for My Love." Moore and his group were from Montgomery, Alabama, and like other bands before and after them, made the trip to Muscle Shoals in order to record at FAME. "They only had enough for two-hours," stated Johnson. "And back then the rate was seventeen-and-a-half dollars an hour. Rick didn't even have to show up at the sessions. Like I said, if he [knew] it was gonna be a hit, he'd a been there, 'cause he wanted to cut all of the hits...If I owned the company that's the way I'd want to be, too." Checker, an imprint of Chicago-based Chess Records, released "Searching For My Love," which reached number twenty-seven on the *Billboard* Hot 100 during the week of August 13, 1966.<sup>69</sup> The Moore track is the earliest connection between Chess Records and Muscle Shoals; a relationship that would reach its peak a few years later when Laura Lee and Etta James, artists under contract with Chess, recorded hit tracks at FAME.

During the spring and summer of 1966, several tracks engineered by the uncredited Johnson charted on the *Billboard* Hot 100. "One day," Johnson told me in 2011, "I turn around and I got asked to do this new act named Percy Sledge."<sup>70</sup> "When a Man Loves a Woman," the track Johnson engineered at Norala, changed the future for everyone involved with the Muscle Shoals music industry.

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<sup>68</sup>Whitburn, *Top Pop Singles 1955-1999*, 248. The Statue label originally released "Road Runner." For peak chart position see Whitburn, *Joel Whitburn Presents the Billboard Hot 100 Charts: The Sixties*, np.

<sup>69</sup>Whitburn *Presents the Billboard Hot 100*, 1990, np.

<sup>70</sup>Johnson, interview with the author, 10 June 2011.

As noted in chapter one, Quin Ivy (1937– ), a local radio DJ at WLAY, opened Norala, a small studio in Sheffield, to accommodate the overflow clientele turned away or who could not afford to record at FAME. “Rick Hall had monopolized the market,” recalled Ivy in 1970. “He had all the big stuff. I thought I’d like to open a small studio to take up the slack with the unimportant groups.”<sup>71</sup> Ivy also drew from the limited talent pool in the Shoals, including Johnson, guitarist Marlin Greene, Roger Hawkins, and Spooner Oldham to work sessions recorded at his small studio. Because Norala attracted a different clientele, the Sheffield studio presented a relaxed mood compared to FAME. Roger Hawkins recalled, “the atmosphere at Quinn Ivey’s [sic] studio wasn’t fancy, but you were appreciated more. We had more fun and more freedom.”<sup>72</sup> He also remarked, “It was a smaller, funkier studio with equipment that wasn’t as good as Fame’s...the attitude and the vibe was much nicer. The studio was not nicer but it was a looser attitude. ‘Let the musicians have a lot more freedom. Let the musicians do what they do,’ was the tone.”<sup>73</sup> Johnson’s recollection of the Percy Sledge session that produced “When a Man Loves a Woman” supports the “looser attitude” claim present at Norala; a “spit’n’balin’ wire studio.”

The multiple skills Johnson learned while working at FAME and Norala highlight the dynamic nature of the Muscle Shoals music industry during the early-to-mid-1960s. “See, my thing was always so diversified—from engineering and playing rhythm to running the business—my whole life was not just my axe,” Johnson told *Guitar Player* in 1982. “But because of my axe everything else happened.”<sup>74</sup> Playing guitar with the Del Rays got

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<sup>71</sup>West, “The Stars are Falling on Alabama,” K1.

<sup>72</sup>Weinberg, *The Big Beat*, 50.

<sup>73</sup>Payne, *Great Drummers of R&B*, 116.

<sup>74</sup>Forte, “Rhythm Guitar Artistry,” 78.

Johnson (and others) through the door at FAME. Johnson's willingness to do nominal jobs for Hall combined with his basic experience as a recording engineer eventually led to the opportunity for him to sit behind the mixing console at Norala and FAME.

The formation of Hall's second house band was very similar to the way the owner-producer "selected" the musicians for his first house band. By the mid-1960s, the "protégés" of the first FAME rhythm section were ready.<sup>75</sup> "[Briggs, Carrigan, and Putnam] moved to Nashville to pursue their recording career," recalled David Hood.

When they did that, that left a vacuum here. So Roger Hawkins, Jimmy Johnson, Spooner Oldham, and some others started doing the session work [at FAME]. Mostly demo's and stuff, for free, or for very little. Just to learn. I was aware that they were doing that. So that's when I started hanging around. At that time, Junior Lowe was playing bass....[H]e was a good bass player, but probably wasn't going to go a whole lot farther. So he switched to guitar. And when he switched to guitar, I started getting more bass work. And so we learned on these sessions.<sup>76</sup>

Although the musical community in the Shoals during the early-to-mid-1960s expanded to include Jimmy Johnson, Roger Hawkins, Junior Lowe, David Hood, and others, there were only a small number of musicians available and willing to perform on recordings sessions at FAME. After Putnam, Briggs, and Carrigan moved to Nashville in 1964 and Thompson's death in 1965, Hall replaced his house band with a group of musicians literally waiting in the studio wings.

David Hood was the only member of the second FAME rhythm section with limited studio or recording experience. Like Norbert Putnam before him, Hood also spoke about the pressure to come up with original bass lines. "All the years I played in that little band The

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<sup>75</sup>In a 1982 interview with *Guitar Player*, Johnson said, "In early '64, right at the time of Terry's death, they moved to Nashville. We were sort of their protégés-the Del-Rays were the only guys left in town who could do it," 78.

<sup>76</sup>David Hood, interview with the author, 24 May 2011. Unless indicated otherwise, all quotes by Hood from this interview.

Mystics,” Hood recalled, “I played whatever I wanted to play. I played guitar lines, not traditional bass.” Hood also believed that growing up in a somewhat remote corner of Alabama effected his playing as well. In 1982, he told *Guitar Player*, “Because I’m so isolated here, I’ve never seen a lot of my favorite players. That probably has a lot to do with how I play, my style, because I’ve had to learn everything from just hearing it.”<sup>77</sup> Hood spent time listening to recordings made at Motown and Stax. In 2011, he recalled:

We all learned about the construction of songs, and what to do in the studio. Because before, when you’re playing in a band, you’re just copying something that you’ve heard. But when you’re in the studio you have to originate something, you have to make a part. A real bass part, not one that’s copied from somebody else...In that way I really learned how to play [at FAME].<sup>78</sup>

#### **CHARISMATIC FIGURES: WORKING FOR RICK HALL & THE ARRIVAL OF WORLD FAMOUS RECORD PRODUCERS**

For their 1979 study Peterson and White remarked, “the diverse efforts [of studio musicians] are coordinated by a charismatic figure or entrepreneur who melds their work in ever-novel ways.”<sup>79</sup> The producer for a recording session yields considerable influence over what goes on a particular track, and is ultimately responsible for the final recorded product. The differing methods of producers Rick Hall and Jerry Wexler serve as case studies that allow further insight into recording practices at Muscle Shoals studios.

Hall had a profound influence upon the young studio musicians working for him. “I was taught about the studio by Rick Hall,” Hawkins recalled in 1984. The drummer continued:

[Hall] used to say, ‘Even if I ask you to go out in the middle of the studio and

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<sup>77</sup>Forte, “David Hood” *Guitar Player*, 39.

<sup>78</sup>Chapter 3 addresses the ability of Hood and others to learn “black” music from listening to records.

<sup>79</sup>Peterson and White, “The Simplex Located in Art Worlds,” 418.

play a paper bag, if that's what I want, then that's what you do.' He really gave me some wisdom about the recording studio and how players should aim to please the producer. The producer is always right; if he tells you to play on the snare side to get a crisper sound you do it.<sup>80</sup>

Hall was demanding, and quite often chastised the studio musicians in front of each other.

Hawkins told fellow drummer Max Weinberg, "Rick Hall had a habit of coming down hard on you at the wrong time. He'd do *subtle* things like hit the talkback button and say, 'Roger, your drums sound like shit.' That would embarrass me to high heaven. I would want to crawl under the drums rather than play them."<sup>81</sup> In a 2011 interview, David Hood recalled Hall's direct approach to producing records:

So we'd go in and play and he'd say "No, that's terrible. No you can't do this." And he'd berate us. But we learned because we hated being bitched at so much. We would learn. You would have to... It was mono recording, and if you made a mistake you'd have to start all over again. Everybody. So you'd not only get Rick's displeasure, you'd get everybody else in the groups displeasure for having to do it again. So it made you learn. It made you learn how to play. I don't think I really learned to play my instrument until I started recording... Rick was brutal. Which was a good thing, in a way, because it made us learn.

Speaking to *Bass Player* in 1999 about the fear of making a mistake while recording in mono Hood remarked,

It was a bloodbath at first, because Rick Hall was a taskmaster who didn't mind embarrassing you in front of everybody. That's when I learned to just cancel my feelings and put everything out of my mind except the job at hand. I loved the job, though I was learning new things and getting paid. Even though it wasn't a lot of money, it was better than working at the tire store.<sup>82</sup>

Hall's 1960s "asskicking" production methods had left a metaphorical imprint on the studio musicians nearly forty-five years after their sessions at FAME.

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<sup>80</sup>Weinberg, *Big Beat*, 49-50.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup>Richard Johnson, "Track Star: David Hood's Marathon Muscle Shoals Run," *Bass Player*, August 1999, 56.

The pressure put on the studio musicians was a mixture of Hall's personality and the technology used to record the music. At that time during the mid-to-late 1960s, it was common to record the lead vocal and instrumental accompaniment live, without overdubs. Recording tracks in mono also meant that either a mistake would remain on the finished track, or the track must be re-recorded. The FAME studio musicians did not use headphones to hear themselves or others, just like sessions recorded in Nashville.<sup>83</sup> "There were no headphones," recalled Hawkins.

It was mono and the only way you got to hear what was happening was on playback. You couldn't hear the other instruments as you were playing. I was in a drum booth and everything was separated as far away as possible for leakage purposes. Usually you'd get the bass about two beats late, but you got used to it. Kind of like playing live but in a place with everything at a distance, like the guitar about thirty feet away.<sup>84</sup>

In Hood's opinion, the lack of headphones was an issue of control for Hall: "He wanted to be in total control. And he was, at first. He was very much in control. But as we started learning things, we started coming up with our own ideas." The charismatic figure of Hall may have coordinated the work of the FAME studio musicians, but the studio musicians equally influenced the process of recording tracks in Muscle Shoals.

Hall acknowledged his authoritarian production style. In 1974, he told author Charlie Gillett, "I say musicians are like basketball players, they need a manager to tell them when to drop a play. My engineering ability and advice on licks and beats contributes more than the individual musicians."<sup>85</sup> Hall, by his own account, also had a fondness for creating competition among his musicians:

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<sup>83</sup>Levy, "Nashville Sound-Era," 27.

<sup>84</sup>Payne, *Great Drummers* 115.

<sup>85</sup>Charlie Gillett, *Making Tracks: Atlantic Records and the Growth of a Multi-Billion-Dollar Industry* (London: Souvenir, 1988), 207.

Another factor was the competition between the players – we’d have, say, three bass players on a session, one in the studio and two sitting out in the lobby, and whoever came up with the best riff got the gig. I’d also give the musicians pep-talks to deflate their egos, sayin’ stuff like ‘this artists has come all the way here to cut a hit record and if you don’t give him one you may never be cuttin’ a record again.’ I was the total dictator of the session and everyone was always on pins and needles with me. I was hell when I was well, and I was never sick!<sup>86</sup>

Jerry Masters remarked, “I worked for Rick for a year-and-a-half. I learned 50 percent of what to do, and 50 percent of what not to do. He’s terrible with people.”<sup>87</sup>

Barry Beckett joined the FAME rhythm section on keyboards in 1967. Beckett need time, however, to adjust to the other members of the rhythm section as his musical style, particularly his piano playing, revealed country influences. “It took Barry a while to develop his piano playing with us,” Johnson told *Guitar Player* in 1982. “On organ and electric piano he was fantastic, but on piano he was playing like Floyd Cramer—very polished and sort of country clean.”<sup>88</sup> Beckett credited Hall with helping to develop his playing style to suit the musical traits associated with performing R&B. Beckett told journalist Barney Hoskyns in 1985 about Hall’s influence upon his playing:

I worked with Rick Hall about a year and a half, and he taught me an awful lot. He taught me the basic ways to make things funky. It took me about a year to turn myself around from the style of player I was. One day it just clicked, and all of a sudden it was *there*, as plain as day... and it felt like a band for the first time. I had to learn an awful lot of soul licks, because basically what I was playing was country or easy listening, too pretty. Rick’s country influences affected the melody lines, the mixture of major into minor, the way he thought melody. He would think white lines on top of black tracks. He would always think about hook melodic lines within the record, not just vocally but instrumentally.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Hoskyns, *Say It One Time*, 106.

<sup>87</sup>Jerry Masters, interview with the author, 3 June 2011.

<sup>88</sup>Forte, “Rhythm Guitar Artistry,” *Guitar Player*, 78

<sup>89</sup>Hoskyns, “Soul Provider.”

Despite Hall's often-harsh treatment of the people who worked for him, each musician interviewed for this project made one thing clear: they each have a deep respect for Rick Hall, and feels indebted to him. "I mean we all feel that we owe Rick Hall a lot for giving us our shot," Johnson warmly stated.<sup>90</sup>

The world of record production and distribution is an interconnected universe where studio owners, song publishers, label artist and repertory (A&R) employees, and others coexist. These connections to larger, national distribution networks are often vital for independent labels and studios; such is the case for FAME and Muscle Shoals. After the success of Alexander's "You Better Move On," tracks recorded at FAME regularly placed on the *Billboard* charts. Except for the tracks cut by Tommy Roe, R&B artists dominated the sessions produced at FAME. While shopping Jimmy Hughes' track "Steal Away," Rick Hall met Joe Galkin, an ex-song plugger from New York. Galkin introduced Hall to Jerry Wexler, the executive vice-president of Atlantic Records, who had at that time been recording artists for his label in Memphis at Stax Records. Wexler, always on the lookout for talent, told Hall to call him if the Muscle Shoals producer ever came across a promising act.<sup>91</sup>

After recording "When a Man Loves a Woman," Quin Ivy sensed that he had a hit on his hands. Ivy had only limited access to national distribution networks, so he asked Hall for help and Hall called Wexler. In 1966, Percy Sledge's "When a Man Loves a Woman" became the first number-one pop single for Atlantic Records. With the success of that track, combined with a dispute between Wexler and Jim Stewart, owner of Stax, Atlantic Records shifted the site of its R&B and soul music production from Memphis to Muscle Shoals. The

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<sup>90</sup>Johnson, interview with the author, 10 June 2011.

<sup>91</sup>Fuqua, *Music Fell on Alabama*, 47.

attention FAME received from Atlantic brought new faces and personalities into the Alabama studio as Wexler began to make regular visits to the Shoals.

Wexler had experienced the Southern process of recording while he worked with several Atlantic artists, including Sam and Dave, and Wilson Pickett, at Stax Records in Memphis.<sup>92</sup> A seasoned industry pro such as Wexler found the differences in the recording process between New York studios and Memphis or Muscle Shoals studios refreshing. Wexler explained in 1979 to *Record World* why he came to record in the Shoals (and the South): “The purpose was to find a house rhythm section where you could do head arrangements, and not have to be at the mercy of arrangers, who were all played out in the ‘60s. That’s why I went down there in the first place.”<sup>93</sup> Wexler recalled in 2004,

The records were all built spontaneously off chord charts, with each chord being numbered. They’d just have the song laid out in front of them, and what they excelled at was coming up with the ‘in-betweens’—the pick-up notes, the turnarounds, the walk-downs, the walk-ups—on the spot. Once somebody came up with a one- or two-bar pattern, they were off.<sup>94</sup>

Wexler described the Nashville number system, an informal method of transcribing music, which according to bassist Norbert Putnam, the session musicians in the Shoals started utilizing about 1964.

Wexler, along with his reputation as a producer, impressed the Alabama musicians long before he arrived in the Shoals. Jimmy Johnson recalled the first time Wexler worked at FAME:

[When he arrived] it was like, if the president of the United States had showed up for the session, he wouldn’t have got any attention. I mean

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<sup>92</sup>Chapter four explores in detail Wexler’s preference for recording in Southern studios.

<sup>93</sup>Sam Sutherland, “Jerry Wexler on Years in ‘Boogaloo Country,’” *Record World Salutes the Tenth Anniversary of Muscle Shoals Sound Studio*, 19 May 1979, 10.

<sup>94</sup>Simons, *Studio Stories*, 103. Wexler described what musicians refer to as a “head arrangement.” These arrangements are worked out in rehearsal and memorized, but not typically written down.

Wexler was so respected. He was so intimidating. He was fifty years old, and I was like 19. Roger was about 17...It was like, 'Lord God, how we gonna get through this?' ...I mean the guy was so brilliant. It was so easy for him to impress us, with all of his musical accomplishments.

David Hood, commenting on Wexler's stature within the music industry, remarked, "Think about it: He produced Ray Charles on 'What'd I Say?' He produced records I listened to before I even thought about being a musician. He's not a musician at all, but he's got the ultimate taste and ears."<sup>95</sup> In 1999, Hood told *Bass Player* about meeting the legendary New York producer, "[Wexler] scared me to *death* when I first met him—this New York Yankee accent came over the talk-back in the studio: 'David, would you come up here please?' 'Oh, God, what does he want? He's gonna fire me!' We laugh about all this now, but he's a tough old guy, and in those days he was *really* a tough guy."<sup>96</sup> In 1986, Jimmy Johnson recalled, "[Wexler] was a very dynamic person. He scared the shit out of us. We just quaked in our shoes."<sup>97</sup> Wexler wrote in his autobiography, "I was in my early fifties; the Muscle Shoals players were in their early twenties, a couple of generations younger. Later on, a real bonding took place—we became family. But in the beginning it took some getting used to."<sup>98</sup>

The difference between Rick Hall's production style and Jerry Wexler's approach was immediately recognizable to the musicians. David Hood commented on the differences:

[It] was exciting [when Wexler arrived]. Before that, most everything we had done had been produced by Rick. And so we were under [Wexler's] leadership. When we started working for Atlantic, and I think Atlantic would have been the first [session] where there really was a real producer that was different from Rick; it was an eye opener. For one thing, they treated us better than Rick did.

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<sup>95</sup>R. Johnson, "Hood: Track Star," 56.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music*, 212.

<sup>98</sup>Jerry Wexler with David Ritz, *Rhythm and the Blues: A Life in American Music* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 193.

By the time Wexler arrived in Muscle Shoals in 1966 he had been working in the music industry since the late 1940s, and produced musicians such as Ray Charles, Ruth Brown, the Drifters, Solomon Burke, Wilson Pickett, Sam and Dave, and many others since the early 1950s. His treating the Muscle Shoals musicians better than Rick Hall did is likely due to Wexler's years of experience working in recording studios with many different personalities. Also, Wexler needed the FAME house band to *want* to work for him and Atlantic Records. Treating the local musicians badly might have resulted in a record that failed to chart.

Both Johnson and Hood also remarked on the language difference between working with someone like Wexler and working with Hall. Johnson recalled, "You know, we could hardly understand [Wexler] because his vocabulary was so advanced...I wanted to know what the hell he was talkin' about." According to David Hood, the expressing of musical ideas by Wexler also required translation: "He was from such a different culture, and even the words he used were funny. We would say, 'Play *da da da da*.' But he would say, 'Davey, play *gi gi gon gon*.' We'd go, '*Gi gi gon gon*? What's that mean?'"<sup>99</sup> The two worlds that Hall and Wexler emerged from were quite different: Hall grew up in rural Alabama amidst abject poverty; Wexler, by no means well-off during his childhood, grew up in New York City, attended college in Kansas where he studied English, and served in the Army.

Wexler's initial trip to Muscle Shoals left a lasting impression on the session musicians. First, despite the differences in age and culture between Wexler and the members FAME's house band, the Alabama musicians along with Hall proved they were capable of producing quality products, at least in terms of sales, for Atlantic Records. Second, and perhaps more importantly, for the first time in their brief careers, Johnson, Hawkins, Lowe,

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<sup>99</sup>R. Johnson, "Hood: Track Star," 58.

Hood, and Oldham worked for a producer who was not Rick Hall. According to David Hood, the revelatory experience of working for Wexler had a profound effect:

It was the first time that we worked for a real professional record producer, from somewhere else, other than Rick Hall. And [Wexler] treated us with a lot of respect. Respected our ideas, and paid us well. And we thought, “Wow, this is how the music business really is.” Prior to that, we didn’t know but one way, and that was Rick’s way, and the little bit we’d done with Quin Ivy, and Marlin Greene. It was very eye opening. It made us realize that we were pretty good if we could please world famous record producers, like Jerry and Tom Dowd, and Arif Mardin, and those guys.

Based on the accounts of Putnam, Hood, and Hawkins, Rick Hall made it very clear to the studio musicians working at FAME that their job was to please the producer. And for the majority of the sessions the FAME rhythm section worked on, Rick Hall was the producer. With the arrival of Wexler, and later other producers, it became apparent to the session musicians that Hall’s method—doing take-after-take and berating the musicians—represented only one way to produce records.

#### **SESSIONS IN THE SHOALS: “LIKE CASTING A MOVIE”**

Wexler brought Wilson Pickett with him to record at FAME on the producer’s first trip to Muscle Shoals in the spring of 1966.<sup>100</sup> The FAME rhythm section at the time of Wexler and Pickett’s arrival was Oldham on keyboards, Johnson on rhythm guitar, Hawkins on drums, and Junior Lowe on bass; David Hood had not become the primary bass player in the section. Although Rick Hall often supplemented the core FAME rhythm sections with horn players for various tracks, by the late 1960s “outside” guitarists and bassists began to augment the core rhythm section as well.

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<sup>100</sup>The first Pickett sessions at FAME occurred on May 8, 9, 11, 1966. See, Michel Ruppli, *Atlantic Records: A Discography vol. 2* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 13.

Wexler, Pickett, Hall, and the studio musicians were expectedly anxious about the session. Pickett's session at FAME had been the first time that an Atlantic artist went to Muscle Shoals to record, and the singer was the biggest star the relatively new rhythm section had ever worked with.<sup>101</sup> In 1984, Roger Hawkins recalled, "'Land of 1,000 Dances' was the first recording I did with him, and boy, was I scared. He had a pretty heavy reputation."<sup>102</sup> Pickett, an Alabama native, was also apprehensive about literally returning to the "land of cotton." He recalled his arrival in Muscle Shoals during May 1966 stating, "I looked down out the plane window, and I see black folks pickin' cotton, and I say, 'Shit, turn this motherfuckin' plane *around*, ain't no way I'm goin' back there.'"<sup>103</sup> For Hall, having Wexler and Atlantic produce a hit recording at FAME would likely lead to a successful partnership. "When [Pickett] first came down," remarked Johnson, "he was very nervous. But he left with 'Land of 1000 Dances' and 'Mustang Sally.' So he turned around real quick." Nearly five months passed between the recording of those two tracks.<sup>104</sup> Perhaps not so curiously after nearly fifty years, Johnson did not recall himself being nervous at what proved to be a watershed moment in his career and the careers of all those involved. Despite any noted anxieties, the sessions were very successful as both tracks charted in *Billboard* during 1966, reaching the number six and twenty-three spots respectively. Pickett returned to record in Muscle Shoals at both FAME and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio on many occasions.

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<sup>101</sup>"When A Man Loves A Woman," although released by Atlantic, was not produced under Atlantic Records' supervision.

<sup>102</sup>Weinberg, *Big Beat*, 53.

<sup>103</sup>Geri Hirshey, *Nowhere to Run: The Story of Soul Music* (New York: Times Books, 1984), 83.

<sup>104</sup>According to session records, Pickett recorded "Land of 1000 Dances" on May 11, 1966, and "Mustang Sally" on October 13, 1966. Atlantic released the tracks during July and November 1966 respectively. See Ruppli, *Atlantic Records A Discography* vol. 2, 13, 44.

The spontaneity of the Pickett sessions is apparent in the way that the musicians describe how the recordings of “Land of 1000 Dances” and “Mustang Sally” took shape. Roger Hawkins, recalling the creative process of the first Pickett session stated, “We just worked it out in the studio. He had a lot of input. On ‘Land of 1,000 Dances’ he gave me the pulse that he wanted me to play by walking up to me and saying, ‘Hey man, play THIS. And he clapped it out and gave me the lick.”<sup>105</sup> There is an undated picture of Pickett standing behind Spooner Oldham, who is seated, while the singer looks over the pianists’ shoulder. Pickett, sharply dressed in grey slacks, black collared shirt and black leather vest, leans forward slightly, weight on his left leg, which is in motion, while his right hand beats time on his thigh. He has a smirk on his face. Oldham’s hands are on the piano keys. Junior Lowe, head down and seated behind a partition, concentrates on his bass playing. Based on Hawkins’ recollection and this photo, it is not hard to imagine Pickett standing in the middle of the FAME studio, attention fixed on the drummer seated at his kit inside a makeshift drum booth; the brash singer says to Hawkins, ‘Hey man, play THIS,’ and then, much like a ebullient dancer, Pickett proceeds to model with his hands and feet the beat that eventually becomes the drum break for “Land of 1000 Dances”: stomp-clap, stomp-stomp-clap; stomp-clap, stomp-stomp-clap. Hawkins transfers the beat to his drum kit, and the session takes shape from there.

The process of “working it out” in the studio also included input from the studio musicians. Oldham, the keyboardist for both sessions, recalled in 2011 how he came up with the organ break for “Mustang Sally,”

Everybody’s tuned up, set-up ready to do something...Jerry Wexler had this demo [of “Mustang Sally”]. I listened to that song, and I don’t hear a

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<sup>105</sup>Weinberg, *Big Beat*, 52.

piano or organ. I don't hear anything in there... And it's time to start doing something, playing it. And I'm thinking, "Well, I want my job. I want to work here, I want to be on this, but I don't have a part." And so, I've got to create a part. What's it gonna be? I'm sitting there on the stool, the organs on, and I'm just day dreaming a minute; "I wonder what it would sound like if you rode a motorcycle through the studio?" And that's what I emulated, that sound on the organ. [Imitates the keyboard riff] 'Wha, wha, wha.' I think [Rick Hall] reached over and turned on the echo; he picked up on it."

Hawkins' and Oldham's comments speak to Wexler's stated intention for wanting to record in the South: the lack of formal arrangements. "[The producers] never did say play this or that," Oldham recalled. "They'd wait for you to hear what you had. I'm sure if you ran out of ideas, they might have an idea. But I don't recall them ever saying 'play this or that.'"

It becomes clear through the comments above that Wexler, who had already worked with Southern musicians in Memphis, allowed the FAME studio musicians to actively participate in the creation of a song arrangement. Hall, on the other hand, who had limited experience working outside of his own studio, claimed that his input as engineer and producer outweighed the contributions of the individual musicians. It is unlikely, however, that the FAME studio musicians would have been comfortable making suggestions about song arrangements with someone of Wexler's stature in the control room unless they had already done the same thing while working for Hall. "It started out with [Rick] telling us what to play and then evolving to us having our own ideas and suggesting them," Hood recalled. "Sometimes he would like it, and sometimes he wouldn't." In the late 1960s, tracks recorded at FAME and released by Atlantic often stated "Arr. by Rick Hall & Staff" on the 45-rpm label.

The various members of the FAME in-house rhythm sections were not the only instrumentalists heard on recordings; regularly utilizing the talents of musicians outside the

core rhythm section had become standard practice in Muscle Shoals by the mid-1960s. Hall and then Wexler frequently used other musicians—horn players, guitarists, or bassists—to augment the sound heard on a particular track. A 1970 *Washington Post* story even reported on the habit of “importing” outside musicians to aid in the recording process: “If there is a need for other accompanist—horn-men, string ensembles, vocalists—they are flow in from Memphis to record during the session or tapes are taken to them for dubbing purposes.”<sup>106</sup>

Tom Dowd, Atlantic Record’s chief recording engineer who also worked closely with Wexler, likened the use of outside players in the recording process to using different actors in a film. In a 1979 he recalled,

It was often like casting a movie. Depending on the nature of the artist, the rhythm section would be capable of doing three or four songs the way you wanted them done. One song might not be in their category so you’d have to introduce a player or two to act as a catalyst in making things right. Then everything would fall into place.<sup>107</sup>

The musical catalysts, which included Tommy Cogbill, Chips Moman, Jerry Jemmott, Duane Allman, Charlie Chalmers, and others, augmented the Muscle Shoals musicians and helped the Alabama studio players and the session producer to realize tracks that did not sit comfortably within the musical comfort zone of the house band.

The death of Terry Thompson in 1965 left a vacancy in the lead guitar position among Muscle Shoals studio musicians. When Jimmy Johnson became the principal guitarist for Hall in the mid-1960s, his specialty was rhythm guitar. Many lead guitar players, including Chips Moman, Junior Lowe, Marlin Green, Eddie Hinton, and Duane Allman performed on sessions at FAME along with the house rhythm section during the late 1960s.

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<sup>106</sup>West, “Stars Falling on Alabama,” K1.

<sup>107</sup>Jospeh Ianello, “Tom Dowd on the Magic of Muscle Shoals,” *Record World Salutes the Tenth Anniversary of Muscle Shoals Sound Studios*, 19 May 1979, 18, 24.

Lowe, Green, and Hinton grew up in or near the Shoals; Moman and Allman were originally from Memphis and Daytona Beach, respectively. Throughout the 1960s, R&B tracks rarely featured a guitar solo. Instead, the lead guitar would provide fills behind the vocal melody. It was not until the arrival of Duane Allman that the electric guitar became a featured instrument on recordings from Muscle Shoals. On several tracks, including Wilson Pickett's version of "Hey Jude" and Boz Scaggs' "Loan Me a Dime," Allman's guitar is heard in an extended solo. In fact, Allman suggested to the singer that he record the Beatles' track, which also became a hit for Pickett.<sup>108</sup>

Several freelance bass players also recorded at FAME, and their contributions can be heard on several well-known tracks. Tommy Cogbill, who primarily worked in Memphis, became a frequent contributor on both bass and guitar to sessions recorded in Muscle Shoals. As Wexler recalled, "Rick [Hall] had never bothered to find out what else [Tommy] could do. And [he] became a master session bass player."<sup>109</sup> David Hood recalled in 2013,

They were bringing guys down from Memphis on some of the sessions. The guys they were bringing were Chips Moman [guitar] and Tommy Cogbill. Tommy was a great guitar player, and on the "Land of 1000 Dances" session, Junior Lowe was having a lot of trouble with that [bass] intro [Hood sings the intro]. And Chips says, 'Tommy's a good bass player, let him try some of the stuff.' So after that track they moved Junior to guitar and got Tommy to play bass. So Tommy played [bass] on "Mustang Sally," "Funky Broadway," and some of those Pickett songs.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>See Randy Poe, *Skydog: The Duane Allman Story* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2006), 81-88. The Beatles' recording reached number one on the Hot 100, and Pickett's reached number 13 on the R&B charts.

<sup>109</sup>Gillett, *Making Tracks*, 206

<sup>110</sup>David Hood, interview with the author, 14 June 2013.

