THE REBIRTH OF THE BLUES
The biggest thing in pop music today is a blend of folk, rock and church music known as soul. Its spiritual home is Memphis, back where the blues really began.

Before the altar at the Clayborn Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church in Memphis, there are three white coffins. Outside, in a freezing drizzle, hundreds of people with umbrellas are trying to shove through the church entrance, while others have stopped at a stand to buy some glossy 8-by-10 photographs. The photographs, which cost a dollar, show six teen-aged boys, one of them white, the rest Negro, looking like a team of bright young pool hustlers in silk suits with short, double-breasted jackets and black shirts with long roll collars. The name of the group is printed at the bottom: The Bar-Kays.

Inside the church you are given an eight-page illustrated program. "Obsequies," the cover announces in Gothic print, "of the late Carl Cunningham, Jimmy Lee King and Matthew Kelly." A Bar-Kays group picture in the program gives no indication who is who, but everybody knows that Carl is the cute one smiling in the center, and Jimmy is the solid-looking one with glasses, kneeling down front. Matthew is not in the picture because he was not a Bar-Kay, but the Bar-Kays' valet.

James Alexander, the plump boy who is standing at the left in the picture, was not on the plane that crashed in Wisconsin a week earlier, killing seven people, including the Bar-Kays' employer, Otis Redding. Ben Cauley, with a lip goatee, kneeling opposite Jimmy King, was the only survivor. The bodies of the other two Bar-Kays are still in Madison, Wis. Phalon Jones, with the nicely processed hair, lies at a local funeral parlor, and Ronnie Caldwell, the lanky white boy, is in Lake Monona, near Madison, where the crash occurred.

The program also contains individual photographs and biographical sketches of Jimmy King and Carl Cunningham. Jimmy, the group's guitarist and leader, "constantly sought to produce the degree of excellence in his performance that would bring kings to their feet, and comfort and solace to men of lowest degree." Carl was a drummer, and "the music which poured from his soul reached the hearts of thousands of souls around the world. The rhythm of his drums still beats oí a melody which lingers on and on." Matthew, the unpictured valet, receives his own, rather stark, biography: "His formal education began in the Memphis School System and continued until God moved in heaven and pronounced that his pilgrimage through life had ended."

The old-fashioned church, with tall stained-glass windows and an overhanging semicircular balcony, is packed with mourners. A very fat nurse is on duty, and pretty girls in R.O.T.C. uniforms are acting as ushers. As the white-gloved pallbearers come down the center aisle, the Booker T. Washington High School Band, seated up in the choir loft, begins a slow, shakily rendition of When Day Is Done, and all the relatives, friends and fans of the Bar-Kays stand in silent tribute.

In a square on Beale Street, just two blocks away, the figure of W.C. Handy, molded in brass, stands in the rain. Since the Civil War, when Beale Street became the mecca and musical center for the Negroes of the Mississippi Delta, there have been many funerals for young men who died in the pursuit of their music. In the old days they died of train wrecks, shooting scraps or unmentionable diseases. Now there are other hazards, but the ritual, the honor, remains the same. At the Clayborn Temple, an usher with creamed-coffee skin dabs at her long-lashed eyes, and somehow you cannot help thinking that the Bar-Kays might have lived out their lives and become old men without achieving anything to equal this glorious traditional celebration.

The official eulogy is presented by the principal of the Booker T. Washington High School, a white-haired gentleman who speaks briefly and eloquently, and closes with a memory: "When I was a boy on Beale Street, we had no electric street lamps. It was the era of the gaslight, and..."
Furry Lewis, above, is 76, and doesn't sing much any more, but he doesn't have to because people in Memphis remember him as the last of the great Beale Street blues men. His earthy style is the basis of today's soul sounds.

Many Memphis singers learn at tambourine-thwacking gospel sessions, such as this one at the Temple Church of God.
every evening toward dark the lamplighter would come along in his cart. Frequently, night would overtake him as he proceeded slowly down the street, so that as you looked after him, he would vanish in the blackness, and you could not see where he was, but by the glowing light of the lamps you could see where he had been.

