



# Sam Cooke

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# "The King of Soul"

Sam Cooke is one of the legendary voices of the 20th century. He is commonly credited as one of Soul music's originators. His blend of Gospel and R&B would be the blueprint for this dynamic genre which was rooted in the struggles of the civil rights era.

("You Send Me" on American Bandstand)



# Why This Topic Was Selected

Sam Cooke is a very important figure in many musical genres including rock and roll. He not only lead the way for the transition of many other gospel artists to secular music, but he also built the early foundation for soul music to grow off of. He also, ina span of 7 years, had 29 Top 40 hits in the U.S. and was also a successful entrepreneur. Overall, Sam Cooke, is an interesting topic based off of his wide range of skills alone. Not many people have had a greater effect on the music industry when compared to Sam Cooke.

# Basic Background Information

- Birth name: Samuel Cooke
- Stage name: Sam Cooke
- Born: January 22nd, 1931
- Died: December 11, 1964 (homicide)
- Birthplace: Clarksdale, Mississippi
- Parents:
  - Father: Charles Cook Sr.
  - Annie May Cook
- Had seven other brothers and sisters



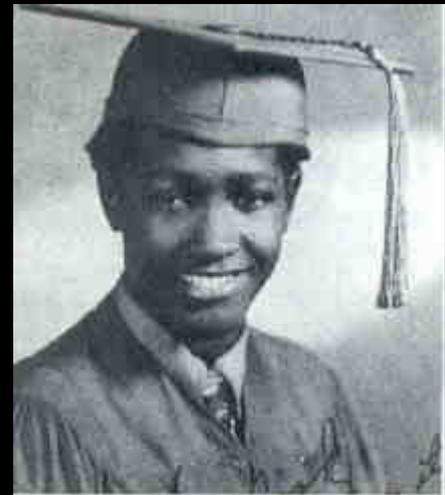
## Background Information (cont.)

Attended high school in Chicago

Genres: Rhythm and Blues, Soul,  
Gospel, and Pop

Labels: Specialty, Keen, and RCA

Singer/Songwriter



# Musical Information



- Formed a gospel singing group with some of his siblings called "The Singing Children." [2]
  - Often opened for their father, who was a Baptist Minister
  - Sam was nine years old at the time
- When he was fifteen, he became the frontman for a bigger teenage group called the "Highway QC's." [2]
  - They traveled on a gospel circuit and performed on some radio shows
  - During this time he trained with a man named R.B. Robinson, who was a baritone of the Soul Stirrers.

## Musical Information (cont.)

- When Sam was 19, he was asked to audition for the Soul Stirrers after lead singer R.H. Harris left due to illness. He made it after his very first try. [1]
- From the first Soul Stirrers recording he was in, "Jesus Gave Me Water," Sam became an icon in the gospel field, [1]
- In 1957, due to his financial situation, so he says, Sam explored crossing over into popular, secular music. He released a song through Specialty under the name Dale Cook, called "Lovable." He tried to make people believe it was his brother Dale, but at this point in his career his voice was way too noticeable. [1]

# Musical Information (cont.)

- He could not continue to do both, so he left the Soul Stirrers. [2]
  - Crossing over to secular music was seen as a sin by some, so the Soul Stirrers were booed, etc. while Sam was still a part of the group.
- He only recorded a few singles with Specialty before he signed with Keen in June of 1957
- Recorded a few hits here including "You Send Me," which sold more than 1.5 million copies. [1]
  - This recording established him as a commercial artist and a pop style singer. [2]



## Musical Information (cont.)

- In 1960, he signed with RCA after a royalty dispute with Keen. [2]
- They initially wanted Sam to be the black counterpart of Elvis Presley. [1]
  - His first single under this idea was "Teenage Sonata," which did not fair well.
- He went back to his original style and upon recording his own "Chain Gang" he started his eventual course to greatness. [1]
- Every single released after this was a hit, even after his death. [1]

# Musical Information (cont.)

- His touring schedules were very extensive [1]
  - He toured all around the U.S. as well as in England and Army bases in Germany.
- The year of 1964, the last year of his life, was a very important one because a lot happened.
  - Wrote "A Change is Gonna Come"
  - Sang this on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson
  - It also became a civil rights classic



# Awards and Accomplishments

- Some of his top hits with Keen include:
  - "You Send Me", "Everybody Loves to Cha Cha Cha", "Only Sixteen", and "Wonderful World".
- Some of his hits (that are still popular today) with RCA include:
  - "Cupid", "Another Saturday Night", and "Twisten the Night Away"
- In 1986, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was founded, and Cooke was one of the first of only ten inductees. [1]
- He is also a part of the Songwriter's Hall of Fame. [1]

# Musical Style

Sam Cooke's style comprises of a somewhat wide range of musical styles of his period.

