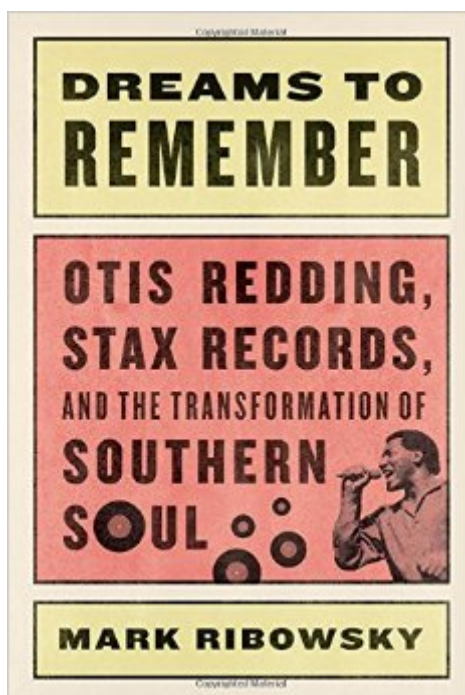


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# Dreams To Remember: Otis Redding, Stax Records, And The Transformation Of Southern Soul



## Synopsis

A soul icon and the southern music he helped popularize come to life in this moving requiem. When he died in one of rock's string of tragic plane crashes, Otis Redding was only twenty-six, yet already the avatar of a new kind of soul music. The beating heart of Memphis-based Stax Records, he had risen to fame belting out gospel-flecked blues in stage performances that seemed to ignite not only a room but an entire generation. If Berry Gordy's black-owned kingdom in Motown showed the way in soul music, Redding made his own way, going where not even his two role models who had preceded him out of Macon, Georgia—Little Richard and James Brown—had gone. Now, in this transformative work, New York Times Notable Book author Mark Ribowsky contextualizes his subject's short career within the larger cultural and social movements of the era, tracing the crooner's rise from preacher's son to a preacher of three-minute soul sermons. And what a quick rise it was. At the tender age of twenty-one, Redding needed only a single unscheduled performance to earn a record deal, his voice so "utterly unique" (Atlantic) that it catapulted him on a path to stardom and turned a Memphis theater-turned-studio into a music mecca. Soon he was playing at sold-out venues across the world, from Finsbury Park in London to his ultimate conquest, the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival in California, where he finally won over the flower-power crowd. Still, Redding was not always the affable, big-hearted man's man the PR material painted him to be. Based on numerous new interviews and prodigious research, *Dreams to Remember* reintroduces an incredibly talented yet impulsive man, one who once even risked his career by shooting a man in the leg. But that temperament masked a deep vulnerability that was only exacerbated by an industry that refused him a Grammy until he was in his grave—even as he shaped the other Stax soul men around him, like Wilson Pickett, Sam and Dave, and Booker T. and The MG's. As a result, this requiem is one of great conquest but also grand tragedy: a soul king of truth, a mortal man with an immortal voice and a pain in his heart. Now he, and the forces that shaped his incomparable sound, are reclaimed, giving us a panoramic of an American original who would come to define an entire era, yet only wanted what all men deserve—a modicum of respect and a place to watch the ships roll in and away again. 8 pages of photographs