“Now these boys have gone from us into the darkness where we can no longer see them. But when we hear a certain melody and rhythm, when we hear that sound—then we will remember, and we will know where they have been.”

The Memphis soul sound lingers because it is where a lot of popular music is today—a return from the psychedelic, freak-out, blow-your-mind pop culture, where it was sometimes difficult to tell the dervishes from the musicians, back to the old roots. A year ago, at the Monterey Pop Festival, The Who exploded smoke bombs and demolished their instruments onstage. Jimi Hendrix, having made a variety of obscene overtures to his guitar, set fire to it, smashed it and threw the fragments at the audience. But “the most tumultuous reception of the Festival,” according to one journalist, went to Otis Redding and the Mar-Keys (the Bar-Keys were their protégés), all of them conservatively dressed and groomed, who succeeded with nothing more than excellent musicianship and a sincere feeling for the roots of the blues.

All over Memphis the boom is on: New recording studios are being built, and old studios are being expanded to meet the growing demand for the “Memphis Sound,” which everyone wants his recording to have. And in the traditional recording centers of New York, Los Angeles and the old Tennessee rival, Nashville, the signs of Memphis’s musical renaissance are being read with some unease; for, down among the magnolias and the cotton bales, this strange and unprecedented combination of farmers, businessmen, dropout, day laborers, shoeshine boys and guitar pickers is making Memphis a new center of the pop-music industry. The recording industries of New York, Los Angeles and Nashville are all much bigger; Memphis is probably a distant fourth. But Memphis has lots of hits. Recently, on a just-average week, 15 of Billboard’s Top-100 pop records, and 16 of the magazine’s Top-50 rhythm-and-blues recordings, were Memphis products.

There are many explanations for Memphis’s musical success, but they all boil down to one word: Soul. Bob Taylor, vice president of the American Federation of Musicians’ Memphis chapter, says, “We don’t have the world’s best musicians, or the greatest recording equipment. But one thing the music of Memphis does have is the ability to communicate to the listener a sincere, deep feeling. You can’t listen to a Memphis record without responding to what the musicians felt when they made it. You have to, at the very least, tap your foot.”

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. Nor, in spite of soul music’s origins in rural poverty, does it belong to any one economic class.
It might have at one time, but it has become too prosperous for that. There are too many poor country boys with Rolls-Royces and matched sets of Cadillacs.

Soul music is concerned with what Faulkner used to call "the basic truths and verities." A song like *Do Right Woman, Do Right Man* by Dan Penn and "Chips" Moman, cuts across all racial and economic lines:

*If you want a do right, home days woman
 You got to be a do right, home nights man...*

But the thing that really distinguishes soul music is its spirit. It is not what is being said, so much as the way it is said, that makes it impossible for a listener to remain passive. Soul performers speak, singing or playing, with such conviction that audiences cannot help but "feel the spirit" and become clapping, shouting participants. A soul music concert is an experience that provides a release of emotion for everyone present.

The country Negroes brought with them a rough but distinctive music, a strange wild sound sung in a foreign tongue by a kidnapped and orphaned people, based on no tradition except a few European hymns and dim memories of African chants. It had thumping rhythms, unorthodox harmonies, earthy lyrics, and, with a smattering of the city musicians' more polished techniques and regular forms, it became the Beale Street blues. The early blues musicians were relatively unsophisticated performers, playing unamplified guitar, harmonica, and primitive instruments like the jug and the tub bass. But such an educated type as W. C. Handy, the best of the Memphis city musicians, found their music worth listening to. Handy made no secret of the fact that much of his time was spent eavesdropping on Beale Street, and he once wrote: "I can tell you the exact song I used as the basis for any one of my blues."

Since almost none of the men whose songs Handy used knew how to read or write music, they had to be content with a nameless sort of fame until the fledgling record companies discovered the lucrative market for Negro blues.
Sam (Moore) and Dave (Prater) adroitly blend gospel, blues and rhythm in their singing and are one of Memphis's best-known groups.

