

SAM COOKE

PORTRAIT OF A LEGEND 1951-1964



Sam Cooke: Portrait of a Legend

BY PETER GURALNICK

Sam Cooke was constantly writing. On napkins. In the car. In hotel rooms and, later, in a notebook he kept, filled with his sketches as well as his lyrics. When he was still with the Soul Stirrers, his friend and fellow gospel singer, J.W. Alexander, manager of the Pilgrim Travelers, bought him a book on songwriting, and he absorbed its lessons: the function of verse and chorus, how to construct a bridge, above all the importance of simplicity — the key to a good song, he always insisted, was to write a melody that even little children could hum.

At first he used the songs he was writing as a kind of social introduction. “We’d have a roomful of people sometimes,” said Soul Stirrers guitarist LeRoy Crume, “he’d get on my guitar and I’d sing back-up, and we’d sing all those songs to the ladies, try them out and see if they were acceptable. And for the most part they were!”

Of the thirty songs on this album Sam wrote or co-wrote twenty-four, and each bears his unmistakable stamp. What makes them so enduring for all of their evident simplicity is not just Sam’s inimitable singing style (“Sam Cooke was the best singer who ever lived, no contest,” said Atlantic Records vice president Jerry Wexler, who tried desperately to sign him at two different junctures in his career. “When I listen to him, I still can’t believe the things that he did”) but the emotion and craft he put into their composition. To Sam it wasn’t worth

singing a song if you didn't believe it. But, just as important, you had to present it in such a way that it mimicked everyday speech.

He took his lesson from no less unlikely a source than Louis Armstrong ("Don't listen to the voice, listen to the phrasing," he told his protégé, Bobby Womack) and built his songs entirely around a conversational style. "You just talk the story," he told Bobby. "That's how you get people to come to you — because it's not like a song, it's like two people rapping, only with a melody attached. But then when you come to the hook ('That's the sound of the men working on the chain gang'), then you're free, everybody's gonna sing that part, you want to get *everybody* to sing along."

That's exactly what Sam did. You can hear the invitation in virtually every song on this collection. See if you can resist. Just try not to sing along.

TOUCH THE HEM OF HIS GARMENT

This is Sam telling a Bible story, as he had learned to do from his preacher father, and as he would do all his life. "He could make the Bible come alive," said Ann Taylor, a sickly five year old when her father, Reverend Goldie Thompson, first started bringing the Soul Stirrers, with their new singer, Sam Cooke, to St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1951. In the case of this 1956 song the Stirrers' new a&r man, Bumps Blackwell, saw evidence of Sam's creative gift and storytelling abilities at first hand. He was riding to the session with the group in their car when it became evident that Sam, at this point the Stirrers' principal composer, was not fully prepared. "Well, hand me the Bible," Sam said, when Stirrers' manager S.R. Crain expressed his concern. "He was skipping over it and skimming through it," Bumps said, "and then he said, 'I got one. Here it is right here.'" And right there, before Bumps' eyes, he composed this song.

LOVABLE

In June of 1956 Sam Cooke wrote to Art Rupe, owner of the Specialty label, for which the Soul Stirrers recorded:

“A fellow I’ve been knowing for quite a while asked me if I would consider recording some popular ballads for one of the major recording companies...I told him yes...But it’s my understanding that I would have to get permission from you before I went through with the deal. I’m planning on doing the recordings under another name....Awaiting your immediate reply.”

The friend was Newark DJ Bill Cook, also manager of twenty-seven-year-old Roy Hamilton, the great balladeer who had announced his retirement due to illness just weeks earlier. Art Rupe replied that of course he would be interested in seeing Sam record some secular numbers but that Specialty would be the label. In December Sam went into Cosimo Matassa’s studio in New Orleans and, under Specialty a&r director Bumps Blackwell’s supervision, recorded “Lovable,” a direct translation of “Wonderful,” one of his biggest recent gospel hits. Because of continued misgivings about the gospel audience’s reaction, the record was indeed issued under a different name — but not all that different, as it came out credited to “Dale” Cook. With Sam’s unmistakable voice and delivery, not to mention the unmistakable source of the song, the change didn’t exactly fool anyone, and the consternation that Sam’s recording caused throughout the gospel world may very well have helped him in his decision to make a clean break and go pop just four months later.

YOU SEND ME

Sam quit the Soul Stirrers in May of 1957 and was in the midst of this June 1 session when Specialty owner Art Rupe walked in and brought the session to a screaming halt. What Rupe objected to, vociferously, was Sam and producer Bumps Blackwell's decision to use a clearly white chorus and a deracinated sound rather than the r&b feel Rupe had assumed they would be aiming for in Sam's first explicitly acknowledged pop release. The ultimate result was Rupe handing over both the tapes of the session and Sam's contract in exchange for any past or future royalties owed to Bumps. When "You Send Me" came out three months later on the brand-new Keen label, it quickly shot to #1, going on to sell almost two million copies and causing Art Rupe to rush-release a follow-up record of his own, "I'll Come Running Back to You," from the New Orleans (the "Lovable" session) tapes Sam had left behind.