- He was commercially popular in the early 1950s up until his death in 1964 and after. (Some of his music is still popular to this day!)
- During this time period the roots of rock and roll (Pop, C&W, and R&B) and the emergence of the basic rock and roll styles (Mainstream, Rockabilly, and Soft Rock) were the popular genres.

# Musical Style (cont.)

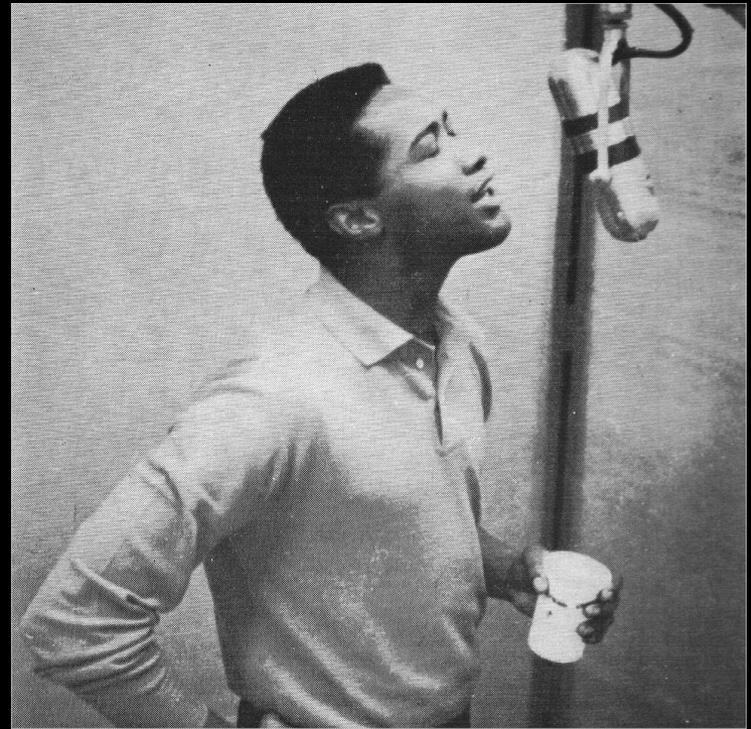
- Sam's style:
  - His roots are tied to Gospel music.
  - He was a successful Gospel and Pop singer.
  - Pop characteristics:
    - Crooning, professional style vocals
    - Urban enunciation
    - Avoided use of explicit, offensive lyrics
    - Avoided improvisational additions
  - Gospel/Soul Characteristics
    - Soulful interpolations
    - Vocal Melismas (his biggest relation to Soul)
      - His vocals were emotional, but not raspy
    - Avoided typical Gospel/Soul shouting style

# How does this music fit into the evolution of Rock & Roll?

Sam Cooke fits into the evolution of rock and roll in a few major ways. First, he was one of the first, and lead many others, to cross over from gospel music into the commercially popular markets (due to segregation practices of the time, this typically means white music/markets like pop, etc.). Therefore, in essence, he is responsible for the gospel style characteristics found in some modern rock and roll. Second, based on his popularity and success in the roots of rock genres (specifically pop), he can be attributed with helping start the rock and roll fad. Lastly, bringing his gospel style to the secular world also made him one of the first people to lay groundwork for the eventual uprising of the Soul genre. This is most obviously noticed through the vocal style of some of his songs (use of vocal melismas and soulful interpolations).

## Were there unique and/or innovative elements of the musical/performance style?

As mentioned, Sam Cooke lead the way for gospel artists to cross over to the commercially popular genres like, for example, pop. He also was one of the first singers to lay the groundwork for soul music. This is most obviously heard through the vocal style of some of his songs (use of vocal melismas and soulful interpolations).



