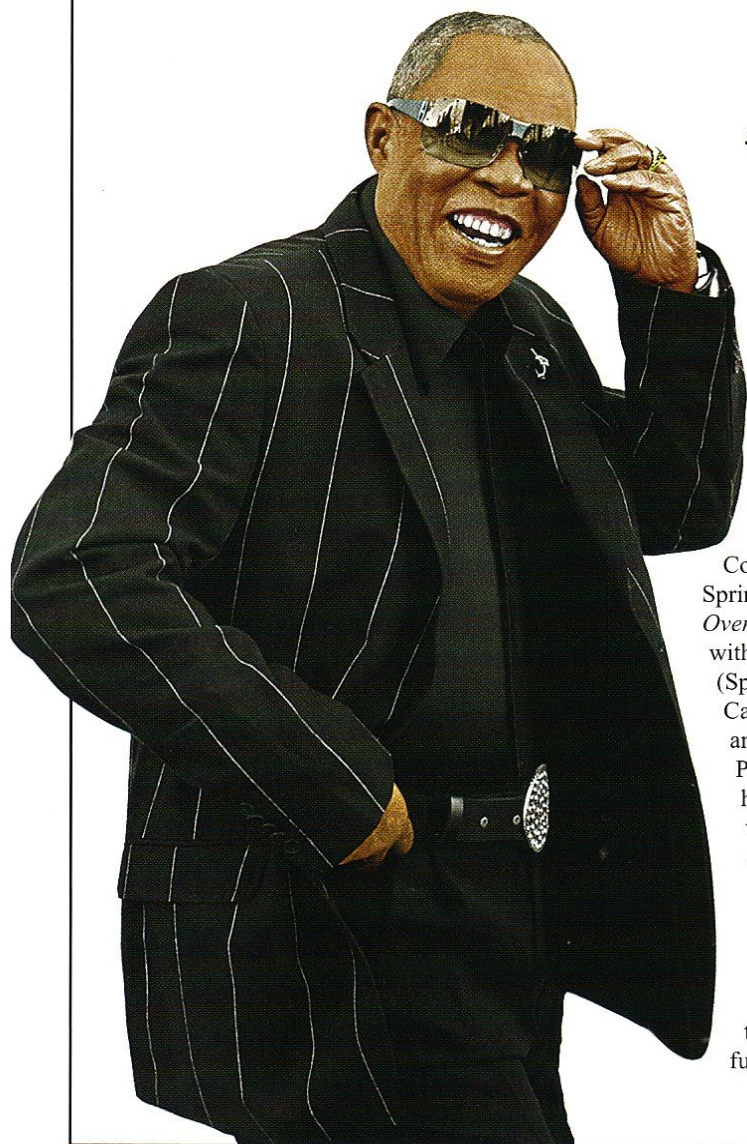


Sam Moore

The "Soul Man" Comes Home

by CORY ALBERTSON



Sam Moore, half of the legendary 1960's soul duo Sam & Dave, has had the creative itch to be a solo artist for some time.

After the duo officially broke up in 1969, Moore struggled to cultivate his own identity. He was bound not only by massive hits like "Soul Man" and "Hold On, I'm Comin,'" but also by having been part of a popular musical team. The decades that followed saw attempts at solo records and collaborations on other artists' projects—most notably with Conway Twitty and Bruce Springsteen. Although his new CD, *Overnight Sensational*, finds Moore with a vast array of guest artists (Springsteen, Vince Gill, Mariah Carey, Sting, Fantasia, Travis Tritt, and, in his last recording, Billy Preston), he manages, with some help from producer Randy Jackson, to punch through with individuality and renewed vigor.

But the new identity formation doesn't stop with the latest career path. Five years ago (at age 65), he learned he was not, in fact, born in Miami, as he had thought all his life. In a twisted full circle moment, Moore discov-

ered that, once again, the link with his former musical partner, Dave Prater, proved inescapable. Like Prater, Moore was born in Georgia—in Winchester Station, a train whistle stop near Ft. Valley.

Exactly how did you find out you were born in Georgia?

Something came about in my travels - I needed something. There was a fire in Miami at one time and I lost my birth certificate. I thought I'll just call and, after I moved to Arizona, I would get me another one. It all came down to "Where did your mother go to school?" I told 'em where she went to college and what not. And the birth certificate comes up and they say, "Hey Sam, you were born in Georgia." I went, "What? You've got me mixed up. You're talkin' bout Dave." They said, "No, we're talkin' bout you. Your mother went to college at Fort Valley State and she was a teacher. You were born in Georgia, Sam."

You also found out that your parents were never married. Finding all this out

at 65, was that difficult for you?

It was. I knew my mother was young. And I knew nothing about Georgia. I still don't! I know Dave was born there. I know Otis Redding was born there. So it was not like I was embarrassed or anything, I just never knew!