ONLY SIXTEEN

The inspiration for this song was the sixteenth birthday of Lou Rawls' stepsister, Eunice. It was intended originally for a teenage actor named Steve Rowland, a friend of Ricky Nelson's, who used to hang around the Keen studio. His father was a B-movie director, "and we just liked him," Sam's business partner, J.W. Alexander, said, "and he asked Sam to write this song. Sam used the bridge from [an earlier song he had recorded], 'Little Things You Do,' and we cut a tape and gave it to Steve, but his producer didn't like the song, and it broke Steve's heart. So Sam recorded it himself."

(I LOVE YOU) FOR SENTIMENTAL REASONS

Released as a follow-up to the huge success of “You Send Me,” this 1946 Nat “King” Cole hit was recorded at Sam’s first actual Keen session, on August 23, 1957 (the label didn’t really exist until then), just a few days before copies of Sam’s debut single were shipped. Nat “King” Cole, along with the Ink Spots’ Bill Kenny, was one of Sam’s earliest ballad-singing models, and here he recreates Nat’s song with all of his own characteristic vocal flourishes and the signature yodel with which he had already put his own unique stamp on gospel music.

JUST FOR YOU

Sam had joined with J.W. Alexander in a song publishing partnership in early 1959. By March he was writing like crazy for their new venture (it was named Kags after their friend Lou Rawls’ stepfather, “Keg”), and “Just For You” was one of a number of new songs (“When a Boy Falls in Love,” “I’ll Always Be in Love With You,” and “Cupid” were some of the others) that he and J.W. were demoing and pitching to other singers every chance they got. By the summer of 1959 Sam had reached a parting of the ways with Keen Records and went into the studio with tapes of some of the demos he had previously recorded with the intention of creating a record of his own. “Just For You” was the song he concentrated on, adding three vocal overdubs to produce a bright, bouncy, effervescent surface that perfectly matched the lilting Latin rhythms he had favored since the previous summer. “Just For You” was ultimately released two years later on Sam and J.W.’s SAR Records (always intended as a label for other artists, not for Sam) — and then only “for a minute,” solely to induce Sam’s new label, RCA, to buy up his Keen masters, which he had acquired in a lawsuit over unpaid royalties. The strategy worked, as reviews in *Billboard* and *Cash Box* prompted RCA to make an immediate offer, and the record did not have a full-scale release until 1986, more than twenty-five years after it had first been recorded.

WIN YOUR LOVE FOR ME

One of Sam's first and most successful experimentations with the Latin rhythms that he and Bumps Blackwell thought could be the next big thing. Recorded in June of 1958, "Win Your Love For Me" represented something of a songwriting breakthrough for Sam, departing for the first time from the "love-song" format of his earlier compositions, and with a chorus that falls in behind him with the kind of quiet quartet sound that had been previously missing from his pop numbers. Like "Just For You," it is the kind of easy, effortless, almost indefinable performance that puts one in mind of some of his most graceful (though not his most intense) gospel recordings.

EVERYBODY LOVES TO CHA CHA CHA

Another of Sam's increasingly familiar Latin numbers. This one stemmed from a Christmas 1958 party at Lou Rawls' stepfather's house. At one point in the evening everyone was doing the cha cha, even the little kids, and Sam was watching his five-year-old daughter, Linda, when all of a sudden one of the kids called out, "Everybody, cha cha cha!" They were all just having a good time, said J.W. Alexander, and Sam grabbed a piece of paper and set the lyrics down while everybody else was dancing. When he went into the studio the week after New Year's, he laid it down just like that. "I think the secret is really observation," he told Dick Clark years later about the key to all of his successful hit songs. If you observed what was going on and were in tune with "the times of your day, I think you can always write something that people will understand."

I'LL COME RUNNING BACK TO YOU

Bill Cook, acting as Sam's manager, was the author of this song, originally recorded with a barebones rhythm section at the same New Orleans session from which "Lovable" emerged. After "You Send Me" had hit on Keen, Specialty owner Art Rupe, realizing the goldmine he had lost, instructed arranger René Hall to do his best to duplicate the sound of Sam's #1 smash, overdubbing some of the same instrumentation and background singers. It went on to become one of Sam's biggest sellers.

YOU WERE MADE FOR ME

One of Sam's earliest and most enduring compositions. He originally recorded it in New Orleans in December of 1956, then demoed it for Bumps, just playing guitar by himself, some five months later, sang it once again at the session that produced "You Send Me," and finally recorded this version for Keen in November of 1957. Five years later, when asked in an interview by his friend, the DJ Magnificent Montague, to name his favorite song, he cited this one and quoted with feeling from its overtly romantic lyrics ("A fish was made to swim in the ocean/A boat was made to sail on the sea/But sure as there are stars above/You were made for me") while suggesting to Montague that he hadn't changed that much over the years, his conception had simply deepened.