The first blues record was cut in 1920 at the Okeh Recording Company in New York. Mamie Smith's version of Crazy Blues sold for months at the rate of 7,500 copies a week, and soon Memphis was overrun with record representatives. They did a brisk business with records by the Memphis Jug Band, the Beale Street Sheiks, Furry Lewis and Gus Cannon's Jug Stompers.

For a while the blues players were riding high. But the Depression brought an end to the profits, sent the record companies packing, and closed down much of Beale Street. It was a terrible time for Memphis Negroes. Local newspapers carried accounts of starving mobs, swarming over garbage dumps, even eating the clay from the river bluffs. The prophecy in Handy's Beale Street Blues had come to pass:

Goin' to the river,
Maybe, bye and bye,
Goin' to the river,
And there's a reason why,
Because the river's wet
And Beale Street's done gone dry...

Continued on page 60


Jazz flutist Herbie Mann (shirtless) is typical of many artists who come to town in search of the magic Memphis Sound.
The music business in Memphis did not revive until after the war. Another generation of blues men was on hand, most of them, as before, from the Delta. They played amplified instruments, and their newly added, heavy back beat caused the music of Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker and Howlin’ Wolf to be called rhythm and blues. It was louder than the old blues, and it had more rocking rhythms, but its lyrical content was as simple as before, with short phrases, pithy and unsentimental, often with strong sexual imagery, viewing life and love from the bottom of society:

Well, it means the same old thing makes a bulldog huff a hound... Well, it means the same old thing makes a preacher lay his Bible down... **

One of the most active early rhythm-and-blues companies was Sam Phillips’s Sun Records. Phillips had been a disc jockey for years in his hometown of Memphis, and, with the help of his outside business partners, had recorded a number of blues artists, but he had not yet recorded any of his own music. In 1954, he sat on the deck of a rented yacht in San Francisco Bay. He remembered the idea, just a phrase and a snatch of melody, and brought it back with him to Memphis. He wanted to work it out with Steve Cropper, the guitarist for Booker T. and the MG’s (the better known name of the Mar-Keys’ rhythm section), who produces Otis’s records and looks like a young Gary Cooper. They joined forces in the dark, cavern-like, gray-and-pink studio at Stax. Volt Records, Memphis’s top studio, which is located in a converted movie theater on McLemore Street, next to a housing project. The marquee is still there, with red plastic letters that spell SOULSVILLE, U.S.A. (The sign was changed once to read STAY IN SCHOOL, but the kids from the project threw rocks at it, so it was changed back again. Now when the Monkees or the Beach Boys come to Memphis, they walk around as if it were a cathedral.)

Otis is playing a bright red, dime-store guitar, strumming simple bar chords as he sings:

_Sittin’ in the morning sun,
I’ll be sittin’ when the evenin’ comes._

The front of the guitar is cracked, as if someone had stepped on it. As he sings, Otis watches Steve, who nods and nods, bending almost double over his guitar, following Otis’s chords with a shimmery electric response:

_Sittin’ in the morning sun..._.

“But I don’t know why he’s sittin’,” Otis says, rocking back and forth as if he were still singing. “He’s just sittin’. Got to be more to it than that.” He pauses for a moment, shaking his head. Then he says, “Wait. Wait a minute...” and starts to sing again:


The rest of the Mar-Keys drift into the studio and sit on folding chairs behind another baffle, one wall of which has a small window. They listen, sucking on reeds, blowing into mouthpieces, as Otis and the rhythm section rehearse the song. When Steve calls, “Hey, horn! Ready to record?” they are thrown into confusion, like a man awakened in the middle of the night.

They have nothing to record; there are, as yet, no horn parts. Steve and Otis develop them by singing to each other. “De-de-da-dee,” Steve says. “Duck, take the horns!” and “We’re making a point in an argument.” When they have the lines they want, they sing them to the Mar-Keys, starting with the verse part, which the Mar-Keys will forget while learning the part for the chorus. After a few tries, however, they know both parts and are ready to record. “That feels good, man, let’s cut it.”

When the recording is finished, the tape is played back at a painful volume level. Steve and Otis stare deep into each other’s eyes, carrying on a kind of telepathic communication. The little boy with the crooked nose says, “I like that. ‘That’s good singing,’ I’d like to be a singer myself.”

