



SOLID GOLD SOUL INSPIRATION



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1. THE IMPRESSIONS • Keep on Pushing
2. JOHNNY NASH • I Can See Clearly Now
3. EDWIN HAWKINS SINGERS • Oh Happy Day
4. THE STAPLE SINGERS • Touch a Hand (Make a Friend)
5. THE WINSTONS • Color Him Father
6. ARETHA FRANKLIN • Bridge over Troubled Water
7. AL GREEN • Everything's Gonna Be Alright
8. ISLAND INSPIRATIONAL ALL-STARS • Don't Give Up
9. SMOKEY ROBINSON & THE MIRACLES • Abraham, Martin and John
10. OTIS REDDING • Change Is Gonna Come
11. THE IMPRESSIONS • People Get Ready
12. BILL WITHERS • Lean on Me
13. THE STAPLE SINGERS • Respect Yourself
14. JAMES BROWN • Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud
15. HAROLD MELVIN AND THE BLUE NOTES • Wake Up Everybody
16. ISLEY JASPER ISLEY • Caravan of Love
17. MIGHTY CLOUDS OF JOY • Mighty High
18. PATTI LABELLE • When You've Been Blessed (Feels Like Heaven)
19. SOUNDS OF BLACKNESS • Hold On (Change Is Comin')
20. COMMODORES • Jesus Is Love

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Special Markets



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was just a short walk from gospel to soul, but a hard-and-fast line separated the two until the advent of inspirational music. Sacred and secular then became one, and some of the most uplifting music of the last four decades was the result.

A Change Is Gonna Come, written by Sam Cooke, stemmed from the turbulence preceding the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In July 1965, just seven months after Cooke's untimely death and within days of the act becoming effective, Otis Redding recorded the song for his epochal *Otis Blue* album, making it clear that he shared Cooke's faith in impending change.

Keep on Pushing was Curtis Mayfield's response to the turmoil of 1964. Mayfield's message was clearer still on **People Get Ready**: "It was taken from my church and the upbringing of messages from the church," he concluded later. "I must have been in a very deep mood when I wrote that." Mayfield

later started his own label, and the Winstons, some of whose members had been in Otis Redding's band, were one of the first signees. Unfortunately, they left the label just before group member Richard Spencer wrote their only major hit, the warmhearted **Color Him Father**, which won a Grammy for Best R&B Song of 1969.



When urban conflict entered the picture in the late '60s, James Brown's

Say It Loud—I'm

Black and I'm Proud

became part rallying cry and part street chant. Despite Brown's intentions, it also became a call to arms. "Just listen to what I was saying," he said later.

"I never said anything about destroying. I thought about building character and principles. You can overcome with no help."

Reggae is deeply spiritual music, but Johnny Nash was the only high-profile American R&B artist to embrace it. Based in London during the early '70s, Nash hired a

down-on-his luck reggae singer, Bob Marley, to write songs for him, then went to Jamaica with some of Marley's band to record one of his own songs, **I Can See Clearly Now**. It topped the charts back home in November 1972. That same year, Bill Withers reached No.1 with **Lean on Me**, a song inspired by his coworkers at the Lockheed Aircraft plant in Los Angeles. Twenty-five years later, Club Nouveau took it back to No.1.

Edwin Hawkins proved that you didn't need to leave the church to top the charts. As leader of the Northern California State Youth Choir, he recorded one of their concerts and pressed 500 albums for friends and family. One found its way to legendary DJ Tom Donohue on KSAN, San Francisco, who played it relentlessly. Buddah Records licensed the album, making the joyous **Oh Happy Day** the biggest-selling black gospel record of all time. Lead singer Dorothy Morrison tried unsuccessfully for a career in soul music, but Edwin Hawkins remained in the church.

The Staple Singers were among the first to migrate from gospel to inspirational music. "When we heard Dr. Martin Luther King preach, [we] said, 'If he can preach this, we can sing it,'" said lead singer Mavis Staples.



Edwin Hawkins Singers

Stax Records' in-house songwriting team of Homer Banks, Raymond Jackson and Carl Hampton (Who's Making Love, If Loving You Is Wrong, etc.) wrote **Touch a Hand (Make a Friend)**, and two Stax stars, Luther Ingram and Mack Rice, wrote **Respect Yourself**. Ingram and Rice were talking politics when Ingram said, "Black folk need to learn to respect themselves." Rice saw a song waiting to be written; he pitched it to the Staples at the suggestion of another songwriter. The Mighty Clouds of Joy followed the Staples' lead in moving from sacred to inspirational music. A top-rated gospel group

since 1959, they had cultivated a reputation as one of the most passionate and innovative acts on the circuit. In 1976, **Mighty High** became their biggest secular hit, peaking at No. 22 on the R&B charts.