SAD MOOD

Originally recorded at Sam's second singles session for RCA in April of 1960, this marked a significant advance, if only because Sam's producers, cousins Hugo Peretti and Luigi Creatore, for the first time fully recognized him at this point as a songwriter. The song's subject matter marked it as something of a departure, too (you

might say it was “light blues”), but the initial recording didn’t work, and when Sam re-recorded it in October, once again at the RCA studios in New York, there was still something missing. He had established a way of working with arranger René Hall out on the Coast, and even though Sammy Lowe’s string arrangements were not all that different from some of René’s, the song still did not say *Sam Cooke* in the way that some of his earlier Keen hits indelibly, if indefinably, had.

CUPID

“Cupid” definitely did have that stamp — no one but Sam Cooke could have made this record, in any one of its particulars, and not coincidentally it stemmed from his first RCA session in Los Angeles. Only one of Sam’s producers was present (Hugo didn’t fly), and Luigi Creatore, tried “an old yogi trick” he had learned in his study of yoga, where “you lie down, and you think of nothing, and then you imagine the session and how well it’s going and how everyone’s enjoying it a lot.” Luigi’s “yogi trick” seems to have worked — that’s the way the session sounds, easy, relaxed, Sam is finally home again. But what makes the session work, of course, are Sam’s songs, in particular this one with its easy conversational style (“Now, Cupid, I don’t mean to bother you, but I’m in distress”), intricate simplicity, and the hint of melancholy it offered in the muted sound of a French horn set against jaunty Caribbean rhythms. For trivia specialists, this record also represents the debut of the Simms Twins (Bobby and Kenny) on record. Sam and J.W. had recently signed them to the SAR label, and they offer the rather subdued background on the chorus, but perhaps just as significantly they are also the sound of the arrow in flight, with Kenny mimicking its whoosh as it leaves the bow, Bobby the thwack when it reaches its target.

(WHAT A) WONDERFUL WORLD

One of the most transcendent of Sam's romantic classics, "Wonderful World" started out as a Lou Adler-Herb Alpert composition. It had something to do, says Adler, with the idea that love — and love alone — could make the world a wonderful place. Not even Lou thought it was one of their better songs, "but Sam kept coming back to it. His idea — since it was all about reading and books and what you didn't have to do [to find love] was to take it more towards school, and that's how it evolved." They recorded it almost accidentally in the Keen studio, just off the cuff, and that may be part of what gives it so much of its charm. No one even thought of releasing it until a year later, after Sam had left the label for RCA. But like so many of Sam's best compositions, the simplest elements coalesced in such a way as to form a whole much greater (and more memorable) than the sum of its parts. "Sam brought everything to it," said Lou Adler. "I don't know what it would have been if he didn't get involved, but what it became was because of him."

CHAIN GANG

"We were driving along the highway," said Sam's older brother, Charles, who served as his driver and valet, "and we saw these people working on a chain gang on the side of the road. They asked us, 'You got any cigarettes?' So we gave them the cigarettes we had and drove down the road and bought five or six cartons more. I asked the guard if it was all right to give them the cigarettes, and they thanked us, and that was it. And Sam said, 'Man, that's a good song right there.' And just started singing it right on the spot." He originally tried to persuade Charles to record it, but by the time of his first RCA session, in January of 1960,

he had decided to do it himself. It had become by then a kind of meditation on longing — it is, really, a love song, however unconventional its source — set once again to a Latin beat. He was unable to fully achieve the kind of vocal effect he was aiming for at that first session, probably, according to coproducer Luigi Creatore, because he and his cousin, Hugo, didn't know Sam well enough yet to bring out the best in him. Three months later Sam came into the studio again and did three quick vocal overdubs, each gaining in assurance and relaxation, with the principal difference showing up in the fade, where all of Sam's vocal improvisation comes into play and the subtle balance of sound and meaning is something which can be neither calculated nor denied.

SUMMERTIME

Sam's original version of "Summertime," from the same session that marked his departure from the Specialty label, was intended to be the A-side of his first Keen single, with "You Send Me" the B-side. Sam took a decidedly unconventional approach to the Gershwin standard, and in fact guitarist Clif White, who first joined him on this session and remained with him for the rest of his life, took decided exception to Sam's interpretation of the song. Clif, a trained musician who had spent years on the road with the Mills Brothers, played it the way it was written, "and Sam said, 'No, man, you're playing the wrong chord.' Well, I don't *play* no wrong chords, particularly to a song like that," said Clif. So he handed the guitar to Sam, who played it "with the harmony entirely reversed, but after a while I began to hear what he was doing." This is a later version of the song and represents yet another variation by Sam, somewhere between a lonesome blues and an elegant spiritual.

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LITTLE RED ROOSTER

Sam was more and more drawn to the blues in the last year or two of his life. He tried to get his brother L.C., a SAR recording artist, to cut this Howlin' Wolf number in the revamped form that he had given it, but when L.C. showed no interest ("I told him, 'I ain't no fucking blues singer'") Sam recorded it himself. It was part of an album, *Night Beat*, that was one of Sam's crowning studio achievements and served as a kind of tribute to the music of blues pianist Charles Brown, a considerable influence on Sam and the direct inspiration for "Bring It On Home to Me." Featured on organ is sixteen-year-old Billy Preston, who had recently signed with Sam's SAR label.