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## Customer Reviews

This long rumored "definitive biography" on Otis Redding, is the third counting those from Scott Freeman in 2001 [By Scott Freeman Otis!: The Otis Redding Story \(1st First Edition\) \[Hardcover\]](#) and Geoff Brown in 2003 [Otis Redding: Try a Little Tenderness \(MOJO Heroes\)](#) but excluding a 2014 44 pager in the American Legends series on the [website](#) that looks like little more than an expanded magazine article. The present book, despite an interesting review in the WSJ, is a mixed bag with minimal new insights from the previous biographies other than access to Robert Gordon's excellent 2013 book on Stax Records [Respect Yourself: Stax Records and the Soul Explosion](#), an article in Atlantic Magazine in July 2013 entitled "The Songs Otis Redding could have sung" and an additional 10 years or so of time for reflective hindsight on the continuing impact of the Big O on Southern Soul history, something the author does not appear to have taken advantage of. At times Mr. Ribowsky can appear very glib having little in the way of empathy or knowledge when his subject matter extends to the larger context of Otis' role in the legendary Stax/Volt Records story. As a result he has a tendency to put down the key players especially Steve Cropper (p. 66 "It wasn't Cropper's call, of course..."; p. 259, "makes the Cropper story hard to believe?"). In fact on pp. 293-4 in his continued focus on portraying Cropper in a bad light for ensuring credit for his writing and producing activities at Stax, the author wrongly credits Cropper for producing and authoring "Time Is Tight", a song written by Booker T. for the "Uptight" soundtrack album for which the sleeve notes clearly cite Booker T. as composer, arranger, conductor and producer. Additionally he zings "Time Is Tight" as "cribbing...[a]...Motown bass line". The book is neither well-written nor adequately proof read - for instance, the legendary African-American educator, Booker T. Washington who died in November, 1915 is listed on p.257 as being present on the session for "Dock of the Bay" in December 1967. In places it is repetitive with confusing sentence constructs and too much in the way of filler (p. 192 - the Billboard R & B singles list for October 22, 1966; p. 240, a half page dedicated to the life and fate of a onetime roadie, a Mr. Twiggs Lyndon). The timelines, especially

those after Otis' death and when Jones, Dunn and Cropper departed Stax in 1968-69, are muddled and inconsistent. We have Booker T. leaving for California and then playing sessions at Hi for which there is little evidence. Both Rob Bowman's *Soulsville, U.S.A.: The Story of Stax Records* and Robert Gordon do a far better job on the Stax detail. There are also several "errors" that are tangential to the Otis Redding story as presented or are not properly developed that contribute further to the sense of page padding. On page 209, the author erroneously identifies EMI as the distributor for Atlantic in Europe at the time of the first Otis tour of the UK in 1966. Some readers may rightly ask "who cares?" or even more audaciously - "what difference does it make?", something that the author fails to address. As in many other instances in this book, a factoid is presented for which there is no context leaving the reader who has not read Bowman or Gordon totally in the dark. In this particular instance, EMI was never the distributor for Atlantic in the UK. Until 1966, Atlantic was distributed via Decca on their famed London American label and then, sequentially including all Stax and Volt product on London Atlantic (1961-1964) and Atlantic (1964-1966). In 1966, the time at which the author writes about, Polydor, the pop music arm of Polydor/Deutsche Grammophon, not EMI, had picked up Atlantic distribution in the UK on the red label 584 series and concurrently gave Stax its own blue label (601 series). With the G + W acquisition in 1968 when Stax became independent, its UK distribution was handled through EMI. In 1970, distribution returned to Polydor (2025 series) with Pye picking up distribution from 1972 until the demise of Stax in 1975. So the author is not only factually wrong but in casually mentioning on p.296 that "Bell and Stewart did combine to spring a deal to repurchase Stax...", he lamentably fails to add important context that this deal was actually financed by Deutsche Grammophon in 1970 (Bowman, pp. 207-208) rather than Al Bell's ATM access. So DG had had a long-standing interest in Stax/Volt that facilitated the deal with Bell and Stewart. Other totally tangential points that can be classified as minor errors or figments of the author's imagination are: p. 215 "a BBC film made of a revue of their stop in Norway on April 7". Say what? Why would the BBC (the British Broadcasting Corporation) be working in Oslo and why would the 2007 DVD release of the video *Stax/Volt Revue Live In Norway 1967* be credited to the NRK (Norsk Rikskringkasting AS), the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation?; on page 296, on the topic of Millie Jackson's 1974 rap version of Luther Ingram's "If Loving You is Wrong" (an item of no real relevance to the Otis Redding story) - the author notes "Baylor produced a cover of the song by Millie Jackson on Koko". According to both Bob McGrath's definitive *Soul Discography* and the notes to the *Ace/Spring* CD reissues, Millie Jackson produced her version of this song together with her long time collaborator Brad Shapiro, not Johnny Baylor. And that track like all of her output until the 1990s was on Spring - not Koko.