Wexler also sent Jerry Jemmott, a veteran bassist from the New York City studio scene, to record at FAME for a Pickett session.<sup>111</sup> Jemmott's recollection of his work at FAME echoed how the Muscle Shoals-based musicians described sessions:

[In Muscle Shoals] we wrote our own chord charts. Whatever the communication we needed to learn the tunes so we'd remember it, and record it is what we wrote down... It would be a very relaxed session. There wasn't the pressure of having to knock something out in three hours. We'd have all day to work on one song if we needed it... Everybody [the singers, and the band] was there. They were always live sessions. There was no tracking. The horns would be there.<sup>112</sup>

The use of these musical catalysts—Allman, Cogbill, Moman, and Jemmott—indeed made “everything fall into place”: songs recorded by Pickett with Cogbill and Moman, “Mustang Sally” and “Funky Broadway,” as well as “Hey Jude” with Allman and Jemmott, all achieved chart success. Speaking about the Beatles’ cover, Barry Beckett once remarked, “Wilson Pickett’s ‘Hey Jude’ was my favorite thing that we did at FAME.”<sup>113</sup>

The presence of bass players Cogbill and Jemmott had a lasting effect on David Hood. “I came in after Tommy Cogbill and Jerry Jemmott, and I was scared to death,” recalled Hood. “But I just had to psyche that fear out of my head and work.”<sup>114</sup> Hood, who had commented on his relative isolation in Muscle Shoals from seeing other bassists perform live, used the opportunity to watch players such as Cogbill and Jemmott up-close to improve his own skills. He remarked in 2011:

On the first Pickett session I played on, they brought Jerry Jemmott, who was an accomplished bass player, down from New York. And so I'm sitting here with my dumb self, and Jerry Jemmott's just *ripping* it up over

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<sup>111</sup>Both Cogbill and Jemmott worked with members of the FAME rhythm section in New York as well, notably on “Think” by Aretha Franklin.

<sup>112</sup>Jerry Jemmott, interview with the author, 20 April 2011. Unless indicated otherwise, all quotes by Jemmott from this interview.

<sup>113</sup>Hoskyns, “Soul Provider.”

<sup>114</sup>R. Johnson, “Hood: Track Star”, 56.

there. And I'm thinking, 'Gosh, what am I even doing here?' So it was scary. And, of course, the best songs on that session were the ones he played on. "Hey Jude," and all that stuff. Though there were some songs that I played on as well. The hits were all the ones that he played on. It was intimidating, but it was a learning experience, and I guess, at least as far as I'm concerned, I hung in there, and learned from what was going on, to come back the next time, and the next time.

Similar to when the FAME rhythm section first worked for "world famous record producers," recording alongside talented bassists and guitarists such as Cogbill, Jemmott, Moman, and Allman helped to challenge and inspire the Alabama musicians.

The use of a horn section, as noted in chapter one, was an important element to the Muscle Shoals sound. The majority of the horn players heard on 1960s recordings from Muscle Shoals, however, were actually Memphis-based musicians. The larger recording scene and the availability of professional horn players in Memphis no doubt accounted for the use of these players in the Shoals. Three descriptions of different recording sessions, one from the early 1960s and two from the late 1960s, speak to how horn players worked in Muscle Shoals.

Jill Shires graduated from Coffey High School in Sheffield in 1963. She was the principal flutist for the concert band, played in the marching band, and selected to Alabama's All-State music festival. Not long after her graduation, Shires was asked to a recording session at FAME. In 2011, Shires told me how she provided the flute obbligato for the Tams' hit "What Kind of Fool (Do You Think I Am)": "Somebody called the band director, and was looking for a flutist. You know I was the best flutist around, and that's how I wound up there."<sup>115</sup> The session excited the teenager, "There [were] two large recording studios. The Tams and I were in one, and the sidemen, other sidemen were in the other. Well, it felt good

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<sup>115</sup>Jill Shires, interview with the author, 5 August 2011. I am extremely thankful to Diane Steinhaus, music librarian at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, for telling me that Jill also worked for the university as a librarian. All quotes by Shires from this interview.

and it felt right. It felt sort of daring.” (Considering the 1960s racial tension in Alabama [addressed in chapter 3], a teenaged white girl working with black musicians was certainly daring.) Shires recalled how her flute line took shape, “There was probably something sketched out, because I wasn’t an improviser. Although, on ‘What Kind of Fool (Do you Think I Am)’ there is a little improvising, and I threw in a little flutter tonguing...It seems like I would have been a lot more comfortable if they had given me a sketch.”<sup>116</sup> The flute line and solo are built around the melody of the vocal response, “do you think I am.” Shires did not know who thought to include a flute on an R&B track, although it was likely producer Rick Hall’s idea. But since the Tams were already in the studio and based on Shires’ recollection, the inclusion of the flute on the recording appears to be a spontaneous idea.<sup>117</sup>

Saxophonist Charlie Chalmers, originally from Memphis, frequently performed in various horn sections heard on recordings made at FAME during the late 1960s. He recalled writing the horn chart for Aretha Franklin’s 1967 hit “I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)” during the session.

I wrote the charts out as Aretha was working up the song with the rhythm players. I got out my manuscript paper, and I just started writing out some parts, some unison parts first, then we added the harmonies, kind of broke out on harmonies on the second pass. I just kind of sat there and jotted’em out.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>Shires would go on to become a very active member of the contemporary music scene as a flutist in Los Angeles during the 1970s and ‘80s.

<sup>117</sup>The use of a solo flute on the Tams’ recording is a novelty. Still searching for his sonic signature, Hall did whatever he needed in order to produce a track that appeared on the national charts. The Tams’ release predates Jimmy Hughes’ 1964 session that produced “Steal Away,” the track that Hall still cites as “the birth of the Muscle Shoals sound.”

<sup>118</sup>Matt Dobkin, *I Never Loved a Man: Respect, and the Making of a Soul Music Masterpiece* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004), 126-127.

Bassist Jemmott described a similar atmosphere in regards to the horns during the 1969 Pickett session he worked on:

[The horn section] would be waiting in the wings for us to finish our track. Then they'd go right in. They'd be in the control room listening to what we're doing, figuring out what they were gonna do, and then we'd finish and they'd come in and do it. Right away. Everything there was by ear. There were very few charts. The horn players didn't write out charts. They figured out their parts, they figured out their harmonies and came in. BAM! Before it got a chance to get cold. They got it while it was hot. They were there all the time. So they were able to absorb it, and add a fresh perspective to it immediately, as opposed to two or three weeks later possibly. So it wasn't such an academic thing of figuring out little bits and things. They went with the feeling of it at the time. They watched the session. They saw the whole thing happening.

Chalmers' comment about the Franklin track and Jemmott's recollection of his Muscle Shoals sessions with Pickett both speak to what Wexler referred to as the Southern musicians' ability to play with "the on-the-spot" feeling, which according to Atlantic executive, the New York-based arrangers could not reproduce in the form of a music chart.

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Jerry Jemmott once remarked while speaking about session work, "Nobody's an overnight sensation. Years of playing in bars and clubs and dances—this is what you bring to the studio with you. All of that experience comes out in your music."<sup>119</sup> In the case of the many Muscle Shoals session musicians, which also included "outsiders" such as New Yorker Jemmott and Memphian Charlie Chalmers, the numerous tracks produced at FAME or Muscle Shoals Sound drew upon the musicians' experience of performing live long before they ever entered into a recording studio. The transformative process from amateur to professional, however, took time. Years spent doing gigs initially infused tracks cut in the Shoals with a sense of urgency and excitement. After settling into regular session work, the

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<sup>119</sup>Poe, *Skydog*, 88.

players continued to develop their musical skills, further informed by the particular demands of the recording studio. Working at FAME, many of the musicians developed other valuable talents. The often-overlapping skills that included learning the business of music publishing, working as a studio engineer, and record production, increased the musicians' cultural capital, which further enhanced their prestige within the local and national music industry.

More than a few of the individuals who worked at FAME went on to very successful careers in the music industry. Six years after they left Alabama, David Briggs and Norbert Putnam opened Quadraphonic Studios in Nashville in 1970, which became one of the premier studios in the "Music City." As an independent producer, Putnam was responsible for many popular albums including Joan Baez's *blessed are...* in 1971, *The Adventures Of Panama Red* by the New Riders of the Purple Sage in 1973, and Jimmy Buffett's 1977 breakthrough *Changes in Latitude, Changes in Attitude*, which included "Margaritaville." When the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section emerged in 1969 as independent contractors, not only did they bring their years of session work experience with them, they also brought Jimmy Johnson's proficiency as a recording engineer. The freedom of operating their own recording studio allowed the four members of the core rhythm section to branch out into logical extensions related to their work that included record production and song publishing. Johnson engineered the Rolling Stones' 1969 session at Muscle Shoals Sound that produced "Brown Sugar." In 1970, less than a year after they opened, their studio's address housed three companies: Muscle Shoals Sound Publishing Company, the Formula Publishing Company, and Muscle Shoals Sound Production Company. "It's pretty hard to say which has been the most successful end of the operation," Bill Williams noted for a December 1970 *Billboard* article. "The studio is booked constantly, the production company is placing

masters daily, and the publishing company has what may be a success unparalleled in the time period.”<sup>120</sup> Barry Beckett and Roger Hawkins first achieved success as co-producers in 1972 with “Starting All Over Again” by Mel and Tim; *Billboard* listed the pair among the top 100 producers for that same year.<sup>121</sup> David Hood, besides his job as bass player, also booked the studio, and produced and wrote several tracks for the MSRS’ unreleased album.<sup>122</sup> By 1975, the Muscle Shoals Sound Publishing Company had twenty-three writers on its roster.<sup>123</sup> When the MSRS moved their operation in the late 1970s from their cramped studio located at 3614 Jackson Highway to the 35,000 square foot facility located at 1000 Alabama Avenue (both in Sheffield), each rhythm section member embodied the fluid nature represented by the term recordist.

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<sup>120</sup>Bill Williams, “Music in Muscle Shoals: Muscle Shoals Sound—Sort of a Commune,” *Billboard*, 5 December 1970, 46.

<sup>121</sup>Beckett and Hawkins placed 83<sup>rd</sup> on the list. Dick Cooper, “Shoals Music,” *Florence Times—Tri-Cities Daily*, 7 January 1973, 35. Beckett left Muscle Shoals in the early 1980s, moved to Nashville, and produced albums for Hank Williams, Jr. and many others.

<sup>122</sup>This album was eventually sold as a limited release and only available at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame. In a June 2013 interview, Hood told me that he and Jimmy Johnson were considering releasing the album in the wake of the success of *Muscle Shoals*, the documentary film about the Alabama music industry.

<sup>123</sup>Dick Cooper, “Travis Wammack Signs Record Contract with Capricorn Records,” *Florence Times—Tri-Cities Daily*, 13 April 1975, 43. This article includes a photo with the caption “New Writers,” and lists the names of the twenty-three songwriters working for Muscle Shoals Sound Publishing Company.

### CHAPTER 3: I'LL TAKE YOU THERE: BLACK AND WHITE MUSCLE SHOALS SOUL

You see the whole thing about recording is the attempt at verisimilitude – not truth, but the appearance of truth. And that's what we would set out to achieve. And you get there not with tricks and schtick, but with music – it's the key to all of this.<sup>1</sup>

Jerry Wexler

A drawing of singer Aretha Franklin dressed in a sparkling gown with her hair in a classic updo adorned the cover of the June 28, 1968 issue of *Time Magazine*. A banner with the words “The Sound of Soul” spread across the upper right corner of the cover. The feature article, “Lady Soul Singing it Like it Is,” began with the following statement:

HAS it got soul? Man, that's the question of the hour. If it has soul, then it's tough, beautiful, out of sight. It passes the test of with-itness. It has the authenticity of collard greens boiling on the stove, the sassy style of the boogaloo in a hip discotheque, the solidarity signified by “Soul Brother” scrawled on a ghetto storefront...

Where soul is really at today is pop music. It emanates from the rumble of gospel chords and the plaintive cry of the blues. It is compounded of raw emotion, pulsing rhythm and spare, earthy lyrics—all suffused with the sensual, somewhat melancholy vibrations of the Negro idiom. Always the Negro idiom. LeRoi Jones, the militant Negro playwright, says: “Soul music is music coming out of the black spirit.” For decades, it only reverberated around the edges of white pop music, injecting its native accent here and there; now it has penetrated to the core, and its tone and beat are triumphant.<sup>2</sup>

The article continued in this fashion, evoking racialized cultural signifiers with colorful language. It also described soul music, and revealed the dichotomy between soul and pop:

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<sup>1</sup>David Simons, *Studio Stories: How the Great New York Records Were Made From Miles to Madonna, Sinatra to the Ramones* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2004), 107.

<sup>2</sup>“Lady Soul Singing it Like it Is,” *Time Magazine*, 28 June 1968, 62.

soul music was black, and pop music, until the release of Franklin's hit album, was white. The article also mentioned that Franklin recorded her 1967 breakout hit, "I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)," with a "funky Memphis rhythm section."<sup>3</sup> Nowhere does the unnamed author indicate that Franklin recorded "I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)" at FAME in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, with a group of white studio musicians who were born in and around that region.

The opening paragraphs of *Time*'s feature story conjured a "world of soul" by utilizing terms that characterized particular geographic locations and racial identities: collard greens represented the South in general, while gospel chords and the blues stood in for the black South. The boogaloo referred to a popular dance found in city nightclubs, performed to a hybrid created in the mid-to-late 1960s of Latin and soul music. Finally, the ghetto storefront signified the urbanized life found in black neighborhoods such as Watts in Los Angeles, or in cities like Washington, D.C., and Detroit: communities identified with seething racial tensions.

The racial climate within Alabama in general and the Muscle Shoals music industry in particular stood in stark contrast to one another. Governor George Wallace extolled segregation during his notorious inauguration speech of January 14, 1963, and he personally blocked the entrance of two black students into the University of Alabama later that same year. The cities of Birmingham and Selma, Alabama, located roughly ninety miles from each other, were epicenters during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, and heightened racial tensions continued in each location into the 1970s. Dr. Martin Luther King wrote his now famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail" in April 1963, and the tragic bombing of the 16<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>"Lady Soul Singing," 63.

Street Baptist Church, also in Birmingham, occurred in September of the same year. The amount of violence in the city gave rise to its derisive nickname: “Bombingham.”<sup>4</sup> In 1965, Selma served as the starting point for civil rights marchers on their way to Montgomery, the state capital. One of those marches culminated in violence, and the national press referred to that day as “Bloody Sunday.”<sup>5</sup> Media outlets filled their broadcasts and papers with stories of the clashes between civil rights activists and the Alabama State and local police.

The racial climate in the Shoals, however, remained relatively calm when compared to other Alabama towns and cities, even though schools in Florence, Sheffield, Tuscumbia, and Muscle Shoals were segregated. The music industry in Muscle Shoals, approximately one hundred miles northwest of Birmingham, produced many hit tracks on which black and white musicians performed together in a cooperative environment based on mutual respect. At that time and continuing into the early 1970s, Muscle Shoals’ racially diverse musical milieu remained relatively unknown to musicians, critics, and fans.<sup>6</sup> Those hits, by artists including Wilson Pickett, Aretha Franklin, and the Staple Singers, took on significant cultural meaning as representations of African-American identity, in spite of the racially integrated sources from which that soul music came. The tracks produced and recorded by an integrated group of musicians within a climate of tolerance in Muscle Shoals during the

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<sup>4</sup>Glenn T. Eskey, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). About the nickname Eskey wrote, “The dynamite blast that shattered the house of Sam Matthews on August 18, 1947, marked the first in a series of racially motivated bombings brought on by the postwar transformation of Birmingham, Alabama. Although racial attacks occurred in other southern cities, the frequency and number—some fifty dynamitings between 1947 and 1965—made Birmingham an exception and gave rise to the sobriquet ‘Bombingham,’” 53.

<sup>5</sup>The march occurred March 7, 1965. See “Welcome to Selma: ‘Civil War to Civil Rights,’” <http://selma-al.gov/about.html>, accessed 12 September 2013.

<sup>6</sup>Cross-racial musical collaborations also took place in Detroit and Memphis during the 1960s at the Motown and Stax record labels, respectively.

1960s embody a decidedly different portrayal of an Alabama best known at that same time for polarizing political figures and racial turmoil.

Franklin's one recording session at FAME which took place during January 1967 discloses a complex web of musical and cultural associations that reveals and challenges the racial discourse surrounding soul music commonly held by black and white audiences during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and, in some cases, continuing to the present. At the same time, the incident that caused the breakdown of Franklin's session demonstrates the fragility of race relations, even in interracial spaces such as FAME.<sup>7</sup> The series of events that led Franklin to record in Muscle Shoals with a group of white musicians, which include her frustrated career with Columbia Records and the increasing number of hits by black artists produced at FAME, weaves together a multifaceted story that spans several years and involves numerous participants. The cultural reverberations of this session have rippled throughout the history of popular music.

This chapter unpacks the racial discourse of soul music that took place at the national level, while at the same time providing a critical analysis of events that occurred during the late 1960s at FAME in Muscle Shoals. For a large segment of African-Americans, particularly during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the connections between soul music and black culture were crucial as they reinforced bonds that helped to formulate a distinct ethnic identity. The rise of the Black Power Movement throughout the 1960s and rhetoric associated with that movement further strengthened these associations. To many black listeners, soul music represented the epitome of black music. In many instances, soul music had the power to provoke listeners, regardless of their race. Therefore, the presence of white musicians

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<sup>7</sup>I wish to thank David Garcia for helping me to develop this idea.

playing on many soul tracks, particularly those recorded in Muscle Shoals, enhances the affective power of soul music's racial valence. The soul music produced by black and white musicians in Muscle Shoals simultaneously contradicts, reinforces, and exploits those tensions in complicated ways. How did a group of white musicians from northwest Alabama learn to perform music culturally coded as black? And, what did those racial identifiers really mean in relation to the music?

Authors such as Guthrie Ramsey have provided a theoretical framework that allows for the critical examination of music and racial identity. For Ramsey, black music exists as a shared cultural memory based on experience. "Ethnicity is not a monolithic experience," according to Ramsey, "but one involving dynamic relationships among other aspects of one's identity: class status, gender, marital status, formal education, profession, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, age, geography, and other factors."<sup>8</sup> Ramsey calls this dynamic relationship the "process of black ethnicity." Experiences with black music, however, were not limited to participants who identified themselves as black Americans; these musical experiences flowed across racial boundaries, and affected many white listeners and the members of the Muscle Shoals music industry in particular.

Analysis of these dynamic relationships helps to explain the musical, historical, and cultural implications of Franklin's Muscle Shoals recording session. Sociologist George Lipsitz, while scrutinizing contemporary musical events, wrote:

The force of history comes from its long fetch. Events that seem to appear in the present from out of nowhere in actuality have a long history behind them...Historical knowledge reveals that events that we perceive as immediate and proximate have causes and consequences that span great

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<sup>8</sup>Guthrie Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 37.

distances.<sup>9</sup>

Examining the musical, social, and cultural events that led Franklin to record at FAME in Muscle Shoals uncovers what Lipsitz described as the “long history” of this singular moment. The tracks Franklin recorded and released on the album *I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)* in 1967 are the immediate events, while her collaboration with the white studio musicians from Alabama has causes and consequences that, indeed, span great distances.

The initial section of this chapter examines the separation of “white” and “black” music into racialized styles and genres. I use my own phrase “racialized sound barrier” here to evoke the fabricated obstacles that created musical and cultural “drag”; the force exerted by these obstacles upon the music, which were typically imposed by those working within the recording industry. After addressing the early twentieth century origins of this practice, this section situates the 1950s musical crucible that produced rock ‘n’ roll within that same racialized musical-cultural framework. The second section of this chapter addresses the importance of tracks recorded by black musicians that were broadcast over the radio and the impact of those tracks upon young, white listeners, particularly those in the South. The experiences during the 1950s of the future members of the Muscle Shoals music industry with music coded as black had a significant impact upon this group. These encounters in Muscle Shoals exemplify the responses of many Southern youth that several historians have recently explored. The third section directly confronts the discourse of soul music that influential authors and media outlets broadcasted to the public during the 1960s.

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<sup>9</sup>George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), vii-viii. According to Lipsitz, “long fetch” describes the mid-ocean origins of waves that break on distant shores.

This chapter articulates the concept that race is, at its essence, a social construction.<sup>10</sup> And, music has the ability to strongly express the urgency of race: the individual and collective desire to embrace and express ethnic identity. For many black Americans, soul music during the 1960s became the real locus of power in conveying racial and cultural pride, as well as representative of the struggle for survival. The soul music produced and recorded in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, by a group of integrated musicians therefore provides a space to delve deeper into the notion of distinct black or white sound worlds.

### **BUILDING A RACIALIZED SOUND BARRIER**

As a formative aesthetic, soul music is Black music because it is the music created by Black people in Black style. Soul music is Black church music realized on the dance floor and applied to how Black people live and love in society. Soul music is the sound of Black cultural expression. It's the groove, the howl, the sass, the swing, and the feel of the music, too.<sup>11</sup>

William Banfield, 2010

The construction of a racialized sound barrier that took several generations and multiple cultural forces to assemble has obscured from view many of the musical exchanges between black people and white people.<sup>12</sup> Built from many blocks, this metaphoric barrier includes the American slave trade and its aftereffects, as well as the collection of (white) folksong traditions. These two barriers, and others, directly and indirectly led to the early twentieth century music industry production of “race” records. For many, these records represented a

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<sup>10</sup>Barbara Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” in *Race, Region, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143-169; David Garcia, “‘We Both Speak African’: A Dialogic Study of Afro-Cuban Jazz,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 5, no. 2 (May 2011): 195-233.

<sup>11</sup>William Banfield, *Cultural Codes: Makings of a Black Music Philosophy An Interpretive History from Spirituals to Hip Hop* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 157. Banfield serves as professor of Africana Studies/Music and Society, and director of the Africana Studies programs at Berklee College of Music in Boston.

<sup>12</sup>See Ronald Radano, *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

tangible barrier. The stream of “race” records into the market during the 1920s further swayed the public reception of what constituted black or white music. By the mid-1950s, a sizeable barrier had been constructed that separated sound, and popular music in particular, along racial boundary lines.

Despite the nearly two-hundred years of systematic racism in the American South, black people and white people co-existed, and as a result their cultures, including music, food, and much more, intermingled. It is certainly naïve to suggest that the socio-cultural exchanges that took place between black people and white people living in the South up through the 1860s were fair when considering the inevitable power imbalance created by the society of the “master” and the slave. However, the long-term impact of these exchanges, especially the musical exchanges, has been profound. For a period of time beginning with the postbellum era in the South, the cultural exchange between the races increased to some degree as many black people moved around the region more freely than in any other prior moment in American history. The popularity of the banjo (an instrument with African ancestral roots) with both races across the nation during the second half of the nineteenth century is only one example that resulted in the socio-cultural-musical exchange between African-Americans and European-Americans.<sup>13</sup> The enactment and enforcement of Jim Crow laws and other impediments in the South during the later decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, began to obscure these musical exchanges from an audience’s perspective, resulting in the separation of southern music based on race.

With the production of folk song collections by scholars representing learned societies and the marketing of “race” and “hillbilly” record catalogues by the phonograph

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<sup>13</sup>See Philip F. Gura, *America’s Instrument: the Banjo in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

industry, the once-fluid musical styles and the southern musicians who performed them became easily classified according to the musicians' racial identity.<sup>14</sup> Traditional songs collected by Francis James Child, John Lomax, and others were one of the pillars of "hillbilly" music: a genre closely associated with rural, white southerners. The cultural and musical barricades reinforced by a segregated musical society during the early part of the twentieth century have resulted in the commonly held notion that the blues, and all of the music that this genre gave birth to including jazz, rhythm and blues, and soul, is black music. Thus, "scholars and artists, industrialists and consumers came to compartmentalize southern music according to race."<sup>15</sup> According to historian Karl Hagstrom Miller, the legacy of attaching race to culture (musical, or otherwise) has affected,

white historians who wrote black people out of the history of the South but also of black historians and their allies who tried to redress this imbalance by uncovering the history of an autonomous black cultural world. The politics of segregation and civil rights, white supremacy and black freedom, often encouraged scholars to produce stories of racial difference, separation, or autonomy.<sup>16</sup>

The 2010 quote by William Banfield at the beginning of this section, which echoes the views expressed by other authors, exemplifies the persistence of these attitudes.<sup>17</sup> While Miller remains sensitive to the "high political stakes involved in writing African American cultural history," he demonstrates that in the not-so-distant past both black and white musicians in the

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<sup>14</sup>Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>15</sup>Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 2.

<sup>16</sup>Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 11. Miller also credits historian Nell Irvin Painter for this viewpoint.

<sup>17</sup>In 1984, ethnomusicologist Robert W. Stephens wrote, "The aesthetic governing the essence, evolution, and legacy of soul was culture-specific; it celebrated blackness defined in its own terms." See Robert W. Stephens, "Soul: A Historical Reconstruction of Continuity and Change in Black Popular Music," *The Black Perspective in Music* 12 no. 1 (1984): 21-43.

South listened to and performed the same styles of music.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Miller's work and the early twentieth century process he calls segregating sound helps to erode the hypothesized racial foundations that have distorted the history of southern music in general and significantly affected the reception of soul music.

With the unexpected success of singer Mamie Smith's 1920 recording of "Crazy Blues," the phonograph industry realized the vast financial potential of vernacular music. In January 1922 an author writing for *Metronome* magazine simply stated, "One of the phonograph companies made over four million dollars on the Blues. Now every phonograph company has a colored girl recording the Blues. Blues are here to stay."<sup>19</sup> Seeking a way to differentiate in their catalogues the music recorded by black musicians and music recorded by white musicians, the major record labels adopted the term "race music" to describe the former. The OKeh label, which released the Smith track, was the first to use "race music" as a marketing term. During the 1920s, many people, regardless of their skin color, did not consider the term "race" derogatory since black people frequently used the term to describe themselves. As Albert Murray remarked in his 1976 monograph, *Stomping the Blues*,

The fact remains—oblivious as certain critics may be to it—that in the black press of the 1920s the most prominent Negro leaders and spokesmen referred to themselves as race spokesmen and race leaders...the indignation over the race terminology as applied to records has been misguided at best."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 12. See also John S. Otto and Augustus M. Burns, "Black and White Cultural Interaction in the Early Twentieth Century South: Race and Hillbilly Music," *Phylon* 35 no. 4 (1974): 407-417. Otto and Burns concluded, "Music frequently became the common interest which drew whites and blacks together to listen to songs from the Anglo-American, Afro-American, and 'common stock' traditions," 417.

<sup>19</sup>Ronald C. Foreman, Jr., "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-32; Their Origins and their Significance for the Record Industry and Society" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Illinois, 1968), 55. The "colored girl" phenomenon refers to the success of Mamie Smith.

<sup>20</sup>Recounted in Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm & Blues* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 9.

Murray's assessment holds true, but misses the deeper cultural implications that Miller's research revealed; by adopting the phrase "race music" as a marketing term during the 1920s, the phonograph industry helped to establish a racialized sound barrier separating music recorded by black and white musicians resulting in a legacy that has had a long-lasting effect on American culture. Ramsey revitalized the phrase "race music" for his monograph precisely because of what the term evoked:

My use of the term *race music* intentionally seeks to recapture some of the historical ethnocentric energy that circulated in these styles [blues, jazz, r&b], even as they appealed to many listeners throughout America and abroad...I use the word *race* in these senses, not to embrace a naïve position of racial essentialism, but as an attempt to convey the worldviews of cultural actors from a specific historical moment (emphasis in original).<sup>21</sup>

Although Ramsey clearly does not advocate for racial essentialism, the forces that helped shape and perpetuate the worldviews of cultural actors during the 1950s and '60s did.

Despite *Billboard* replacing "race music" in 1949 to describe "discs manufactured for Negro buyers, i.e. 'the race,'" it is doubtful that anyone did not also associate their newly adopted term, "rhythm and blues," directly with music recorded by black musicians.<sup>22</sup>

One often-misunderstood consequence of the segregation between music performed by black musicians and music performed by white musicians occurred when these two seemingly disparate soundscapes collided during the mid-1950s, which resulted in the emergence of rock 'n' roll. For those in the South who wholeheartedly opposed any mixing of the races, the infiltration of "Negro music" upon what they thought were the wholesome

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<sup>21</sup>Ramsey, *Race Music*, 3.

<sup>22</sup>Jerry Wexler, "Rhythm and Blues in 1950." Series 1, folder 6, in the Jerry Wexler Collection #20393, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The article, a clipping of the original, is undated. However, it was written for the *Saturday Review of Literature*, 24 June 1950, 49. Wexler, while working as a writer for *Billboard*, allegedly coined the phrase "rhythm and blues" and advocated for the magazine's adoption of the term.

sounds of (white) pop music represented an abomination.<sup>23</sup> According to the White Citizens Council headquartered in Mississippi, the exposure of white youths to these “jungle” sounds could cause irreparable damage. The black and white musical pioneers of rock ‘n’ roll faced a steadfast southern opposition with ingrained roots firmly planted before the Civil War. These attitudes regarding race, remarked historian Michael Bertrand, characterized “a rationale that became tradition, a prejudice that became a way of life.”<sup>24</sup> The legacy of institutional racism in the South combined with the compartmentalized associations inadvertently created by the phonograph industry labeling of “race” and “hillbilly” music also helped to perpetuate the myth that whites did not, or could not, perform music culturally coded as black.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the self-appointed gatekeepers of the cultural elite such as Theodor Adorno saw the emergence of popular music in general and rock ‘n’ roll in particular as a representation of the negative influence that unchecked commercialism had upon American society. The demise of Western (European) culture was certainly at hand.

Few, if any, cultural critics or historians during the 1950s, or immediately after, realized that the music of black America and the music of white America were never as far apart as some made them seem. Despite the cultural blinders worn by many, cross-racial influences had bubbled beneath the American popular music landscape for some time.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Michael Bertrand, *Race, Rock, and Elvis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); see chapter 3 and 4 in particular. Also see Kerry Segrave, *Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1988).

<sup>24</sup>Bertrand, *Race, Rock, and Elvis*, 110.

<sup>25</sup>In the 1920s and 1930s, when white musicians performed in a style culturally coded as “black,” they often performed under an assumed name. For example, guitarist Eddie Lang, who was white, frequently recorded with guitarist Lonnie Johnson, who was black. For these releases, which the record label marketed towards a black audience, Lang was billed as Blind Willie Dunn. See Otto and Burns, “Black and White Cultural Interaction,” 414-415.

<sup>26</sup>During the late 1940s and early 1950s, numerous examples can be found. Country music singer Hank Williams learned to play blues guitar from Rufus “Teetot” Payne, a black musician. For more information about the influence of black music within country, see Diane Pecknold, *Hidden in the Mix: The African American*

When Elvis Presley burst into the national consciousness during 1956, his ability to mix black and white soundscapes surprised nearly everyone. While his musical style and gyrating hips confounded many adults in the North and the South alike, to the burgeoning youth culture, especially in the South, Presley became a progressive symbol. The white rock ‘n’ roll musicians who followed Presley, many of whom came from southern working-class backgrounds, represented a new image of the South—one that attempted to turn their back on the region’s racist past. According to Michael Bertrand,

What distinguished rock ‘n’ roll artists from the hillbilly versions of minstrelsy and the contemptuous public treatment of their black peers, therefore, was a willingness to identify completely with the rhythm and blues singers they emulated. They were not pretending to be, or making fun of, African American artists. Through style of performance, dress, speech, and manner of presentation, they were attempting to connect to their black counterparts. They were forcing their way out of the complex, rigid southern folk and country music tradition into which they had been born. With their audiences, they were engaged in a degree of public interchange and support of black music and culture that both united and separated them from their folk past.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, historian Pete Daniel remarked, “In their desire to gain musical insight, musicians created a blueprint for racial cooperation that was lost on both political leaders and most whites...In a decade of enormous tension, the music that flowed from the genius of black and white southerners resonated with youths throughout the country and ultimately the world.”<sup>28</sup> This phenomenon was not strictly limited to rock ‘n’ roll and R&B musicians. In her study of the Civil Rights movement and jazz history, *Freedom Sounds*, ethnomusicologist Ingrid

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*Presence in Country Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013). Chuck Berry, a pioneer of rock ‘n’ roll, acknowledged the influence of fiddler Bob Wills’ western swing recordings on his songwriting.