I knew my mom was a teacher. It was very interesting to know that all those years, my parents' situation was never discussed. But then you have to understand something, in those days if a girl got pregnant out of wedlock—knowing my family as well as I knew my family—they would do a lot of cover-up. I'm pretty sure now that after my mom got pregnant with me, with my dad, they migrated to Miami.

Have you explored Georgia yet?

In all the years I've played down there, even having lived in Macon and Augusta, I've never explored it. People have asked me, "How do you feel to be born in Georgia? Are you ashamed?" Heck no! A lot of people don't know where they were born. A lot of people can't call no place home. I can. I'm so fortunate I have two places—Florida and Georgia. I'm so blessed.

Will you do some exploring soon?

Yeah, I probably will. No telling. I just hope I don't have to pay taxes in both places!

It's interesting, because Dave was from Georgia too. It kind of makes one look at the energy you two had together a little differently.

Yeah, you look at it and go, "Wow."

Starting out with Dave and then doing collaborations with different artists afterward, did you struggle to find your own identity?

I did. It's interesting because in 1969, that was the first time I walked away from the act. On a personal level, I felt I could sing more than just "Soul Man." I could sing more than just "Hold on, I'm Comin'." I knew I could do more than that. It was not that I was trying to break up the act. I wanted to spread my wings a little more. I wanted to share with people my God-given talent. I had a little bit more I wanted to say or to sing about.

I struggled with that for years. A lot of people thought I wanted to break up the act because they thought I thought I was better. No, I just wanted to do more than sing that. I wanted to sing other material. *Rhythm, Country and Blues*, remember that? When they asked me would I sing with Conway on "Rainy Night in Georgia"...

There was some foreshadowing going on with that song.

It was, wasn't it? And, for some reason, I knew I jumped at it too quick. And I had never, ever done any shows with Conway. I knew of his work and I liked his work. I had so much fun with that song and with him. It never occurred to me my big connection back to my state. Believe it or not, out of all the songs, I still enjoy singing that one.

Overnight Sensational is really a step in establishing you with the identity of a solo artist, isn't it?

For some reason, it feels right. It feels good what I'm doing here—I get a little emotional with this. It's like, "Hello Georgia people, look what your boy's doing here. You enjoyed Sam & Dave, but now you'll really get a chance to share from the past to the future." Look at what I've done now with some wonderful people on this album.

What did Randy Jackson bring to this project?

As soon as I walked through his office I knew it was right. He and I

laughed and we talked. And in the middle of the conversation he said "Sammy, you got the list of songs? Let me see it." And I showed him the list. He said "Is this what you want to do?" I said "Yeah." He said "OK, let's go to work. Let's you and I get in there and do some good music." You don't know how that made me feel, because 22 years I've been trying to get somebody to listen.

I'm not going to do the material that they're writing today...I'm an adult....I wanted somebody that could get it—somebody that had the experience to know when to tell me I was flat or sharp or you're pitching a little bit. And you know what, Randy was the man. I haven't had nobody like that since Isaac Hayes and David Porter.

Some of the arrangements are so interesting, like having Mariah Carey and Vince Gill together with you on "It's Only Make Believe."

When Randy was discussing it with me I was going, "I don't know how this is going to work?" You know Mariah's into that hip-hop bag and she sings her kind of stuff. I know she can sing and I know she can hit all those high notes. Can you believe how Randy did that?

Her voice sounds like an orchestral instrument while Vince provides harmony to you.

I sent her a letter, "Only the dogs would be able to hear that note."

You sound so energized with this record and with this stage in your life. How do you account for that?

I wasn't all the time. After I recorded with King Curtis on the "lost" solo album and when they didn't put it out, I lost faith. I went back to say, "Well, maybe nobody wants to hear me without Dave. Maybe I'm not as good as I think I am." The faith and belief came back, believe it or not, from Randy. He said, "Sam, you don't want to be pigeon-holed into this soul bag. You got away to do what?" I said, "To do songs people wouldn't even think I would do." He said, "That's what we're going to do. Trust me."

When he started bringing up songs like [Milli Vanilli's] "Blame it on the Rain," [Ray Charles'] "Riding Thumb" and Garth Brooks' ["We Shall Be Free"], I said, "Come on!" He said, "You've got to do the challenge. People ain't gonna' believe that you would do that, because everybody's got you in the soul bag."

What would you like your legacy to be?

It took me a long time to get to do what I wanted to really do. I'm still appreciative. I'm not humble and all that stuff, because I can still be an asshole. I can still gripe and grumble, but I appreciate what's happened now—that people can understand that Sam Moore can sing more than what I have been singing. I have had a wonderful career—good or bad, negative or positive—I have had an interesting career. I'm still around and, hey, I have proven that I can still sing with a 21-year old. I'm appreciative to be able to do that. Regardless what I did with my life, that's "did." Let's move on. Now, let's get to the next chapter.

Only the dogs will be able to hear that note.

- Sam Moore on Mariah Carey's high notes on his new album, *Overnight Sensational*