Why on earth does the author assume the need to fabricate stuff that if left out would have no tangible impact on the book other than reduce the page count? Mr. Ribowsky also has further extemporaneous pronouncements that illustrate his lack of in depth knowledge regarding the subject matter of the book. On p.293 he notes "...the vital center of soul seemed to shift .....to the smoother, more elegant "Sound Of Philadelphia". Atlantic would have no place in this new soul galaxy, nor care to." appearing to be totally oblivious of the many successful albums on Atlantic from Philadelphia from The Spinners (produced by Thom Bell) as well as Gamble-Huff/MFSB produced sides on Dusty Springfield, Wilson Pickett, the Trammps and Archie Bell and the Drells. This theme of blithe ignorance is continued on p. 307 where Mr. Ribowsky opines that "The sacred Stax catalog...has made millions .. but by the 1990s was being bandied around like a shuttlecock in more mergers and reformations". An interesting thought but one that is contradicted by the Bill Ingot/Dan Hersch remastered 9 CD set the Complete Stax-Volt Singles on AtlanticÂ The Complete Stax/Volt Singles: 1959-1968Â that went gold, the Rhino Atlantic-Atco Remasters album series, the two huge Stax-Volt Singles BoxesÂ The Complete Stax/Volt Soul Singles: 1968-1971Complete Stax Volt Soul Singles Vol. 3Â on the Fantasy reincarnation of the Stax label and the meticulous curating of the Stax catalog by Roger Armstrong of Ace in London and Bill Belmont at Fantasy in the 1990s that continues even today with the efforts of Tony Rounce and Dean Rudland at Ace, David Gorman and Chris Clough at Concord and RZA at Soul Temple. Mr. Ribowsky's lack of familiarity with even the basic canon of Mr. Redding's work is further illustrated in an embarrassing account of the public service track "Stay in School" cited on p. 249. In this, Mr. Ribowsky quotes the Big O as singing "without an education you can only be a tramp. Grow your iron shoes, no haircut, just plain ole country". Rather than the very strange "Grow your iron shoes" which may have some legitimacy in the context of Deuteronomy 33:25, what Otis' actually sings is "brogue-iron shoes" as those familiar with the "Tramp" duet with Carla Thomas would know - "You know what? You wear overalls, and brogue-iron shoes, and you need a haircut, Tramp."Overall this book is significantly derivative of the Bowman, Gordon and Freeman books that is written by a journalist whose knowledge of Southern Soul and Southern Music in general shows significant limitations as attested to by reviews of his other recent book on Lynyrd Skynyrd. Unlike Bowman and Gordon there is no passion or original interview material from Jim Stewart, Booker T. or Steve Cropper while the author's interviews with Al Bell add little new to the Otis Redding story. For those with an interest in Otis Redding, an imperative is his actual music available via stunning remasters by Joe Tarantino on the 2013 Concord/Stax compilationÂ Lonely & Blue: The Deepest Soul Of Otis ReddingÂ and Bill Ingot/Dan Hersch on the beautifully packaged 2013 must have "The Complete Stax/Volt Singles [3 CD]" set on Shout Factory