<sup>27</sup>Bertrand, *Race, Rock, and Elvis*, 99-100. Also see Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>28</sup>Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 148.

Monson postulates that while a change in consciousness occurred among many African Americans brought on by the movement, a parallel corresponding rejection of the “racial status quo” that had existed with their parents’ generation took place among many white youth. According to Monson, this transformation, which took place between 1950 and 1967, led many whites involved in the musical community to embrace “African American musical and cultural standards as a benchmark for evaluating themselves aesthetically, morally, and politically.”<sup>29</sup> From the 1950s on, it became progressively more difficult, particularly in the South, to impose a systematic culture of racial segregation on a growing white youth movement increasingly fascinated with black music. If Presley and the musicians who helped pioneer rock ‘n’ roll were already a few steps removed from the South of their parents, the generation who came of age in the South during the ascendancy of rock ‘n’ roll, including the future members of the first FAME house band and the MSRS, had even less association with the old South and its segregated musical history. This new breed of musician, openly reared by both black and white soundscapes, listened to and fluidly performed along both sides of the color line. Ultimately, these musicians would challenge the notion of a racialized sound barrier.

#### **BREAKING THE RACIALIZED SOUND BARRIER: THE INFLUENCE OF RADIO**

The radio became one of the primary sources for the transmission and reception of black music into the homes of black and white listeners alike during the 1950s. Through a series of events including the formation of Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI) in the late 1930s, and a radio broadcaster’s boycott of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) in the early 1940s, music that had previously received limited radio play such as

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<sup>29</sup>Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15.

“race” and “hillbilly” tracks gained valuable airtime. The musical and cultural fallout from these exchanges that took place via the radio during the mid-to-late 1950s, particularly those of white listeners hearing music performed by black musicians, would deeply impact a group of students growing up in and around Muscle Shoals, Alabama.

The creation of BMI in 1939 allowed those who wrote or performed “race” music, which also included blues and jazz, and “hillbilly” music to more easily join a performing rights organization (PRO).<sup>30</sup> Prior to the formation of BMI, ASCAP, which was the sole PRO, denied membership to those who wrote and recorded in those styles, ultimately creating a stranglehold on the music publishing industry. The formation of BMI, founded in part as a low-cost alternative to ASCAP, created competition that provided another source for music licensing. When ASCAP requested a higher fee to broadcast the music written by their membership over the radio, radio stations responded by boycotting their music altogether. This, in turn, raised the profile of all the artists represented by BMI, specifically those who performed “race” and “hillbilly” music.

The music industry felt the impact, and the sonic ripples caused by the formation of BMI circulated across the ether. BMI’s licensing of influential publishing catalogs such as Ralph Peer’s Peer International and others further supported the organization.<sup>31</sup> Commenting on this transitional period, Atlantic Records executive Jerry Wexler remarked, “Music heretofore ignored—a new kind of rhythmic blues emerging from the black urban centers,

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<sup>30</sup>“History: BMI and Pop Music,” [http://www.bmi.com/genres/entry/history\\_bmi\\_and\\_pop\\_music](http://www.bmi.com/genres/entry/history_bmi_and_pop_music), accessed 26 September 2013.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid. Ralph Peer retained culturally valuable and financially lucrative rights to the songs of Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family, among many others.

and hillbilly music coming out of the white South—was making commercial noise.”<sup>32</sup>

Historian Brian Ward noted that a contributing factor to “the growth of post-war black-oriented radio was the partial collapse of the old triumvirate of Tin Pan Alley publishing houses, major record companies and radio networks which had largely controlled American entertainment broadcasting since the 1920s.”<sup>33</sup> The establishment and flourishing of BMI helped to deconstruct the racialized sound barrier.

The sounds of black music broadcast across the airwaves and picked up by radio receivers in homes across the entire country, particularly in the South, during the 1950s had at least two effects: 1) it helped erode long-held cultural perceptions among white people, and 2) it allowed listeners an opportunity to hear music markedly different than what their parents heard. “Radio’s relationship to Jim Crow’s demise after World War II was pervasive, not only as a form of entertainment but also as a means of providing a realistic, positive portrayal of black culture,” Michael Bertrand remarked. “For the first time, stations throughout the South instituted extensive black programming.”<sup>34</sup> White listeners tuned in to radio broadcasts and programs initially marketed to target black-only audiences. The broadcasts of Nashville-based WLAC that featured music performed by black musicians had a particularly lasting impact on white listeners. Writing about the popular music upheaval that took place during the 1950s, musicologist Albin Zak commented,

Over the years, WLAC’s black fans numbered in the millions but so, it turned out, did whites. And while the cultural trappings and sensibilities that produced the songs and performances were remote from most whites’

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<sup>32</sup>Jerry Wexler and David Ritz, *Rhythm and the Blues: A Life in American Music* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1993), 55.

<sup>33</sup>Brian Ward and Jenny Walker, “‘Bringing the Races Closer’: Black-Oriented Radio in the South and the Civil Rights Movement,” in *Dixie Debates: Perspectives on Southern Cultures*, ed. Richard H. King and Helen Taylor (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 131.

<sup>34</sup>Bertrand, *Race, Rock, Elvis*, 165.

everyday experience, the black sounds emanating from their radios spelled delight, novelty, exuberance, exoticism, and a good time, all of which were irresistible to a restless new generation seeking an identity apart from that of their parents.<sup>35</sup>

Jimmy Johnson, rhythm guitarist for the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section, remembered hearing radio broadcasts from this influential Nashville-based station while growing up in Sheffield, Alabama:

All the music I learned [to play when I was younger, I learned by] listening to WLAC in Nashville...especially late at night. [A DJ] by the name of John Richburg, he went by the name of John R., would do a midnight show, and play the blues. And I'm telling you, I imagined [him as] a 380 pound black man.<sup>36</sup>

Just as music broadcast over the radio shielded, in some ways, the racial identity of the musicians, the DJs' racial identity was also assumed. Richburg, who was white and like many other white DJs who worked at stations that broadcast to primarily black audiences, adopted mannerisms that allowed his listeners to think he was black.<sup>37</sup> "As part of their on-air personae," Zak noted, "many white jocks affected a version of black street vernacular, creating an impression of hipness, which, in turn, conferred a mantle of authority, a sense that these men understood the music and, in a sense, lived its ethos."<sup>38</sup> Listeners heard tracks performed by white and black musicians broadcast over the radio; white DJs such as Richburg in Nashville, or Dewey Phillips in Memphis, adopted characteristics that led

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<sup>35</sup> Albin Zak, *I Don't Sound Like Nobody: Remaking Music in 1950s America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 37.

<sup>36</sup> Jimmy Johnson, phone interview with author, 8 November 2010. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes by Johnson from this interview.

<sup>37</sup> David Henry, "The 50,000 Watt Quartet," *Oxford American*, November 2013, 16-18. Henry's article describes both the influence that the music broadcast by WLAC had upon many listeners, and how the white DJs navigated the racial divide over the airwaves.

<sup>38</sup> Zak, *I Don't Sound Like Nobody*, 36. Norman Mailer address these transformations in his essay, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections of the Hipster," originally published in *Dissent* in 1957, reprinted in *Advertisements for Myself* (New York: Berkeley Publishing, 1966). Also see Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders*, 73-83.

listeners to associate them with black culture, yet their shows appealed to both black and white audiences. In a 1990 article addressing the transmission of black music in the South during the 1920s through the 1960s, Robert Kloosterman and Chris Quispel noted, “The rise of broadcasting stations playing mainly black music enabled whites to contact blacks outside the firmly established patterns of ‘labeled interaction.’ Thanks to the further diffusion of radio broadcasting, social distance [between white people and black people] was reduced.”<sup>39</sup> When combined, all of these socio-cultural interactions during the 1950s that mingled the soundscape of black and white America helped to distance young southern audiences from the highly-charged, racialized exchanges of their parents’ generation.

***“EVERYTHING WAS ALL THE SAME...IT WAS JUST MUSIC TO US”***

The personal experiences for many of the musicians who became the foundation of the Muscle Shoals music industry corroborate what scholars have claimed about black and white musical interactions during the 1950s. Experiencing black music for these people, first over the radio, then performing music originally recorded by black musicians, would ultimately transform this isolated region of northwest Alabama from an area known during the 1920s as the location of the Wilson Dam to the “Hit Recording Capital of the World” by the mid-1970s.

As rock ‘n’ roll and R&B “fever” grabbed hold of youth across the United States, teenagers in the Shoals also fell under the music’s spell. Seeking a different musical path

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<sup>39</sup>Robert C. Kloosterman and Chris Quispel, “Not Just the Same Old Show on My Radio: An Analysis of the Role of Radio in the Diffusion of Black Music in the South of the United States of America, 1920–1960,” *Popular Music* 9, no. 2 (1990): 163. Kloosterman defines a “labeled interaction” as “the phenomenon where a discriminated group in its relations with the rest of society is expected to act accordingly to a specific label or code,” 152. Also see Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed From It* (New York: William Morrow, 1963), 169-170.

than their parents, the soundscape of black America intrigued many. Session bass player

Norbert Putnam recounted his youthful musical interests during a 2011 interview:

Country was off-limits. Our parents listened to country music. We would never spend one moment listening to Hank Williams, or any of those people. You can't dance to that! We want James Brown. The culture of the music for the young people really was black R&B music. Nothing else existed for our generation. When I was younger I listened to Broadway, and I really loved the writing of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Rodgers and Hart, Lerner and Lowe, and that all appealed to me until I found out that you really couldn't dance to it. And so, that was all, sort of, given up. When Ray Charles, Bobby Blue Bland, James Brown, Hank Ballard and the Midnighters, Chubby Checker, [and] all those guys are *giving* you something, you don't need to go to Arthur Murray to learn these steps. You just get out there and you start moving, and everything is OK. That was the culture.<sup>40</sup>

Keyboardist Barry Beckett recalled in 2009, “*everybody* picked up Hoss Allen and John R on WLAC at night. *Nobody* wanted to hear strictly country music, which in a small town like Muscle Shoals was all you got, and the only alternative was WLAC out of Nashville [original emphasis].”<sup>41</sup> David Hood, also a bass player, had a similar experience when he first encountered music performed by black musicians over the radio.

I remember Tommy Van Sandt, was the son [of the WJOI radio station owner], he had “Tommy’s Turntable” on Saturdays, and he would play music...R&B, and early Elvis music, and early rock ‘n’ roll music on his show...that was mid-50s. Stations that me and my friends listened to in high school was WLAY, and it was a station that played everything. It played rock ‘n’ roll, R&B, country, all. Everything was all the same thing. And so, we grew up hearing Chuck Berry, and Bobby Vee, and Elvis, and Ray Charles, and some country music all on the same station. And as a result, we didn’t really know what was white music and what was black music. It was just music to us.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Norbert Putnam, interview with the author, 10 June 2011.

<sup>41</sup>Barney Hoskyns, “Soul Provider: Muscle Shoals Keyboard Legend Barry Beckett in His Own Words,” *Rock’s Backpages*, originally published 15 June 2009, <http://www.rocksbbackpages.com/Library/Article/soul-provider-muscle-shoals-keyboard-legend-barry-beckett-in-his-own-words>, accessed 11 May 2012.

<sup>42</sup>David Hood, interview with the author, 24 May 2011. Unless indicated otherwise, all quotes by Hood from this interview. A teenaged Van Sandt interviewed Elvis Presley several times during his radio show in 1955. Van Sandt also promoted three of Elvis Presley’s shows during the mid-1950s that took place at the Sheffield Community Center.

The perceived fluidity of musical styles broadcast over the radio helped to expose the artificial nature of the racialized sound barrier, while at the same time dismantling this socially fabricated sonic barricade.

Hollis Dixon (1935–2010) has been credited by many as the first musician in the Shoals to perform rock ‘n’ roll and R&B. Dixon described to author Barney Hoskyns in 1998 his early musical interests:

At the beginning it was solid Jimmy Reed and John Lee Hooker. *To us, there was no difference between black and white.* I grew up in the cottonfields with blacks, and later I used the first two black guys in a white Muscle Shoals band, Jesse Boyce and Freeman Brown [emphasis added].<sup>43</sup>

Dixon, along with his band, the Keynotes, served as a musical training ground for many future stars of the Shoals’ recording industry. Recalling Dixon’s influence, Hood remarked, “Hollis had a profound impact on me and a lot of the musicians of my generation. He had the first, true rock ‘n’ roll band around here. It was the first time anybody saw anyone play rock ‘n’ roll music.”<sup>44</sup> Despite having grown up in a musical family, Jimmy Johnson first became interested in the guitar only after hearing Chuck Berry on the radio and then seeing Hollis Dixon’s guitar player perform “Johnny B. Goode.”<sup>45</sup> Johnson recalled the moment of his musical epiphany during a 2010 interview:

I never have liked country music. My dad, many times, tried to teach me the chords on the guitar, and, I just [did so to] appease my dad. I wasn’t interested, until I heard [on WLAY] a little tune by Chuck Berry called “Johnny B. Goode.” And when I heard that, I said, ‘I got to rethink this.’ And, as a result, I started watching a local band here by the name of Hollis Dixon

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<sup>43</sup>Barney Hoskyns, *Say it One Time for the Brokenhearted: Country Soul in the American South* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 95.

<sup>44</sup>Russ Corey, “Shoals Music Pioneer Hollis Dixon, 75, dies,” originally posted 27 October 2010. <http://www.timesdaily.com/article/20101027/NEWS/101029822/1011/NEWS?Title=Shoals-music-pioneer-Hollis-Dixon-75-dies>, accessed 14 November 2010.

<sup>45</sup>Johnson’s father, Ray, performed with his brother, Dexter, as part of the Johnson Brothers. The duet had a radio program on WJOI in Sheffield, Alabama. They also hosted a radio show in Nashville broadcast by WSM.

and the Keynotes. Their guitar player [Donnie Srygley] absolutely mesmerized me...the first time I heard him play, he played “Johnny B. Goode” I knew I had to learn how to play that.

Listening to black music on the radio and then hearing and seeing the same music performed live created a lasting impression for these white, Alabama youths.

Recent research by sociologist Les Back and linguist James Gee help illuminate how the white, Muscle Shoals musicians were able to absorb, interpret, and then perform music coded as black. Back, while concentrating on soul music recorded in Muscle Shoals, asserted that the racial differences between the participating musicians received too much emphasis, which, in his opinion, limited the understanding of the relationship among sound, culture, and race.<sup>46</sup> Back pointed to a musicians’ ability, regardless of their race, to learn a style from just listening to it, and therefore to transcend the idea of “black” or “white” music. My ethnographic research supports Back’s assertions. Bassist David Hood recalled in 2011:

When I started working in the studio, I started having to play what was expected to be played. And so I would buy records...Stax records or Motown records, and listen to them since we were doing mostly rhythm and blues. I would listen to what the bass player was doing on that and started figuring out what my role was within the rhythm section.

As Back concluded, “the ways in which the color line was blurred in sound ... invites new ways of understanding the complex combinations of dialogue, multiculture, and racism that are both the southern culture’s lifeblood and its dowry.”<sup>47</sup> By learning from records that featured black artists, the white Muscle Shoals musicians began to teach and learn for themselves the musical tropes that for many listeners signified black music.

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<sup>46</sup>Les Back, “Out of Sight: Southern Music and the Coloring of Sound,” in *Out of Whiteness: Color, Politics, and Culture*, ed. Vron Ware and Les Back (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 231.

<sup>47</sup>Back, “Out of Sight,” 270.

The work of James Gee bolsters Back's claim that white musicians could learn to perform black music by listening to it.<sup>48</sup> Several of Gee's "36 Learning Principals" provide a framework to explain how the Alabama youth developed their musical skills. These principles also reveal how musicians can learn the ideology of race through the transmission of certain musical signifiers.<sup>49</sup>

After hearing a track or instrument performed by a black (or white) artist, the young Muscle Shoals musicians attempted to learn that particular track on their own by teaching themselves. Gee refers to this process as the "Active, Critical Learning Principal."<sup>50</sup> Jimmy Johnson had little interest in learning guitar, especially country music, when taught to him by his father. After hearing "Johnny B. Goode," Johnson's interest in the guitar rapidly increased. In seeking out guitarist Donnie Srygley as a role model, Johnson created for himself an active learning environment. For David Hood, the recording studio literally became his active learning environment, further enriched by his personal listening habits.

After developing their own skills, musicians often seek out other musicians in order to perform together, demonstrating what Gee calls the "Affinity Group Principle" where collaboration becomes skills-based.<sup>51</sup> Within this particular affinity group (in this case, amateur musicians rehearsing within the confines of someone's garage or basement), these musicians practice their parts together with what Gee refers to as the "relatively low cost of

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<sup>48</sup>James Paul Gee, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>49</sup>Gee, *What Video Games*, 220-227.

<sup>50</sup>Gee defines the "Active, Critical Learning Process" as "All aspects of the learning environment (including the ways in which the semiotic domain is designed and presented) are set up to encourage active and critical, not passive, learning," see *What Video Games*, 220.

<sup>51</sup>Gee defines the "Affinity Group Principle" as "This group that is bonded primarily through shared endeavors, goals, and practices and not shared race, gender, nation, ethnicity, or culture," see *What Video Games*, 227.

failure.”<sup>52</sup> Following the musicians’ months and years of honing their individual and collective skills through repeated practice while performing at dances and in bars, the public then received the tracks recorded by this group of white musicians from Alabama as black music.

The lived experiences of the white musicians who grew up in Muscle Shoals listening to and then learning to perform music culturally coded as black, as their personal stories noted above have indicated, challenge soul’s racial discourse and Banfield’s assertion that “Soul music is Black music because it is the music created by Black people in Black style.” For Dixon, Putnam, Johnson, Hood, Beckett and others hearing black music during the 1950s deeply affected their musical futures. Despite the seemingly disparate economic and social backgrounds between the white listeners from northwest Alabama and the black musicians who created the tracks that influenced them, the sounds broadcast over the radio or performed in public created a cultural space that through critical analysis reveals the contradictions inherent in the racial discourse surrounding R&B and soul. When the revelatory musical experiences of hearing R&B and rock ‘n’ roll during the 1950s combined with the practical applications of performing these musical styles on a weekly basis in clubs and at dances during the early 1960s, this mix created a group of white musicians who, over a period of about ten years, became proficient in playing music coded as black. Through the act of repeated listening, actively learning, and performing, the white, Southern musicians from Muscle Shoals acquired a familiarity with the musical riffs and tropes that operated within the domain of black music.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Gee, *What Video Games*, 59.

<sup>53</sup>The riffs and tropes refer to what Gee defines as “semiotic principle”: “Learning about and coming to appreciate interrelations within and across sign systems (images, words, actions, symbols, artifacts, etc.) as a complex system is core to the learning experience,” see *What Video Games*, 220.

## SOUL MUSIC AND THE DISCOURSE OF BLACK POWER

The connections between racial identities and specific musical styles and genres such as R&B and soul are deeply engrained within American culture. In the mid-twentieth century, influential forces within black society including authors and print media outlets loudly expressed these connections, which sources with widespread access to mainstream (white) culture later echoed. As black people gained more-and-more political and social capital, especially in the South during the 1950s and continuing into the 1960s, music provided an increasingly important space for the articulation of an ethnically distinct cultural heritage. At the same time, the recovery of a separate cultural heritage revealed ideologies that countered the integrationist political policies achieved with the passing of the Civil Rights acts during the mid-1960s. While many black people gained more-equal footing within some levels of American society, soul music became a space where authors and activists associated with the Black Power Movement delineated racial differences, as a result of the perceived failures of integration. For many within that cultural atmosphere, soul music represented black music.<sup>54</sup>

As Guthrie Ramsey noted, the “perceived boundaries surrounding ethnicity and musical style are rigorously policed,” and guards patrolling the soul music borders were many and boisterous.<sup>55</sup> Authors including Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Phyl Garland, and Rochelle Larkin published essays or book-length studies during the late 1960s that clearly demarcated soul music and soul culture from mainstream (white) America. Articles

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<sup>54</sup>See William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: the Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). In chapter five, “Black Power in Afro-American Culture: Folk Expressions,” Van Deburg states, “Soul music was claimed as the aesthetic property of blacks. In both structure and conceptualization it was said to be part of an African musicological continuum. As an indigenous expression of the collective African-American experience, it served as a repository of racial consciousness,” 205.

<sup>55</sup>Ramsey, *Race Music*, 38.

published in magazines such as *Ebony* and *Jet* both implicitly and explicitly made these music and racial associations as well.

Throughout the 1960s, events including the murders of Medgar Evers in 1963, Malcolm X in 1965, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, exacerbated already growing racial tensions, particularly in some parts of the South. The national media seized upon the phrase “Black Power,” first uttered by Stokely Carmichael in June 1966, as the “signpost of a new militancy.”<sup>56</sup> The word “soul,” used in a cultural context, began to take on an often-radicalized meaning. Writing in a December 1967 special issue of *Africa Today* devoted to Black Power and Africa, W. A. Jeanpierre, who later chaired the Afro-American Studies Department at Brown University, noted, “‘Soul’ is that secret, exclusive confraternity to which ‘Blacks Only’ are admitted, because only those who have paid the dues exacted by racism and slavery have access thereto.”<sup>57</sup> In the mid-to-late 1960s, authors began to clearly articulate the association between soul music and black America. As historian Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar recently stated,

Soul was a very common, somewhat generic, term for phenomena that reflected the unique qualities of “blackness.” For many black artists, its overtly black style safeguarded it against white cooption, unlike jazz and rock and roll. Indeed, the term was synonymous with blackness in that it reflected the new black mood of resistance and self-determination that pervaded black communities after 1966.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Peniel E. Joseph, ed., *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2. Carmichael first used the words after being arrested while on a march in Mississippi with Martin Luther King, Jr., which continued James Meredith’s “March Against Fear.” As Joseph noted, “For many journalists and political analysts the Meredith March represented a stark line between civil rights and the coming Black Power Movement,” 2. Recent scholarship by Joseph and others, collectively known as “Black Power Studies,” “highlights connections between two historical periods, characterizing the civil rights and Black Power era as a complex mosaic rather than mutually exclusive and antagonistic movements,” 8. Also see, Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006).

<sup>57</sup>W.A. Jeanpierre, “African Negritude: Black American Soul,” *Africa Today* 14, no. 6 (1967): 11.

<sup>58</sup>Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 110.

In his 1968 book, *Black Music*, Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) wrote, “Rhythm and Blues is part of ‘the national genius,’ of the Black man, of the Black nation. It is the direct, no monkey business expression of urban and rural (in its various stylistic variations) Black America.”<sup>59</sup> Although Baraka used the phrase “rhythm and blues” in his description, by 1969 “soul” became the preferred term.

The connections between soul, soul music, and the growing Black Arts Movement and Black Power Movement were becoming clearer to a wide segment of the population as tracks such as “Respect,” released in 1967 by Aretha Franklin, and “Say It Loud: I’m Black And I’m Proud,” released in 1968 by James Brown, broadcast the message over the airwaves.<sup>60</sup> While Black Power organizations such as the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party held opposing views on black popular music, historian William Van Deburg noted that during the late 1960s “the soul singer became a true cultural hero—the embodiment of soul style and the repository of folk wisdom.”<sup>61</sup> Journalist Phyl Garland wrote in her 1969 book, *The World of Soul*:

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<sup>59</sup>Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), “The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music),” in *Black Music* (New York: William Morrow, 1968), 185.

<sup>60</sup>In 1983, ethnomusicologist Portia Maultsby explored the connections between soul and the 1960s Black Power Movement. She wrote, “One of the most innovative and generative forms of music that evolved from the 1960s Black Power Movement served to elevate the consciousness of an African heritage among black Americans. This music, coined ‘soul,’ established new trends and direction for the tradition of urban back popular music.” See Portia Maultsby, “Soul Music: Its Sociological and Political Significance in American Popular Culture,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 17 no. 2 (1983), 51.

<sup>61</sup>Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon*, 208. Ogbar discusses black popular music in relation to the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party in *Black Power*, see pages 32 and 110, respectively. Rolland Snellings, writing in a 1965 volume of the *Liberator*, remarked, “Our main philosophical and cultural attitudes are displayed through our MUSIC, which serves as the ROOT of our culture; from which springs our art, poetry, literature, etc. Our creative artists—especially singers and musicians—function as PRIESTS, as PHILOSOPHERS of our captive nation; a holdover from our ancient past.” See Rolland Snellings, “Keep on Pushin’: Rhythm & Blues as a Weapon,” *Liberator* 5 (October 1965): 6. Snellings was closely associated with LeRoi Jones’ (Amiri Baraka) Black Arts Repertory Theater and School located in Harlem. A 2013 book specifically focuses on the relationship between soul music and the Black Panther’s. This source, however, came out too late for me to include it in this chapter. Rickey Vincent, *Party Music: The Inside Story of the Black Panthers’ Band and How Black Power Transformed Soul Music* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2013).

The spirit of rebellion that had begun to sweep the nation with the Watts rebellion of 1965 had begun to crest with major racial uprising in Newark and Detroit...“Black Power” was all the rage, and a great many blacks had begun to tire of things as they were...Newspapers, periodicals and television commentators pondered the question of “Why?” as Aretha Franklin spelled it all out in one word, *R-E-S-P-E-C-T!* Black folks adopted the song as their new “national anthem”...<sup>62</sup>

Tracks such as “Respect” produced tangible cultural reverberations. “It is the art of the singer and the song, who together are telling it like it is,” Rochelle Larkin proclaimed in 1970.

“Who are commiserating and communicating; celebrating and vindicating the sweet-and-sour mysteries of life...The artist who works his rootsy, bluesy, mojo magic on the heart of the listener is perhaps the most important artist of all, for he speaks to us and he speaks to today.”<sup>63</sup> For many black listeners, the words sung by Franklin, along with tracks by other soul singers, resonated deeply.<sup>64</sup> As Garland noted, “Any infringement upon [the relationship of the black listener to the music that he regards as ‘his’,] either by whites seeking out black music as presented by black performers or by white artists offering convincing duplications of black music, is likely to be resented.”<sup>65</sup> For Garland and many others, “Respect” represented the epitome of black music while Franklin ascended the throne of soul culture.

Franklin began her singing career as a child while performing in her father’s Detroit church, and by the age of eighteen, she signed a contract with Columbia Records. Despite her

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<sup>62</sup>Phyl Garland, *The Sound of Soul* (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1969), 193-94.

<sup>63</sup>Rochelle Larkin, *Soul Music: The Sound! The Stars! The Story!* (New York: Lancer Books, 1970), 175. This quote is taken from the chapter “The Music is the Message.” Larkin’s chapter also appears in R. Serge Denisoff and Richard Peterson, eds., *The Sounds of Social Change* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1972). Words on the back cover of Larkin’s book, perhaps echoing the words expressed by James Brown, state, “!!!Black is Beautiful is Soul!!!...Soul is Black and It’s Beautiful and It’s Proud!”

<sup>64</sup>See Roger D. Abrahams, *Positively Black* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), 145. Abrahams writes, “[“The word] soul has not only provided an emotional and conceptual focus for Negro musical developments but also it has become a rallying cry for a black social movement which uses the concept as an aggressive device, part of the elaborate ‘hidden language,’ bringing Negroes together and excluding whites,” 145.

<sup>65</sup>Garland, *The Sound of Soul*, 31.

constant tours and albums that sold relatively well, Franklin's five-year tenure with Columbia failed to produce a breakthrough hit. John Hammond, who signed Franklin to Columbia and her first producer, recalled, "I watched her go from one producer to another while these lavish single records did little to increase her sales and nothing to enhance her career."<sup>66</sup> When her contract with Columbia expired in 1966, Jerry Wexler of Atlantic Records sought out Franklin. Many of the leading figures of R&B had recorded for Atlantic Records, including Ruth Brown, Ray Charles, Clyde McPhatter and the Drifters, and Solomon Burke. "To me, Atlantic meant soul," Franklin remarked in her autobiography. "And more and more—especially with the advent of Atlantic artists like the Young Rascals, Arthur Conley, and Wilson Pickett—soul music was exploding...A new wave of blues-based soul was sweeping the country."<sup>67</sup> Wexler, who had already achieved success by producing Pickett in Muscle Shoals, brought Franklin to record at FAME in January 1967.

The marketing of Aretha Franklin as the "Queen of Soul" began with the release of her 1967 album *I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)*. Many of Franklin's most popular songs, including the title track, "Respect," "Dr. Feelgood (Love is a Serious Business)" and "Do Right Woman–Do Right Man" appear on the album. At the same time, the success of Franklin's album, and the single "Respect" in particular, contributed to many of the assumptions about soul music, race, place, and people that began to form in the minds of musicians, fans, and journalists. Almost overnight, the mass media and many publications, including *Billboard*, *Time Magazine*, *Esquire*, *Ebony*, *Jet*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*, began to use the word "soul" to describe a style of music, as well as characterize a cultural movement. Soul, as both a concept and musical style, reached a broader audience following

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<sup>66</sup>John Hammond, *John Hammond on Record: An Autobiography* (New York: Ridge Press, 1977), 349.

<sup>67</sup>Aretha Franklin with David Ritz, *Aretha: From These Roots* (New York: Villard, 1999), 107.

the publication of these feature stories that described the term, its musical associations, and its roots in black America.

Publications that directly targeted a black readership such as *Ebony* and *Jet* maintained the historically racial delineated status quo of certain musical genres. Many of these articles bolstered the racialized sound barrier by only focusing on the star singer. In not mentioning the supporting musicians or their race—because, perhaps, the authors did not know they were white (which is likely), or they did not want to mention that fact (which is possible)—the readership remained free to assume that since the singer was black, the accompanying musicians must be black as well. Also, when photographs of the featured black singers appeared in these articles, they were most often with other black individuals.<sup>68</sup>

The tacit acknowledgement of the inherent racial connections between soul music and black identity continued with a *Jet* cover story about Aretha Franklin from April 1967.<sup>69</sup> The article, “Aretha Bounces Back!,” published only a few months after the release of *I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)*, affirmed Franklin’s position as heir to the empty “Blues Queen” throne; a throne left vacant with the 1963 death of singer Dinah Washington. Phyl Garland’s “Aretha Franklin—‘Sister Soul’” *Ebony* feature in October 1967 made explicit the singer’s connections to the who’s who of the black entertainment world. Growing up the daughter of Reverend C.L. Franklin, a prominent preacher from Detroit who was well respected by both secular and religious leaders, the young Franklin had frequent interactions with gospel, blues, and pop stars such as James Cleveland, Mahalia Jackson, Clara Ward, Arthur Prysock, B.B. King, Dinah Washington, and Sam Cooke. With regard to her 1967 hit

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<sup>68</sup>In my opinion, these articles represent an instance of the type of writing that historian Karl Miller alludes to when he refers to “uncovering the history of an autonomous black cultural world [which] produce stories of racial difference, separation, or autonomy.” See Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 2.

<sup>69</sup>Chester Higgins, “Aretha Bounces Back!,” *Jet*, 20 April 20 1967, 58.

record Garland wrote, “Aretha accompanies herself at the piano... Unknown to much of the public, she was backed, on most of her hit records, through a process of over-dubbing, by a vocal group consisting of Aretha herself, and her two sisters, Erma...and Carolyn.”<sup>70</sup> It is quite clear from the language used in the article that Garland had an understanding of how recordings were made. Based on Garland’s description, however, the reader might assume that Franklin and her sisters were the only musicians to perform on the album. In only spotlighting the contributions of Aretha and her sisters, Garland obscures the creative contributions that any other individuals may have had on the album—regardless of their race—leaving all of the cultural capital firmly in the hands of the singers.