“That’s it,” Otis says when the record ends.

“That’s a mother,” says Booker.

Nearly every man at Stax dresses in a kind of uniform: narrow elbowless pants, Italian sweaters, shiny, black slip-on shoes. But now, standing in the lobby, there is a tall young Negro man with a shaved head and full beard. He is wearing a Russian-style cap, a white pull-up with green stripes, bright green pants, black nylon see-through socks with green ribs, and shiny green lizard shoes. His name is Isaac Hayes. With his partner, David Porter, Hayes has written such hit songs as _Soul Man_ and _Hold On, I’m Comin’_ for the singing team of Sam and Dave. Porter, dressed in bell-bottoms, has a baby face, his long hair pulled up in a rubber band. Hayes looks like a singer.

“We’re in,” says Hayes. “Let’s go next door and write. I’m hot.”

“I can’t go nowhere till I take care of this here thing, Otis.”

“Which chick is this?”

“You know which chick. You think I ought to call her?”

“What the hell do I care? I want to go write.”

“Well, she’s occupying my mind.”

“Let’s go, man, let’s go. I’m hot.”

Phillip Porter follows Hayes to an office next door where there are three folding chairs, a table littered with old issues of _Billboard_ and _Hit Parade_, and a baby grand piano with names and initials carved on it. Hayes sits down at the piano and immediately begins to play church chords, slow and earnest. As he plays, he hums, whistles, sings. Porter hums along. He has brought with him a black attaché case, and now he opens it, takes out a ball-point pen and several sheets of white typing paper, and be-
and forth

The door opens, and a small man wearing a black suit, black hat and black moustache comes in, leading a very thin girl in an orange wig. "You got to hear this," the man says, nodding toward the girl, who is visibly shaking.

"Are you nervous?" Hayes asks her.

"Just relax and enjoy yourself. Don't worry about us. We just two cats off the street." The girl smiles weakly and sits down.

Porter is writing, Forever Wouldn't Be So Long, across the top of the page. Then,

My love will last for

Till the morning sun finds no
dew

"Cause I'm not tired of loving

you . . . .

He stops, puts down the pen, and yawns; "Naw, I had something flowing in my mind."

"How long you be working?" the man in the black suit asks.

"How do I know?" Hayes says.

"We don't observe no time limits." "Yes," says Porter, "Hayes will probably be here all night. He don't observe no time limits."

Hayes laughs, Porter stamps his right foot once, twice, Hayes strikes a chord, Porter closes his eyes, and shouts, "Cross yo' fingers!" He sings, bending, the chair squeaking, getting louder and faster, as if he were singing a song he had heard many times, and not one that he was making up, in an incredibly fluent improvisation. The girl smiles, then breaks into a giggle. Porter stops and groans. "Man, we should've had a tape recorder, I'll never get that feeling again. Damn! That's a hit! Cross Yo' Fingers! That's a hit title!" He turns back to his writing paper to reconstruct the lyrics.

Hayes looks at the girl. "So you're a singer?" She gulps and nods. The wig, high heels, a tightly belted raincoat only make her seem thinner and more frightened. "Would you like to sing something for us?"

She swallows and nods again. They pick a song, a key (Hayes asks, "can you sing that high?") and she begins to sing. At first her voice trembles, but as she sings, it grows stronger. She shuttered her eyes and moves softly back and forth as her voice fills the room. Porter stops writing to watch her. She is so frail-looking that one expects her to miss the high notes, but she hits them perfectly, each time, as her voice swells, blossoms. Finally she stops, on a long, mellow, vibrating note, opens her eyes, and gulps.

Porter applauds. "Wasn't that beautiful," he says.

"Where did you go to high school?" Hayes asks the girl.

"Manassas."

"Man—I went to Manassas. When did you graduate?"

She looks away and does not answer.

"Haven't you graduated? How old are you?"

The girl mumbles something.

"What?"

"Sixteen," she whispers.