BRING IT ON HOME TO ME

Sam was out on tour when he wrote "Bring it on Home to Me" in the spring of 1962. It was based on Charles Brown's "I Want To Go Home," which was in turn based on a familiar spiritual, and Sam offered it to his friend, fellow singer Dee Clark, one of the featured performers on the show. But Clark, who had already recorded several other songs of Sam's, turned it down, and Sam scheduled a session of his own out on the Coast. "Bring It On Home to Me" was very different from anything Sam had recorded for Keen or RCA to date. It represented for the first time an explicit bow to his gospel roots ("[He] felt that he needed more weight, that that light shit wouldn't sustain him," said J.W. Alexander), and after experimenting with a chorus made up of Alexander, Lou Rawls, and Fred Smith on the first take, he selected Lou Rawls alone to provide the echoing second voice in a call-and-response pattern as old as anything in the African-American musical tradition.

NOTHING CAN CHANGE THIS LOVE

One of Sam's deepest ballads, not so much because of the words as for the feeling that the singing imparts to them. Sam recorded this in a completely different "doo wop" version six months earlier, but here he transforms it into a lushly orchestrated, finely calibrated expression of belief in apple pie, the American dream, and romantic love that suggests a picture-postcard view, with only the singer's tone to suggest the layers of irony, yearning, and knowledge underpinning its heartfelt declarations.

SUGAR DUMPLING

Written in nominal tribute to Sugar Hall, the wife of Sam's longtime arranger, René, this was Sam's second version of the song, and with an arrangement by Jimmie Haskell, entirely different from the more conventionally orchestrated original. Sam was obviously very fond of the number — not only did he record it twice himself, but he cut it on the Valentinos as well — though it appears to be more about the same mythic "W-O-M-A-N" that Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller would write about for Peggy Lee than any one reality-based female. "Whenever I tell her, 'Honey I'm hungry,'" Sam sang with good-natured braggadocio, "Now go and fix me something to eat/This girl rushes into the kitchen/And fixes me a dinner/With seven different kinds of meat." On the other hand Sam's brother L.C. insists that "Sam did things exactly the way that he wanted to. He told me, 'You see the way I live today? I want to live like this all my life.' And he had four or five different kinds of meat at the table. That's just the way he was!" So who knows in the end where legend and reality intersect?

AIN'T THAT GOOD NEWS

"Ain't That Good News" was a direct translation of the gospel standard, "Good News," most recently familiar in the Staple Singers' 1959 version. The deceptively simple approach that Sam took to its translation was complicated, though, by the introduction of a jangling banjo lead, perhaps suggested by René Hall (who had made his professional debut playing tenor banjo with Papa Célestin's Orchestra in New Orleans in the early '30s), playful congas, and a horn chart that pushed hard against the banjo's country flavor. But it was Sam's vocal, as always, that dominated, introducing an almost subliminal note of wistful melancholy into the uptempo approach and otherwise cheerful message.

MEET ME AT MARY'S PLACE

"Meet Me at Mary's Place" was a variation on a number Sam had written for Johnnie Morissette in 1962 to take advantage of the Twist craze ("Meet Me at the Twistin' Place" was one of the SAR label's first big hits). For this January 1964 version Sam got his old group, the Soul Stirrers, to sing back-up, overcoming their reservations about appearing on a pop session by arguing that since he was trying to break their gospel songs in the pop marketplace, why shouldn't they help him restore some of the gospel feel to *his* music? While the song can certainly stand on its own as a celebration of shared good times, it was in fact written in explicit tribute to gospel fan and promoter Mary Trapp in Charlotte, North Carolina, and offers an affectionate salute not just to a single individual but to a fondly recollected era.

TWISTIN' THE NIGHT AWAY

Another example of Sam's inspired reportorial skills. The Twist had been all the rage for well over a year in late 1961 when it suddenly caught on with high socie-

ty at New York City's Peppermint Lounge, and for the second time Chubby Checker had a #1 pop hit with the same rendition of Hank Ballard's tune. Sam happened to be watching a TV show one day featuring scenes from the Peppermint Lounge with "old ladies dressed in diamonds twisting away," as he told a British reporter, and he "switched the set off, sat down, and wrote [the song] straight off." Like so many of his "story" songs, it was based almost entirely on description, but for all of its apparent straightforwardness, it was so perfectly matched in metre, melody, and rhyme as to be instantly memorable and, once heard, virtually unforgettable.