One of the few articles to directly confront the conflation of music and race predates Franklin’s ascendancy to the “Queen of Soul.” Lerone Bennett, Jr., addressing the growing soul-jazz movement in a December 1961 issue of *Ebony*, asked the rhetorical questions, “Do white [jazz] musicians have soul? If not, can they get it by osmosis?” Bennett deferred his answer to one of the spearheads of the movement: “Horace Silver and other leaders of the soul-funk school have said repeatedly that soul is not a racial attribute, that it is, in part, environmental and that some white musicians definitely have it.”<sup>71</sup> A few paragraphs later, Bennett presciently notes:

The emergence of soul as a movement kicked up racial issues which have been simmering in jazz for years. Jazz is and has been, at least partially, a music of protest. During the last 15 years, it has mirrored rather accurately the strains and tensions of the “angry ghetto.” Soul music is the latest and perhaps most accurate reflection of the state of mind or soul, if you wish, of the young urban Negro. There is in the music a new note of racial pride, a celebration of

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<sup>70</sup>Phyl Garland, “Aretha Franklin—‘Sister Soul,’” *Ebony*, October 1967, 51.

<sup>71</sup>Lerone Bennett, Jr., “The Soul of Soul,” *Ebony*, December 1961, 116. Bennett also authored many books during the 1960s including, *Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America, 1619-1962* (1962); *What Manner of Man: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (1964); *Confrontation: Black and White* (1965); *Black Power, U.S.A., The Human Side of Reconstruction, 1867-1877* (1967).

ties to Africa and a defiant embrace of the honky-tonk, the house-rent party and people who say ‘dis here’ and ‘dat dere’—an embrace, in short of all the middle-class America contemns.<sup>72</sup>

As the 1960s progressed, others began to echo and amplify Bennett’s 1961 observations of soul music’s association with racial pride. In 1966 John Szwed, also addressing the relationship between jazz and soul, wrote, “If soul were merely a musical phenomenon it would be interesting enough, but it has accompanying aspects that extend deeply into race consciousness and strong anti-white sentiments.”<sup>73</sup> An October 1968 Wilson Pickett feature from *Ebony* elevated the “angry ghetto” theme to surface level. Describing Pickett author David Llorens stated:

There is a sense that Pickett is the embodiment of that peculiar aggressiveness one has seen in black boys who ended up in the man’s jail before reaching manhood, and the further sense that he is the ideal expression of how all that energy, if not harnessed, can blow this world. Wilson Pickett, as Richard Pryor once said about fellow comedian Bill Cosby, is one who got away.<sup>74</sup>

The article concluded, perhaps not surprisingly, by quoting one of the leading voices within the black community: “Rhythm and blues, as Brother LeRoi Jones pointed out in *Black Music*, takes one to a place where black people live and where black people ‘move in almost absolute openness and strength.’”<sup>75</sup>

While the emergence of soul music quickly resounded throughout the black popular press, the mainstream press’ coverage of soul music’s wider impact on white America lagged slightly behind. Over a year after Franklin’s “arrival” upon the pop music scene, *Time* ran its feature article on her. Like stories about Franklin that appeared in the black press, *Time*

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<sup>72</sup>Bennett, “The Soul of Soul,” 114-116.

<sup>73</sup>John Szwed, “Musical Style and Racial Conflict,” *Phylon* 27 no. 4 (1966): 360.

<sup>74</sup>David Llorens, “Soulin’ With ‘Wicked’ Pickett,” *Ebony*, October 1968, 138.

<sup>75</sup>Llorens, “Soulin,’” 138.

directly linked the singer and her biography to soul music: “If a song’s about something I’ve experienced, or that could’ve happened to me, it’s good,” Franklin remarked. “But if it’s alien to me, I couldn’t lend anything to it. Because that’s what soul is about—just living and having to get along.”<sup>76</sup> For the large readership of *Time*, the unknown author overtly made connections between soul music and its deep roots in black America: “Since its tortuous evolution is so intertwined with Negro history and so expressive of Negro culture, Negroes naturally tend to value [soul] as a sort of badge of black identity...when soul solidarity is founded on a fellowship of suffering, it may involve not a demand for white acceptance but an outright exclusion of whites.” Or, quoting comedian Godfrey Cambridge, “Soul is the language of the subculture; but you can’t learn it because no one can give you black lessons.”<sup>77</sup> Stanley Booth, author of “The Rebirth of the Blues” published February 8, 1969, in the *Saturday Evening Post*, provided a more nuanced description of Memphis’ soul music culture: “Across the country, ‘soul’ has become synonymous with ‘black’—as in ‘soul brother.’ But in Memphis those who ‘have it’ will tell you that soul is not the exclusive property of any one race.”<sup>78</sup> Although Booth did not rely on racial essentialism to present his history, the connection between black people from the South, the blues and Memphis, and their connection to soul music remained quite clear throughout the article.

In April 1968, *Esquire* published “An Introduction to Soul.” The cover of this particular issue also featured an iconic photograph of Muhammad Ali in the style of the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian—a half naked body pierced by multiple arrows. Several brief articles, primarily written in a street-wise vernacular, comprised this introduction, including,

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<sup>76</sup>“Lady Soul Singing,” 62.

<sup>77</sup>“Lady Soul Singing,” 65-66.

<sup>78</sup>Stanley Booth, “Rebirth of the Blues,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 8 February 1969, 29.

“Soul is Motion and Sound,” “Who’s Got Soul,” a list of politicians, movie stars, musicians, writers, and others who either did or didn’t have soul, and articles on food, style, and language.<sup>79</sup> The opening paragraph of the first article, written by Claude Brown, provided the reader with a provocative definition of soul:

Soul is sass, man. Soul is arrogance. Soul is walkin’ down the street in a way that says, “This is me, muh-fuh!” Soul is that nigger whore comin’ along...ja...ja...ja, and walkin’ like she’s sayin’, “Here it is, baby. Come an’ git it.” Soul is bein’ true to yourself, to what is *you*. Now, hold on: soul is...that...uninhibited...no, *extremely* uninhibited self...expression that goes into practically every Negro endeavor. That’s soul. And there’s swagger in it, man. It’s exhibitionism, and it’s effortless. Effortless. You don’t need to put it on; it just comes out.<sup>80</sup>

Describing the relationship between soul and music, the authors wrote:

It is stomping and clapping with the gospel music of the First Tabernacle of Deliverance (Spiritual), American Orthodox Catholic Church on Harlem’s One Hundred Twenty-fifth Street, and boogalooing the Funky Broadway to the Memphis gospel soul blues of Otis Redding while walking down the street. Soul is “Doin’ the Thing” with the church-oriented funky jazz of Horace Silver and just *moving* back down home with John Lee Hooker’s gutbucket folk blues. Soul is being natural, telling it like it is.<sup>81</sup>

This vignette continued by mentioning places of worship such as a Yoruba Temple in West Africa, and Sanctified and Baptist churches of America’s black ghettos; the musicians Mahalia Jackson, Bessie Smith, Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, and James Brown; WLIB and WWRL, two New York City radio stations that programed music for primarily black audiences; and dances including the Watusi, Boston Monkey, Shing-a-ling, Karate, Boogaloo, The Pearl, the Funky Broadway. The article concluded with a quote from the LeRoi Jones. It was unlikely that the readership targeted by *Esquire* would have mistaken

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<sup>79</sup>The *Time* 28 June 1968 issue featured “An Arbitrary Guide to Soul,” 66.

<sup>80</sup>Al Calloway and Claude Brown, “An Introduction to Soul,” *Esquire*, April 1968, 79.

<sup>81</sup>Al Calloway and Claude Brown, “Soul is Motion and Sound,” *Esquire*, April 1968, 80. The reference to “Funky Broadway” also evokes Wilson Pickett’s 1967 hit, and *Doin’ the Thing* is a 1961 live album by pianist Horace Silver.

soul for anything other than a representation of black culture; or as folklorist Roger D.

Abrahams, commenting in 1970 on Brown's assertion that "soul is sass," remarked:

Soul then, which began as a search for roots, has gravitated toward an expression of an entire world view, one which emphasizes cultural integrity-honesty in expression, in feeling, especially in not being afraid to perform publicly in the way in which the spirit strikes. Soul *is* sass. It is, if nothing else, a rhetoric of on-going confrontation.<sup>82</sup>

The *Time*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Esquire* features demonstrated the enormous impact that soul music and soul culture had upon late 1960s American culture. To anyone reading these articles it would have been perfectly clear that soul had musical and cultural roots in black America that went back centuries.

Within the music industry of the late 1960s, many correctly sensed the ascendancy of black music to the status of popular music. In June 1967, *Billboard* issued its first annual feature, "The World of Soul." Paul Ackerman, executive editor, described the rationale for the eighty-six page supplement stating, "The World of Soul is the initial step by *Billboard* to document in depth the blues and its many derivatives...most importantly, blues and its derivatives—and the concept of soul—are major factors in today's pop music."<sup>83</sup> Containing over forty articles, the "World of Soul" had very little to do with the soul music genre, a genre that in June 1967 the music industry had not yet fully recognized. The inaugural issue of "The World of Soul," instead, served as a reminder to those in the music industry about the black, typically Southern, musical, social, and historical roots for much of contemporary popular music. *Billboard* printed the third installment of "The World of Soul" as a supplement to the August 16, 1969 issue. By 1969, the term soul described both a musical genre and a concept. Arnold Shaw, in his article "The Rhythm & Blues Revival No White

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<sup>82</sup>Abrahams, *Positively Black*, 155.

<sup>83</sup>Paul Ackerman, "The Blues: A Document in Depth," *Billboard* "The World of Soul," 24 June 1967, 4.

Gloved, Black Hits,” described the late 1960s cultural shift of mainstream audiences towards soul music:

By the time Aretha arrived at Atlantic [in 1967]...the music market was ready for a drastic turn...The emergence of the Memphis Sound, a much darker mixture than Motown or Atlantic of Mississippi mud and country blues, suggests that white record buyers were ready for the real thing—not white kids singing or playing black, but the black vocalists singing and playing black.<sup>84</sup>

The title of Shaw’s piece, along with the content of the article, made it quite clear that soul music, and Franklin’s brand of soul music particularly, was unequivocally black music, and that black and white audiences preferred it to the sound of “blue-eyed soul” or other “watered down” treatments of black music.<sup>85</sup> On August 23, 1969, *Billboard* replaced the term “rhythm and blues” with “soul” to chart sales of music recorded by black artists. According to *Billboard*, the decision was “motivated by the fact that the term ‘soul’ more properly embraces the broad range of song and instrumental material which derives from the musical genius of the black American.”<sup>86</sup>

Authors such as Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Phyl Garland along with *Ebony*, *Jet*, and other publications became powerful voices for the expression of cultural pride within black America during the 1960s. *Time Magazine*, *Esquire*, and the *Saturday Evening Post* served as a few of the news sources for much of mainstream (white) America. Aware of

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<sup>84</sup>Arnold Shaw, “The Rhythm & Blues Revival No White Gloved, Black Hits,” *Billboard* “The World of Soul,” 16 August 1969, S-3. The phrase “Aretha arrived” is wordplay on the singer’s August 1967 album for Atlantic Records, *Aretha Arrives*.

<sup>85</sup>The origins of the term “blue-eye soul” are unclear, although Georgie Woods, a black DJ who worked on WDAS in Philadelphia, often receives the credit. In 1964, the vocal duo The Righteous Brothers released an album, *Some Blue-Eyed Soul*, which certainly helped bring the term into wider use. Singers and groups associated with this term include: Steve Winwood, Gregg Allman, Dusty Springfield, Eric Burdon, The Rascals, and others.

<sup>86</sup>*Billboard*, 23 August 1969, 2. Also quoted in Portia K. Maultsby, “Soul Music: Its Sociological and Political Significance in American Popular Culture,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 17, no. 2 (1983): 58.

these implicit and explicit forces upon the reception of black music and African-American identity, Guthrie Ramsey noted:

Ethnic identities like African Americanness are, indeed, “socially constructed” yet powerful realities. They are the result of a multilayered cultural and historical dialogue. This dialogue involves two shifting forces: one that establishes and maintains a group’s we-ness, and an external one the shapes its they-ness.<sup>87</sup>

These articles, essays, and books revealed both the maintenance of a “we-ness” and the construction of a “they-ness.” Articles written for a black popular audience as demonstrated by the *Ebony* and *Jet* features examined above perpetuated the ethnocentricity of soul music: soul music was music created by black musicians for black audiences; in other words, for the targeted black readership, these articles maintained soul music’s we-ness. The articles about soul and soul musicians written for *Esquire*, *Time*, and the *Saturday Evening Post* aimed particularly at a white readership also established the ethnocentricity of soul music: soul music was music created by black musicians for black audiences; in other words, for the largely white audience, these articles constructed soul music’s they-ness.

Current scholarship, however, provides nuanced interpretation of the soul era. Paul Gilroy, addressing the notion that soul music is racially marked as specifically black, stated in 1998:

That is not the story that music tells you. It is only on the most superficial level, but if you dig into the history of the music you find that is an untenable position. To make the music tell that story, you must do violence to the music... The presence and participation of white players was not obstacle to soul. In a sense, it may even have enhanced it by making “race” irrelevant and symbolizing the possibility of white agency against white supremacy. Those “outsiders” venerated the tradition of black music before that was fashionable. Their collaboration signified something profound.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Ramsey, *Race Music*, 36.

<sup>88</sup>Monique Guillory and Richard C. Green, “Questions of a ‘Soulful Style’: Interview with Paul Gilroy,” In *Soul: Black Power, Politics, and Pleasure* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 257-258.

More recently, Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar remarked, “Not all soul artists were black. Many were, however, active players in the cultivation and promotion of ideas and culture that complemented the Black Power movement.” Ogbar, in an endnote for the previous sentence, went on to state, “Fame Studios in Alabama was a white-owned business with white musicians who performed for black artists like Wilson Pickett. White artists like David Hood, Jimmy Johnson, and Spooner Oldham admitted being inspired by black performers like Chuck Berry and Bo Diddly.”<sup>89</sup>

An integrated group of musicians recorded Aretha Franklin’s “Respect” in New York City on February 14, 1967. Jerry Wexler, who produced the track, brought Jimmy Johnson, Roger Hawkins, and Spooner Oldham to New York from Muscle Shoals to help finish the Franklin sessions, which were originally begun a few weeks earlier at FAME. Franklin had left the FAME session after an altercation between her husband, Ted White, and one of the musicians, and returned to New York. David Hood, who was present at Franklin’s only session in Alabama, recalled in 2011:

Wexler brought Aretha here. And that first session, only two songs were done here before things kind of fell apart, and they finished it in New York. But I was playing trombone, I wasn’t playing bass on that, Tommy Cogbill was playing bass. And so we were working on horn arrangements, while they were working out the rhythm track. It was not the horn section that they originally wanted. There was a conflict, and the guys they originally wanted couldn’t come. I think they were wanting some of the Memphis horns, and couldn’t get everybody they wanted so it was Charles Chalmers, who was sort of the horn section leader, and myself on trombone, Joe Arnold on another saxophone. The trumpet player was Ken Laxton. He was somebody that none of us knew. He was the one that kind of caused the problems that made the session break up. He was making some remarks that weren’t too cool to Aretha, and to Aretha’s husband, Ted White. That’s what caused the big fight, that happened later on after that session. We weren’t there [to see the fight], but that’s what caused it. Over the things that happened between Ken, and Ted, and Aretha.

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<sup>89</sup>Ogbar, *Black Power*, 110. The text for note number 72 appears on 226.

Ken thought that he was being cool, but Ted was seeing it as being a fresh, smart-ass white guy. They were drinking, and as things went on, it just escalated, and grew into a fight.

Although Rick Hall had a policy of no alcohol during a recording session, it was a well-known secret that some musicians drank while working at FAME, and White and Laxton shared a bottle at this session. In the several accounts of this story, White and Laxton were acting like pals, but as Wexler noted, “a redneck patronizing a black man is a dangerous camaraderie.”<sup>90</sup> The exact comments made by Laxton remain a mystery, but according to Wexler, “he began using racist slang words, to which Ted took instant offense.”<sup>91</sup> In her 1999 autobiography, Franklin stated,

It’s been so long and so many things have happened since those days, I really don’t recall [what occurred]. I do remember, however, some kind of friction, and I do remember White going upstairs to discuss something, but he never came back. I vaguely recall loud noises and voices shouting and doors slamming. I never learned the details. I was uncomfortable enough, though, that I decided to leave.<sup>92</sup>

Franklin’s account describes the events that took place at the hotel, several hours after the recording session had deteriorated. After the altercation between White and Laxton, Franklin left the studio never to return. As Wexler recalled, “There was no way Aretha was going to be comfortable returning to [FAME]. I knew she was very comfortable with the musicians however. So it was essential that we get them back together [in New York] for the rest of the

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<sup>90</sup>Wexler, *Rhythm and the Blues*, 210. Several authors recount the details surrounding this incident. See Bego, *The Queen of Soul*, 67-68; Matt Dobkin, *I Never Loved a Man: Respect, and the Making of a Soul Music Masterpiece* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004), 133-155; Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music*, 340-342. In Dobkin’s book, he explains that his multiple attempts to contact Laxton and find out more about the trumpet player were unsuccessful; see *I Never Loved a Man* 136-137.

<sup>91</sup>Mark Bego, *Aretha Franklin: The Queen of Soul* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2012), 67.

<sup>92</sup>Franklin, *From These Roots*, 109. In his autobiography, *Rhythm and the Blues*, Wexler referred to the events at the hotel in this way: “It was *Walpurgisnacht*, a Wagnerian shitstorm, things flying to pieces, everyone going nuts,” 211.

album.”<sup>93</sup> Upon returning to New York, Franklin completed the remaining tracks for *I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)*. The public and press, not seeing past the color of Franklin’s skin, did not realize that “Respect,” the “new [black] national anthem,” utilized a group of white musicians from northwest Alabama who had been recording what many had already considered black music for several years.

The incident between White and Laxton exposes the particularly fragile state of race relations in the South during the late 1960s. Franklin and White would have been familiar with Alabama’s well-known history of racial tension, which frequently erupted into violent clashes. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Franklin’s father, C.L. Franklin, were friends, “My dad brought him to Detroit, and introduced him to the city of Detroit through the New Bethel Baptist Church.”<sup>94</sup> Based on the relationship between Dr. King and Reverend Franklin, the young Franklin was only one degree removed from the well-known leader of the Civil Rights movement. Although Franklin and White trusted Wexler’s musical instincts, at least White recalled being skeptical about recording in Alabama. Speaking in 2004 of Muscle Shoals, White stated, “I’d never heard of it, really. I just had heard the results of some of the things that had been done down there—thought it might be a pretty good idea. But with the racial situation at that time, I was a bit reluctant, apprehensive.”<sup>95</sup> FAME studios had produced many recordings where black and white musicians performed together without any occurrences of racial hostility, which effectively created an interracial space within a state frequently characterized as racist. Laxton’s comments and White’s existing doubt about working in the South combined with a situation fueled by alcohol helped to tip a delicate

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<sup>93</sup>Simons, *Studio Stories*, 103-04.

<sup>94</sup>Bego, *The Queen of Soul*, 87.

<sup>95</sup>Dobkin, *I Never Loved a Man*, 113.

racial balance towards animosity. In this specific instance, the making of music exacerbated the urgency of race.

This analysis of Aretha Franklin's Muscle Shoals recording session discloses a diversity of interconnected events. In essence, Franklin's FAME session served as both cause and effect. At one level, Alabama's troubled history with race relations was the catalyst, or "long fetch" to use George Lipsitz's term, behind the immediate event—the White-Laxton incident—that took place at FAME during January 1967. At a deeper level, the impact upon American popular culture of Franklin's 1967 Alabama recording session and the subsequent New York session—the immediate event—helped to unveil for many and further reinforce for others the black American roots of soul music—the long fetch.

The connections between soul, soul music, and the growing Black Arts Movement and Black Power Movement were not entirely lost on the white studio musicians from Alabama who helped to create the sound of Southern soul. "The death of Martin Luther King, it changed everything," recalled Jimmy Johnson. In August 1968 at the National Association of Television and Radio Announcers (NATRA) convention in Miami, a group of black DJs and their associates that called themselves the Fair Play Committee hung Jerry Wexler in effigy.<sup>96</sup> According to Peter Guralnick, "the avowed [intention of the group was] wresting money and power from the white colonialists who still controlled black music."<sup>97</sup>

Atlantic Records released a greatest hits album titled *Aretha's Gold* in 1969.<sup>98</sup> The back cover of the album featured photographs of Franklin, guitarists Jimmy Johnson and Duane Allman, drummer Roger Hawkins, keyboardist Spooner Oldham, and bass player

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<sup>96</sup>Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music*, 382-383.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>98</sup>Aretha Franklin, *Aretha's Gold*. Atlantic Recording Company, SD 8227, 33rpm.

Jerry Jemmott, the only other black musician pictured. It is likely that very few people knew that the majority of musicians who performed on Franklin's records were white. In a 2011 interview, guitarist Jimmy Johnson recalled the moment of the album's release:

We used to have a fear that the first time they'd ever show our face, that we would never get to play on another record again. And we had a fear of that, then, as soon as *Aretha's Gold* came out. And there we *weerrre*. Whitey in all of his glory. And we said, 'Well it's been nice. We've enjoyed it.'

In spite of Johnson's concern that the photographs would endanger at least his career in the minds of fans, critics, and music industry personnel, as it turned out, the "exposing" of the musicians had no effect on their reputations. In fact, if they were noticed at all, few noticed they were white.

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Jerry Wexler's epigraph that began this chapter stated that recording "is the attempt at verisimilitude – not truth, but the appearance of truth." For many black listeners, soul music represented one manifestation of the truth: soul music signified black cultural pride, a truth that embodied the views held by many black Americans who had struggled for civil rights for so very long. Throughout the 1960s, authors from a variety of sources that catered to a broad readership amplified the cultural connections between black culture and soul music. From this perspective, a white listener might also arrive at the same conclusions regarding soul music as a black listener—that soul music was black music. Powerful cultural agents, however, had perpetrated the notion that soul music was black music—an ideology or the "appearance of truth"—upon listeners regardless of their ethnicity, which intensified the racial discourse surrounding the music. Long ago, folk song collectors, record labels, authors and cultural critics, and societal forces including legislated segregation helped to construct a

racialized sound barrier that perpetuated the association that blues music and all of its derivatives such as R&B and then soul is black music.

There were many white, Southern born musicians who venerated the mid-century black soundscapes of R&B and early rock 'n' roll heard over the radio, and then learned to perform that same music. What made the experiences of key Muscle Shoals musicians unique is that the public and press alike received the music they helped to create during the 1960s and early 1970s as black music. The reception of R&B and soul recorded in Muscle Shoals as black music—music performed by an integrated group of musicians—articulates through sound the fluidity of race and how ethnicity can become socially constructed.

Aretha Franklin, accompanied by white studio musicians from Muscle Shoals, helped create much of the late 1960s soul soundscape for audiences, black or white. The tracks released by Franklin beginning in 1967 and continuing through the early 1970s became a virtual lock for various “year-end,” or “best female R&B/Soul vocalist” awards, and her albums and singles sold millions of copies. As Franklin quickly became the iconic public face of soul music during the late 1960s, the reputation of Muscle Shoals as the leading destination to record black music, along with the studio musicians who worked there, increased. The Muscle Shoals mystique had begun to seep into pop music consciousness, and artists who audiences would not consider part of an R&B or soul music aesthetic began to travel to northwest Alabama to make records.

## CHAPTER 4: LAND OF 1000 DANCES: THE MUSCLE SHOALS MYSTIQUE

New York used to be the center of the music world and of the recording industry; now the business has gone to Los Angeles and London and most of all to the South, to Nashville and Atlanta and Memphis and Macon and Muscle Shoals, a north Alabama town of 4,000 people.

John Egerton, 1974<sup>1</sup>

Singer Paul Simon asked Stax Record's executive Al Bell in 1972 who the funky Jamaican musicians were on the Staple Singers' reggae-infused track "I'll Take You There." Bell responded that the band was the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section, a group of musicians who owned and operated a recording studio in northwest Alabama, Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, and who recorded many Southern soul hits with artists such as the Staples, Wilson Pickett, and Aretha Franklin.<sup>2</sup> Bell also told Simon that the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section were white and not black like Simon imagined. In an effort to capture the unique sound and feel he heard on "I'll Take You There," Simon recorded several tracks with the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section including "Kodachrome," "Loves Me Like A Rock," and "American Tune" for his 1973 album *There Goes Rhymin' Simon*. The rock music press also picked up on Simon's intentions and new musical direction. Stephen Holden, who reviewed the album for a June 1973 issue of *Rolling Stone*, remarked:

The chief new musical element Simon has chosen to work with—one he has hitherto eschewed—is black music: R&B and gospel motifs are incorporated brilliantly both in Simon's melodic writing and in the sparkling textures of the

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<sup>1</sup>John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press). 204.

<sup>2</sup>Loraine Alterman, "Here Comes Rhymin' Simon" *Melody Maker*, 12 May 1973, 36.

album's ten cuts, more than half recorded in Muscle Shoals, Alabama.<sup>3</sup>

Both "Kodachrome" and "Loves Me Like A Rock" peaked at number two on the *Billboard* pop charts, and *There Goes Rhymin' Simon* received a Grammy Award nomination for Best Album.

Several factors fueled Simon's musical and racial assumptions associated with Muscle Shoals. This chapter investigates what I call the Muscle Shoals mystique: a nexus of musical and cultural events that facilitated the dissemination of a product cultivated by Northern-based record executives and sought by many to satiate their musical needs for an "authentic" (black) South. Throughout much of the twentieth century, particularly in the early decades, Tin-Pan Alley songwriters, Hollywood movies, and Madison Avenue advertising executives constructed one image of the South. In many cases, this image revealed an exotic South: a pastoral region that became in the minds of some the opposite of the industrialized North. Executives within the fledgling 1920s music recording industry ventured south and discovered a wealth of untapped talent in both white and black performers, which, to the surprise of many, sold millions of records.<sup>4</sup> The desire by those within the music industry to "look south" for their next big hit continued well past mid-century. With the increase of social and political capital that began during the 1950s, black R&B and soul performers of the 1960s found themselves in a previously unprecedented position: songs they recorded dominated the airwaves and pop record charts. A significant number of these hits were recorded in studios located in the South by black musicians who

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<sup>3</sup>Stephen Holden, "Records: There Goes Rhymin' Simon, Paul Simon," *Rolling Stone*, 21 June 1973, 62.

<sup>4</sup>Although it is beyond the scope of this project to address 1920s recordings by southern musicians, a partial list includes: "Crazy Blues" by Mamie Smith in 1921 for the Okeh label, and the subsequent success of blues singers Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith; Fiddlin' John Carson's June 1923 recording of "Little Old Log Cabin;" sessions by blues musicians Blind Lemon Jefferson, Son House, and Charlie Patton; and Ralph Peer's historic Bristol, Tennessee sessions in 1927.

had southern roots. As these tracks by black performers played from radios and turntables, other musicians and record executives began to take notice of where these songs were recorded. And, in many instances the location was Muscle Shoals, Alabama. “When a Man Loves a Woman,” “Mustang Sally,” “I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Loved You)” “Sweet Soul Music,” and many other tracks recorded in the Shoals received critical and popular praise. By the late 1960s and continuing into the 1970s, Muscle Shoals became a recording destination for artists not directly associated with “black” music who sought a connection to a Southern musical past and a culturally revered musical aesthetic.

“Media-made Dixie,” a term first coined by historian Jack Kirby, describes the outside forces that constructed an image of the South.<sup>5</sup> From movies produced in Hollywood, books, and music, a narrative of southern identity developed, which industries outside of the South widely disseminated.<sup>6</sup> In the case of the Muscle Shoals music industry, New York-based Atlantic Records primarily cultivated the image of FAME as an off-the-beaten-path recording studio staffed with talented musicians who lacked formal training but had the uncanny ability to consistently produce hits. An aura formed around this north Alabama region while hit R&B tracks distributed the “Muscle Shoals sound,” resulting in FAME and then Muscle Shoals Sound Studio as destinations for pop musicians beginning in the late 1960s. This “diffusion process” through personal contact with the Alabama musicians by other singers, instrumentalists, and industry personnel and what economist Fritz Redlich described as objectification, “uncontrollable symbols, through which ideas can be communicated over space and time without any personal contact,” helped to spread the

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<sup>5</sup>Jack Kirby, *Media-made Dixie: the South in the American Imagination* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

<sup>6</sup>Karen Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 5.

mystique.<sup>7</sup> “The identification of musical difference through regional sounds,” noted musical geographers John Connell and Chris Gibson, “is an integral component of the fetishization of place – securing the ‘authenticity’ of local cultural products in particular physical spaces as they move through national and global economics.”<sup>8</sup> For many people within the popular music industry and the public, the recording industry in Muscle Shoals represented the continuation of an imagined South manifested in sound.

This chapter begins with the ways in which outside actors have manipulated the image of the South, particularly during the early to mid-twentieth century. Authors, filmmakers, songwriters and music publishers, and photographers primarily crafted an image of the rural South that helped feed and perpetuate mostly Northern-created stereotypes. This chapter then turns to the music industry, focusing primarily on Atlantic Records and Jerry Wexler and how they constructed a Southern soundscape. The next section examines the dissemination of the Muscle Shoals mystique in two ways: first, through articles published in mainstream sources such as *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *Newsweek*, and *Signature*, as well as magazines that catered to the music industry and music fans, including *Billboard*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Crawdaddy!*; and second, through information printed on 45-rpm labels for tracks recorded in the Shoals. Both the articles and 45s represent Redlich’s “uncontrollable symbols.” The chapter then details the spreading of the Muscle Shoals mystique via recordings made by non-American artists Jimmy Cliff, the

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<sup>7</sup>The relationship between the “diffusion process” and music is addressed in Larry Ford, “Geographic Factors in the Origin, Evolution, and Diffusion of Rock and Roll Music,” *The Journal of Geography* 70, no. 8 (November 1971): 456. Ford also cites Redlich. The definition of objectification is from, Fritz Redlich, “Ideas, Their Migration in Space and Transmittal Over Time,” *Kyklos* 6, no. 4 (November 1953): 301.

<sup>8</sup>John Connell and Chris Gibson, *Sound Tracks: Popular Music Identity and Place* (London: Routledge, 2003), 111.

Rolling Stones, and Traffic. Finally, I provide a close reading of the cumulative events that led to Paul Simon's 1973 arrival in Muscle Shoals.

