

Yikes—a resourceful and careful Posse member found that I had provided the same URL twice for the two versions of “Take me to the River.” A thanks and hat tip to them. (I keep all members anonymous, to protect the guilty or not-yet-proven-guilty, so you will write in and correct the record or quarrel with me, or agree.)

This painful Department-of-Clarification correction also gives me a chance to note a great and related piece from the NY Times: Eric Hynes’s story, Riffs on the Rock Documentary, showing several new movies about our beloved music soon to be in fine theaters everywhere: <http://nyti.ms/1qTsr1b>. I also note that after the MFA-H show, there was a great discussion with several of the principals involved in the project. I always love to hear from those in movies who attend screenings and elaborate and clarify. They deserve our thanks and praise, as do those film curators who keep showing these great movies.

Chagrined in Houston,

Michael

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGD8aQ2GKr0> (Al Green version)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGD8aQ2GKr0> (Talking Heads version) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ar2VHW1i2w> CORRECTED

Last night, Tina and I went to a sold-out show at the Museum of Fine Arts-Houston to see “Take Me to the River,” a Martin Shore film that I had heard about since it killed at the SxSW film festival

a few months ago. It is a story about Memphis Music—Stax, Hi, Ardent, Sun, and other recording studios—and the extraordinary array of talent that was either from Memphis or that moved there (and then later, many moved North to Chicago). Stax and Hi, of course, were the home to a core of black artists (and later, white musicians such as Steve Cropper and Duck Dunn) such as Al Green, Otis Redding, Isaac Hayes, the Staple Singers, Willie Mitchell, Rufus and Carla Thomas, Syl Johnson, Luther Ingram, Wilson Pickett, Booker T. and the MGs, Sam & Dave, and hundreds of others, including the Memphis Horns. In many respects, when you loop back to the country/rockabilly Elvis and Sun Studio days (Roy Orbison, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, and many others), it could easily be argued that Memphis was the convergence of and home to Rock and Roll, Country, Gospel, Soul, and Blues music traditions, or residence, if not domicile of all these. It is to soul and r&b music what Nashville is to country music today.

“Take Me to the River” is one of the most important rock and roll films ever made, not for its documentary or live music portions, although there are those, but for the hands-on experience of the blues and rock and soul studio recording event that was informally put together by the film and music team: Otis Clay, William Bell, Mavis Staples, Bobbie (“Blue”) Bland, and dozens more of the originals who recorded there, jamming with Terrence Howard, Snoop Dogg, Lil P-Nut, The North Mississippi All-Stars, Yo Gotti, and a number of others. The ease with which the musicians slipped in and out of blues and rap was among the most interesting of the many fascinating dimensions. For example, there is a scene where Bobbie Bland (in a wheelchair, and dead within months of the event) shows the 12 year old rapper Benjamin Flores, Jr., a/k/a Lil’ P-Nut how to vary his sound between the diaphragm and his throat; you may recall that Lil P-Nut was Atticus the Penguin rapper in the movie “Happy Feet Two,” if you have kids or nieces,

as I do. Uncle Michael is the coolest Uncle, so I am told. (Easy touch is more like it....) All throughout, one artist was showing another how to play slide on the guitar, how to hit the note, how to transcribe the music, etc. It included several local high school kids who were wicked talents, and this amazing group of old guys who were anxious to pass on their lore and to be recognized by each other.

My favorite of all the songs—most of them covers of Stax music, but not all, was Bobbie “Blue” Bland and rapper Yo Gotti singing the sublime Bill Withers song "Ain't No Sunshine." This song is great, almost no matter who sings it and in what style—see the improbable cover by Keith Urban and Guy Sebastian <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gF-8acjiik> , and there is a new Best of Bill Withers cd at his website, celebrating his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday: <http://www.billwithers.com/> . I was immediately reminded by several Posse readers that I left him out of my earlier list of greats who disappeared, only to resurface in great form. I left out several, including the most prominent, Brian Wilson, and I am sure there are others.

The tour guide parts of the movie showed the original studios, as well as information about musical Memphis, Dr. King’s murder, and other archival photos. (Stax Studio itself deteriorated and was rebuilt as the Stax Museum of American Soul Music—clearly a necessary stop on the rock and roll Hajj pilgrimage.) I kept expecting Al Green to show up, given the title of the movie and his soulful records and crossover appeal to many audiences, but he only appeared in some concert footage and album covers. It is a slight misdirection, but forgivable. “Take Me to the River,” written by Al Green and Mabon “Teenie” Hodges (of The Hodges Brothers), never was actually released as a single by Rev. Green, but it is part of his deep playbook. Ironically, it was only released by Hi Records by Syl Johnson, who was part of the in-house talent, and who was backed by the same house musicians as was Green,

on his album version. It was also famously covered by The Talking Heads and many dozens more.

Here is the listing of all the songs in the movie score soundtrack. This is gold, and the DNA of rock and roll. It is on Amazon.com and elsewhere. I have ordered a copy, which cannot get here soon enough. Go and see this great movie, and if it ever plays with its cousin, "Muscle Shoals" (starring The Swanpers), I will be there for that double feature, you can be sure.

1. "Ain't No Sunshine" - Bobby "Blue" Bland featuring Yo Gotti
2. "Wish I Had Answered" - Mavis Staples with North Mississippi All-Stars
3. "Be Like Me" - Bar Kays featuring 8Ball and MJG
4. "Push and Pull" - Bobby Rush featuring Frayser Boy
5. "Supposed to Be" - Booker T. with North Mississippi All-Stars, featuring Al Kapone
6. "Trying to Live My Life Without You" - Otis Clay featuring P-Nut
7. "I've Been Boked" - Mavis Staples with North Mississippi All-Stars
8. "I Forgot to Be Your Lover" - William Bell with Stax Music Academy, and featuring Snoop Dogg
9. "If I Should Have Bad Luck" - Charlie Musselwhite with the City Champs
10. "Knock On Wood" - William Bell with Stax Music Academy
11. "Henpecked" - Bobby Rush featuring Frayser Boy
12. "Walk Away" - Terrence Howard with Hi Rhythm Section

Great rock and roll movies like this just support our habit—as they should. Life just does not get better than this,

Michael