SHAKE

Sam got the inspiration for this uncharacteristically hard-driving dance number (Otis Redding picked it up three years later) from Bobby Freeman's "C'mon and Swim," which you can hear echoed in Bobby Womack's guitar outro. Cut at Sam's last session in November 1964, less than a month before his death, it marked a real departure for his music, indicating his belief that r&b (and popular music in general) was heading in a direction that more and more was "almost all sound. It used to be that sound brought attention to the lyric," he explained — but what you needed to do now was to find sounds that could "emotionally move" an audience, "inject [the kind of] fervor that makes people want to dance."

TENNESSEE WALTZ

A visible demonstration of Sam's fondness for country music (he even wrote a country song or two). Sam took the Patti Page classic in a direction, as he says on his *Live at the Copa* album, that Patti Page would scarcely recognize. For one thing it is no longer a waltz, with a driving beat reminiscent of Roy Hamilton's

"You Can Have Her" and gospel underpinnings that give this otherwise tragic tale of love gone wrong an unexpectedly cheerful tone. Sam rose to the vocal challenge of the chorus ("I never thought he was going to make that note," Soul Stirrers guitarist LeRoy Crume, who was standing right in front of him, wryly observed. "He let out a little laugh when he did") with all of his customary élan.

ANOTHER SATURDAY NIGHT

Sam wrote this on his sole English tour in the fall of 1962 almost as a kind of goof. "We were staying in the Royal Maharajah Suite at the Mayfair Hotel," said J.W., "and they wouldn't let us have any female guests. So Sam picked up his guitar and started strumming, 'Here it is another Saturday night/And I ain't got nobody/I got some money 'cause I just got paid/How I wish I had someone to talk to/I'm in an awful way.'" But nobody should feel sorry for Sam. He and J.W. managed to maintain an active social life ("You know, it was like a joke," said J.W., who arranged to switch to a less stuffy hotel right away). This was, like so many of Sam's songs, an exercise in *imagination*. Once again the clipped tone of the verses and the almost irresistible pull of the singalong chorus created a hit song in both the pop and r&b markets.

GOOD TIMES

This comes from the same December 1963 session as "Ain't That Good News," the first of two sessions (held one month apart) that produced Sam's first album under his new Allen Klein-negotiated RCA contract (technically, the contract was with Tracey, a holding and manufacturing company set up for Sam), guaranteeing him not only half a million dollars but total artistic control. "Good Times" provides an example of the kind of perfectionism that Sam brought to even his simplest and most transparent compositions. Here Sam was clearly inspired by

Louis Jordan's anthemic "Let the Good Times Roll" but took a full twenty-five takes over the course of two days to achieve that same good feeling, layering in marimbas, congas, and rhythm banjo as he became more and more confident of the feel that he wanted for the song. Then he added four more takes of vocal overdubs to create a number that, like "Having a Party," explicitly invited the listener not only to join in the fun but to sing along.

HAVING A PARTY

"Having a Party" was the inevitable close of Sam's live show from the time that he first recorded it at the same 1962 session as "Bring It On Home to Me." It *sounds* like a party, as you hear Lou Rawls, Fred Smith, and J.W. all joining in on the chorus and adding handclaps to boost the party atmosphere. "'Having a Party' was *the* song," said Sam's drummer, June Gardner. "All the other acts would be out on stage, and we'd be throwing confetti, and everybody be having a jolly good time." The entire audience would be singing along, and all the other performers, too. "We're having a party/Dancing to the music/Played by the DJ/ON THE RA-DI-O," the voices would swell, with Sam's rising above all the others and exhorting them to "Keep on having that party" as the curtain came down. "Keep on having that party," he would call out over and over again. "No matter where you're at, remember, I told you, keep on having that party." Through his music, he declares, he will continue to be with them — it's as close to eternity, in their common but unvoiced understanding, as they will be able to come.

THAT'S WHERE IT'S AT

A minor hit for the Simms Twins in 1963, Sam recorded his own variation on his and J.W.'s composition in this slower-paced, more stately, almost mournful version that evokes all of the flavor, and all of the soul, of the gospel world he had

come out of. It is a beautiful performance that hints at a fatalism and profundity which can scarcely be borne out by the words but is conveyed nonetheless by tone, phrasing, and the melancholy of that ever-present sixth chord, along with Sam's penchant for always suggesting a deepening subtext.

A CHANGE IS GONNA COME

Sam's magnum opus. It clearly stemmed from a confluence of events: Sam's appreciation for (and envy of) Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," which had been a #2 pop hit for Peter, Paul and Mary the previous summer ("He listened to that," said J.W. Alexander, "and he said, 'Alec, I got to write something. Here's a white boy writing a song like this....'"); his conversations with student sit-in demonstrators in Durham, North Carolina; and his own arrest in October for trying to register at a segregated Shreveport motel. But nothing can fully explain the majesty or soaring eloquence of the song. It came to him almost, he said, as if it were dictated in a dream. "He was very excited," said J.W. Alexander, "and when he finished it, he explained it to me — his reason behind the lyrics. Like, 'I don't know what's up there beyond the sky' — it's like somebody's talking about I want to go to heaven, really, but then who knows what's really up there? In other words, that's why you want justice on earth. Or, you know, in the verse where he says, 'I go to my brother and I say, Brother, help me please,' — you know he was talking about the establishment — and then he says, 'That motherfucker winds up knocking me back down on my knees.' He said, 'I think my daddy will be proud.' I said, 'I think so, Sam.'" In the summer of 1964 Sam donated the use of both the composition and the recording for an album to benefit Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