### WALKING INTO EDEN

Throughout the early twentieth century, a continuous flow of films from Hollywood and best-selling novels depicting the South captivated an overwhelming majority of Americans. Contemporaneous with Hollywood and best-selling portrayals, writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance revealed a different South, the black South, which elevated the rhythms of vernacular black speech along with blues and jazz music to that of literature and high art. Documentary studies of the 1930s and '40s South influenced scholarship on blues music written during the early 1960s. Concurrent with the portrayal of the "moonlight and magnolia" South by authors and films, H.L. Mencken famously castigated the region's lack of culture in his essay "The Sahara of the Bozart." While targeted towards Northern and Southern audiences alike, the movies produced in Hollywood, books and essays published by black and white authors, and documentary studies presented a South that in many cases was far removed from the world inhabited by the majority who consumed these sources.<sup>9</sup>

From its early twentieth century beginnings, the Hollywood film industry featured stories set in the South. *Birth of a Nation*, released in 1915, is one of the earliest examples, but Dixie held an increasing allure for directors and fans alike. Universal Studios adapted the

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<sup>9</sup>Between 1900 and mid-century, nearly 60 percent of the U.S. population lived in either the Northeast or Midwest. See Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, "U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports, Series CENSR-4," in *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002); available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf>, accessed 10 December 2013. The combined population of the eleven Confederate states (Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, Virginia, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, North Carolina, and Tennessee) ranked 18<sup>th</sup> out of 48 for the 1920, 1930, 1940, and 1950 census. Texas had the highest ranking, six, of these eleven states. In 1950, the population of New York City, the highest ranking city for population, was nearly eight million, while Houston, TX, the highest ranking Southern city, had a population of almost six-hundred thousand. For further information, see [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).

wildly successful 1927 Broadway musical *Show Boat*, which featured songs “Old Man River” and “Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man Man,” into a film, released in 1936. Bette Davis received the Best Actress Academy Award for her starring role in *Jezebel* (1938), a romantic drama set in antebellum New Orleans. The 1939 film adaptation of the hit novel *Gone with the Wind* focused a bright spotlight upon the South. The critical and popular success of that film resulted in a steady stream of movies set in the South. And, in 1958 alone, six hit films including *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*, *God’s Little Acre*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Hot Spell*, *Long Hot Summer*, and *The Defiant Ones* all featured plots that relied on the South for their narrative.<sup>10</sup>

Writers working within the literary arts produced a significant body of work beginning in the 1930s that focused on the South, which captured both the attention of the American public and the praise of critics. T.S. Stribling’s *Vaiden Trilogy* (*The Forge*, 1931, *The Store*, 1932, and *The Unfinished Cathedral*, 1934), set in Florence, Alabama and discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, found widespread success, and won the 1932 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Novels by Erskine Caldwell such as *Tobacco Road* (1932) and *God’s Little Acre* (1933), and Margret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* (1936) maintained spots atop many best-seller lists. While works by William Faulkner including *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), and *Light in August* (1931) were not immediate best sellers, these novels significantly influenced the future direction of American literature from their publication onward. Now-forgotten works by Frank Yerby published in the late 1940s and early 1950s enraptured readers with their tales of plantation owners and slaves.<sup>11</sup> The staged works of Tennessee Williams such as *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *Streetcar Named*

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<sup>10</sup>See Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie*, 1-23, 64-79.

<sup>11</sup>*The Vixens*, 1947; *The Foxes of Harrow*, 1947; and, *Floodtide*, 1950.

*Desire* (1947), and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) made the author a star, and continued to focus Northern attention on Southern plotlines.

*Gone with the Wind* has generated significant critical and popular reaction since the work first appeared over seventy-five years ago. According to literary scholar Scott Romine, “both [the] novel and film...ranks as the South’s most famous and widely consumed text, rivaled as a cultural export only by Elvis and Coca-Cola.”<sup>12</sup> Numerous authors have incorporated or parodied characters like Scarlett O’Hara and Rhett Butler or the imagery of Mitchell’s novel. Tara, the fictional Georgia plantation setting, in the words of Romine is “ground zero of southern cultural reproduction: the site at which the real South is simultaneously exploded and regenerated—re-covered and recovered, ad infinitum and in many respects ad nauseam—in what amounts to an endless loop.”<sup>13</sup> Although *Gone with the Wind* was not the first text to conjure nostalgic images of the Old South, it remains the touchstone example.<sup>14</sup>

Writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance relied on common themes such as the use of folk material from the South and a preference for the blues tradition as the basis of their work. DuBose Heyward set his 1925 novel *Porgy* in Catfish Row, a black tenement in Charleston, South Carolina, and his characters occasionally speak in the Gullah language: a language primarily spoken by black people that live on the South Carolina and Georgia coast. The characters and setting of Heyward’s novel found an even broader audience when composer George Gershwin collaborated with the author and adapted the story into the opera

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<sup>12</sup>Scott Romine, *The Real South: Southern Narrative in the Age of Cultural Reproduction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 43.

<sup>13</sup>Romine, *The Real South*, 27.

<sup>14</sup>See Scott Romine, “Tara! Tara! Tara!: *Gone with the Wind* and the Work of Cultural Reproduction” in *The Real South*, 27-59.

*Porgy and Bess*, which premiered in Boston and moved to Broadway during fall 1935.

Langston Hughes' first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues* (1926), included the poem of the same title that reflected the rhythms of the music itself. Zora Neal Hurston privileged both vernacular speech and southern folkways in her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. George Lee provided one of the earliest histories of the blues with *Beale Street: Where the Blues Began*, published in 1934. The works by these individuals and many others balanced a view of the South typically told by white voices with stories written by black authors.

Historian James Cobb has remarked, "In many key aspects, the Harlem Renaissance was simply a geographically detached—but no less real or important—part of the Southern Renaissance."<sup>15</sup> Although no less idealistic in some cases than their white contemporaries, the black authors associated with the Harlem Renaissance who wrote about the South provided an alternative to the romanticized plantation narrative commonly portrayed in novels and Hollywood films.

Coinciding with the interest in southern-themed literature, a growing interest in documentary studies of the South began to appear in print during the 1930s. In general, documentarians of the 1930s and '40s south privileged "feeling over fact" in their approaches toward their portrayal of the region. Images taken by some of the leading photographers the day such as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, Carl Mydans, Marion Post, and Arthur Rothstein, all of whom worked for the Farm Security's Photography Unit, depicted many southern people with downtrodden faces. These images were, in fact, staged; the published photographs presented an image of the South and its inhabitants that the

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<sup>15</sup>James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 148.

photographer wanted the public to see and not necessarily the South that actually existed.<sup>16</sup> William Stott, author of *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, referred to this as “the look: mournful, plaintive, nakedly near tears.”<sup>17</sup> James Agee’s and Walker Evans’ *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, first published in 1941 and possibly the most well-known documentary text about the South and Alabama in particular that also included photographs utilizing “the look,” did not achieve widespread popularity, however, until the 1960s, nearly twenty years after it was first published.<sup>18</sup>

The appearance of blues music scholarship, along with the blues “revival,” occurred simultaneously with the 1960 reprint of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Sam Charters published *The Country Blues* along with a companion album of the same name in 1959. British author Paul Oliver published *Blues Fell This Morning: The Meaning of the Blues* in 1960. These works and others including *The Poetry of the Blues* (Charters, 1963) and *Conversation with the Blues* (Oliver, 1965) forwarded the image that blues music represented the antithesis of commercialized pop culture. A recent examination by Christian O’Connell of blues revivalist scholarship had the historian conclude:

The “invention” of the blues and the romantic interpretation of early-twentieth-century African American culture as anti-modern, unpretentious, and uncomplicated by the whims of popular culture were inherent to blues revival writing. In other words, the “revival” of the blues constituted its invention.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 11.

<sup>17</sup>Stott, *Documentary Expression*, 58-59.

<sup>18</sup>Agee’s and Evans’ Alabama research trip occurred during July and August 1936, and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was published in 1941.

<sup>19</sup>Christian O’Connell, “The Color of the Blues: Considering Revisionist Blues Scholarship,” *Southern Cultures* 19, no 1 (2013): 78.

Authors such as Charters and Oliver had their view of the blues, blues musicians, and the cultural associations connected to black Southerners filtered through a lens that others helped craft. In many ways, the pioneering work of Charters, Oliver, and others on the blues did little to counter long-established images associated with the rural black South.

Writer and social critic H.L. Mencken's essay "The Sahara of the Bozart," first published in 1917, served as an invective on what the author saw as the South's thorough lack of culture. In many ways, however, Mencken's diatribe supported views of the South depicted on film and in books during the 1920s; while criticizing the South of 1917, Mencken subtly romanticized the old South: "The South has simply been drained of all its best blood. The vast hemorrhage of the Civil War half exterminated and wholly paralyzed the old aristocracy, and so left the land to the harsh mercies of the poor white trash, now its masters."<sup>20</sup> As the decades progressed, it was the "old aristocracy" glamorized in *Gone with the Wind* and "the poor white trash" graphically portrayed in the works of Caldwell that Mencken detested, which eventually became the subject of documentarians.

The spread of Southern stereotypes in the early twentieth century through various forms of media including books and film created a subculture that looked below the Mason Dixon Line and saw a land free from the confines of the industrialized North. These views remained pervasive well into the late twentieth century. In a September 1976 special issue of *Time* called "The South Today," Stefan Kafner, senior writer for the magazine, remarked on the enduring legacy of works penned by southern authors:

Literature still provides the dominant myth of Dixie. Tennessee Williams' hostile parlors, James Dickey's blood rites, William Faulkner's epic feuds, Margaret Mitchell's antebellum aristocrats, Richard Wright's mangled blacks

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<sup>20</sup>H.L. Mencken, *The American Scene: A Reader*, ed. Huntington Cairns (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1977), 161. "Sahara of the Bozart" originally appeared in the newspaper *Evening Mail* (New York), 13 November 1917.

supply the melodramatic leads. Popular culture contributes the script. Barrel-bellied redneck sheriffs and chanting, chain-gang Negroes have been staples of films since the '30s.<sup>21</sup>

For some, during the 1920s and '30s the South came to represent the embodiment of the pastoral as characterized by Mitchell, or even the archaic as depicted by documentarians, while others, particularly those within the music industry, saw the South as the last bastion of unspoiled, “authentic” American melodies. Dixie was chic, and music from and about the South sold well.

Songwriters and music publishers working in the Northern-based music industry during the early twentieth century were among the first to help others sing the praises of the South. As sheet music gave way to sound recordings, however, record label executives would become central figures in the musical promotion and romanticization of the South. From the earliest days of Tin Pan Alley, tunesmiths have shaped through their songs the ways in which American audiences viewed the South. Isaac Goldberg, a journalist and biographer of George Gershwin, commented on this trend in his 1930 history of Tin Pan Alley:

The South is the romantic home of our Negro; the Negro made it a symbol of longing that we, half in profiteering cold blood, but half in surrender to the poetry of the black, carried over into our song. Our song boys are of the North. Paradise is never where we are. The South has become our Never-never Land—the symbol of the Land where the lotus blooms and dreams come true.<sup>22</sup>

“The aesthetic aim of Tin Pan Alley [songs about the South] was not truth-telling,” wrote historian Stephen Whitfield in 2002. “Rather, Tin Pan Alley—and its offshoots in the Broadway and Hollywood musicals—offered an entirely fanciful South, which does not

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<sup>21</sup>Stefan Kafner, “The South Today,” *Time*, 27 September 1976, 29.

<sup>22</sup>Isaac Goldberg. *Tin Pan Alley: A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket* (New York: John Day Company, 1930), 46. I came across part of this quote while reading Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*, 10.

mean that it was utterly false, only that it was a fabrication.”<sup>23</sup> The allure of the South did not cease with the rise of the music recording industry—if anything the quest to record Southern-born musicians replaced the need for songs with the South as their subject. Jerry Wexler, perhaps more than any other music industry figure, made sure that the necessity for “authentic” Southern performance practices usurped the desire to hear about “moonlight and magnolias” written by regional outsiders and crooned by matinee idol pop stars.

While the major record labels of the 1940s and ‘50s sought the next big pop artist, industry executives and talent scouts working for independent labels such as New York City-based Atlantic Records went South searching for a fresh sound; a sound that was soon called rhythm and blues, or R&B by the music industry press. “The crucial period for...Atlantic was apparently a 1947 trip down South by [label executives Ahmet] Ertegun, [Herb] Abramson, and [Jesse] Stone to study the taste their previous New York-created recordings weren’t reaching,” wrote author Nelson George. He continued:

It was a trip that established the tradition of Atlantic looking to the South for talent and direction. ‘The kids were looking for something to dance to,’ Stone told Nick Tosches. ‘I listened to the stuff that was being done by those thrown-together bands in the joints, what was missin’ from the stuff we were recording was the rhythm. All we needed was a bass line.’<sup>24</sup>

Atlantic soon reaped the financial rewards of their southern trip after signing artists such as singer Ruth Brown from Virginia, pianist Professor Longhair from New Orleans, and singer Joe Turner from Kansas City as tracks by them and others frequently appeared in the R&B top-ten. Throughout the 1950s and into the ‘60s, Atlantic primarily utilized the working band

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<sup>23</sup>Stephen J. Whitfield, “Is It True What They Sing About Dixie?” *Southern Cultures* 8, no. 2 (2002): 15.

<sup>24</sup>George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*, 38. The Stone quote originates from Nick Tosches, *Unsung Heroes of Rock and Roll: The Birth of Rock in the Wild Years Before Elvis* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1999). “Cole Slaw” (1949) by Frank Culley became the first Atlantic track recorded with the “new” rhythm.

of artists like Brown, Longhair, and Turner to accompany the singers instead of relying on the highly polished sounds of New York City studio musicians.

By the mid-1950s, R&B music and its offshoot, rock ‘n’ roll, was poised to dominate the popular music charts. Jerry Wexler (1917–2008), who joined Atlantic in 1953 after having worked for BMI and *Billboard*, co-authored along with Ertegun the article “The Latest Trend: R&B Disks Are Going Pop” for the July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1954, issue of *Cash Box*, an industry trade publication.<sup>25</sup> Wexler, sensing the musical equivalent to a bull market, stated, “If rhythm and blues music keeps happening the way it has been, we’re all going to wake up one morning and find ourselves in the middle of a full-fledged trend—and if there’s one thing everybody in the music business seems to love, it’s a trend.”<sup>26</sup> The R&B record sales “boom” began in the South, and Wexler summarized for his readership how it came to pass:

As far as we can determine, the first area where the blues stepped out in the current renaissance was the South. Distributors there about two years ago began to report that white high school and college kids were picking up on the rhythm and blues records—primarily to dance to. From all accounts, the movement was initiated by youthful hillbilly fans rather than the pop bobbysoxers—and the latter group followed right along. A few alert pop disk jockeys observed the current, switched to rhythm and blues formats, and soon were deluged with greater audiences, both white and negro, and more and more sponsors... The southern bobbysoxers began to call the r & b records that move them ‘cat’ music. And what kind moves them? Well, it’s the up-to-date blues with a beat, with infectious catch phrases, and with highly danceable rhythms. Not all r & b qualifies as cat music. It has to kick, it has to move, and it has to have a message for the sharp youngsters who dig.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Jerry Wexler and Ahmet Ertegun “The Latest Trend: R & B Disks Are Going Pop,” *The Cash Box*, 3 July 1954; Jerry Wexler Collection #20393, Series 1, folder 6, Southern Folklife Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. *Cash Box* was a weekly coin-machine and music-industry magazine published from July 1942 until November 1996, and competed directly with *Billboard*.

<sup>26</sup>Wexler and Ertegun, “The Latest Trend,” 56.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. Atlantic started a short-lived subsidiary label called Cat Records in 1955, which was abandoned after twenty releases. The Chords hit “Sh-Boom” was originally released on the Cat Records imprint; see Charlie Gillett, *Making Tracks: Atlantic Records and the Growth of a Multi-Billion-Dollar Industry* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1974), 86-87.

For record industry executives during the mid-to-late 1950s including Wexler, the sounds emanating from the South became a musical bellwether for the future of pop music.

Wexler's interest in esoteric music—typically blues or jazz performed by black musicians—began at a young age. As a teenager growing up in mid-1930s New York City, Wexler was an avid collector of race records. “We’d go to Salvation Army depots and junk shops, where sometimes, in the back of beat-up old-fashioned Victrola cases, you’d luck up on priceless booty,” Wexler recalled. “We were a new cult of record collectors, relentless in pursuit of our Grail, prospecting beyond Harlem, over to the Bronx, east to Queens, south to Brooklyn, deep into Bedford-Stuyvesant... We were record hunters, fierce and indefatigable.”<sup>28</sup> Wexler described the 1930s race records fraternity to a middle-class readership in his *Saturday Review of Literature* article, “Rhythm and Blues in 1950”:

In the early Thirties a new cult of record collectors came into being complete with ritual, ethic and idiom. Its pioneer members first encountered each other in junkyards, Salvation Army depots, and back rooms of rummage shops, evasively concealing from each other their discoveries. When proper confidence had been established they might swap anecdotes of their finds—a rare Louis, an early Bessie, a cut-out and forgotten Earl (naturally it was superfluous to mention such last names as Armstrong, Smith or Hines).<sup>29</sup>

The pursuit by Wexler for a musical Grail persisted during his tenure with Atlantic and well into the 1970s. It was not until he began consistently recording in the South that he fulfilled his quest.

From an early age, Wexler, born to Jewish parents and a self-proclaimed “record hunter,” sought out a musical product created by black musicians and traveled throughout the

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<sup>28</sup>Wexler *Rhythm and the Blues*, 21, 35.

<sup>29</sup>Jerry Wexler, “Rhythm and Blues in 1950.” Series 1, folder 6, in the Jerry Wexler Collection #20393, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The article, which is clipping of the original, is undated. However, it was written for the *Saturday Review of Literature*, 24 June 1950, 49.

five boroughs of New York City to fulfill his musical mission. The near-obsessive nature of his interests with jazz and blues music and their related universe—Wexler and his friends were also fond of dancing at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem—fostered at a young age his willingness to venture beyond the confines of convention in order to navigate unknown but utterly attractive musical worlds; a cultural outsider peering through an open musical window.

Wexler's formal education also helped crystalize notions not fully explored until he produced records in the South. He spent two unremarkable semesters as a student at City College in New York City, and gambled away money intended for summer school courses at New York University. His mother then enrolled him as a journalism major in 1936 at what is now Kansas State University. Within a few years, Wexler had failed most of his courses and he returned to New York to work as a window washer alongside his father. The army drafted Wexler in 1941, and after his stateside service, he resumed his education by taking correspondence courses through Kansas State, eventually returning there to graduate with a journalism degree. The "golden wheat fields, clear blue skies, and people who spoke with a twang decidedly different from what I heard on the boardwalk at Coney Island" had a profound impact on Wexler and ultimately his chosen geographical preferences while working within the music industry.<sup>30</sup> "I'd always thought that the meat in the sandwich of America is between the two coasts," Wexler recalled. "Much later, while the music business competed mostly in Hollywood and New York, I worked and thrived in Alabama, Tennessee, Florida, Georgia, Texas, and Louisiana. Root Americana always touched my heart—and I

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<sup>30</sup>Wexler, *Rhythm and the Blues*, 29. For Wexler's time at City College and Kansas State, see pages 25-31.

trace that connection to Kansas.”<sup>31</sup> For Wexler, nostalgia for what he thought epitomized the American heartland grounded by his time spent in Kansas as a college student would dictate not only the music he produced, but where he would produce that very music.

After having spent over a decade in the music industry, at some point in the 1960s Wexler grew tired of the formal written musical arrangements commonly used in New York City recording studios. Henry Stone, a veteran R&B producer, recalled, “[Wexler] recognized in the South he’s going to get that feeling which you cannot get—I know you can’t get that in New York being involved in producing myself.”<sup>32</sup> Wexler sought a way to bolster Atlantic’s slumping sales during the early 1960s. “The South was the scene, and the music, later labeled Soul, would change my life,” Wexler wrote in 1993.<sup>33</sup> What he found initially in Memphis but ultimately in Muscle Shoals aligned his personal interests and musical taste—“a roots music that seemed to refer to the past, present, and future all at once.”<sup>34</sup>

Wexler grew up in an era where popular novels and films romanticized the South. His admitted personal interest in collecting blues and jazz records demonstrates the desire to seek out the musical unknown. Wexler, in many ways, embodied the Northern idealized view of the South; a view fueled by literature and mass-media stereotypes. Tom Dowd, who worked with Wexler at Atlantic for several decades, recalled:

Wexler was educated as a writer, and a psychology major, and he was liberal thinking, hard-driving, hard nose in those topics, but he was a romantic. And as we spent more time in the south recording and making acquaintances in the south, some of the romanticism that he had never seen before in his life might

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>32</sup>*Immaculate Funk Collection ARC – 0008 FBN Motion Pictures Collection, Box 1, Folder 26 Henry Stone circa 1996*, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Library and Archives, Cleveland, OH.

<sup>33</sup>Wexler, *Rhythm and the Blues*, 167.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 169.

have all of a sudden started to appear in human beings that he only imagined or aspired to or read about in books or wrote about.<sup>35</sup>

In 1969, while recounting to author Stanley Booth how much he enjoyed recording Southern musicians, Wexler stated “I’ve always wished my kids could grow up in the South...Because the good people of the South understand brotherhood better than anybody else in the country.”<sup>36</sup> The use of the word brotherhood is problematic, especially for someone like Wexler who carefully chose his words. Equally problematic is the phrase “the good people of the South,” a romanticized view of the region for sure. Having spent the better part of the 1960s working in Memphis and Muscle Shoals, Wexler witnessed firsthand the segregated South.<sup>37</sup> Despite Wexler’s erudite views, in the late 1960s news and media outlets provided daily reminders of Jim Crow’s legacy and the continuing Civil Rights struggles in the South for many black Americans. It is possible, however, to interpret the recordings Wexler produced in Memphis and Muscle Shoals as the musical byproduct of this imagined Southern brotherhood. Wexler, an outsider from New York, developed a kinship with the Southern studio owners and musicians. He respected the musicians’ abilities, and they revered him for his iconic music industry status. Within this framework, “the good people of the South”—the white studio personnel that worked very closely with the black singers—who, from Wexler’s privileged vantage point, formed a “brotherhood” that integrated white and black culture far better than any leading politician could hope for at that time. Viewed in this light, Wexler’s comment that “More than any other local or individual, Muscle Shoals changed my life—

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<sup>35</sup>*Immaculate Funk* ARC-0008 FBN Motion Pictures Collection Tom Dowd, Box 1 Folder 10 (circa 1996-99) Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Library and Archives, Cleveland, OH.

<sup>36</sup>Stanley Booth, *True Adventures of the Rolling Stones* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2012), 357.

<sup>37</sup>In his autobiography, Wexler recalled nearly being arrested in Memphis after entertaining singers Rufus and Carla Thomas in his hotel room. Due to the racial climate in Memphis, Wexler thought, “there was no place a mixed party could be comfortable.” Wexler, *Rhythm and the Blues*, 170.

musically and every which way” makes perfect sense.<sup>38</sup> Historian Sheldon Hackney, in a 1973 essay describing “The South as Counterculture,” remarked:

To an increasingly fragmented world the South offers an integrated view of life... Compare [the brilliant snippets of experience that coagulate without melding by writers Donald Barthelme and Jerzy Kosinski] to the vision of William Faulkner in which past, present and future are linked together; in which individuals don’t merely rub up against each other in fleeting encounters but are enmeshed in each other’s lives; in which individual lives over long periods of time are bound together by their connection to place. There is a wholeness to life in the South, even in its harsh and ugly aspects, and this is a useful antidote to a world in which increasing individuality means increasing isolation.<sup>39</sup>

In the early 1970s, Wexler was a well-traveled citizen of “an increasingly fragmented world.” If the veteran New York producer did not actually achieve insider status within the Southern studio culture, Wexler at least received the status of “honorary Southerner,” which for him may have been the next best thing.

Recording in the South produced hit songs for Atlantic and a musical epiphany for Wexler. “When you want to make certain types of records and wish to capture that pristine R&B sound,” Wexler told *Billboard* in November 1966, “you need to go South.” This front-page article, “‘Piney Woods’ Industry’s New R&B Happy Hunting Ground,” detailed the successes that Atlantic and other independent record companies had working in the South.<sup>40</sup> The author outlined the “keys to success” for major labels looking to record R&B, which included recording in states like Tennessee and Alabama, using a “select group” of independent producers that included Stax’s Jim Stewart and FAME’s Rick Hall, and utilizing the “sound” created in local studios performed by the house musicians. Portraying the

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<sup>38</sup>Wexler, *Rhythm and the Blues*, 180.

<sup>39</sup>Sheldon Hackney, “The South as Counterculture,” *The American Scholar* 42, no. 2 (1973): 291–92.

<sup>40</sup>Claude Hall, “Piney Woods,” *Billboard*, 16 November 1966, 1. The article appeared on the front page; the Wexler quote appeared in the same issue on page 8.

independent R&B producers and musicians of the South as being “in the business strictly for the fun of it,” the article established a dichotomy between the commercialized Northeast music industry and the “Swamp Bottoms” where Wexler and others preferred to record.

The use of “piney woods” in the title suggests a remote, bucolic setting while the phrase “happy hunting ground” implies a fertile region with low-hanging musical fruit. The fact that most of the geographic areas referred to in the article—Alabama, Tennessee, southern Texas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana—had no association with the term “piney woods” bothered no one.<sup>41</sup> It appeared that the long-leaf pine had replaced the magnolia in 1966 as the favored southern perennial for the music industry. The financial success R&B tracks recorded in the South, the “hunting ground,” certainly made those within the music industry “happy.” Similar to the advice Wexler offered his colleagues in the 1954 article “The Latest Trend: R&B Disks Are Going Pop,” the 1966 music industry, primarily centered in New York, still looked towards the South. Over the course of thirty-five years, relatively little had changed since 1930 when Isaac Goldberg remarked that the South was the land where musical dreams came true.

The success of R&B artists repeatedly placing on the pop charts heavily influenced the music industry’s direction during the mid-to-late 1960s to the point where the sound of R&B and pop records became nearly indistinguishable. Larry Uttal, president of the independent label Bell records, remarked in *Billboard’s* 1967 special supplement “The World of Soul”:

Some of those producers are dedicated to the point where they’ll go into the hills into the fields to find talent and bring them into the studio. They’re

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<sup>41</sup>According to the World Wildlife Fund, “The Piney Woods Forests stretch across eastern Texas, northwestern Louisiana, and southwestern Arkansas.” See “Piney Woods forests” <http://worldwildlife.org/ecoregions/na0523>, accessed 8 April 2013. Piney Woods, Mississippi is home to the Piney Woods School, a boarding school for African Americans founded in 1909.

interested in bringing out the soul of the singer...not the musical performance, the technical perfection...those are secondary. They also have a unique ability to communicate with the artists. Most of these producers have either country music or blues backgrounds and these two forms, in my opinion, come from largely a common source.<sup>42</sup>

Uttal's comments, along with the imagery, are nearly identical to Wexler's 1966 sentiment regarding recording in the South. The producer, according to Uttal's "field guide," would venture into the wild in search of new talent. Language used by Uttal echoed nineteenth century Northern as well as Southern writers who portrayed "stock Southern characters, [who were the] embodiment of noncommercial nobility, the counterpoint to the shrewd but crude robber baron who ruled the Gilded Age."<sup>43</sup> Upon locating the talent, Uttal's producer was then only interested with releasing the soul, the very essence of the singer to the listener. Most importantly according to Uttal, Southern producers had the uncanny ability to communicate with the newfound talent because the producer spoke a musical dialect common to both: country or blues. For the music industry outsider then, recording in the South based on Uttal's article required a musical guide, typically a local independent producer, who could find talent and "bring out the soul of the singer" for widespread distribution by the Northern-based record company.

In the December 27, 1969 special issue celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Billboard*, Jerry Wexler wrote an appreciation of Southern music titled "What It Is – Is Swamp Music – Is What It Is."<sup>44</sup> This article provided a summation of Wexler's musical worldview at a time

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<sup>42</sup>Larry Uttal, "Soul Searching in the South," in "World of Soul" *Billboard*, 24 June 1967, 40. Ellipses appear in the original.

<sup>43</sup>Hackney, "The South as Counterculture," 289-90. Also see, Cobb, *Away Down South*, "Cavalier and Yankee: The Origins of Southern 'Otherness,'" 9-33.

<sup>44</sup>Jerry Wexler, "What It Is – Is Swamp Music – Is What It Is," *Billboard: Billboard 75*, 27 December 1969, Section 1, 70. All quotations from this article appear on page 70. A type written manuscript of this article on Atlantic Records stationery with hand made corrections is located in the Jerry Wexler Collection #20393, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Series 1, folder 6.

when he was, arguably, at the height of his prowess. At the very least, Wexler's prose demonstrated to the readers of *Billboard* the music industry veterans' accrued abundance of musical, cultural, and symbolic capital.

Written in a mixture of urban sophisticated prose and street-wise vernacular, the first seven paragraphs offered individual vignettes that described musical happenings which took place across the country: Memphis (mentioned twice), Muscle Shoals, Los Angeles, New York City, Miami, and one unknown location. The musical events Wexler portrayed, recording sessions or jam sessions at private parties and clubs, may not have actually occurred, but the musicians mentioned in the article were real, and nearly all of them white. Wexler characterized the music-making in Muscle Shoals in this way:

At 3614 Jackson Highway in Muscle Shoals writer-guitarist-singer and embryonic guru Eddie Hinton works out a Taj Mahal rhythm with drummer Roger Hawkins and it is finally figured out the only way is to start the beat on two instead of one. The session is Ronnie Hawkins' first for Atlantic and the tune is "Who Do You Love"...At another studio in Muscle Shoals, Rick Hall's Fame, Bobby Gentry cuts her fantastic song, "Fancy," and Rick's new rhythm section burns in a beautiful track. Solomon Burke gets an advance copy of Tony Joe White's new album from Donnie Fritts, the elegant Alabama Leaning Man, and does a hell of a cover of Tony Joe's "The Migrant"—at 3614.<sup>45</sup>

Wexler, in his summary of the musical movement, called "this emergent thing" the "Southern sound! R&B played by Southern whites! It is up from Corpus Christi, Thibodaux, Florence, Tupelo, Helena, Tuscaloosa, Memphis! It is the flowering of the new Southern life style!"

Revealing his literary background, Wexler associated the arrival of "Swamp Music" with the ascension of thirty-two year old Willie Morris, born in the Mississippi Delta, to the editorship of *Harper's Magazine* in 1967. According to Wexler, Morris, like William Faulkner, "calls the black people of his home his kin." Although not explicitly stated by the

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<sup>45</sup>3614 Jackson Highway is the address for Muscle Shoals Sound.

Wexler, the article more than implied that the white and black Southern musicians shared a musical kinship, too.

Wexler dubbed the style “Swamp Music,” and categorized the sound as “country funk... It’s a pound of r&b, and an ounce or three of country...It’s a lot of Gospel changes and very, very rarely 12-bar blues...It’s not rockabilly, either, but the echoes of early Sun are there...It isn’t opry shit-kicking Nashville.” Perhaps the clearest example of Wexler’s infatuation with the musical South appeared in a paragraph that described the lyrics of “this emergent thing,”

The words? They are plain old representational words – Southern folk communicating with each other in beautiful, un-ornate spare earth talk. There is field lore. There is love on a farm. There is swamp myth. The people who play it and sing it are conditioned by the way they grew up. Southern life-style: it’s in the ground they walked on, the grits they ate, the water they drank. Their imagery has humor and insight, and the references, although they are regional and even parochial, are easily comprehended.

The words used by Wexler faintly echo those of Donald Davidson, who, in his 1930 essay “A Mirror for Artists,” championed a Southern, agrarian culture that provided for artists a more enriching environment than a cultural life founded on (Northern) industrialism.<sup>46</sup>

Music industry personnel already working in the South during the 1960s also noticed Wexler’s enlightened state. Al Bell, an executive for Stax Records in Memphis, recalled:

I believe that when Jerry came to Memphis, Tennessee and into the South and experienced what he experienced there, how the music was produced and how the musicians related to each other—they weren’t reading charts, they were feeling each other, and they were playing their instruments with what they

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<sup>46</sup>Donald Davidson, “A Mirror for Artists,” in *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, Twelve Southerners, 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 28-60. Sheldon Hackney’s 1973 essay, “The South as Counterculture,” also described the relationship between 1960s counterculture and the South. In regards to the Agrarians, Hackney wrote, “The Agrarians... were nonetheless engaged in the old Southern sport of defining an alternative to the national consensus...It was a frontal assault on the principles of Northern and modern civilization, a continuing comparison between the disordered present and the heroic past, which has always been the currency of groups disturbed by change,” 290.

called at that time, head arrangements, until a groove was established. And it happened naturally between the musicians. And when the chemistry was right the song became the song. When Jerry Wexler walked into that, I believe that he walked into Eden.<sup>47</sup>

From the mid-1960s through the remainder of his career, Wexler spent much of his time recording in the South, mostly at FAME and Muscle Shoals Sound Studios.