# Song Analysis "A Change is Gonna Come"

Released in 1964 as a single, "A Change is Gonna Come" became known not only as Sam Cooke's greatest works but one of the most cherished songs of the civil rights era. Inspired by Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind", Cooke wrote the song after an incident where he was arrested and jailed for refusing to leave a Los Angeles hotel that wouldn't honor his reservation because of his race. The song became an anthem of the era and while it was a mild hit for Cooke, its message and music has prevailed for decades. (it was used in the film Malcolm X and has been covered dozens of times by a wide variety of artists) Near the time of its release Cooke was shot in a bizarre altercation with a motel manager and would never see the long lasting and far reaching impact of the song.



# Discussion of Musical Elements and Structures in "A Change is Gonna Come"

- Orchestral arrangement of strings, horns (including french horn), bass, and drums
- Meter: Could be read as 6/8 or a slow 4/4
- Beat Subdivision: Could be read as either triple or double
- Texture: Melody and Accompaniment Homophony
- Musical Form: A A' A" B A'''
- Timbre: It has an overall feel of a mixture between soul/gospel and pop music.
  - Orchestra Style Accompaniment
  - Vocals sound crisp, clear, and professional but he also sings the song with an intensity and passion that stems from his gospel roots.

# Sam Cooke the Businessman

As Sam Cooke continued to break ground musically by blending gospel and R&B while crossing over with several pop hits, he was breaking ground in the business side of the music industry that had not been achieved. He would open the door for many more black artists to capitalize on their record sales in ways that had never been possible before. Being one of the very first of his era to take interest in and control of his own copyright protection. His own publishing company called Kags music and a year later he began his own record company. SAR Records allowed for Sam to control his own career in a very powerful way. [11]

# Sam Cooke the Businessman

This type of control over his material and ability to maximize profit had never been seen and would become even more the standard after Ray Charles took things the same direction. Sam used his power with SAR Records to help start careers of other young black artists such as Bobby Womack, Johnny Taylor, Billy Preston, and others. It can be said that he is the first African-American music mogul. [11]

# Influences on Sam Cooke

- Influenced by different genres of music, including Gospel, Pop, and Rhythm and Blues, which he shaped into Soul music.  
[9]
  - Sam Cooke's earlier career as a member of the gospel group the Highway Q.C.'s helped in the development of not only his talent but style
  - The pop influence is noticeable in his singing, which is a crooning style, and his use of pure clear vocals

# Influences on Sam Cooke (cont.)

- R.H. Harris/ The Soul Stirrers
  - Sam Cooke has called Harris his "major stylistic influence."
- Bob Dylan
  - After hearing Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind", Sam Cooke was upset he had not written that song "before a white man", which led to his writing of "A Change is Gonna Come". [10]



Bob Dylan



R.H. Harris

# Influences on Sam Cooke (cont.)

Even though Bob Dylan influenced Sam Cooke, it is interesting that Sam Cooke influenced Bob Dylan as a young boy:

- “At midnight the gospel stuff would start,” he said, referring to the Shreveport station. “I got to be acquainted with the Swan Silvertones and the Dixie Hummingbirds, the *Highway QC's* and all that.” [13]



# Sam Cooke's Influence

Cooke influenced many artists, including Otis Redding, Michael Jackson, The Heptones, Smokey Robinson (phrasing), Marvin Gaye (songwriting), Lou Rawls, Aretha Franklin, John Legend, and more.



# Sam Cooke's Influence (cont.) [12]

Of the many musicians that were influenced by Sam Cooke, some of them were also his own peers. They described Cooke in many different ways:

- Smokey Robinson described Sam Cooke's style of music as "So unique and so awesome."
- Lou Rawls once said that "To this day still there are many, many people around the world that still love this man singing his music. Because he wrote great songs, man."
- James Brown was quoted saying that "Sam Cooke, there will never be another like that soul brother."