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Sam's magnum opus. It clearly stemmed from a confluence of events: Sam's appreciation for (and envy of) Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," which had been a #2 pop hit for Peter, Paul and Mary the previous summer ("He listened to that," said J.W. Alexander, "and he said, 'Alec, I got to write something. Here's a white boy writing a song like this....'"); his conversations with student sit-in demonstrators in Durham, North Carolina; and his own arrest in October for trying to register at a segregated Shreveport motel. But nothing can fully explain the majesty or soaring eloquence of the song. It came to him almost, he said, as if it were dictated in a dream. "He was very excited," said J.W. Alexander, "and when he finished it, he explained it to me — his reason behind the lyrics. Like, 'I don't know what's up there beyond the sky' — it's like somebody's talking about I want to go to heaven, really, but then who knows what's really up there? In other words, that's why you want justice on earth. Or, you know, in the verse where he says, 'I go to my brother and I say, Brother, help me please,' — you know he was talking about the establishment — and then he says, 'That motherfucker winds up knocking me back down on my knees.' He said, 'I think my daddy will be proud.' I said, 'I think so, Sam.'" In the summer of 1964 Sam donated the use of both the composition and the recording for an album to benefit Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

JESUS GAVE ME WATER

“Jesus Gave Me Water” is from Sam’s very first recording session with the Soul Stirrers, scarcely two months after he had joined the group. They had recorded seven songs at the session already, but “Jesus Gave Me Water” had been one of Sam’s featured numbers with his previous group, the teenaged Highway QCs. Specialty Records owner Art Rupe was against it, primarily because the label had just had a hit with the song by the Pilgrim Travelers, J.W. Alexander’s group. Soul Stirrers manager S.R. Crain and J.W. insisted, though, and Sam’s performance more than bore out their confidence in him. It is imitative of no one, despite his enormous admiration for R.H. Harris, the Stirrers’ previous lead, and while he is not fully in control of all of his remarkable vocal gifts, it is obvious from the first notes that he is singing with a confidence and flair that had not appeared previously in the session. Several times in the course of the performance Sam hits on a unique, almost lilting way of playing with the melody, as he elongates the central element of the story, “water,” until it becomes a kind of patented ululation (“wa-a-a-a-ter”), which takes up several bars and occupies the listener’s attention in a manner that becomes its own text. All in all, it is a bravura piece, a startlingly confident performance from a fresh-faced twenty-year-old still trying to grow a mustache. Only two takes of the song were necessary to get it right, and when they had finished there was little question in anyone’s mind what the next Soul Stirrers single was going to be.

Peter Guralnick is currently working on a biography of Sam Cooke, to be published by Little, Brown.

1. Touch The Hem Of His Garment (Cooke)

Recorded 02/02/1956 at Master Recorders, Hollywood, CA

Producer: Art Rupe

2. Lovable (Cooke & Harris)

Session 1: Recorded 12/12/1956 at Cosimo's Studio, New Orleans, LA

Producer: Bumps Blackwell

Session 2 (vocal overdubs):

Recorded 11/01/1957 at Master Recorders, Hollywood, CA

Producer: René Hall

Background Vocals: Lee Gotch, Alicia Adams, Ralph Brewster,

Loulie Jean Norman

3. You Send Me (Cooke)

Recorded 06/01/1957 at Specialty Studios, Los Angeles, CA

Producer: Bumps Blackwell

Background Vocals: Sue Allen, Alicia Adams, Charles Parlato, Lee Gotch

4. Only Sixteen (Cooke)

Recorded December 1958/January 1959

Producer: Bumps Blackwell

5. (I Love You) For Sentimental Reasons (Watson & Best)

Recorded 08/23/1957 at Radio Recorders, Hollywood, CA

Producer: Bumps Blackwell

6. Just For You (Cooke)

Session 1: Recorded Early 1959

Producer: Sam Cooke

Session 2 (vocal overdubs):

Recorded July 24, 1959 at Capitol Records, Hollywood, CA

Producer: Sam Cooke

7. Win Your Love For Me (Cooke)

Recorded 06/22/1958 at Capitol Records, Hollywood, CA

Producer: Bumps Blackwell

8. Everybody Loves To Cha Cha Cha (Cooke)

Recorded 01/07/1959 at Radio Recorders, Hollywood, CA

Producer: Bumps Blackwell

Arranged by: René Hall

9. I'll Come Running Back To You (Cook)

Session 1: Recorded 12/12/1956 at Cosimo's Studio, New Orleans, LA

Producer: Bumps Blackwell

Session 2 (overdubs):