The romanticization of the South, musical or otherwise, throughout Wexler's 1969 article illuminates how passionately regional outsiders with ties to systems of national distribution constructed a narrative of southern identity (even if there were faded traces of "authentically" Southern ideologies). Wexler, a New York-born record executive for New York-based Atlantic Records, heralded "Swamp Music" as a heterogeneous musical style, born in the South of mixed racial heritage that found commonality between its participants based in part on cultural similarities. "Swamp Music," at least for Wexler, represented the future direction of American popular music. His 1969 article concluded: "There's more—it's only just beginning."

#### **WORDS AND MUSIC FROM "NOWHERESVILLE BEFORE 1964"**

In the late 1960s, articles about Muscle Shoals and the recording industry located there, along with reviews of recordings made at FAME or MSS, began to appear in the mainstream media and the popular music press. Recording reviews printed in widely circulated sources such as *Rolling Stone* and *Crawdaddy* typically mentioned not only Muscle Shoals but also specific individuals working within the Alabama music industry, which helped to disseminate and reinforce the mystique. Articles about Muscle Shoals in these sources also coincide with the maturation of rock criticism, a powerful tool that shaped the music's reception. The stories

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<sup>47</sup> Al Bell, Immaculate Funk ARC-0008 Box 1 Folder 3 Series I - Al Bell (circa 1999), Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Library and Archives, Cleveland, OH.

that appeared in major newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post*, glossy magazines like *Newsweek* and *Signature*, and the Sunday magazine section of *The Boston Globe* revealed to a broad segment of the public that this Alabama “Highwaytown, USA,” population of less than 5,000 people, produced hit tracks on an almost weekly basis. 1970 in particular would become the year where major articles about Muscle Shoals appeared in news sources like those previously mentioned and also in the music industry press (Table 4.1).

Starting in 1968, tracks recorded at FAME included wording on the 45-rpm label that told the listener where the recording took place. Tracks recorded at Muscle Shoals Sound Studios included similar wording after the studio opened in 1969. This type of labeling occurred regardless which record company released the track. These 45s came to represent the physical evidence, the objectification, of the Muscle Shoals mystique. Both the articles and the artifacts indicate that by the late 1960s the term “recorded in Muscle Shoals” held significant and increasing symbolic capital.

Source	Article Title	Date
<i>Newsweek</i>	Muscling In	September 15, 1969
<i>New York Times</i>	How the Memphis Sound Came to Be	November 23, 1969
<i>Fusion</i>	Muscle Shoals–Ronnie Hawkins: North Country Boy Down Home	November 28, 1969
<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	Muscle Shoals Sound on 3 Albums	February 15, 1970
<i>Washington Post</i>	The Stars are Falling on Alabama, They Dig Muscle Shoals	February 15, 1970
<i>The Commercial Appeal</i>	The Big News in Rhythm and Blues	April 19, 1970
<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	The Lucrative Sound of Muscle Shoals	April 19, 1970
<i>Boston Globe</i>	The Hustle at Muscle	April 26, 1970
<i>Signature</i>	Big New Noise from Muscle Shoals	May 1970
<i>Billboard</i>	Music in Muscle Shoals (7 articles)	December 5, 1970

**Table 4.1** – A partial list of articles about Muscle Shoals published during 1969 and 1970.

The purpose of a recording review is to share the critic’s opinion of the album or track under consideration with the reader. Not every review addressed below spoke of

Muscle Shoals or the musicians working there in flattering terms. It is worth noting, however, that as the 1960s ended and the '70s began, the reviews that mentioned Muscle Shoals only did so with praise, which indicates the growing lore that surrounded this Alabama musical community. The reviews, both good and bad, that mentioned Muscle Shoals demonstrate additional ways in which the mystique seeped into the public consciousness.

Before the release of Aretha Franklin's 1967 album *I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Loved You)*, published reviews of material recorded in the Shoals were scarce.<sup>48</sup> Jim Payne wrote one of the first reviews of Franklin's album for the August 1967 issue of *Crawdaddy!* The three-page review included one brief paragraph about Muscle Shoals:

“Do Right Woman,” another slow tune, was obviously recorded in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. You see, they don't have much money down there so the studio has a Farfisa instead of a Hammond organ and you can spot it right away, like on Percy Sledge's “When a Man Loves a Woman.” A little too thin, but the guy who's playing it can still have soul, even if his instrument doesn't, right?<sup>49</sup>

Payne, who was also a drummer, demonstrated his knowledge of Shoals-produced recordings by referencing the 1966 Sledge track. And, both the Sledge and the Franklin tracks featured a Farfisa organ. Payne's few sentences about Muscle Shoals, however, privilege what the author perceived as a lack of economic capital and the “exotic” location: he conflates two different studios, FAME and Norala, into one location, while in the same sentence indicates that “down there” (Muscle Shoals, Alabama, or the South more broadly), studios could not afford to purchase what Payne suggests as superior equipment.

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<sup>48</sup>Before the mid-1960s, relatively few sources existed that primarily focused on popular music. The first issue of *Crawdaddy!* appeared in February 1966. The first issue of *Rolling Stone* appeared on November 9, 1967. *Creem* first appeared in March 1969.

<sup>49</sup>Jim Payne, “I Never Loved a Man—Aretha Franklin,” *Crawdaddy!* #10, July/August 1967, 35. A reprint of this review appears in Paul Williams, ed., *The Crawdaddy Book: Writings (and Images) from The Magazine of Rock* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2002), 183-86.

A review of singer Boz Scaggs's first album appeared in a November 1969 issue of *Rolling Stone*. Author Ed Leimbacher noted the then recent pop music trend of musicians "going south" to record:

In this era of hick *Hee-Haws* and Hollywood cowboys, Nashville cronies and Nudies creations, seems like everybody and his musical brother (and also his chaste sister) has to make it to Tennessee or Alabama, or he jes' cain't make it a-tall. Most of the transient residents at 3614 Jackson Highway [the studio address], for example, site of the much favored Muscle Shoals Sound Recorders, have no business recording there. Things really aren't all *that* magical in Muscle Shoals—what counts is what a musician brings into town with him [and Boz] sounds right at home in Muscle Shoals [original emphasis].<sup>50</sup>

The author made it quite clear to the readers that recording an album in Muscle Shoals (or the South in general) was simply not enough; the artist(s) that went South had to also have the requisite talent, and in Leimbacher's opinion, Scaggs did. Leimbacher's review tacitly suggests that Scaggs's talent was the secret ingredient, "things really aren't all *that* magical in Muscle Shoals," and not the "much favored" rhythm section or studio.

Several reviews published in *Rolling Stone* during the early 1970s specifically praised the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section. Vince Aletti described the sound heard on the Staple Singers' "I'll Take You There" as "a little Southern hot sauce—producer Al Bell's mix of Muscle Shoals rhythm section and Memphis brass."<sup>51</sup> The effusive praise continued with a review of Luther Ingram's 1972 album, *If Loving You is Wrong (I Don't Want to be Right)*, which aligned the singer and the rhythm section with soul music royalty:

Luther Ingram and his public are in the midst of a revolution of the entire

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<sup>50</sup>Ed Leimbacher, "Boz Scaggs," *Rolling Stone*, 11 November 1969 in *The Rolling Stone Record Review*, ed. Rolling Stone (New York: Pocket Books, 1971), 456-7. Although Leimbacher does not specifically name the "transient residents" referred to in his review, they are likely Cher and Lulu: two pop stars that also recorded at Muscle Shoals Sound during 1969. The Nashville reference about "everybody and his musical brother" recording in Tennessee might suggest to Leimbacher's audience the recordings of Bob Dylan, *John Wesley Harding* (1967) and *Nashville Skyline* (1969), and the Byrds, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* (1968).

<sup>51</sup>Vince Aletti, "Records: Beatitude: Respect Yourself, The Staple Singers," *Rolling Stone*, 22 June 1972, 62.

genre known as soul music...What Ingram...has managed to achieve in the space of two albums is the refinement of a vocal style...Plus, Ingram has a tune stable of his own (he also writes) and the guidance of a veteran R&B producer...Johnny Baylor. Add the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section and "Hot," "Buttered," and "Soul" to affairs and the result is a sound akin to what you might expect Sam Cooke to be involved in, were he still alive.<sup>52</sup>

A full-page feature on keyboardist and songwriter Barry Goldberg's forthcoming album appeared in February 1974. The former member of Electric Flag noted:

So [Bob] Dylan and [Jerry] Wexler were producing me and they asked me where I wanted to record. And I said Muscle Shoals. I had a month to work on the stuff and there was a lot of pressure knowing that the caliber of the people was so great. It took five days to do the basic tracks; Eddie Henton [sic], David Hood, Barry Beckett, Peter Carr and Roger Hawkins, the main Atlantic rhythm section guys.<sup>53</sup>

The use of the phrase "the main Atlantic rhythm section" is significant: in a musical era increasingly defined by either self-contained rock bands such as the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, or the Eagles, or singer-songwriters such as James Taylor, Joni Mitchell, or Carly Simon, Goldberg's remark indicates the high level of esteem that those within the music industry reserved for the musicians of the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section.

Rock criticism began in the 1960s, an offshoot of the New Journalism. *Rolling Stone*, *Crawdaddy!*, *Creem*, and the alternative-weekly press in cities like New York and Boston provided a forum for authors to express their views on what they believed to be the soundtrack for their generation. Major news sources that privileged opera and symphony over popular music routinely looked askance at what editors thought of as music for kids: rock 'n' roll. Robert Christgau, the self-appointed "Dean of American Rock Critics," has written, "Rock criticism's '60s strongholds were mostly underground or counterculture, a

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<sup>52</sup>Gary Von Tersch, "Records: If Loving You is Wrong, I Don't Want to Be Right, Luther Ingram," *Rolling Stone*, 21 December 1972, 68. The "Hot Buttered Soul" comment refers to the 1969 Isaac Hayes' album of the same name.

<sup>53</sup>Lotti Golden, "Barry Goldberg Returns with an LP and a Friend," *Rolling Stone*, 14 February 1974, 12.

formation the dailies in their lowest-common-denominator caution resisted more recalcitrantly than the upmarket slicks [glossy magazines].”<sup>54</sup> In contrast, popular music critics and the sources they wrote for furthered what Simon Frith called the “ideology of rock,” which hyped musicians and bands, or in this case, a recording “scene.”<sup>55</sup> The promotion of a rock culture by music critics such as Christgau, Dave Marsh, Lester Bangs, and Jon Landau fueled the fetishistic needs of popular music fans, and helped the Muscle Shoals music industry receive significant ink in “the dailies” and “upmarket slicks.”

Three different articles printed during 1969 and 1970 by papers from major US cities described the growing influence Muscle Shoals had within the music industry. Writing for *The New York Times* in November 1969, Burt Korall noted:

The vivid, natural pulse, mixture of country, blues and gospel and the family interrelating among musicians particular to the identity of Memphis music, also can be found on records made in the recently emergent Alabama town of Muscle Shoals, 120 miles away. In both places, the combining of Southern performing and songwriting talent with artists from outside the pale has proven particularly fruitful.<sup>56</sup>

Korall’s language, similar to words used by Wexler and the writers from *Billboard*, recalled the image of a southern recording scene built upon musically-enriched, fertile soil. Robert Hilburn, in a 1970 article for the *Los Angeles Times* titled “Muscle Shoals Sound on 3 Albums,” made explicit the impact of the Shoals upon popular music:

Muscle Shoals, a small Alabama town just across the border from Tennessee, is rapidly emerging as a junior partner in the Southern recording complex that is headed by nearby Memphis and Nashville. In only four years, Muscle

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<sup>54</sup>Robert Christgau, “A History of Rock Criticism,” in *Reporting the Arts II: New Coverage of Arts and Culture in America*, ed. Andras Szanto, Daniel S. Levy, and Andrew Tyndall (New York: National Arts Journalism Program, 2003), 140. Christgau’s website refers to him as the “Dean of American Rock Critics.”

<sup>55</sup>Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock* (London: Constable, 1983). For hype see, Devon Powers, “Bruce Springsteen, Rock Criticism, and the Music Business: Towards a Theory and History of Hype,” *Popular Music and Society* 34, no. 2 (2011): 203–219.

<sup>56</sup>Burt Korall, “How the Memphis Sound Came to Be,” *New York Times*, 23 November 1969, 6.

Shoals' recording studios and its handful of resident musicians has helped produce a series of million-sellers for a variety of vocalists. The town probably turns out more hit records per capita than any other city in the world. But, unlike Memphis and Nashville, Muscle Shoals is almost unknown outside the record industry. Except for those who read record label credits closely, few realize the importance the city and its musicians have played in the recording industry.<sup>57</sup>

That Hilburn or his editors used "Muscle Shoals Sound" in the article title indicates how quickly the catch phrase spread throughout the popular press. The observation by Hilburn that Muscle Shoals produces "more hit records per capita than any other city in the world" precedes by five years the phrase "The Hit Recording Capital of the World," the slogan adopted by the Muscle Shoals Music Association in 1975. Also, the final sentence in the Hilburn quote about "those who read record label credits" alludes to a point discussed in further detail below. Hollie West's *Washington Post* article, "The Stars Are Falling on Alabama, They Dig Muscle Shoals," a clever word play on the 1934 standard "Stars Fell on Alabama," appeared the same day as Hilburn's Los Angeles column. After situating the area within the context of the TVA's dams, she remarked:

[T]here is a new energy being generated in Muscle Shoals these days — it's the power of local musicians who play earthy and propulsive rhythm and blues in recording studios containing the most up-to-date sound equipment. The combination of the music and studios is attracting many of the world's pop music heroes who would rather record here than in New York or Los Angeles. During their recent American tour the Rolling Stones spent a week here rehearsing and listening to themselves in this oasis of sound and soul.<sup>58</sup>

The contrast between West's categorization could not be any different than what Payne offered in his 1967 review: the studios of Muscle Shoals, once "poor" in 1967, had by 1970

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<sup>57</sup>Robert Hilburn, "Muscle Shoals Sound on 3 Albums," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 February 1970, Q31. Hilburn reviews three albums: Aretha Franklin, *This Girl's in Love with You*; Lulu, *New Routes*; and Ronnie Hawkins, *Ronnie Hawkins*. Franklin did not record her album in Muscle Shoals, but instead utilized the talents of musicians from Muscle Shoals while recording in New York.

<sup>58</sup>Hollie I. West, "The Stars are Falling on Alabama, They Dig Muscle Shoals," *The Washington Post*, 15 February 1970, K1.

developed into “the oasis of sound and soul” sought out by top artists. Based on these articles published in major news outlets, “down there”—Muscle Shoals—quickly became *the* place to record.

“Muscling In” appeared in the September 15, 1969 issue of *Newsweek*. The article began with the unnamed author locating Muscle Shoals for the reader: “Someplace in TVA country, on Route 43, another hamburger highway, strewn with McDonald’s, Colonel Sanders’ Kentucky fried chicken and Big Dip dairy shakes.”<sup>59</sup> The author balanced the remoteness of “TVA country,” somewhere in the South, with the ubiquity of fast-food restaurants that littered many American roads; this could be where you are from “But,” the article proclaimed, “Muscle Shoals is different.” Positioning the importance of this particular town for the readership the author explained,

What Nashville is to country music, Muscle Shoals is trying to be to rhythm and blues. Its studios have launched the careers of such soul singers as Aretha Franklin, Clarence Carter and Percy Sledge. What lures the artists to Muscle Shoals is the musical climate. Compared with its easy pace Nashville is the Los Angeles freeway at rush hour. Still, that Southern drawl is deceptive. The studio musicians mean business even if they prefer to make the sounds up as they go along rather than read them from a lead sheet.

These few sentences encapsulate the mystique. As a recording center, Muscle Shoals rivaled Nashville, but was more laid back, pastoral, or rustic than even the country music capital; the tracks recorded in Alabama by leading soul (black) artists indicated a level of musical “with-it-ness” considering the overall popularity of soul and R&B; finally, the image of the “untrained” musicians that produced hits supported comments made by Wexler and others regarding recording centers like New York as “tired” and “played out.” The article concluded with a Rick Hall summarizing this last point in vernacular terms, “It’s not like New York.

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<sup>59</sup>“Muscling In,” *Newsweek*, 15 September 1969, 90. All quotes from this article appear on page 90.

Here we're all there is. If we don't cut hit records we don't eat. We can't afford to be mechanical."

In Spring 1970, journalist Arthur Whitman published an article on the Muscle Shoals music industry that appeared in at least four major sources: the *Chicago Tribune* and Memphis, Tennessee's *Commercial Appeal Mid-South Magazine*, both published Sunday, April 19, 1970; the Sunday magazine of the *Boston Globe*, April 26, 1970; and *Signature*, May 1970, the magazine published by Diners Club.<sup>60</sup> Whitman's article ran under separate titles for each source, and provided a more in-depth history of the Muscle Shoals recording industry's development than the *Newsweek* story. Three of the four article titles, "The Hustle at Muscle" (*Boston Globe*), "Big New Noise from Muscle Shoals" (*Signature*), and "The Lucrative Sound of Muscle Shoals" (*Chicago Tribune*) indicated to the reader that *something* was happening in Muscle Shoals. The general theme of the Shoals as an out-of-the-way, laid-back area that had become "one of the country's leading production centers of hit records," however, remained.<sup>61</sup> A subtext within the article also mimics the spread of the mystique: a transmission process that began with those inside the music industry, then passed to other musicians, and finally received by the public. Whitman primarily narrates Rick Hall's biography, and remarks that the success of tracks recorded at FAME "attracted wide attention in the gossipy, inbred industry."<sup>62</sup> The author was likely the first one to point out in print that

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<sup>60</sup>Arthur Whitman, "The Lucrative Sound of Muscle Shoals," *Chicago Tribune*, 19 April 1970, J16, 19-20; "Big News in Rhythm and Blues," *Mid-South, The Commercial Appeal Magazine*, 19 April 1970, 24-26, 28-29; "The Hustle at Muscle," *Boston Sunday Globe Magazine*, 26 April 1970 36-40, 41, 43; "Big New Noise from Muscle Shoals," *Signature*, May 1970, 38-41. I first encountered a photocopy of the *Signature* article while working at the Sheffield, Alabama Public Library. I am grateful to Betty Dyar, a volunteer who managed the "Local History" room, for her assistance. The copy is located in a file called "Music Industry." While all four articles narrate the same story, there are a few minor differences between the Memphis version and the other three. All page references are to "Big New Noise," *Signature*.

<sup>61</sup>Whitman, "Big New Noise," 38.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

when Johnson, Hawkins, Hood, and Beckett left Hall in 1969 to open their own studio, “They named their new enterprise Muscle Shoals Sound (anyone using the term would automatically be naming them).” While MSS was in direct competition with their former boss, Whitman keenly observed, “The net result only seems to enlarge Muscle Shoals’ capacity for producing hit records.”<sup>63</sup> The production of hit records at multiple studios attracted other artists interested in producing hit records for themselves.

From Nowheresville before 1964, Muscle Shoals’ music industry has since invented Percy Sledge, Stevie Wonder, Clarence Carter and Aretha Franklin, and is new recording territory for stars such as Bobbie Gentry, Cher, The Rolling Stones, Brook Benton and Wilson Pickett.<sup>64</sup>

The word “invented” is curious as it removes any agency from the singers themselves and places the sole responsibility for their success in the hands of the “Muscle Shoals music industry.” More importantly, however, is the observation that the success of Sledge, Carter, and Franklin attracted pop musicians such as Gentry, Cher, and the Stones, which in fact, it did, as we shall see later in this chapter. Only eight months after the publication of the *Newsweek* feature, Whitman concluded his article by commenting on the public impact of tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals: “Perhaps you are the sort who wouldn’t want to wait in line for anything else [besides making music] in Muscle Shoals, but to get your hands on the music from Muscle Shoals, the line at the record store forms to the rear.” Tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals sold well, and the 1970s music industry took note of this Alabama “oasis of sound and soul.”

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<sup>63</sup>Whitman, “Big New Noise,” 41.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid. To my knowledge, Stevie Wonder never recorded in Muscle Shoals, and it is very unlikely that Berry Gordy, the owner of Wonder’s label, Motown, would have allowed him to do so at anytime during the 1960s.

Seven articles about the Muscle Shoals music industry appeared in the December 5, 1970 issue of *Billboard*.<sup>65</sup> The multi-page spread, “Music in Muscle Shoals,” featured stories on the then five operating recording studios: FAME, Muscle Shoals Sound, Quinvy, Widget, and Paradox; as well as an article on W.C. Handy, and Kontention Sound, Ind., a music complex located in Huntsville, about fifty miles east of Muscle Shoals. Bill Williams, who authored each article, noted that the Shoals music business was “one of the big money-producing industries of the region.”<sup>66</sup> Similar to the articles that appeared in the national press, Williams also highlighted the studio musicians’ work ethic, and the idiosyncrasies of the location, which happened to also be “dry”: “‘People come here to work, not to drink or go to night clubs,’ was the general feeling. ‘This is what makes Muscle Shoals so successful.’”<sup>67</sup> Rick Hall expressed a similar sentiment stating, “The remoteness of the area is conducive to good recording. There is no hustle or bustle, no booze, no night life. When people come here, they come only to record.”<sup>68</sup>

“Muscle Shoals Sound—A Sort of Commune,” noted that the studio, “really needs a scorecard to keep track of its many arms and branches, but it may soon need a computer to total its successes.”<sup>69</sup> Like FAME, the owners of Muscle Shoals Sound operated several businesses from their location, including two publishing companies and a sound production company. After listing the numerous record companies that do custom work and the “incredible” list of talent who use Muscle Shoals Sound, Williams concluded: “But more

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<sup>65</sup>Bill Williams, “Music in Muscle Shoals,” *Billboard*, 5 December 1970, 45-50. The seven articles, all written by Williams, are: “‘People Come Here to Work,’” “FAME Studio Musicians Average \$25-35,000 a Year,” “Muscle Shoals Sound—Sort of a Commune,” “Muscle Shoals Honors W.C. Handy,” “Quinvy Sound—The Natural Transition,” “Widget—From Demos to Label,” “Paradox: Bearing Fruit,” and “Kontention Content.”

<sup>66</sup>Williams, “‘People Come Here to Work,’” 45.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>68</sup>Williams, “FAME Studio Musicians Average \$25-35,000 a Year,” 45.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

important, the sound is there. So are the people and the hits.”<sup>70</sup> A full-page ad placed by the studio punctuated Williams’ prose, “Recording sessions are our bread and butter [–] the hits we’re turning out are yours. Thanks for recording your artists in our studio. Atlantic – Stax – Shelter – Capitol – Epic – Bang – Happy Tiger and all the others ...”<sup>71</sup>

Quinvy, Widget, and Paradox, although successful, had yet to produce hits at the rate equivalent to FAME or MSS, so the *Billboard* articles about these three studios were brief. The story on Quinvy, which Quin Ivy owned and operated, noted the Ivy’s work with singer Percy Sledge, and one of his new groups, Lynyrd Skynyrd.<sup>72</sup> Both Widget and Paradox had only recently started their operations, but according to Williams, the demos, masters, and custom work recorded at these studios were “bearing fruit.” An ad for Widget stated, “We are part of ‘The Muscle Shoals Sound,’” which signified that the up-and-coming studios in the area also sought to capitalize on the industry and popular successes of both FAME and MSS.<sup>73</sup>

The articles and record reviews that appeared in the national and music press during the late 1960s and early 1970s indicate the widespread dissemination of the Muscle Shoals mystique. The transmission, however, took time. It began with the music: a few tracks that made their mark with the public and on the record charts, followed by repeated successes. Then, just as those within the music industry noted the mid-century R&B sales trends, tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals became a valuable commodity. The number of hit tracks produced

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<sup>70</sup>Williams, “Muscle Shoals Sound–Sort of a Commune,” 46.

<sup>71</sup>*Billboard*, 5 December 1970, 49.

<sup>72</sup>The mention of Ivy and Lynyrd Skynyrd working together in 1970 is significant. Ivy’s, and his then engineer, David Johnson’s, work with Skynyrd in Muscle Shoals has all but been erased from pop music history, and replaced by the Shoals sessions that Jimmy Johnson (no relation) produced and engineered a few years later. An ad on page 50 also listed Lynyrd Skynyrd as one of Quinvy’s “exclusive artists.”

<sup>73</sup>*Billboard*, 5 December 1970, 50.

in and musicians traveling to this “Nowheresville” caught the attention of the national press. When the big city newspapers and glossy magazines printed their stories, the public and industry construction of the Muscle Shoals mystique was nearly complete, and the aura surrounding this northwest Alabama music industry was glowing. In order to make the music industry and public clearly aware that a certain track was recorded in Muscle Shoals, the label on the 45-rpm told the listener just that.

Prior to 1968, the majority of tracks released on 45-rpm and examined for this dissertation provided no information in regards to where the song was recorded. In fact, that appeared to be the industry norm during the 1950s up through the 1980s: the information on the 45 label typically provided the name of the track and the writer of the track, but very little else to help the listener locate the recordings origins.<sup>74</sup> The only track recorded in Muscle Shoals before 1968 that indicated location was Jimmy Hughes’ 1964 track “Steal Away,” which Hall released on his own record label, FAME. For that release the label on the 45 read, “A Rick Hall Production 603 E. Avalon, Muscle Shoals, Alabama.” Those within the music industry had access through *Billboard* and *Cash Box* to specific information such as which studio recorded what song as noted by Whitman in his articles, but the general public did not.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>This information is based on my own observations. There is no definitive guide to information about industry wide 45-rpm labels. Neither Motown nor Stax provided location specific information on their 45s released during the 1960s.

<sup>75</sup>In 1967, tracks recorded at FAME and released by various record companies began to indicate the following information on the 45 label: “Prod. by Rick Hall & Staff” or “Arr. by Rick Hall & Staff.” No indication, however, of the location of the studio was provided. Both *Billboard* and *Cash Box* published yearly lists that provided information on recording studios, publishers, etc...Articles about hit tracks in these sources often told the who, what, and where about the track.

Beginning in 1968, nearly every 45 released and examined for this dissertation indicated the name and location of the recording studio.<sup>76</sup> The label for Clarence Carter's November 1968 Atlantic Records release "Too Weak to Fight" read: "Produced by Rick Hall & Staff Recorded at Fame Studios, Muscle Shoals."<sup>77</sup> Subsequent releases by artists such as Carter, Laura Lee, Wilson Pickett, and others provided similar information.<sup>78</sup> The first release recorded at Muscle Shoals Sound Studios by Cher also included location specific data: "I Walk on Guilded Splinters," the "B" side of her 1969 single "Chastity's Song" read: "Recorded at Muscle Shoals Sound Studios, Muscle Shoals, Alabama."<sup>79</sup> For tracks released during the early 1970s by Memphis-based Stax records, the label stated, "Rhythm recorded at Muscle Shoals Sound Studios, Muscle Shoals, Ala." Succeeding tracks recorded at either FAME or Muscle Shoals Sound indicated both the studio name and the location. Starting in 1971 with Candi Staton's "Mr. and Mrs. Untrue," Rick Hall differentiated the tracks recorded at FAME by including not only the studio name and the address, but the phrase "Home of the Muscle Shoals Sound," often set apart from other text on the label.<sup>80</sup> (See Figures 4.1 through 4.6.)

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<sup>76</sup>For tracks that I did not physically examine, the website [www.45cat.com](http://www.45cat.com) provides a database that includes photographs of thousands of singles, both the "A" and "B" sides.

<sup>77</sup>"Too Weak to Fight," Atlantic Records 2569.

<sup>78</sup>Chess Records released at least two Laura Lee tracks recorded at FAME in 1967 that gave no indication of the recording location. In 1968, her Cadet (a subsidiary of Chess) release "Hang it Up" b/w "It's Not How Good You Make It" reads "Arranged by Rick Hall & Staff – Recorded in Muscle Shoals, Ala. Fame Recording Studios."

<sup>79</sup>"Chastity's Song" b/w "I Walk on Guilded Splinters" Atco 45-6684.

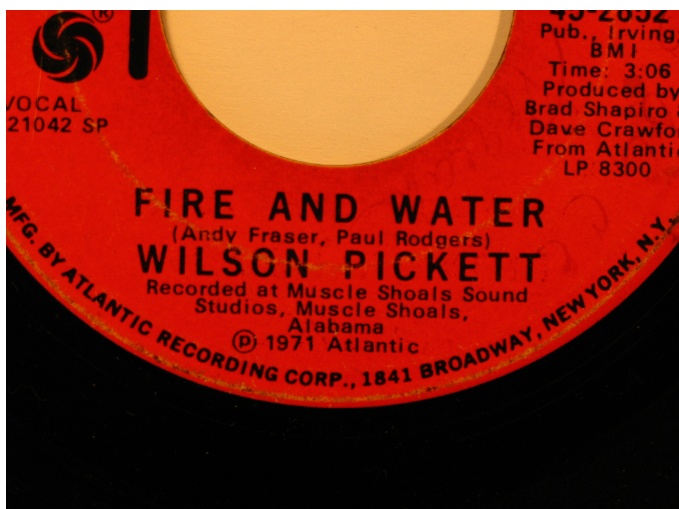
<sup>80</sup>"Mr. and Mrs. Untrue" b/w "Too Hurt to Cry" FAME 1478.



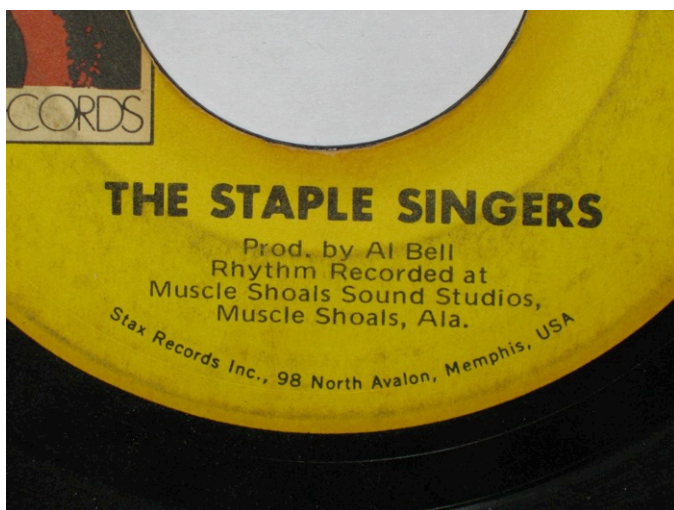
**Figure 4.1** – “Hey Jude” (1969) label detail. (Photo by Chris Reali.)



**Figure 4.2** – “I’m Just a Prisoner” (1969) label detail. (Photo by Chris Reali.)



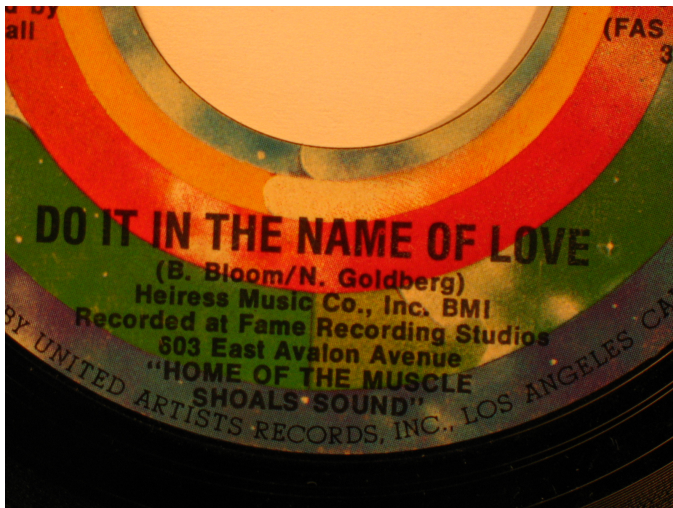
**Figure 4.3** – “Fire and Water” (1971) label detail. (Photo by Chris Reali.)