## Sam Cooke's Influence (cont.) [7]

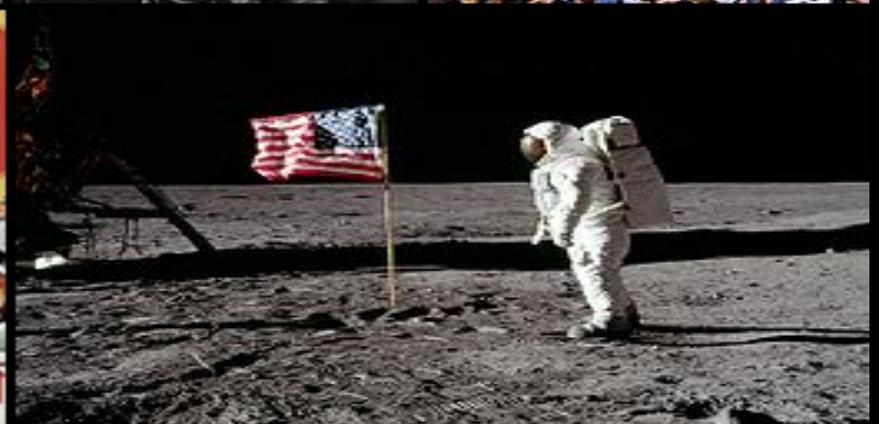
- Cooke led a crossover movement for black singers from gospel to the white market of Pop.
- Cooke influenced John Legend, which can be seen in his music and lyrics, especially in the song "I Can Change", in which Cooke is mentioned.
- Otis Redding, Smokey Robinson, and Marvin Gaye would all have different singing styles without the influence of Cooke.

# Cooke's Untimely and Violent Death



To this day many questions remain surrounding the death of Sam Cooke. What is known is that he was shot by a motel manager after Cooke entered her office late one evening after bringing a young woman there. The manager claims that he broke down the door in a rage and grabbed her asking, "Where is the girl?". Fearing for her life she broke free and grabbed a pistol, shooting three times and hitting him once. The girl had run from the motel to call the police. She claimed that Cooke had kidnapped her and attempted to rape her. She claimed that while Cooke used the bathroom she grabbed a pile of clothes, (some of which were Cooke's) and ran for it. This explains why when the shooter saw Cooke he was wearing only blazer and a shoe. What is troubling is that many eye witnesses with Cooke that evening saw that he was carrying thousands of dollars cash and when searched by the police they only found 108 dollars on him. What is also peculiar is that witnesses saw the girl walk to the motel willingly where Sam Cooke, a very famous singer, signed for the room in his real name. The girls profession at the time would not be known to the courtroom which later would be revealing. Some time after the trial, she was arrested for prostitution. The general theory now is that after a night of heavy drinking, Cooke escorted the girl to the motel, checked in, and after a while went to use the bathroom which is when the girl grabbed his things and ran in an attempt to rob him. Upon discovering this he stormed the office door which Cooke saw the girl knocking on moments before. This was the altercation that led to his shooting.

# Other Events of The Period (1960s)



# The Music Scene During and Following Sam Cooke's Time

In 1960s, Elvis returned to the music scene from the US Army, joining the other white male vocalist at the top of the charts; Bobby Darin, Neil Sedaka, Jerry Lee Lewis, Paul Anka, Del Shannon and Frankie Avalon. America, however, was ready for a change. The Tamla Motown Record Company came on the scene, specializing in black rhythm and blues, aided in the emergence of female groups such as Gladys Knight and the Pips, Martha and the Vandellas, the Supremes, and Aretha Franklin, as well as some black men, including Smokey Robinson, James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, and the Temptations. Bob Dylan helped bring about a folk music revival, along with Joan Baez and Peter, Paul & Mary. The Beach Boys began recording music that appealed to high schoolers. The Beatles, from England, burst into popularity with innovative rock music that appealed to all ages. The Righteous Brothers were a popular white duo who used African American styling to create distinctive sound.



# 1960s

"The 60's were a leap in human consciousness. Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Che Guevara, Mother Teresa, they led a revolution of conscience. The Beatles, The Doors, Jimi Hendrix created revolution and evolution themes. The music was like Dali, with many colors and revolutionary ways. The youth of today must go there to find themselves."

--Carlos Santana

Popular music entered an era of "all hits", as numerous artists released recordings, beginning in the 1950s, as 45-rpm "singles" (with another on the flip side), and radio stations tended to play only the most popular of the wide variety of records being made. Also, bands tended to record only the best of their songs as a chance to become a hit record. The taste of the American listeners expanded from the folksinger, doo-wop and saxophone sounds of the 1950s to the Motown sound, folk rock and the British Invasion. The Los Angeles and San Francisco Sound began in this period with many popular bands coming out of LA and the Haight-Ashbury district, well known for its hippie culture. The rise of the counterculture movement, particularly among the youth, created a market for rock, soul, pop, reggae and blues music.

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