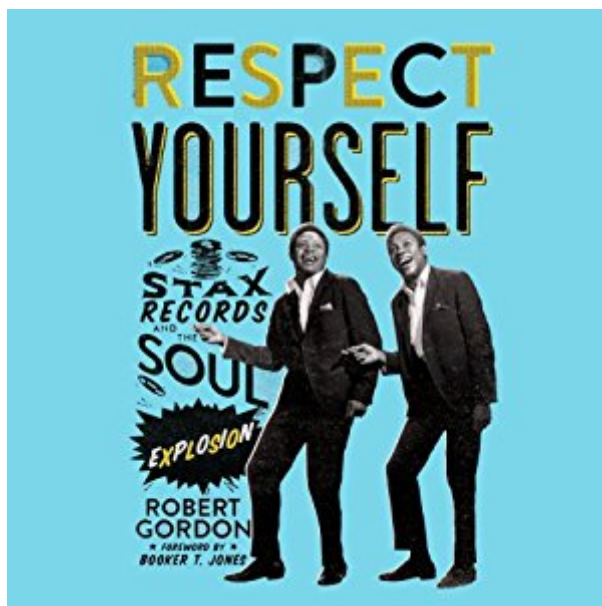


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Respect Yourself: Stax Records And The Soul Explosion



Synopsis

The story of Stax Records unfolds like a Greek tragedy. A white brother and sister build a record company that becomes a monument to racial harmony in 1960's segregated south Memphis. Their success is startling, and Stax soon defines an international sound. Then, after losses both business and personal, the siblings part, and the brother allies with a visionary African-American partner. Under integrated leadership, Stax explodes as a national player until, Icarus-like, they fall from great heights to a tragic demise. Everything is lost, and the sanctuary that flourished is ripped from the ground. A generation later, Stax is rebuilt brick by brick to once again bring music and opportunity to the people of Memphis. Set in the world of 1960s and '70s soul music, *Respect Yourself* is a story of epic heroes in a shady industry. It's about music and musicians - Isaac Hayes, Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, Wilson Pickett, the Staple Singers, and Booker T. and the M.G.'s, Stax's interracial house band. It's about a small independent company's struggle to survive in a business world of burgeoning conglomerates. And always at the center of the story is Memphis, Tennessee, an explosive city struggling through heated, divisive years. Told by one of our leading music chroniclers, *Respect Yourself* brings to life this treasured cultural institution and the city that created it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Love Memphis music? Love R&B from the 60s? Stop what you are doing and buy this book! This book is the definitive history of Stax, the Memphis recording studio that made Issac Hayes, Otis

Redding and others. It is truly fascinating and I couldn't recommend this book higher if you have interest in those subjects. From the early music to Rufus and Carla Thomas, to Steve Cropper, the Bar Kays, Booker T and the MGs, it's all here. But the highlight has to be the guitar player who came in with his chauffeur/gofer who begged to sing one song even after the band left. But once he started singing, WOW! They quickly reconvened and a SUPERSTAR WAS BORN! Read this to find out who it was. And how did Issac Hayes start and how did he become a singer and what was his relevance to the Stax history? And of course, the horrible plane crash that changed the face of music. Interested on the business side? Two buyouts, unread contracts that come back to harm you and other business stories are all here. If you are a music historian or love Memphis or R&B music, BUY AND READ! The first half of the book literally jumps off the page.

Gordon tells the remarkable story of the rise and fall of the venerable Stax label in a way that one suspects that only a Memphian like him can. From a tiny studio fronted by a record store to the fifth largest black-owned business in America, Stax produced a grittier, more "real" alternative to the pop-oriented African American music coming from Motown in the Sixties and early Seventies -- a veritable "soul explosion," as Gordon puts it. His tale is based on interviews with the label's owners, brother and sister Jim Stewart and Estelle "Miz Axton" Axton, its studio musicians (The MGs), producers, and administrative staff, and most of its star artists, such as Carla and Rufus Thomas, Isaac Hayes, William Bell, and Mavis Staples. The singer who put Stax squarely in the public's consciousness was, of course, Otis Redding, to whom devotes many touching, informative, and even funny pages. Gordon argues that Stax essentially grew faster than its leaders, namely Al Bell, could manage. Bell's vision of making Stax a major multimedia force drove the company to it heights, but his lack of control over the millions Stax made sank the enterprise even more quickly than it grew. Less than a decade after Redding's landmark performance at the Monterey Pop Festival, Stax had issued its last single and fell into bankruptcy, leaving in its wake the broken lives of dozens of employees as well as one hell of a musical legacy.

We passed on Graceland and went straight to the Stax Museum of American Soul Music. It was a moving and informative experience, and I came away with a naive, romantic notion of a happy place where hometown geniuses gathered in an atmosphere of creative joy and color-blindness. After reading "Respect Yourself", I now know that it was that kind of a place, but that there was so much more to the story. Gordon presents an engaging tale of the place and the players, with a degree of detail that makes you think that he was there, making notes on everything that happened. The "rest

of the story" is inspiring, depressing, disgusting, and ultimately forgiving. The achievements were crazy high and the failures tragically low. I found it a gripping read, and as others have noted, learned a lot about the music business. There are so many stories about how the hits happened. The one that stands out for me is how David Porter and Isaac Hayes came up with "Hold on, I'm Coming" - it's hysterical.

I've seen bits and pieces of the Stax documentary, so downloading this book onto my Kindle was a must. One of the very best books I have ever read about the music business. Robert Gordon had some great interview sessions with the Stax management and session players. You're back in the 1960's with all the politics going on with Civil Rights and Southern racism. At Stax, white and black musicians and executives worked well together where the color of one's skin wasn't an issue. It was all about the music and the stories they tell about working with each other and making songs from simple ideas into major hits is educational and entertaining to the reader. The demise of Stax is sad, unfortunate, but perhaps unavoidable. Books such as this one could be used in history classes about the advent of popular music and soul music from the latter part of the 50's, through the tumultuous 60's, and into the mid 1970's. Just a great, great, read.

Robert Gordon's objective history of STAX Records is both a moral tale of fleeting success in the cut throat US recording industry and an unflinching look at Memphis in the 1950's through the 1970's. It's a fascinating look at the emerging power of media conglomerates, but more importantly, it is wonderful way to acquaint yourself with some of the most influential soul and blues music personalities of the era. Jim and Estelle Stewart and Al Bell (owners of STAX) provided us with some of the most enduring music of our time including Otis Redding, Isaac Hayes, Booker T and the MG's, Carla and Rufus Thomas and hundreds more. For readers looking for more understanding of racism in the USA - this book reveals a portrait of a Memphis that this reader had never known - how a city so steeped in wonderful music tradition could be one of the centers of divisive racism in our country. For lovers of soul and blues music, the book is crammed with trivia, biographical information and anecdotes about all kinds of performers, producers, record companies, etc. While full of information, this book is an extremely relaxed read - I'd highly recommend it for music crazed high school students as well as adult readers.

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