Recorded 11/01/1957 at Master Recorders, Hollywood, CA

Producer: René Hall

Background vocals: Lee Gotch, Alicia Adams, Ralph Brewster &

Loulie Jean Norman

10. You Were Made For Me (Cooke)

Recorded 11/26/57 at Radio Recorders, Hollywood CA
Producer: Bumps Blackwell

11. Sad Mood (Cooke)

Recorded 10/01/1960 at RCA Studio, New York, NY
Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi
Orchestra Conducted by: Sammy Lowe

12. Cupid (Cooke)

Recorded 04/14/1961 at RCA Studio, Hollywood, CA
Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi
Arranged & Conducted by: René Hall

13. (What A) Wonderful World (Cooke, Alpert & Adler)

Recorded 03/02/1959 at Rex Productions, Los Angeles, CA
Engineer: Dino Lapis
Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Lou Adler

14. Chain Gang (Cooke)

Recorded 01/25/1960 Vocal Overdub 4/13/1960 at RCA Studio,
New York, NY
Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi
Orchestra Conducted by: Glenn Osser

15. Summertime (Gershwin, Gershwin & Heyward)

Recorded December 1958
Producer: Bumps Blackwell

16. Little Red Rooster (Dixon)

Recorded 02/23/1963 at RCA Studio, Hollywood, CA

Engineer: Dave Hassinger

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi

Arranged by: René Hall

17. Bring It On Home To Me (Cooke)

Recorded 04/26/1962 at RCA Studio, Hollywood, CA

Engineer: Al Schmitt

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi

Arranged & Conducted by: René Hall

Second Vocal: Lou Rawls

18. Nothing Can Change This Love (Cooke)

Recorded 08/23/1962 at RCA Studio, Hollywood, CA

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi

Arranged & Conducted by: René Hall

19. Sugar Dumpling (Cooke)

Recorded 09/11/1963 at United Recording, Hollywood, CA

Engineer: Bones Howe

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Al Schmitt

Arranged and Conducted by: Jimmie Haskell

Background Vocals: Betty Baker, Jackie Ward, Robert Tebow,
Doreen Tryden & Jack Halloran

20. (Ain't That) Good News (Cooke)

Recorded 12/20/1963 at RCA Studio, Hollywood, CA

Engineer: Dave Hassinger

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi

Arranged & Conducted by: René Hall

21. Meet Me At Mary's Place (Cooke)

Recorded 01/28/1964 at RCA Studio, Hollywood, CA

Engineer: Dave Hassinger

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi

Arranged & Conducted by: René Hall

Background vocals: S.R. Crain, Paul Foster, Jimmie Outler,

Richard Gibbs & J.J. Farley

22. Twistin' The Night Away (Cooke)

Recorded 12/18/1961 at RCA Studio, Hollywood, CA

Engineer: Al Schmitt

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi

Arranged & Conducted by: René Hall

23. Shake (Cooke)

Recorded 11/16/1964 at RCA Studio, Hollywood, CA

Engineer: Dave Hassinger

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Al Schmitt

Arranged & Conducted by: René Hall

Background vocals: Carol Lee Lombard, Sally Stevens Castle, Betty Jane

Baker, James Bryant, Thomas D. Kenny & Robert Tebold

24. Tennessee Waltz (Stewart & King)

Recorded 01/28/1964 at RCA Studio, Hollywood, CA

Engineer: Dave Hassinger

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi

Arranged & Conducted by: René Hall

25. Another Saturday Night (Cooke)

Recorded 02/28/1963 at RCA Studio, Hollywood, CA

Engineer: Dave Hassinger

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi

Arranged & Conducted By: René Hall

26. Good Times (Cooke)

Recorded 12/21/1963 Vocal Overdub 02/02/1964 at RCA Studio
Hollywood, CA

Engineer: Dave Hassinger

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi

Arranged By: René Hall

27. Having A Party (Cooke)

Recorded 04/26/1962 at RCA Studio, Hollywood, CA

Engineer: Al Schmitt

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi

Arranged & Conducted by: René Hall

28. That's Where It's At (Cooke & Alexander)

Recorded 08/20/1964 at RCA Studio Hollywood, CA

Engineer: Dick Bogart

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Al Schmitt

Arranged & Conducted by: René Hall

29. A Change Is Gonna Come (Cooke)

Recorded 01/30/1964 at RCA Studio Hollywood, CA

Engineer: Dave Hassinger

Producer(s): Sam Cooke with Hugo & Luigi

Arranged and Conducted by: René Hall

30. Jesus Gave Me Water (Campbell)

Recorded 03/01/1951 at Universal Recorders, Hollywood, CA

Producer: Art Rupe

Background vocals: Paul Foster, S.R. Crain, Thomas L. Bruster,
R.B. Robinson & J.J. Farley