The Isley Brothers were soul pioneers, and in 1969 they brought younger brothers Ernie and Marvin and cousin Chris Jasper into the act. In 1984, the younger trio broke from the older brothers, dubbing themselves Isley Jasper Isley. The following year, **Caravan of Love** topped the R&B charts, and a 1986 cover version by the Housemartins topped the British charts. Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes had an equally long pedigree, beginning as a street-corner doo-wop group back in 1954. By 1970, Teddy Pendergrass was the lead singer; **Wake Up Everybody**, dating from 1975, was one of his last recordings as a Blue Note before going solo.

The daughter of a charismatic preacher, Aretha Franklin recorded gospel music before becoming the undisputed Queen of Soul. Her producer, Jerry Wexler, realized that she could transform Paul Simon's **Bridge over Troubled Water** into a redemptive spiritual epic. Franklin's recording was made

just as Simon and Garfunkel's version was breaking but was held back for a year, eventually topping the R&B charts in 1971. **Abraham, Martin and John** was another pop



hit reinterpreted by an R&B star. Originally recorded by Dion, it was, he said, "a way of reminding people that they could aspire to great things even in the midst of tragedy." Dion's record was a top-five hit in 1968, and

the following year Smokey Robinson and the Miracles took it back to the charts. The Miracles kept company at Motown Records with Lionel Richie's Commodores, whose justly acclaimed 1980 album *Heroes* celebrated everyday feats of love and courage and included Richie's heartfelt **Jesus Is Love**. The group's roots in Southern gospel shone through, and although the record fared poorly at the time of release, it has become a spiritual classic.

Al Green and Patti LaBelle appeared together on Broadway in 1982 in the show *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God*. Green was taking time out from his new mission as pastor of Memphis's Full Gospel Tabernacle. As he explained at the time **Everything's Gonna Be Alright** was released, "The things you say in the tabernacle come out of the Book, and the spiritual guidance of those words. To spread it to as many people as I can, I put it in a song." LaBelle, an R&B star since the '60s, was on the verge of a career revival. She tells her own story in the stirring **When You've Been Blessed (Feels Like Heaven)**. LaBelle's thrilling five-octave range was never used to better effect than on this sweet return to her sacred roots.

The Island Inspirational All-Stars' **Don't Give Up** was a true all-star affair featuring

four contemporary gospel heavyweights: Kirk Franklin; Karen Clark; Pastor Hezekiah Walker, leader of Brooklyn's Love Fellowship Tabernacle Choir; and Donald Lawrence of the Tri-City Singers. And from 1997 comes **Hold On (Change Is Comin')** by the Sounds of Blackness. As musical director Gary Hines said, "We're a 40-member ensemble: a 10-piece orchestra and 30 vocalists. We're dedicated to glorifying God and unifying people through singing the full range of African American music." The Sounds of Blackness unify all the music here: gospel, spiritual, R&B, soul and funk. The lines that many thought should not be crossed become invisible. Categories don't matter if the music touches your soul.

—Colin Escott

- 1 Keep on Pushing *The Impressions*** • Music and lyrics by Curtis Mayfield. Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Co. BMI, ABC-Paramount 10554 (1964). No. 10*
- 2 I Can See Clearly Now *Johnny Nash*** • Music and lyrics by Johnny Nash. Dowan Music Inc. ASCAP, Epic 10902 (1972). © 1972 Sony Music Entertainment (UK) Limited. Under license from Sony Music Special Products, A division of Sony Music. A group of Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 38*
- 3 Oh Happy Day *Edwin Hawkins Singers*** • Music and lyrics by Edwin R. Hawkins. Edwin R. Hawkins Music Co./EMI April/Kama Rippra Acct. c/o EMI April Music Inc. ASCAP. Pavilion 20001 (1969). Courtesy of Arista Records, Inc. No. 2*
- 4 Touch a Hand (Make a Friend) *The Staple Singers*** • Music and lyrics by Homer Banks, Carl Mitchell Hampton and Raymond Earl Jackson. Irving Music Inc. BMI. Stax 0196 (1974). © 1974 Stax Records. Courtesy of Fantasy, Inc. No. 3*
- 5 Color Him Father *The Winstons*** • Music and lyrics by Richard Lewis Spencer. Holly Bee Music Company. BMI. Metromedia 117 (1969). Courtesy of Metromedia Company. No. 2*
- 6 Bridge over Troubled Water *Aretha Franklin*** • Music and lyrics by Paul Simon. Paul Simon Music. BMI. Atlantic 2796 (1971). Produced Under License From Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 1*
- 7 Everything's Gonna Be Alright *Al Green*** • Music and lyrics by Jimi Randolph and Eban Kelly. Pop Spiritual Music/Songs of Universal Inc. BMI. A&M 2919 (1987). © 1987 A&M Records. No. 22*
- 8 Don't Give Up *Island Inspirational All-Stars*** • Music and lyrics by Stanley Brown and Stephen L. Lawrence. Star Brown Music. BMI. Island 854478 (1995). © 1995 The Island Def Jam Music Group. No. 28*