**Figure 4.4** – “Respect Yourself” (1971) label detail. (Photo by Chris Reali.)



**Figure 4.5** – “Do It In The Name of Love” (1972) label. (Photo by Chris Reali.)



**Figure 4.6** – “Do It In The Name of Love” label detail. (Photo by Chris Reali.)



**Figure 4.7** – “It’s Better to Have (And Don’t Need)” (1974) label detail. (Photo by Chris Reali.)

The 45-rpm represented the primary musical artifact for the distribution of R&B and soul music.<sup>81</sup> DJs and fans alike interfaced with this seven-inch piece of plastic, which typically provided the listener with information (besides artist name and song title) such as songwriter, publishing information, and occasionally the album title. The inclusion of the studio name and address on the 45-rpm linked the disembodied sounds heard on the record to a physical location. Identifying specific artists and songs with Muscle Shoals further separated these tracks for fans and industry related personnel with the sounds produced in Memphis by Stax or in Detroit by Motown. Consumers who bought, sold, or traded these records participated in the local, national, and global migration of a regional sound closely associated with Muscle Shoals, Alabama, in particular, and the American South in general.

These 45s, released by multiple record companies, objectified the “Muscle Shoals sound.” Simply stated, by pointing to a 45 that read “Recorded at FAME Studios, Muscle

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<sup>81</sup>Full-length album releases by artists who recorded at either FAME or Muscle Shoals Sound Studios typically included the recording location in the liner notes. For artists identified with R&B and soul (and sometimes other musical styles, too), full-length albums usually came after the release of multiple singles.

Shoals, Alabama,” or “Recorded at Muscle Shoals Sound Studio” a listener was able to identify a tangible piece of the “Muscle Shoals sound.” Releases from labels including Atlantic Records, Stax, Mercury, and Capitol Records by artists such as Wilson Pickett, Clarence Carter, Candi Staton, Cher, the Staple Singers, and Don Covay that identified the location of the recording studio and town, which widely circulated among a variety of listeners, ultimately distributed a physical product of the Muscle Shoals mystique through the diffusion process.<sup>82</sup>

### **BROWN SUGAR & THE FANTASY FACTORY**

Once FAME began to continuously produce R&B and soul hits during the mid-to-late 1960s, a diverse group of musicians noticed the recorded output from Muscle Shoals and traveled to Alabama to record. These events—George Lipsitz referred to similar cultural events as the “long fetch”—that center on the recording industry located in the Shoals that take place over the period of about ten years and span several different countries, provide the musical, historical, and cultural framework necessary to contextualize Paul Simon’s arrival at the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio in 1972. Three key moments in the spreading of the Muscle Shoals mystique occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Each of these involved a non-American artist, and two were directly connected. In 1969 both Jamaican singer Jimmy Cliff and the Rolling Stones recorded tracks at Muscle Shoals Sound Studio. Traffic, a band signed to Island Records, the same label as Cliff, arrived in Alabama in 1971 and recorded at Muscle Shoals Sound.

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<sup>82</sup>Tracks recorded at FAME or MSS and released by a wide variety of artists during the late 1970s and into the early 1980s also included location specific information on 45s.

The fascination of many British rock musicians in the 1960s with music performed by black Americans is widely known.<sup>83</sup> Both the Beatles and the Rolling Stones during the early-to-mid 1960s recorded cover versions of tracks by Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and many others. There is also a direct connection between these two British groups and Muscle Shoals that dates from that period: each group recorded songs originally performed by Arthur Alexander; the Beatles recorded "Anna (Go to Him)" in 1963, and the Stones recorded "You Better Move On" in 1964.<sup>84</sup> Paul McCartney once remarked, "If the Beatles ever wanted a sound it was R&B. That's what we used to listen to, what we used to like, and what we wanted to be like. Black, that was basically it. Arthur Alexander."<sup>85</sup> In a recent interview Stones' guitarist Keith Richards admitted that at the time they covered Alexander's track, the band did not know where "You Better Move On" had been recorded. "I think the Beatles beat us to Arthur Alexander by a couple of weeks," Richards recalled. "They cut 'Anna,' and I think we cut 'Better Move On' maybe a month later. It was a love of Arthur Alexander. But that time we had no idea where [it] was recorded."<sup>86</sup> The Stones were likely more familiar with music recorded in the Shoals when they made an impromptu stop at Muscle Shoals Sound Studios in late 1969. Recalling their Alabama recording session Richards wrote in his autobiography,

There we cut "Wild Horses," "Brown Sugar" and "You Gotta Move." Three tracks in three days, in that perfect eight-track recording studio. Muscle

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<sup>83</sup>See Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>84</sup>The Beatles, *Please, Please, Me*, Parlophone, PMC-1202, 1963. This was the debut full-length album released by the Beatles. The Rolling Stones, *The Rolling Stones*, Decca 887-1, 1964. This was the debut EP by the band. Rereleased in the United States in 1965 as *December's Children (And Everybody's)*.

<sup>85</sup>This quote appears on the back cover of Younger, *Get a Shot of Rhythm and Blues*. The original quote is from a Paul McCartney interview, and appears in Mark Lewisohn, *The Beatles Recording Sessions* (New York: Harmony Books, 1988), 6.

<sup>86</sup>*Muscle Shoals*, dir. Greg 'Freddy' Camalier, Magnolia Pictures, 2013.

Shoals was a great room to work, very unpretentious. You could go in there and do a take, none of this fiddling about: ‘Oh, can we try the bass over there?’ You just went in, hit it and there it was. It was the crème de la crème, except it was just a shack in the middle of nowhere. The people that put the studio together—great bunch of southern guys, Roger Hawkins and Jimmy Johnson and a couple of others owned it—were famed musicians, part of the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section who had been in the house band at Rick Hall’s FAME Studios, previously situated in Muscle Shoals proper. That setup already had a legendary ring because some great soul records had been coming out of there for several years—Wilson Pickett, Aretha Franklin, Percy Sledge’s “When a Man Loves a Woman.” So to us, it was on par with going to Chess Records...<sup>87</sup>

Richards, by singling out one studio, several artists, and specific tracks, was clearly aware of the history that surrounded the Muscle Shoals recording industry. Richards’ quote also encapsulates several themes already discussed in this chapter: first, the down-to-earth nature of the studio itself; second, the description of the owners as *southern*; and third, Muscle Shoals as a recording destination because of tracks previously produced there. The Stones recording in Muscle Shoals would only add to the growing aura that surround an area located “someplace in TVA country.”

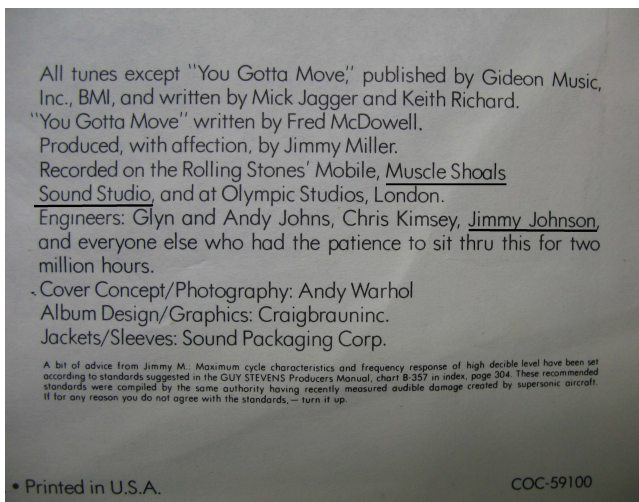
Word about the Stones’ Alabama detour spread quickly: the impact upon the Muscle Shoals music industry of the Rolling Stones recording there in 1969 was already evident in Whitman’s 1970 feature article—a full year before the release of *Sticky Fingers*, the album that included the Stones’ tracks cut in the Shoals.<sup>88</sup> The Stones released “Brown Sugar” as a single on May 17, 1971. The track quickly reached the number one position on the *Billboard* Hot 100 singles chart and remained there for two weeks (May 29 through June 5). The album also reached the number one position during May and held the top chart spot for four weeks

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<sup>87</sup>Keith Richards, *Life* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2010), 273-74. The Rolling Stones recorded “Brown Sugar,” “You Got To Move,” and “Wild Horses” at Muscle Shoals Sound during their 1969 American tour, released on *Sticky Fingers* April 23, 1971. The 1969 movie *Gimmie Shelter* documents some of these sessions, as well as Stanley Booth, *True Adventures of the Rolling Stones*.

<sup>88</sup>Whitman’s articles also predate the December 1970 release of *Gimmie Shelter*, the movie made during the 1969 Rolling Stones tour that shows the band recording in the Shoals.

(May 22 – June 12), due in part to the popularity of the single. Although no member of the MSRS performed on the three tracks recorded by the Rolling Stones, Jimmy Johnson engineered the sessions. Johnson and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio received engineering and studio credit, respectively, on the record dust jacket (Figure 4.7). The release of *Sticky Fingers* in 1971—the Stones’ first studio recording since 1969—along with the success of “Brown Sugar” and the album credit (another example of objectification) raised the symbolic capital of this former “Highwaytown–Nowheresville” as a recording destination within the world of popular music.



**Figure 4.8** – Detail of album dust jacket for *Sticky Fingers*. (Photo by Chris Reali.)

During 1969, Jamaican singer Jimmy Cliff worked on songs for the album that became known as *Wonderful World, Beautiful People*.<sup>89</sup> At a meeting in New York City, Chris Blackwell, the head of Island Records, suggested that Cliff record a non-reggae track. Blackwell paired Cliff with the MSRS and their current lead guitarist, Tippy Armstrong, on

<sup>89</sup>The album was released under two different titles. In late 1969, Trojan, the reggae subsidiary for Island Records, released the album under the title *Jimmy Cliff*. During January 1970, A&M Records, who distributed Island’s records in America, released the album under the title *Wonderful World, Beautiful People*.

the track “Many Rivers to Cross.”<sup>90</sup> The MSRS were probably in New York to record for Wexler, and made available for Cliff’s session. Journalist Charlie Gillett noted in a review that “Many Rivers to Cross” “intended to evoke a mood comparable to ‘When a Man Loves a Woman.’”<sup>91</sup> The use of an electric organ on both the Sledge and Cliff tracks suggest church hymn-like timbres; a sound closely associated with southern soul.

Two years later in May 1971, Blackwell sent Cliff to record with the MSRS at their Alabama studio in an attempt to further broaden the appeal of the Jamaican singer; an effort that began with the success of “Many Rivers to Cross.”<sup>92</sup> Cliff recorded “Sitting in Limbo” at Muscle Shoals Sound Studio and released the track on *Another Cycle* (1971). That song, along with “Many Rivers to Cross,” gained wider success after the inclusion of both tracks on *The Harder They Come* soundtrack.<sup>93</sup> At the time Cliff recorded in Muscle Shoals, he, along with reggae, was relatively unknown in the US. As Cliff recalled:

After I recorded *Wonderful World, Beautiful People*, I wanted to do different kinds of recordings. After *Wonderful World*, they started giving respectability to reggae in England, so that was good, but by then all the blues and R&B that I had been doing while playing clubs in England had become part of me, so I welcomed the opportunity to record in Muscle Shoals, and it was a very positive experience.<sup>94</sup>

MSRS bassist David Hood viewed the Cliff session from a slightly different perspective, “[Island Records] sent him here trying to make him sound non-Jamaican. This was before

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<sup>90</sup>David Katz, *Jimmy Cliff: An Unauthorized Biography* (Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2012), 66-69.

<sup>91</sup>Charlie Gillett, “Jimmy Cliff: It’s a Hard Road to Travel, Yes it’s a Rough Road to Ride,” *Let It Rock*, November 1972, 35.

<sup>92</sup>In 1973, Blackwell attempted to broaden the appeal of Bob Marley and the Wailers to a rock audience in America by “enhancing” the reggae sound on *Catch a Fire*, the first full-length Island Records release by the group. Blackwell recalled, “One was trying to change a perception, and reach a market.” See *Bob Marley and the Wailers: Catch a Fire, Classic Albums*, dir. Jeremy Marre, Eagle Rock Entertainment, DVD, 1999.

<sup>93</sup>There is no mention of Muscle Shoals, or the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section in the liner notes or credits for *The Harder They Come*.

<sup>94</sup>Katz, *Jimmy Cliff*, 75.

Bob Marley and the Jamaican thing caught hold, so they were trying to Americanize his sound.”<sup>95</sup> Based on these comments, “Americanizing” Cliff’s sound, at least from Blackwell’s vantage point, meant sending the Jamaican singer to record in Alabama.

In 1972, in an attempt to revitalize their stalled music career, the British rock group Traffic, which featured the “blue-eyed soul” singer Steve Winwood, recorded their album *Shootout at the Fantasy Factory* in Muscle Shoals with members of the MSRS. Traffic’s drummer, Jim Capaldi, had recorded his first solo album, *Oh How We Danced*, at Muscle Shoals Sound in late 1971 or early 1972, and urged the remainder of the group to come to Alabama. In 2006 Winwood reflected on his time with the Muscle Shoals musicians:

The thing with Traffic always was that we’d try to combine different elements to make this kind of music soup—it was a deliberate process. We decided that we wanted to incorporate elements of music that weren’t perhaps ideal bedfellows in order to create something that was new or peculiar just to us. We tried to use elements of folk, jazz, blues, and all kinds of ethnic music. We knew all about Hood and Hawkins from Muscle Shoals and we thought they would bring a great element to Traffic. We didn’t really want to sound like the “Memphis Soul Stew” band. I mean, we would have loved to have done that but we knew we never could. But we felt that they would actually bring an element to Traffic that would give it another dimension.<sup>96</sup>

Winwood’s remarks indicate that in the early 1970s he, along with other members of Traffic, were aware of the music recorded in Muscle Shoals, as well as David Hood’s and Roger Hawkins’ reputation. And, adding a different rhythm section to Traffic brought a new element to the band; *Shootout at the Fantasy Factory* climbed up the American record charts not long after it was released. Traffic then toured in support of the album with Hood and Hawkins on bass and drums, respectively, eventually adding Barry Beckett on keyboards

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<sup>95</sup>Ed Reynolds, “All Souled Out,” *Birmingham’s City Paper* “Black & White,” originally published 10 March, 2005, <http://www.bwcitypaper.com/Articles-i-2005-03-10-118305.112112-All-Souled-Out.html>, accessed 8 September 2011.

<sup>96</sup>Robbie Gennet, “Weaving Through Traffic: Steve Winwood Reflects on the Band That Launched a Thousand Jams,” *Keyboard*, June 2006, 47.

while Jimmy Johnson mixed the front-of-house sound. Winwood, speaking about touring with the Alabama musicians, reflected, “In some ways, that was the best band because there was never really a bad night. If it was bad, it was still fucking good. The Muscle Shoals lot wanted to work with us and I definitely wanted to work with them.”<sup>97</sup> Although their association was fruitful, at some point in late 1972 or early 1973 the musicians parted ways. Winwood told *New Musical Express* in March 1973, “They’ve got their studio, you see. They’ve got work, and they produce a lot of people. And in the same way that I don’t want to be stuck playing with the same musicians, I’m sure they don’t want to either—not for all their life.”<sup>98</sup>

MSRS’s collaboration with Traffic had a profound impact on the future success of the studio musicians. According to Roger Hawkins, he rejuvenated his playing by performing live. More importantly, the MSRS’s exposure to reggae through their association with Traffic became a vital element to the furthering of the Muscle Shoals mystique. As Hawkins recalled, “In London we were really exposed to reggae music. Being exposed to the music in London brought about the desire to know how to do that and to feel it and to try to play it.”<sup>99</sup>

To many musicians and producers within the music industry, recording in Muscle Shoals during the early 1970s represented something both tangible and intangible. For the Rolling Stones, it was the connection to classic soul recordings and that “perfect eight-track recording studio”; for Chris Blackwell, head of Island Records, it was the opportunity to

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<sup>97</sup> Alan Clayson, *Back in the High Life: A Biography of Steve Winwood* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1988), 173. The Traffic tour that included members of the MSRS also produced the 1973 live recording called *On The Road*. A concert film from the US leg of this tour titled *Traffic, Live at Santa Monica Auditorium* features some of the only live footage of Roger Hawkins and David Hood performing. *Traffic, Live at Santa Monica Auditorium*, dir. Allan Muir, Basing Street West, 1972, VHS.

<sup>98</sup> Tony Stewart, “Traffic: Dear Mr. Fantasy,” *New Musical Express*, 3 March 1973, 12.

<sup>99</sup> Jim Payne, *The Great Drummers* (New York: Face the Music Productions, 2006), 120.

“Americanize” the reggae sound of Jimmy Cliff and broaden the singer’s appeal to a wider audience; for Traffic, recording and performing with the well-respected MSRS invigorated their career. The idea of recording in Muscle Shoals appealed to the Rolling Stones, Traffic, Jimmy Cliff, and Chris Blackwell for differing reasons, but produced the same outcome: to own for themselves a piece of the Muscle Shoals sound; a sound these artists and record executive believed they could only get with this select group of musicians in this studio in Alabama.

The MSRS, fresh from their tour with Traffic, returned to their studio and blended the “new” sound of reggae with The Staple Singers gospel influences. Roger Hawkins recalled that moment stating, “I always thought that [Traffic] lifted us up. We could have never done what we did with ‘I’ll Take You There’ if we hadn’t been with Traffic. They were always playing reggae on the bus, and we absorbed a lot of that. ‘I’ll Take You There’ wasn’t quite reggae—it was our version of it—but we were able to express that in our music.”<sup>100</sup> This seemingly odd pairing of “slick” studio musicians from Alabama with a folk music-influenced, blues-loving, jam-based rock band from England resulted in a reggae-soaked, R&B track that became a number one pop hit for a Chicago-based, family gospel quartet.

Even though they had previously recorded with Jimmy Cliff, a *bona fide* reggae artist, the MSRS first encountered reggae while working with the British rock band Traffic. The MSRS then blended a reggae feel and their years of experience creating some of pop music’s deepest, soulful grooves with the gospel influences of The Staple Singers, which produced “I’ll Take You There.” When Simon and the MSRS met up in 1972 to record tracks for *There Goes Rhymin’ Simon*, he let the Alabama studio musicians pick the songs to record while the

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<sup>100</sup>Dan Ropek, “Muscle Shoals’ Traffic Jam,” *Goldmine*, 2 April 2004, 19.

MSRS tried to sound like the band on Simon's previous recordings, which were mostly a bunch of New York City session players.

***“ONE MAN’S CEILING IS ANOTHER MAN’S FLOOR”: PAUL SIMON & MUSCLE SHOALS***

Throughout Paul Simon's long career, he has demonstrated his musical adventurousness: the New York born-and-raised singer has recorded with musicians from Jamaica, South Africa, Brazil, and collaborated with Nobel laureate Derek Walcott to write the Broadway musical *Capeman*. In 1973, a *New York Times* review called Simon “a musical explorer utilizing the services of musicians from other fields.”<sup>101</sup> Simon's interest in musical cultures beyond the United States border ultimately led him, perhaps ironically, to the South and to Muscle Shoals, where he recorded several of his best-known tracks. Many previously addressed aspects of the Muscle Shoals mystique coalesced with Simon's 1972 Alabama recording sessions. First, the musical groove and sound, which Simon encountered while listening to the Staple Singers recording, allowed the singer to fetishize the musicians who performed on the track as well as the location. Second, because the Staple Singers were black, Simon, in working with the same studio musicians, formed a connection with two musical traditions he associated with blackness: gospel, which provided a link to the black South and reggae from Jamaica.

When Simon split with Art Garfunkel in 1971, he was an extremely successful songwriter. The last album recorded by the duo, *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, virtually swept the 1971 Grammy Awards, garnering the majority of the pop music prizes. As several cuts on *Bridge* validate, the gospel influenced title track and the use of Andean folk music heard on

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<sup>101</sup>Loraine Alterman, “There Goes Rhymin’ Simon,” *New York Times*, 6 May 1973.

“El Condor Pasa” for example, Simon had diverse, eclectic musical tastes.<sup>102</sup> In 1972, Simon told rock journalist Jon Landau “I like other kinds of music. The amazing thing is that this country is so provincial. Americans know American music...The Jamaican thing, there’s nobody getting into a Jamaican thing.”<sup>103</sup> While living in London during the late 1960s, Simon heard reggae quite some time before it gained popularity in the States. “Why Don’t You Write Me?,” from *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, is Simon’s early attempt at “the Jamaican thing.” Simon remarked that the song “came out a bad imitation,” and went on to say, “I’m not going to get [the Jamaican thing] out of the regular guys [the NY-based studio musicians]. I gotta get it out of the guys who know it. And I gotta go down there willing to change for them.” Simon flew to Jamaica and hired Jimmy Cliff’s band to record with him.<sup>104</sup> When Simon got into the studio with the Jamaican musicians to record “Mother and Child Reunion” for his first solo album he had trouble finding a place for his rhythm guitar. As Simon told Landau, “It was bad. So I sat down and said, ‘You play it. Play what you want.’ That’s the key thing. Let them play whatever they want, and then you change. You go their way. That’s how you get that.”<sup>105</sup>

When Simon arrived in Muscle Shoals in late 1972, he capitalized on his previous recording studio experience of working with an unfamiliar backing band. Initially, Simon had

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<sup>102</sup>Aretha Franklin recorded “Bridge Over Troubled Water” in 1972, and the song won her a Grammy for Best Female R&B Vocal the same year. Simon included the Franklin performance on his career retrospective CD, *Songwriter*, released in 2011. The Franklin track is the only cover song included on the collection.

<sup>103</sup>John Landau, “The Rolling Stone Interview with Paul Simon” in *The Paul Simon Companion*, ed. Stacey Luftig (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 89.

<sup>104</sup>In a 1973 review of two Jimmy Cliff records that appeared in *Rolling Stone*, Charlie Gillett wrote, “[Cliff] seems to be pissed off that Johnny Nash and Paul Simon borrowed those same musicians who played on “Wonderful World,” maybe took a little of Jimmy’s voice too, and hit the jackpot with their ‘derivations.’” Johnny Nash scored a hit with his 1972 reggae-influenced track, “I Can See Clearly Now.” See Charlie Gillett, “Records: Jimmy Cliff, *Unlimited* [and] *Wonderful World, Beautiful People*,” *Rolling Stone*, 27 September 1973, 98.

<sup>105</sup>John Landau, “The Rolling Stone Interview with Paul Simon,” 89.

only planned to record one track in Alabama, and he booked three days to accomplish that. The speed at which the MSRS recorded “Take Me to the Mardi Gras,” however, caused Simon to rethink his Alabama stay. “We knocked that out in two takes,” recalled Hawkins, “and he was just amazed.” “He started playing some other songs, we told him which ones we liked, and we cut them,” the drummer continued. “That’s why we got co-production credits” (Figure 4.9).<sup>106</sup> It is not surprising, considering Simon’s comments about working with the Jamaican rhythm section, that the songwriter let the MSRS select the songs *they* wanted to record. However, David Hood recalled that when an unfamiliar artist came to record with the MSRS, at least he would listen to some of the artist’s previous records. “[W]ith the different artists that we would work with,” Hood remarked in 2011, “[we] always tried to sound like we were *that* particular artists’ band. If we were working with Paul Simon, we wanted to sound like *his* band.”<sup>107</sup> Ed King, former guitarist for Lynyrd Skynyrd, recently remarked that the “true genius” of the rhythm section was their ability to “change who they were depending on the artist that walked through the door.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Bruce Borgerson, “In The Studio: The Glory Days Of Muscle Shoals,” originally posted June 17, 2013, [http://www.prosoundweb.com/article/print/the\\_glory\\_days\\_of\\_muscle\\_shoals](http://www.prosoundweb.com/article/print/the_glory_days_of_muscle_shoals), accessed 23 August 2013

<sup>107</sup>David Hood interview with the author, 24 May 2011.

<sup>108</sup>*Muscle Shoals*, dir. Camalier, 2013.



**Figure 4.9** – “Take Me to the Mardi Gras” label detail. (Photo by Chris Reali.)

Simon first noticed “I’ll Take You There” because he thought the backing band—the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section—were funky Jamaican musicians, and then the singer constructed a narrative about the track based on his assumption that a group of Jamaican reggae musicians performed in such a deeply soulful style while supporting a black American gospel group. “Of course the reason he came down,” Barry Beckett stated, “was to get a black sound. He liked what we got on the Staples’ ‘I’ll Take You There.’”<sup>109</sup> Seeking the originators of the “funky” groove heard on “I’ll Take You There,” Simon was directed to the white, Alabama-born and raised MSRS who, through years of recording experience, could assimilate seemingly disparate musical styles into their own sound. The resulting collaboration between Simon and the MSRS produced yet another event that furthered the Muscle Shoals mystique.

<sup>109</sup>Barney Hoskyns, “Soul Provider: Muscle Shoals Keyboard Legend Barry Beckett in His Own Words,” *Rock’s Backpages*, originally published 15 June 2009, <http://www.rocksbbackpages.com/Library/Article/soul-provider-muscle-shoals-keyboard-legend-barry-beckett-in-his-own-words>, accessed 11 May 2012.

Zooming out, away from Alabama, exposes the relationship between the Muscle Shoals mystique and what author John Egerton called “The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America.” The “Southernization” process involved “the North (that is to say, all the non-Southern states)” showing “itself to be more and more like the South in the political, racial, social, and religious inclinations of its collective majority.”<sup>110</sup> For Egerton, Southern music was influential to that process; “In the perpetuation and diffusion of the many strains of Southern culture, no other instrument carries more force and vitality,” which led the author to single out Muscle Shoals in his 1974 monograph, quoted at the opening of this chapter.<sup>111</sup> The Muscle Shoals mystique acted as a tributary that feed the northerly flow of Southern culture, although much of the American public ultimately adopted country music over soul and R&B as their music of choice during the 1970s.<sup>112</sup>

Paul Simon’s work with the MSRS also linked the Muscle Shoals mystique to another cultural phenomenon, the connection between soul music and African-American identity—either a continuation or revitalization of the racial discourse surrounding soul. The 1973 *Rolling Stone* review of Simon’s album bluntly stated that the “chief new musical element” of the record was “black music,” particularly “R&B and gospel motifs.”<sup>113</sup> Unlike tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals by Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, and other black singers, the music created by Simon with the help of the MSRS did not express the urgency of race for African Americans. The incorporation of this so-called “chief new musical element”

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<sup>110</sup>Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America*, xix.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid*, 202.

<sup>112</sup>For the influence of country music upon 1970s American culture see, James Cobb, “From Muskogee to Luckenbach: Country Music and the ‘Southernization’ of America,” in *Redefining Southern Culture: Mind & Identity in the Modern South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 78-91.

<sup>113</sup>See Holden, “Records: There Goes Rhymin’ Simon,” 62.

performed in part by the MSRS, however, furthered Muscle Shoals' association with black music, and perpetuated the illusory notion of an "authentic" South manifested in sound.<sup>114</sup>

### **CODA: REVIVING THE MYSTIQUE FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

Starting in the early 1980s, members of the Shoals music industry and the community as well as local and state politicians began to build a physical legacy that reflected the cultural influence of the Shoals and Alabama upon the world. The Muscle Shoals Music Association, with the help of state senator Bobby Denton and others, proposed during the early 1980s the formation of an Alabama Music Hall of Fame.<sup>115</sup> With the financial support of a 1987 statewide referendum, a 12,500 square foot museum located in Tuscumbia opened in 1990, whose mission "exists to recognize and honor musicians, primarily natives of Alabama, whose artistry has earned acclaim throughout the United States, all the while representing the great State of Alabama."<sup>116</sup> Present day locals still attribute the Shoals' excess musicality either to the areas indigenous peoples or to the "Singing River"—"there's something in the water," some still claim.<sup>117</sup> The "Singing River" is central to the marketing campaign promoted by the Colbert County Tourism and Convention Bureau. The first paragraph of their *Media Packet* states:

The earliest inhabitants of the region surrounding the Tennessee River at the place where the river bends northward were the Native Americans... They told of the spirit of the Indian maiden that dwelt in the Shoals and called the babbling flow, the "Singing River." Whether poetic or prophetic, singing and other forms of music have continued to be associated with Muscle Shoals,

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<sup>114</sup>The Dixie Hummingbirds, a black gospel group originally from Greenville, South Carolina, performed on the tracks "Loves Me Like a Rock," which also includes the MSRS, and "Tenderness."

<sup>115</sup>Myra Staggs, "Governor Boosts State Music Hall of Fame," *Times Daily*, 18 February 1981, 1.

<sup>116</sup>"Mission Statement," Alabama Music Hall of Fame, <http://www.alamhof.org/about/board-members/>, accessed 22 December 2013.

<sup>117</sup>Tori Bailey, interview with the author, 9 June 2011.

Alabama.<sup>118</sup>

Although James Joiner, Tom Stafford, and others only poured the foundations for the Muscle Shoals music recording industry during the mid-1950s, based on these and other promotional materials the historical music timeline of the Shoals is one that originated circa 800 BCE, but did not prosper until 1956. The region has further promoted the legacy of the “Singing River” by rededicating the Patton Island Bridge in 2010 with a new name: “Singing River Bridge.”<sup>119</sup> In 2012, the Singing River Sculpture project unveiled in Sheffield the first of four planned sculptors, one for each of the quad-cities. The mission of the project, similar to the mission of the Alabama Music Hall of Fame, is “To recognize, celebrate and promote the appreciation of the musical heritage of the Shoals Area to the world.”<sup>120</sup>

During the 1960s and ‘70s, professional music making in the Shoals operated behind closed doors, out of sight from the local community. Ben Tanner, a producer and session musician who now plays with the Alabama Shakes remarked, “The musical history of North Alabama has everything to do with the recording studio and very little to do with live playing. Back in the real heyday, in the ‘60s and ‘70s, none of those players were really interested in having a live venue. They didn’t care if they had a place to play live.”<sup>121</sup> In fact, very few places existed to hear live music in the Shoals up through the 1980s. Colbert County, home to Sheffield, Tuscumbia, and Muscle Shoals, became “wet” only in 1982, and Lauderdale County, remains a “dry” county, although the city of Florence has an exemption.

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<sup>118</sup>Ninon Parker, “History of the Muscle Shoals Music Industry,” in *Muscle Shoals Music Past & Present: Media Packet* (Tuscumbia, AL: Colbert Country Tourism and Convention Bureau, 2011).

<sup>119</sup>Russ Corey, “Singing River Bridge Dedicated,” *Times Daily*, 10 September 2010.

<sup>120</sup>*Singing River Sculptures*, “About,” <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Singing-River-Sculptures/139816106070583?id=139816106070583&sk=info>, accessed 31 October 2013.

<sup>121</sup>Davis Inman, “Alabama Sounds” in “Alabama Shakes,” *American Songwriter*, March/April 2012, 58.

Over the course of the past few years, the Shoals developed into a region that boasts a growing live music tradition.