"Sixteen? A voice like that at sixteen? Old Manassas. Damn, you can't beat it." Hayes begins singing the Manassas Alma Mater. Porter joins in. They get up and start to dance. Porter puts on a pair of long, black gloves, and she joins him, singing and dancing. They all whirl around the room, as the man with the moustache closes his eyes and smiles.

I'm a Soul Man

Got what I got the hard way

And I'll make you know each and every
day

Be sure honey, you don't lose it cause you ain't seen nothin' yet

I'm a Soul Man. . . ."*

The Porter and Hayes song had just become the nation's No. 1 hit, earning a gold record for Sam and Dave, who were singing it in Memphis that Saturday night. With Carla Thomas, they were to star in the Goodwill Revue, a charity concert sponsored annually by radio station WDIA. In 1948, WDIA, the nation's first station with programming exclusively for Negroes, and it now describes itself as "50,000 Watts of Soul Power."

The Mid-South Coliseum was filled to near its capacity of 13,000 for the opening acts, but the audience did not come to life until the appearance of a great element in the history of soul music—Muddy Waters. Wearing an iridescent blue-green silk suit, huge green-and-white jeweled cuff links, and matching pinky diamonds, Muddy walked onstage, sang the opening bars of one of his earliest recordings, and was greeted by a roar of welcoming applause.

I got a black cat's bone, I got a mojo too.

I'm John the Conqueror, I'm gonna mess with you.

I'm gonna make you pretty girls lead me by the hand.

Then the world will know I'm the hoochie coochie man. . . ."

The loudspeaker system crackled and sputtered while Muddy was on, but everyone knew the words. During the performance of the next singer, Bobby "Blue" Bland, the first four rows to the right of the stage began to sway together and to sing or hum along with the music—long-held notes in four-part harmony—even anticipating the chord changes. The four rows were filled with the Teen Town Singers, a group of about six talented youngsters from high schools and junior colleges in the Memphis area, some of whom each year are given scholarships from Goodwill Revue revenues.

When Carla Thomas was 18, she was a Teen Town Singer. That year she wrote and recorded a song called Gee Whiz, which made the Top 10 and made her a star. She has seldom been without a hit since, and now as a mature artist she is known as the "Queen of the Memphis Sound."

Her material has matured with her, but her first song at the Revue went back about six years ago. She stepped into a pink spot, a big, beautiful brown girl, wearing a white brocade dress covered in pearls and sequins, and sang one of her early successes, called B-A-B. The Teen Town Singers sang along on every note, inspired by the knowledge that if they didn't they might become Royalty of Soul.

Then Carla's father, Rufus Thomas, a WDIA disc jockey with several record successes of his own hit, Walking the Dog, created one of the dance crazes of the early '60s, joined her for a duet, and the atmosphere was that of a family reunion. Rufus and Carla sang 'Cause I Love You, the first song Carla ever recorded, and the first hit, however small, to come out of the Stax/Volt studios. The audience loved it, clapping on the afterbeat, and they might not have allowed them to leave the stage if Sam and Dave had not been scheduled to appear next.

Sam Moore and Dave Prater, along with Carla and the other Stax artists, had taken Soul around the world, and now they were bringing it back as No. 1, the world's most popular music. Their singing combines all the history of soul music—blues, rhythm. "They'll go to church on you in a minute," a Stax executive has said, and it is an apt description of what they did at the Revue.

With their band, in black pants and turquoise balloon-sleeved shirts, strutted across the stage behind them, Sam and Dave, dressed all in white, singing, dancing, shouting, exhorting the congregation like old-fashioned preachers, created a sustained frenzy of near-religious ecstasy. "Now doggone it, I just want you to do what you want to do." "Put your hands together and give me that old soul clapping." "Little louder." "Little bit louder." "Do you like it?" "Well, do you like it?" "I said, 'Do you like it?' "Well, then, let me hear you say, Yeah!"

It was nearly midnight when, with their coats off, shirts open and wringing wet, they got around to the song that seemed to say it all, for soul music's past, present and future:

"So honey, don't you fret 'Cause you ain't seen nothin' yet I'm a Soul Man. . . ."