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- 9 Abraham, Martin and John *Smokey Robinson & the Miracles*** • Music and lyrics by Dick Holler. Regent Music Corp. BMI. Tamla 54184 (1969). No. 16*
- 10 Change Is Gonna Come *Otis Redding*** • Music and lyrics by Sam Cooke. Abkco Music Inc. BMI. Volt LP 412 (1965). Produced Under License From Elektra Entertainment Group. Did not chart.
- 11 People Get Ready *The Impressions*** • Music and lyrics by Curtis Mayfield. Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Co. BMI, ABC-Paramount 10622 (1965). No. 3*
- 12 Lean on Me *Bill Withers*** • Music and lyrics by Bill Withers. Interior Music Corp. BMI. Sussex 235 (1972). © 1972 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. Under license from Sony Music Special Products, A division of Sony Music, A group of Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 1*
- 13 Respect Yourself *The Staple Singers*** • Music and lyrics by Luther Ingram and Mack Rice. Irving Music Inc. BMI. Stax 0104 (1971). Courtesy of Fantasy, Inc. No. 2*
- 14 Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud *James Brown*** • Music and lyrics by James Brown and Alfred Ellis. Fort Knox Music Inc./Trio Music Co. Inc. BMI. King 6187 (1968). No. 1*
- 15 Wake Up Everybody *Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes*** • Music and lyrics by Victor Carstarphen, Gene McFadden and John Whitehead. Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Co. BMI. Philadelphia International 3579 (1975). © 1975 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. Under license from Sony Music Special Products, A division of Sony Music, A group of Sony Entertainment Inc. No. 1*

16 Caravan of Love *Isley Jasper Isley* • Music and lyrics by Ernest Isley, Marvin Isley and Christopher Jasper. IJ Publishing/WB Music Corp. ASCAP. CBS Associates 05611 (1985). © 1985 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. Under license from Sony Music Special Products, A division of Sony Music, A group of Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 1*

17 Mighty High *Mighty Clouds of Joy* • Music and lyrics by David Crawford and Richard Downing. Da Ann Music Inc./Universal MCA Publishing, a division of Universal Studios Inc. ASCAP. ABC 12164 (1976). © 1975 MCA Records. No. 2†

18 When You've Been Blessed (Feels Like Heaven) *Patti LaBelle* • Music and lyrics by James Ellison, Julie Gold, Nona Hendryx, Patti LaBelle, Walter Sigler and Nathaniel Wilkie. Budsky Music Inc./Eat Your Heart Out Music/Irving Music/Julie Gold Music/Universal Songs of PolyGram International/Zuri Music Inc. BMI. MCA 54376 (1992). © 1991 MCA Records. No. 4*

19 Hold On (Change Is Comin') *Sounds of Blackness* • Music and lyrics by Willie Clarke, Clarence Reid, Levi Seacer, Billy Steele, Larry Troutman and Roger Troutman, Michael Anthony Music/New Perspective Publishing Inc./EMI April Music Inc. ASCAP. Saja Music Company/Songs of Lastrada/Sony/ATV Songs LLC. BMI. Perspective 549029 (1997). © 1997 A&M Records. No. 22*

20 Jesus Is Love *Commodores* • Music and lyrics by Lionel Richie. Brenda Richie Publishing/Jobete Music Co. Inc./Libren Music. ASCAP. Motown 1502 (1980). © 1980 Motown Record Company, L.P. No. 34*

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Tonight: The Story of Sun Records, Hank Williams: The Biography and an anthology of music journalism, *Tattooed on Their Tongues*.

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* Indicates highest Billboard R&B chart position

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