The transition from the “old” Shoals, a recording industry-based scene, into the “new” Shoals, an emerging live music scene, was gradual, but by 2012 “the New Sound of the Shoals” had arrived. “I think that the spirit went away for a while, but there’s been a rejuvenation recently,” Tanner recently remarked. “There’s something a little mysterious about [Muscle Shoals]. I take it for granted because I’m from here, but people come here from other places, and they’re kind of blown away by the talent that’s here.”<sup>122</sup> In January 2013, an article in *Southern Living* titled “The New Sound of Muscle Shoals” exclaimed: “A bumper crop of talent has recently emerged from those wide rolling hills. The new generation of the Muscle Shoals sound includes everything from retro revivalists to backwoods-gothic rockers, but they all share a deep-rooted connection to the corner of the South they call home.”<sup>123</sup> This “bumper crop of talent” includes The Secret Sisters, Laura and Lydia Rogers, who play the part of the “retro-revivalists”; John Paul White, one half of the acclaimed but now-on-hiatus duo of the Civil Wars; the Drive-by Truckers, who are the elder states-musicians of the “new” sound as well as the “backwoods-gothic rockers”; Jason Isbell, former songwriter and guitarist for the Truckers who has made a name for himself as a solo artist; and the Alabama Shakes, whose debut album, *Boys and Girls*, made both a popular and critical splash in 2012. Expanding this collective to bands who do not yet have national recognition, as a September 2012 article from the magazine *Relix* did, the list would include The Pine Hill Haints, Belle Adair, The Bear, The Pollies, and the Local Saints to name but a

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<sup>122</sup>Francie Johnson, “A musical Road: Muscle Shoals’ Rich Heritage in Music Makes its way to Tuscaloosa,” *The Crimson White*, <http://cw.ua.edu/2013/11/04/a-musical-road-muscle-shoals-rich-heritage-in-music-makes-its-way-to-tuscaloosa/>, accessed 4 November 2013.

<sup>123</sup>Rachael Maddux, “The New Sound of Muscle Shoals,” *Southern Living*, January 2013, 87-88.

few.<sup>124</sup> Mostly raised in and around the region, some members of these groups have direct connections to the Shoals' music industry. Patterson Hood, co-founder of the Drive-by Truckers, is the son of David Hood, bassist for the MSRS, and the Local Saints include brothers Jaime and Rob McFarlane, sons of guitarist Will McFarlane, who also played with the MSRS.

The biography of the Alabama Shakes, the best known of the “bumper crop” groups, presents the greatest quandary concerning the Shoals connection: they are not from the Shoals. The magazine *Rolling Stone* helped link the band to the region with a February 2012 article, “Muscle Shoals Revival: Alabama Shakes Take Off.”<sup>125</sup> The Shakes formed in Athens, Alabama, located approximately 50 miles east of Florence, and while growing up, members of the group were only vaguely aware of the Shoals' musical legacy. Speaking about the Shoals, Shakes' guitarist Heath Fogg remarked in a 2013 interview, “I knew it was there, and I knew something really important happened there musically. It just took growing up to start digging and realize what did go on.”<sup>126</sup>

Almost none of the aforementioned bands sound like the R&B or soul music that originally made the Shoals famous. Even the Alabama Shakes, the band most closely associated with the sound of the “old” Shoals, distance themselves from that sonic imprint. “Retro soul is not what we're going for, though it's understandable why people say it,” says singer Britney Howard in the official band bio. “We take inspiration from that, but we all understand Black Sabbath, too.”<sup>127</sup> The “sound” of many of the new Shoals-based bands

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<sup>124</sup>Cherokee Lair, “The New Sound of the Shoals,” *Relix*, September 2012, 42-47.

<sup>125</sup>David Peisner, “Muscle Shoals Revival: Alabama Shakes Take Off,” *Rolling Stone*, 2 February 2012, 25. This is the first article about the band to appear in *Rolling Stone*.

<sup>126</sup>Maddux, “The New Sound of Muscle Shoals,” 92.

<sup>127</sup>“Alabama Shakes Bio,” <http://thefunstar.com/artists/alabama-shakes/>, accessed 21 October 2013.

reference alternative music with sonic markers such as the use of distortion and feedback as well as the use of pedal steel that indicate both rock and country influences.

Connections to the Shoals for this new generation of musicians, while certainly real for many of those who make up the “bumper crop,” are more than just an association with an identifiable sound. Some musicians within this newly revitalized scene proudly wear their association with Muscle Shoals like a musical badge of honor. Chris Tompkins, a songwriter from the Shoals who has co-written hits for Carrie Underwood and Florida Georgia Line, recently remarked in a *Rolling Stone* feature on Jason Isbell, “Being from Muscle Shoals is kind of like having a cool tattoo or something.”<sup>128</sup> Even if some of the musicians responsible this “new sound” were unaware of the storied musical past of the Shoals, bands like the Secret Sisters, the Pollies, or Belle Adair and the music they make—much like folk music—reflect creativity and innovation within a distinct tradition.<sup>129</sup> These musicians, connected by geography to this corner of northwest Alabama, have built on the mid-century foundations laid by many, and make their own individual contributions to the sounds that now emanate from Muscle Shoals. As Patterson Hood once remarked, “Muscle Shoals music isn’t a history lesson. It’s still going on.”<sup>130</sup>

The “burden of history,” however, can weigh heavily upon the living. Bands currently involved in the creation of the “new” sound of the Shoals compete with ghosts from a storied musical past. In September 2013, Magnolia Pictures released the documentary film *Muscle Shoals*. This film foregrounds the “Singing River” myth while simultaneously renewing the

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<sup>128</sup>James Sullivan, “Jason Isbell: ‘There’s Still Just as Much Awe’ in Sobriety,” *Rolling Stone*, 1 August 2013, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/jason-isbell-theres-still-just-as-much-awe-in-sobriety-20130801>, accessed 21 October 2013.

<sup>129</sup>Deb Boykin, “Muscle Shoals Music: It’s Still Going On,” in *Rocking the Blues: The Story of Rock in the Shoals*, program notes, 30 July 2011.

<sup>130</sup>Boykin, “Muscle Shoals Music: It’s Still Going On,” np.

Muscle Shoals mystique for twenty first century audiences. The film begins with the sound of water, and then quickly moves to images of water—dripping water, a waterfall, and finally water lapping in a shallow pool along the Tennessee River—followed by a voice-over spoken in a very deliberate and reverential tone by Bono, the lead singer for the Irish band U2:

Magic is the word that comes to mind, for me, when I think of Muscle Shoals. It's about alchemy. It's about turning metal, the iron in the ground, the rust, into gold. You just have to listen, and you *will* be transported; you *will* be changed. You're gonna hear some of the greatest voices that ever were (original emphasis).<sup>131</sup>

John Paul White is the only one of the “bumper crop” musicians to appear on screen. He speaks about the “subconscious rhythm [of the Shoals] that gets in your head...like a groove, which sticks in your gut.” These rhythms—people singing in fields, the sound of trains rumbling and the river roaring—inspired Sam Phillips, and according to White “connect all of us [in the Shoals].”<sup>132</sup> White, along with Clarence Carter and Alicia Keys at other moments during the film, also speaks reverentially about Helen Keller; White, while sitting in a hallway at FAME surrounded by pictures of the many artists who recorded there, remarks that the first word Keller learned was the word water.

The Shoals, indeed, is a land of music, as a 1999 article from Florence's *Times Daily* proclaimed.<sup>133</sup> Much of that history, however, only began in the early 1960s, but local beliefs coupled with larger-than-life physical artifacts such as the Singing River Sculptures have connected the Shoals' music industry to the regions' indigenous peoples, which effectively create a nearly 2000-year-old musical tradition. Those who ascribe the remarkable modern-

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<sup>131</sup>*Muscle Shoals*, dir. Camalier, 2013.

<sup>132</sup>*Muscle Shoals*, dir. Camalier, 2013.

<sup>133</sup>Kathy Silverberg, “Muscle Shoals Sounds,” *Times Daily*, 1 August 1999, 1.

day musical prosperity of the Shoals to “something in the water” of the Tennessee River perpetuate the Muscle Shoals mystique with a fluid network that both (re-)interprets history and waters the seeds of the next “bumper crop.”

## CONCLUSION

Muscle Shoals has got the Swampers.  
They've been known to pick a song or two. (Yes they do!)  
Lord, they get me off so much.  
They pick me up when I'm feeling blue. How 'bout you?

“Sweet Home Alabama,” Lynyrd Skynyrd, 1974

In 1975, the Muscle Shoals Music Association erected signs in several prominent locations that read, “Welcome to City of Muscle Shoals. Hit Recording Capital of the World.” Dozens of chart-topping tracks produced locally supported the claim made by a city with a relatively small population (6,907 in 1970) that boasted eight recording studios in 1972.<sup>1</sup> A little more than a month before the 1976 election of Jimmy Carter, *Time* ran a special issue on “the South.” An article about music in that issue written by David DeVoss exclaimed:

The South is to the music of America what late 18<sup>th</sup> century Vienna was to the classical-music era of Europe—the source. In fact, anyone who ponders the long Southern legacy—from jazz to blues, from gospel to bluegrass, and, more lately, truckers’ songs—might just begin imagining that the Mississippi has been flowing North all this time. Southern music rose from the common man, but there is nothing common about its variety or the range of lives it touches and consoles.<sup>2</sup>

It appeared to the editors of the weekly magazine that the musical and political “common man” was poised in the mid-1970s to shift the gaze of the American public southward.

Within a few years of the *Time* feature, however, the sheen of the Muscle Shoals

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<sup>1</sup>1970 Census data from “Census of Population and Housing: Census of Population and Housing, 1970 – Vol. 1, Characteristics of the Population: Alabama,” <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>, accessed 2 January 2014. A full-page ad placed in *Billboard*, 13 May 1972, 22, exclaimed, “‘8’ BIG REASONS Why You Should Record in ‘Muscle Shoals’” followed by smaller ads with the names, addresses, and phone numbers for the eight recording studios.

<sup>2</sup>David DeVoss, “A Honky-Tonk Man,” *Time* “The South Today,” 27 September 1976, 90.

brand of Southern music began to fade. New musical styles replaced the once powerful Muscle Shoals sound, those directly involved in the creation and growth of the Shoals music industry approached or were middle-aged, and emerging recording technologies helped to diminish the need for the studios and session musicians that made the region famous. The Shoals-based music industry shrank in size during the 1980s and '90s, but it did not disappear. Through those years, the Muscle Shoals industry returned to its roots in publishing and country music. Now, both the area and industry are undergoing revitalization.

The four chapters of this dissertation investigated how the Muscle Shoals Music Association arrived at their 1975 claim. More importantly, the dissertation disclosed the interconnected relationship between several cultural movements that took place across the twentieth century and the music recorded in this region of northwest Alabama. The music produced in Muscle Shoals was a direct result of changes within American culture, and that same music affected the direction of popular culture in America.

The first two chapters were primarily concerned with process: the process of creating the “Muscle Shoals sound,” and the development of Shoals natives into world-class session musicians. The first chapter established the legitimacy of a “Muscle Shoals sound.” It is clear by examining specific tracks recorded in the Shoals and through analysis of the tracks’ reception that the Muscle Shoals music industry produced a recognizable sound that both the public and press celebrated. Chapter 2 mapped the musical journeys traveled by many of the studio musicians who worked in Muscle Shoals to uncover their significant contributions to tracks recorded at FAME and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio. The process of becoming studio musicians directly affected the recording techniques utilized by Rick Hall at FAME in the 1960s, which other studio owners working in the Shoals during the 1970s also adopted. Both

the musicians who performed the music and the music created in the Shoals took part in a larger musical conversation that often occurred in dialog with other recording centers including Nashville, Memphis, Detroit, and New York.

The reciprocal effects between the merging of American culture and music made in Muscle Shoals are evident in the two case studies found in chapters 3 and 4. By examining the sociocultural and musical precedents that brought Aretha Franklin to record at FAME in January 1967 and the events that immediately followed the session, Chapter 3 interpreted the relationship between tracks publically received as black music that were recorded in the Shoals accompanied by white, Southern musicians. The close-reading of Franklin's session further disclosed the inherent contradictions found in the discourse that framed soul music while simultaneously addressing the fragility of race relations during the late 1960s, even as FAME operated as a racially neutral space. Chapter 4 explored the notion of the South as the "source" of American music, as David DeVoss claimed in 1976, by investigating the Muscle Shoals mystique and the events that brought Paul Simon to Alabama in 1972. Tracks recorded in a variety of musical styles during the 1960s and '70s at FAME and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio ultimately became part of a larger stream of Southern music that flowed northward throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The music recorded in the Shoals helped to inform the viewpoint by critics and fans alike—a belief shaped over the course of many decades—that "Southern music" represented American music.

Songs recorded in Muscle Shoals are ubiquitous in modern popular culture. Tracks almost too numerous to list have become staples of rock and R&B radio. "When a Man Loves a Woman" is regularly heard at weddings, and the song has appeared on many

soundtracks; a 1994 feature film took the Percy Sledge hit for its name.<sup>3</sup> Bar-bands frequently perform “Mustang Sally” as a musical rite of passage. Television commercials by Chevy, the Gap, and Bank of America have prominently featured “I’ll Take You There.” The 1983 movie *Risky Business* had Tom Cruise dancing in his underwear while lip-synching to Bob Seger’s “Old Time Rock ‘n’ Roll.” The *Forrest Gump* soundtrack included “Land of 1000 Dances.” The soundtrack to the 2013 film *Muscle Shoals*, nominated for the “Best Compilation Soundtrack for Visual Media” Grammy award, simultaneously celebrated and revitalized the music originally recorded “somewhere in TVA country.”<sup>4</sup> Lynyrd Skynyrd’s “Sweet Home Alabama,” which also appeared on the *Forrest Gump* soundtrack, although not recorded in the Shoals, famously name-checks the region and the studio musicians every time listeners hear the song over the radio, jukebox, or performed in bars.

The influence of music recorded in the Shoals extends well beyond the United States border. *Blues and Soul*, a British magazine first published in 1967 and still in print today, frequently wrote stories during the late 1960s and ‘70s about artists who recorded at FAME or Muscle Shoals Sound. For many British fans and journalists, music recorded in the Shoals represents the continuation or legacy of the sonic South, a sound steeped in the blues tradition. The Yahoo! Southern Soul List, an Internet-based discussion group with 1290 members, many of whom live in Europe and Asia and a few of which wrote for *Blues and Soul*, actively converse about music from the Shoals. The group description states:

Discussion of southern soul recordings, and the performers, musicians, producers, engineers, and music business personnel involved, from the late 50s through the early 70s. A serious, behind-the-scenes look at southern soul,

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<sup>3</sup>According to IMDb, the Internet Movie Database, “When a Man Loves a Women” appears on over 30 film and television soundtracks. “Percy Sledge,” [http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1429510/?ref\\_=ttsnd\\_snd\\_8](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1429510/?ref_=ttsnd_snd_8), accessed 2 January 2014.

<sup>4</sup>The *Sound City* soundtrack won the award.

with an emphasis on the Stax/Hi scene in Memphis and the Muscle Shoals scene in Alabama.<sup>5</sup>

For many of the most active members on the Southern Soul List, the music recorded in the Shoals are museum pieces, which reflect attitudes that look down upon nearly all music created after 1975.<sup>6</sup> These contemporary attitudes towards soul and R&B echo the views expressed in the late 1950s and early 1960s by blues revivalists like Sam Charters and Paul Oliver. The members of the Southern Soul List and other fans have reified tracks recorded in Memphis and Muscle Shoals during the “classic” era of soul.

The self-imposed limit by the Southern Soul List to interest in music recorded between the “late 50s through the early 70s” speak to larger issues, some of which are partially responsible for the “fall” of the “Hit Recording Capital of the World.” Not long after the city Muscle Shoals erected its billboards, disco and punk, styles that had roots in the clubs of New York City and Paris and the council estates of London, appeared on the musical horizon. Just as rock criticism once championed the sounds of R&B and soul, music journalists heralded punk and other musical styles and musicians—a new “ideology of rock”—which helped to shift attention away from the Shoals and the music recorded there. “Southern music,” regardless of how fans or the media defined that term, fiercely competed within an expanding global market to maintain its relevance. The country music industry centered in Nashville weathered the late 1970s musical “storm” by incorporating elements of disco such as more pronounced bass lines and horns, which resulted in a style dubbed “countrypolitan.” The recording studios in Muscle Shoals, much like the mainstream music

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<sup>5</sup>“Group Description,” <http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/southern soul/info>, accessed 2 January 2014. I am also a member of this group.

<sup>6</sup>After I posted a link to a free “mixed tape” by Parallel Thought, a Bronx-based hip hop artist, which only featured tracks recorded in Muscle Shoals, several vocal members of the group posted derisive comments about the “tape” and rap music in general, even though the mix did not include any rapping.

industry, abandoned R&B and soul as the styles slowly morphed into disco.<sup>7</sup> It was singer Bob Seger, after all, who proclaimed in 1979 on a track written by FAME songwriter George Jackson and accompanied by the MSRS, “Don’t try to take me to a disco...I like that old time rock and roll”; a statement that members of the Southern Soul List would agree with. Neither mainstream country nor the studios in Muscle Shoals embraced punk music. There have always been competing musical styles within any given decade or year, but by the early 1980s the “funky old soul” of the “Muscle Shoals sound” no longer held the same symbolic capital as it once did.

Shifts in musical tastes alone were not responsible for the Shoals recording industry slowdown. In 1979, Tascam introduced the Portastudio 144, the first cassette-based 4-track recording device, which provided musicians the option to record tracks of relatively high quality in their own home. “Now you can have the essential functions and flexibility of multitrack recording,” proclaimed Tascam, “in one compact, self-contained unit.”<sup>8</sup>

According to *Mix Magazine*, “the 144 was a runaway success with a legacy of thousands of artists and engineers today who made their first multitrack recordings on Portastudios.”<sup>9</sup>

Bruce Springsteen, a performer that critic Jon Landau pronounced in 1974 as “rock and roll’s future,” released *Nebraska* in 1982, an album of demos recorded on the Portastudio 144. By 1985, a print ad juxtaposed the Fostex X-15 multi-track tape recorder with the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* as the copy read “4-track masterpieces.” With the rapid evolution of analog cassette recorders, as well as the introduction of inexpensive mixing

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<sup>7</sup>For a broad view of this phenomenon, see Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*. The MSRS appear on the 1979 James Brown track “The Original Disco Man.”

<sup>8</sup>PDF of the original Tascam ad posted at “The Introduction of the 4-Track,” <http://www.preservationound.com/?p=4662>, accessed 2 January 2014.

<sup>9</sup>“1979 Teac Portastudio,” <http://mixonline.com/TECnology-Hall-of-Fame/1979-teac-portastudio-090106/>, accessed 2 January 2014. Teac is the parent company of Tascam.

consoles, professional and amateur musicians alike were no longer required to rent studio time in order to produce their own music. The 1979 appearance of home recording technology did not have an immediate impact upon the Muscle Shoals recording industry. Over time, however, the affordability of “project studios”—well-equipped, home-based studios—, along with the shifting popular music landscape, slowly eroded the demand in Muscle Shoals and other locations for the services once found only in professional facilities. Conversely, project studios also allowed some professional session musicians with engineering and production skills to break free of the studio “system” and work independently by setting up their own home studios.

The availability of high quality, low-to-moderately priced recording equipment, along with the introduction of synthesizers and other digital technologies like the drum machine and sequencer, have also altered recording “scenes” by shifting the record-making process from the control room to the living room. Jimmy Johnson learned his engineering skills hands-on by working with Rick Hall at FAME in the early 1960s; beginning in 1979, anyone interested in making a demo could purchase a 4-track and start recording the same day.<sup>10</sup> If musicians no longer had to record in a professional studio, the need for professional studio musicians also decreased. When I asked veteran session musician Jerry Jemmott in 2011 how the recording industry has changed over his long career, his response was simple and direct: “The beginning of the end was the drum machine.”

When the drum machine came in they said, “We can get rid of the drummer, we can control it more.” And that’s when things stopped. Basically, the advent of the drum machine. Less musicians, combined with the computer, [then] synch the drum machine up with the computer, [and then] with the synthesizer. [The drum machine], even in its most elementary form, combine

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<sup>10</sup>This was my exact experience when I first used a Fostex 4-track recorder in 1987 or 88. While at college, someone had a 4-track, and over the course of one evening, we learned how to operate the machine and record a song demo.

[that] with the synthesizer, and then the computer came. Everything came about 1973, '74. I saw it coming... So the music is changing, the way it's produced is being changed, everything changed. Studios started going under, people started doing stuff in their homes, in their basements; they didn't need the studio. That took the industry out. It took the industry out. Also, live music was going out at the same time. DJs came in with the disco thing in the late 70s going into the 80s. It was a slow progression, you know, many things. Like I say, it takes four fingers and a thumb to make a fist; they all came together. It wasn't overnight, but you could see it coming. You could see the idea of control being the dominating factor. It wasn't to make the music better. It was to have more control over the music, to save money. To be more cost effective.<sup>11</sup>

Although Jemmott did not articulate exactly who sought “more control,” his reference was likely to demanding producers who worked in the high-pressure settings of New York studios. By replacing the drummer with a drum machine, the producer gained more control because the machine reduced the amount of personnel in the studio, which also had financial benefits for whomever paid for the session. Jemmott also situates the beginning of the recording industry's slow demise sometime in 1973 or '74, just slightly before the self-declared title erected by the city of Muscle Shoals (and around the same time Italian producer Giorgio Moroder collaborated with singer Donna Summer at a Munich studio, which resulted in “Love to Love You Baby,” their 1975 disco hit).

Also lost with the rise of low-cost recording technology and the use of synthesized sounds was the idea of place. Why travel to Alabama and record at FAME or Muscle Shoals Sound when musicians could produce tracks at home? Digital technology would eventually replicate the “especial sound” of the echo chamber once found only at studios like FAME. A new generation of independent producers, working in homemade studios with 4-track machines, catered to musicians looking to make high quality, yet inexpensive recordings. While hit tracks recorded in make-shift studios is certainly nothing new—the Muscle Shoals

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<sup>11</sup>Jerry Jemmott, interview with the author, 20 April 2011.

recording industry was founded on the do-it-yourself model—the DIY culture of the alternative rock scene, particularly during the 1980s and ‘90s, foregrounded and emphasized the “home-made” musical aesthetic.<sup>12</sup> For example, the liner notes for Beck’s 1994 album *Mellow Gold* read, “Recorded at Karl’s house and Rob’s House and Beck’s four track.”<sup>13</sup> This production credit was very different from the prestige once associated with the phrase “Recorded at FAME Studios, Muscle Shoals, Alabama”; a phrase that immediately branded a track or album with a long-standing musical and historically significant connection. The recording industry “scene” is still present and high-profile studios certainly exist, but the number of state-of-the-art studios filled with professional session musicians once located in New York, Los Angeles, and Muscle Shoals has declined. The country music industry in Nashville supports one of the few remaining recording-studio cultures.

By the mid 1970s, two of the “sounds” that dominated much of American popular music during the 1960s were gone: Motown moved its operations to Los Angeles in 1972; Stax closed in 1975. The once ever-present Muscle Shoals sound occasionally surfaced on commercially successful tracks like Bob Dylan’s “Gotta Serve Somebody” (1979) or Delbert McClinton’s “Giving It Up For Your Love” (1980). In 1980, the members of the MSRS were nearing the age of forty, Rick Hall was forty-eight, and popular music, a style whose sound was historically dominated by musicians in their teens and twenties, began to bypass Alabama. Within twenty years of their births in the early 1960s, sounds made by the holy

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<sup>12</sup>I would like to thank my colleague, Brian Jones, who is writing his dissertation on aesthetics in DIY music scenes, for discussing this idea with me. See Brian Jones, “Process-Oriented Aesthetics in Rock Analysis,” Conference Paper Delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Pittsburgh, PA, 7 November 2013. I would also like to thank Brian for providing me a copy of his paper.

<sup>13</sup>“Loser,” the hit single from Beck’s album, contained a sample of “I Walk on Gilded Splinters,” recorded by Johnny Jenkins at FAME in 1970. Beck, Karl Stephenson, and Rob Schnapf produced *Mellow Gold*.

trinity of 1960s soul—Motown, Stax, and Muscle Shoals—had either moved, closed, or simply faded out.

“Black Music,” the term adopted in 1982 by *Billboard* to replace “Soul,” no longer had primarily Southern roots. Decedents of those who moved North or West during the Great Migration were creating new sounds born in urban centers like the Bronx, and rap, the musical product, relied on personal ingenuity and the skills of independent producers working in make-shift studios, just like R&B and soul once did. Today, producers like The Neptunes, Pharrell Williams and Chad Hugo, generate beats and sounds for hit R&B and hip-hop tracks from their laptops and keyboard workstations.

While the music industry has never left Muscle Shoals since its mid-century beginnings, the flow of hits began to ebb during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Music publishing and country music helped sustain the Shoals industry during those years. The members of the MSRS sold their studio and publishing company in 1985 to Malaco Records, a Jackson, Mississippi-based company, owned by Tommy Couch, a Tuscumbia native. After the sale of the studio, pianist Barry Beckett moved to Nashville and produced records for Hank Williams, Jr., Kenny Chesney, and others. The remaining members of the MSRS frequently performed on tracks recorded by Malaco. FAME continued to operate as a studio, producing hits primarily for country acts; Shenandoah, a local Shoals-based band originally co-produced by Rick Hall, had three number one hits in 1989. Although artists produced hit recordings at both FAME and in other studios, the business of music publishing took precedent. The songwriters who have been associated with FAME publishing include Walt

Aldridge (“Modern Day Bonnie and Clyde”), Gary Baker (“I Swear”), Chris Tompkins (“Before He Cheats”), Brad Crisler (“Hillbilly Deluxe”), and many others.<sup>14</sup>

Now somewhat removed from the 1950s, ‘60s, and ‘70s “golden era” of recording studios, musicians and independent record labels often attempt to recreate those lost sounds. Just as artists once traveled to the Shoals in the 1960s and ‘70s in search of a specific sound, musicians make musical pilgrimages to record at famous studios. U2 and other bands have recorded at Sun Studios in Memphis; the Black Keys recorded *Brothers*, their 2010 breakthrough album, at Muscle Shoals Sound because of the studios storied past, even though the band was openly critical about their experience in Alabama.<sup>15</sup> Independent labels like Jack White’s Third Man Records in Nashville “strives to bring a spontaneous and tangible aesthetic back into the record business,” an obvious snub to musicians and producers who spend countless hours in the studio endlessly tweaking their gear, and to fans that prefer digital downloads to vinyl.<sup>16</sup> Daptone Records describes itself as, “The little indie label that could...Musician-owned and run, our Brooklyn-based family of soul-drenched talent channels the spirits of bygone powerhouses like Stax and Motown into gilded moments of movement and joy.”<sup>17</sup> Either using vintage recording technology such as tube mics and analog recording consoles, nostalgia for a long-gone era, or both, these musicians and labels attempt to recreate and recapture the sounds of the recorded past.

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<sup>14</sup>Aldridge and Tompkins were born and raised in the Shoals; Crisler grew up in a nearby county, and Baker is originally from New York, but has lived in Sheffield for over thirty years.

<sup>15</sup>Christian Hoard, “Rock & Roll in the Studio – The Black Keys’ Muscle Shoals Odyssey,” *Rolling Stone*, 10 December 2009, 22. In the article, singer-guitarist Dan Auerbach states, “We’ve seen all those ‘making the album’ videos where U2 has an outdoor mosque with Indian rugs all over the fucking floor. And here we are walking around with a bag of Funyuns, totally burned out.” The band had to bring in all of their own gear to record.

<sup>16</sup>“Thirdman Records – About,” <http://thirdmanrecords.com/about/>, accessed 3 January 2014. For the past several years, Thirdman Records has placed a full-page ad for their shop and services in *Oxford American*, “The Southern Magazine of Good Writing” published quarterly.

<sup>17</sup>“About Daptone Records,” <http://daptonerecords.com/about-daptone-records/>, accessed 3 January 2014.

Several movies have also memorialized once hallowed recording studios located in Detroit, Los Angeles, and Alabama. *Standing in the Shadows of Motown* (2002), although primarily about Motown's house band the Funk Brothers, has many scenes with musicians waxing poetically about the studio affectionately referred to as the "snake pit." *Sound City* (2013) told the history of the storied Los Angeles studio while focusing "on the albums recorded there that went on to change the world," and discussed "the human element of music in an age of technology."<sup>18</sup> Dave Grohl, director of *Sound City* and former drummer of Nirvana and current front man for the Foo Fighters, is also a champion of the "back to analog" movement. Finally, *Muscle Shoals* (2013), through telling Rick Hall's story, also reminisces about the glory days of the former "Hit Recording Capital of the World," and the tracks captured on tape at FAME or Muscle Shoals Sound.

Sociologist George Lipsitz once remarked, "Events that seem to appear in the present from out of nowhere in actuality have a long history behind them."<sup>19</sup> Events that took place between September 2012 and January 2014 that center on Muscle Shoals bear out Lipsitz's claim. The magazine *Relix* ran a feature article "The New Sound of the Shoals" in the September 2012 issue.<sup>20</sup> The following month, the Alabama Music Hall of Fame located in Tuscumbia closed its doors due to steadily declining visitors over the past several years and budgetary cutbacks at the state level. An article titled "The New Sound of Muscle Shoals" appeared in the January 2013 issue of *Southern Living*.<sup>21</sup> The acclaimed Sundance Film festival screened *Muscle Shoals* on January 26, 2013. The Alabama Shakes appeared as the

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<sup>18</sup>"Sound City Movie – About," <https://www.facebook.com/soundcitymovie/info>, accessed 3 January 2014.

<sup>19</sup>Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark*, vii.

<sup>20</sup>Cherokee Lair, "The New Sound of the Shoals," *Relix*, October 2012, 42–47.

<sup>21</sup>Rachael Maddux, "The New Sound of Muscle Shoals," *Southern Living*, January 2013, 87–88.

musical guests on the February 16, 2013 episode of *Saturday Night Live*. Film festivals across the country included *Muscle Shoals*, and the film received glowing reviews from major news sources. Magnolia Pictures released the documentary for theatrical distribution on September 27, 2013. Promoting the documentary, the Swampers, Candi Staton, Jason Isbell, and John Paul White performed “I Ain’t Easy to Love” on the October 3, 2013 *Late Show with David Letterman*. Less than a week after the *Late Show* performance, a *New York Times* article claimed:

A tentative revival is under way in this rural nook of northwest Alabama, a holy place in the evolution of rock ‘n’ roll and home to a museum noticeably light on tourists.<sup>22</sup>

The Alabama Music Hall of Fame reopened on October 18, 2013. In December 2013, the Recording Academy announced the Grammy nominations, which included the Alabama Shakes and the Civil Wars, and that Rick Hall would receive the Trustees Award for his significant contribution to the field of recording.<sup>23</sup>

On January 1, 2014, the *Times Daily* printed an article that highlighted some of the musical events addressed in the paragraph above, and lauded the 2013 album releases *Southeastern* by Jason Isbell, the self-titled album by the Civil Wars, and *Over the Sea* by the Bear. Eli Flippen, owner of Pegasus Records in Florence, remarked:

I think that with the *Muscle Shoals* documentary hitting theaters and coming out on DVD [in February 2014], this area is on the verge of breaking more into the mainstream. Maybe this is our watershed type of year. There has been one or two things the past few years... We’ve seen more media interest and

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<sup>22</sup>Jennifer Crossley Howard, “Alabama Museum, in Area Where Stars Found Sound, Seeks an Audience: Tourists,” *New York Times*, 7 October 2013, A16.

<sup>23</sup>The Alabama Shakes track “Always Alright” was nominated for “Best Rock Performance,” and the Civil Wars for “Best Country Duo/Group Performance,” which they won, for “From This Valley.”

tourist interest.<sup>24</sup>

Forty years ago, music recorded in Muscle Shoals was very much part of the mainstream, and musicians traveled to this “rural nook of northwest Alabama” to capture some of those sounds for themselves. It now appears that historical knowledge of music from the Shoals is giving purpose to immediate events.

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<sup>24</sup>Bobby Bozeman, “Stellar Year: While 2013 was Good for Music in Shoals; Industry Officials Expecting Bigger, Better 2014,” *Times Daily*, [http://www.timesdaily.com/life/music/article\\_fb8093ee-7245-11e3-9992-10604b9f1ff4.html](http://www.timesdaily.com/life/music/article_fb8093ee-7245-11e3-9992-10604b9f1ff4.html), accessed 3 January 2014.

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