both of which attest to the magic of the production skills of Jim Stewart, Tom Dowd, and "Stax Staff" including Steve Cropper and Booker T. The more recent (2014) "King of Soul" 4 CD set on Rhino/Atlantic while remastered and better sounding than the 1993 Definitive Otis Redding set does not reach the sonic heights of the previous two compilations but is a great deal nonetheless. For books, Gordon's recent history of Stax is an excellent start while Bowman's amazingly detailed and still definitive 1997 book is a must. Finally for the conspiracy inclined, Mr. Ribowsky who makes much of the lawsuit against Scott Freeman for the insinuation in his book of mob connections with Phil Walden and the possibility that Redding's plane was sabotaged (Freeman, pp. 217-218), separately documents in his book a ride by Otis Redding from the Mayfair Hotel in London in "two big black cars" (p.218) that may or may not have indicated interest by the "European Mafia" in managing him. Additionally, in the acknowledgements section (p.311) the author notes in the context of the "chilling credit card receipt for the purchase of the oil that filled Redding's doomed plane" that he saw in the archives of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland that "no fuel was apparently left in its engines". This off the cuff statement echoes that mentioned in passing by Freeman as a "who knows possibility?" (Freeman, p.217) that is not mentioned in the brief section on the equally brief NTSB report of the Wisconsin plane crash (pp. 278-9) and is sure to reinvigorate the sabotaged plane theory. This thoroughly mediocre book should not detract the reader from seeking out the Bowman and Gordon books - or even Freeman which is much better written - nor from appreciating the timeless music of the one and only King of Soul - Otis Redding. As William Bell sang on his "Tribute to A King" - "Otis, he was known as Big O, we gonna miss him so"

Two points:1. When I came across the word "threnody" on the very first page, I was afraid that I, with both a master's and law degree, was going to need a dictionary to read this book about this great soul singer. Fortunately, the author refrained from using such uncommon words when simpler ones sufficed.2. While Steve Cropper is quoted throughout the book, the sources of those quotes are from third parties. Cropper is not among those interviewed for the book and there is no mention as to whether he declined to be interviewed. As I recall, Jim Stewart is said to have declined. Especially because one of his co-musicians claimed that Cropper insinuated himself to get undeserved credit and royalties, it would have been good to get Cropper's side of the story. Even without such negative accusation, given Cropper's otherwise well documented relationship as producer and collaborator with Redding, Cropper's first hand report of his experiences with Redding would have enhanced the story.

Absolutely loved the book. The narrator, not so much. He sounded too much like one of those dramatic doc or mock doc narrators that are so lampooned. But, what a great story! There are a lot of names and a lot of details that are hard to keep straight at times, but that's how it is if a comprehensive story of someone's life is to be told. It made me even more aware of what a loss to the music world Otis' early death was/is!

Bought this after hearing Mr. Ribowsky on the Diahne Rehm show on WAMU 88.5 (NPR). Haven't been able to get past the first chapter. Clearly Ribowsky is enamoured with his subject but I can't seem to stick with this book. Not sure why.

Author seems more interested in his own erudition than Otis ! I was looking forward to this book as I had served in US Army Basic Training with Otis' younger brother Luther in 1965 and soon became yet another young white guy fan of Stax and Motown. Disappointed...haven't finished.

An insightful, honest portrayal of Otis Redding's short but storied career. It is pretty incredible that by the time he died at 26 he had managed to incite a movement and change the music industry in such a historic way. *Dreams to Remember* doesn't shy away from the uglier details, though, and paints a picture of a remarkable talent with a dark, damaged side that he tried and often failed to hide. A fascinating read for anybody interested in the history of soul.

I received my copy today. I am an enormous Redding fan. I have a keen knowledge of his public life and times, as well. Thus, for me Otis Redding was much more than just music! This book (though I have only glimpsed bits here and there) is what disciples and devotees have awaited for so long. It has the substance of a block buster film trilogy . I give it 5 star's for effort, substance and passion!!

I received a copy of *Dreams to Remember* by Mark Ribowsky on August 11 as a Goodreads Giveaway from W.W. Norton & Company. Otis is one of my heroes - thank you so much for sharing this biography with me! Because he died so young, there was little information out there about Otis Redding and his family. I was pleased to be able to fill in the blanks of the life of a gentleman who shared such talent with his listeners, and fronted some of the changes in Blues and Rock through the 1960's. This book covers some of those changes very well. I would recommend it to anyone who loves the Blues, R & B and classic rock. It is interesting to see how much of that growth of R & B and Country Rock, the birth of Southern Blues, took place in Macon, Georgia - one thinks of Chicago

and New York as being the soul of Blues.

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