MUSICIAN · INSTRUMENT · TRACK#

Adolphus Alsbrook · Bass · 7, 8, 10, 13
 John Anderson · Trumpet · 20, 25, 28
 Chuck Badie · Bass · 21, 24, 29
 Israel Baker · Violin · 18, 19, 29
 Robert Barené · Violin · 18, 19
 Everett Barksdale · Guitar · 11
 Hinda Barnet · Violin · 11
 Norman Bartold · Guitar · 29
 Harold Battiste · Piano · 21, 24, 29
 Edward Beal · Piano · 18
 Arnold Belnick · Violin · 19, 29
 Louis Blackburn · Trombone · 29
 Charles Blackwell · Drums · 5, 7, 8, 10
 Hal Blaine · Drums/Percussion · 16, 25
 Edgar Blanchard · Guitar · 2, 9
 Samuel Boghossian · Viola · 18
 James Bond · Bass · 19
 John Boudreaux · Drums · 21, 24
 Russell Bridges · Piano · 19
 Ted Brinson · Bass · 3, 5
 Alfred Brown · Violin · 11
 Robert Bryant · Trumpet · 23

Lawrence Bunker · Vibes · 10
 Max Cahn · Violin · 11
 Red Callender · Bass · 22
 Glen Campbell · Guitar · 19
 Frank Capp · Drums, Percussion · 17, 23, 27
 George Collier · Guitar · 5
 Joseph Coppin · Cello · 18
 Harper Cosby · Bass · 23, 28
 Jack Costanza · Bongos · 7, 8
 LeRoy Crume · Guitar · 21, 24
 John DeVoogdt · Violin · 18, 19
 Harold Dickterow · Violin · 18
 Jesse Ehrlich · Cello · 19
 John Ewing · Trombone · 20-25, 28, 29
 Frank Fields · Bass · 2, 9
 Cecil Figelski · Cello · 17, 27
 Elliot Fisher · Violin · 17, 18, 27
 Fred Fradkin · Violin · 11
 David Francis · Drums · 11
 Ernest Freeman · Piano · 17, 27
 June Gardner · Drums · 28
 Joseph Gibbons · Guitar/Banjo · 12, 20

MUSICIAN · INSTRUMENT · TRACK# · continued

Jewell Grant · Saxophone · 20, 22,
23, 25, 28

William Green · Saxophone · 17, 20,
21, 23, 24, 27

Edward Hall · Drums/Percussion ·
16, 20, 26

René Hall · Guitar · 3, 8, 10, 12, 16,
17, 18, 20-29

Allan Harshman · Viola · 18

Harry Hyams · Viola · 19, 29

Ernie Hayes · Piano · 11, 22

Clifford Hils · Bass · 12, 16, 25

William Hinshaw · French Horn · 29

Milton Hinton · Bass · 11

Plas Johnson · Saxophone · 23, 25

Raymond Johnson · Piano · 16, 25

Armand Kaproff · Cello · 17, 27

John Kelsom · Saxophone · 22

Barney Kessel · Guitar · 25

Bob King · Guitar · 1

William Kurasch · Violin · 18, 19, 29

Melvin Lastie · Trumpet · 21, 24

Archie Levin · Violin · 11

Charles Libove · Violin · 11

Marvin Limonick · Violin · 17, 27

Irving Lipschultz · Violin · 19, 29

Ulysses Livingston · Guitar · 7

Harry Lookofsky · Violin · 11

Leonard Malarsky · Violin · 18, 19, 29

Ben Miller · Violin · 11

Warren Myles · Piano · 2

David Nadien · Violin · 11

Alexander Neiman · Viola · 19, 29

Gareth Nuttycombe · Violin · 18

Wilbert Nuttycombe · Viola · 17, 27

Mike Pacheco · Conga · 8

Earl Palmer · Drums · 2, 3, 9, 12, 18,
19, 22, 23, 29

Jack Pepper · Violin · 29

John Pisano · Guitar · 20, 26

William Pitman · Guitar · 18

Ray Pohlman · Bass · 17, 18, 19, 26, 27

Billy Preston · Organ · 16

Emil Radocchia · Marimba, Tympani,
Percussion · 20, 26, 29

Edgar Redmond · Saxophone · 20, 28

Howard Roberts · Guitar · 20
Isadore Roman · Violin · 18
Ambrose Russo · Violin · 19
Myron Sandler · Violin · 17, 27
Emmet Sargeant · Cello · 19, 29
Joseph Saxon · Violin · 17, 27
Ralph Schaeffer · Violin · 17, 18, 19, 27, 29
Ronald Selico · Drums · 13
Frederick Seykora · Cello · 18
Sidney Sharp · Violin · 18, 19, 29
Marshall Sosson · Violin · 17, 27
Tommy Tedesco · Guitar · 17, 22, 27

Anthony Terran · Trumpet · 23
Darrel Terwilliger · Violin · 18, 19, 28, 29
Eddie Tilman · Bass · 20
Red Tyler · Saxophone · 21, 24
Julius Wechter · Percussion · 27
Irving Weinper · Viola · 17, 27
David Wells · Trombone · 29
Clifton White · Guitar · 3-8 and 10-29
Stuart Williamson · Trumpet · 22
Bobby Womack · Guitar · 23, 28, 29
Tibor Zelig · Violin · 19, 29

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