

Otis Redding Fans Stunned By Plane Tragedy



POLL WINNING RECORD ARTIST OTIS REDDING (right) is pictured with his Stax/Volt labelmate Carla Thomas presenting plaque to Tennessee Senator Howard H. Baker, Jr., in recent photo... The tragic plane crash, Dec. 10, which claimed the lives of Redding and six others has devotees of the popular vocalist reeling... 26-year-old Redding was buried Monday afternoon on the grounds of his 300-acre Big O Ranch near Macon, Georgia. Earlier in the day, from 7 to 11:30 a.m., his body lay in state in the huge City Auditorium in Macon where a steady procession of thousands of his fans, who had come to Macon from across the nation to pay last respects to their idol, filed by in dignified mourning.

Otis Redding, the King of the "Memphis Sound", is dead at the age of 26.

The popular vocalist, four members of the Bar-Kays instrumental group, Redding's pilot and valet perished Sunday (December 10) when Redding's private jet plane crashed in Lake Monona, Wisconsin while attempting to land at the Madison Airport.

According to FAA spokesman Robert King of Madison, the plane was making its second attempt to land at the airport when it crashed into the lake's icy waters. Because of weather conditions (a light fog and drizzle), an all-instrument landing was in process when the crash occurred at 3:27 P.M. C.S.T. Search parties tried unsuccessfully to recover the bodies of the seven victims, until they were forced to give up the hunt after three hours because of darkness.

One member of the Bar-Kays, Ben Culley, 18, survived the crash and is hospitalized in fair condition. Dead are group members Phalon Jones, 18; Ronnie Caldwell, 19; Jimmy King, 18, and Carl Cunningham, 18, all from Memphis, Tennessee. They were enroute to Madison from Cleveland for an engagement. Another member of the group, James Alexander, 18, was on a different flight. The integrated group recently scored successfully with their Volt recording of "Soulfinger", their first record, and had traveled extensively with Redding this summer. Redding's pilot, Richard Frazier, and his valet, Matthew Kelly 17, both, like Redding, from Macon, Georgia, were also killed.

JUST THREE months ago, a poll conducted by Great Britain's Melody Maker Magazine had selected Otis Redding as the world's number one male vocalist. Redding had dethroned Elvis Presley, who had held the top position since 1956, to win the title. He was the only Negro on the poll, having come up from seventh place on last year's survey.

His best known Volt recordings included "Try A Little Tenderness", "Satisfaction", "These Arms Of Mine", "I've Been Loving You Too Long" and "Respect", the latter written by Redding, and recently again popularized by Aretha Franklin. Redding was recently represented on the nation's best selling record charts by his hit version of "Tramp", sung in a duet with his Stax/Volt labelmate Carla Thomas.

Only last week, Redding received and accepted a personal invitation from Vice-President Hubert H. Humphrey to head a troupe of Stax/Volt "Memphis Sound" recording artists to en-

tertain our troops in Vietnam this Spring. This would have been the first group of "soul" music exponents to visit Vietnam.

The social conscience of Otis Redding was reflected in the fact that he and the other Stax/Volt recording artists donated their talents to create the 1967 "Stay In School" campaign album for the United States Department of Labor. Vice-President Humphrey wrote the liner notes for the album, designed to convince teenagers to continue with their education. Earlier, U.S. Senator Howard H. Baker, Jr. of Tennessee had authored the liner notes for the Stax/Volt "King and Queen" album which teamed Otis with Carla Thomas.

REDDING WAS undeniably the hit of the recent Monterey Pop Festival, and he, along with the Bar-Kays, were the only "soul" music performers to appear at Expo '67. He had just returned to the road after undergoing and recuperating from minor throat surgery at his home.

His 300-acre "Big O" ranch outside of Macon, where he raised prize winning cattle, and which featured a 150,000 gallon O-shaped pool was a showplace. It was recently visited by a BBC-TV film crew, and this summer was the scene of a gigantic Bar-B-Q when he hosted the delegates to the NARTA (National Association of Radio and Television Announcers) Convention. Redding earned more than \$600,000 so far this year from public appearances alone. His recent summer tour set new earnings records for a touring revue doing one-nighters across the country.

San Francisco Chronicle columnist Ralph J. Gleason (wrote the liner notes for the last album by Otis to be released, titled ironically "The History of Otis Redding") recently pointed out in an article in Rolling Stone that Otis sold more records in a year than Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin combined. Otis was to appear in San Francisco beginning on Christmas day, at which time Gleason planned to produce a television special on Otis to be released to the 180 member stations of the National Educational Television network.

IN AUGUST, while in Chicago for the Chicago Daily Defender's Billiken Day Parade, in which Otis and Carla Thomas were crowned as the King and Queen of the "Memphis Sound", Redding talked with the Defender's Dave Potter who asked Otis about his goals. Otis replied: "I want to become two things. First I want to become an international recording and performing star. Then, I would like to fill that silent vacuum that

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was created when Sam Cooke died."

Less than a month after that interview came the news of the Melody Maker poll.

And, today, only four short months later, Otis is dead.

His last single recording was titled "Shake". It was written by Sam Cooke, who also died tragically at the peak of his career. And in one of those odd strokes of fate, "Shake" had been Cooke's last record also.

Otis Redding is survived by his widow Zelma, and three children; Otis, Jr., Dexter, and the youngest, Carla, namesake of Carla Thomas, the Queen with whom he shared his all too brief reign over the world of "soul" music.