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Ambassador for the Stax Cause

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transcended the time and place of their creation and are now woven into the fabric of our national culture. Stax songs have been covered and sampled by a variety of artists, from the Blues Brothers to hip-hop and rap groups. They can be heard in television commercials, Hollywood feature films, and of course on the radio.

Stax is today the most reissued independent label in the world, proving itself more popular than ever before. When Stax went bankrupt, its music publishing rights weren't valuable enough to save it. Those same rights today have been valued in excess of \$200 million.

My recent trip to California to gather rough cuts of songs for the museum also had another purpose: It coincided with the first public screening of eight of the museum films with which I've been involved. The filmmaker had requested that I introduce him to an expected audience of about 200 to 300 of his friends and colleagues, and I was happy to do so. The night of the screening was rainy and cold, and a whipping wind helped make conditions pretty inhospitable.

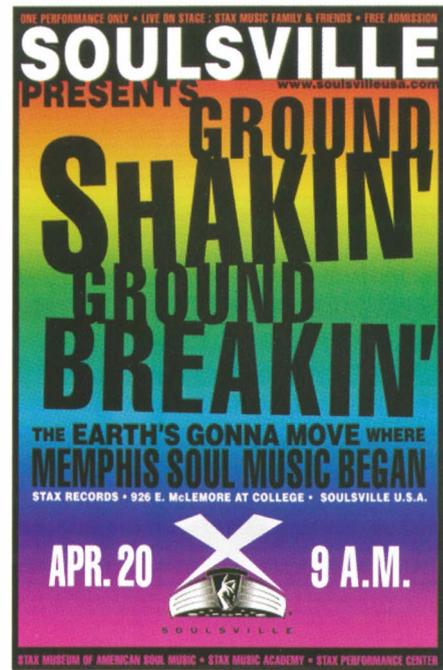
When I arrived, an hour early, at the cavernous bar where the screenings were to be shown, I found a line of about a dozen people waiting outside. The small turnout figured, I thought, given the weather.

After reviewing my planned remarks with the filmmaker, I went back outside to look for two friends from Memphis. Neither the rain nor the wind had let up. But there in front of me was a line of hundreds of people, many without umbrellas, waiting to attend the screening. Of the 500 that we were able to accommodate that night, at least that many were turned away.

This event confirmed what I had come to suspect. Although we were more than a thousand miles from Memphis, a throng of people was willing to brave the elements to enjoy an evening of films about the largely unheralded Stax Records. The mood was festive and lighthearted, and it bore a distinct and unmistakable insider's air.

These people *knew* about Stax. And they knew something else, too: Stax was about to get its due.

Hold on. It's comin'.



THIS POSTER TRUMPETED THE GROUNDBREAKING FOR THE STAX MUSEUM IN 2001.

AMBASSADOR FOR THE STAX CAUSE

The last time *Furman* magazine mentioned Mark Crosby was in the fall of 2000, when it ran a blurb about the release of *New York*, Crosby's second book of photographs of his adopted home city. *New York* followed the success of *New York Christmas*, which sold out its original press run.

Of course, all of this was before the Stax Museum project began to consume Crosby's time, interest and passion. But he hasn't given up dreams of returning to the photographic art just yet.

"Who knows?" says Crosby, who earned a philosophy degree from Furman in 1984. "On May 2, after the museum's grand opening, I'd love to get a bunch of film, grab a camera and some lenses, and just go shoot."

Or maybe he could take a sabbatical and nurture his talent as a jazz pianist. It wouldn't be the first time; after he graduated from Washington and Lee Law School in 1987, he spent a year studying jazz piano in New York before settling into his law career.

Let's see: Music. Law. Photography. Was it coincidence that these seemingly disparate interests suddenly

coalesced in the Stax project — in Crosby's hometown of Memphis?

He thinks not. And he suggests that something else was at play all along.

"The last few years have been a real gift," Crosby says. "For all of these things to come together in this one venture — Memphis, music, intellectual property rights, visual content — it's beyond chance.

"God gave me an opportunity to use my talents and experience in a way I never could have imagined. That's why I've worked so hard on the Stax project — to fulfill that gift, even though it doesn't feel like work."

And in crisscrossing the country, meeting and working with the famous and the forgotten, and absorbing the extent of the Stax legacy, his eyes have been opened to the impact of the music of his youth.

"I grew up in Memphis," he says, "but until I began working for the museum, I couldn't have told you where the old studios were located. Nor did I know they'd been torn down. The only concrete memory I had of Stax growing up was of once seeing Isaac Hayes' gold-plated Cadillac.



Mark Crosby makes a visit to the Stax Museum.

"When I first watched *The Blues Brothers* or *The Commitments*, I couldn't have told you that a good portion of the music in those films was first recorded in Memphis, at Stax. I've long been a fan of the Stax sound, but I never knew just how much Stax and its music have meant to so many people."

Now he does — and he's spreading the word.

— Jim Stewart

More information about Soulsville USA and the Stax Museum project can be found on the Web at www.soulsvilleusa.com.