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## YOU'RE MISSING: Booker T. and The MG's

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Music has always flooded the mind of [Booker T. Jones](#). He began taking piano lessons at a young age. When he was 10 years old, his music teacher showed him a Hammond organ. The instrument grabbed him, but the price for the lessons did not, so Jones did what every good ol' boy would do: he got a paper route.

The route was a blessing in disguise, for one stop on the trek was renowned jazz pianist Phineas Newborn. Jones would toss the paper to the front porch and then sit outside and absorb the sounds Newborn put out. Soon after, Jones made his way to Beale St. He was too young to get in anywhere, but he sat outside of Club Handy and listened to the wondrous Blind Oscar pounding out Delta blues on the Hammond organ.

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Booker T. & the M.G.'s - "Green Onions"

Then, in 1960, Satellite Record shop opened in Jones' neighborhood. There he could listen to records without having to buy them. Shortly after opening, Satellite Records became Stax Records. Two years later, [Booker T. & the M.G.'s](#), consisting of Steve Cropper on guitar, Lewie Steinberg on bass, and Al Jackson Jr. on drums, became the house band at Stax. They provided backing music for infamous singers like Otis Redding and Wilson Pickett. One day, during a break from recording with Billy Lee Riley, the four piece backing band began jamming around on a laid-back soulful number. It caught the ear of Stax Records president Jim Stewart, who decided Booker T and The MG's needed their own release. Their casual jam number would come to be known as "Behave Yourself," and it was used as the B-side on their release. The A-side was a little rhythmic riff which Jones had been playing around with previously. Cropper suggested it as the second song on the release. It has come to be known as "Green Onions," and may be one of the most iconic songs of the 1960s.

This is where the story of Booker T. Jones takes a twist. "Green Onions" shot to #1 on U.S. Billboard R&B charts and #3 on the Pop charts. Stax Records was the definitive sound of the Memphis blues and R&B sound, and Booker T. & the M.G.'s had the chance to back up the amazing singers. Jones was only 17 and still in high school when "Green Onions" came out. It would have been easy to live a life of fame with Stax, but Jones decided to continue pursuing his academic endeavors. After graduating from Booker T. Washington High School, he went on to the University of Indiana to study music.

While away at college, Jones, (along with The MG's), still played sessions at Stax. They recorded with numerous artists such as Otis Redding, Albert King, The Staple Singers, and Eddie Floyd. The band is featured on such songs as "Hold On I'm Coming," "Soul Man," and "Try a Little Tenderness." Steinberg was replaced on bass by Donald "Duck" Dunn in 1965. Dunn had much more of a groove mentality, being able to suspend long improvisational strands.

In 1967, along with Stax's Otis Redding, Booker T. & the M.G.'s performed at the Monterey Pop Festival. They played among the likes of Jimi Hendrix, The Who, Jefferson Airplane, and Janis Joplin. By '69, Dunn and Jones had become engrossed with The Beatles' *Abbey Road*. So much so, in fact, that Booker T. & the M.G.'s recorded a tribute to the album, named *McLemore Avenue*, which is the street Stax was located on. Come to find out, Booker T. & the M.G.'s had also had a vast impact on The Beatles. John Lennon always wanted to write an instrumental for the band, and Paul McCartney shared a similar melodically-driving bass style with Dunn.

Booker T. & the M.G.'s opened up for Creedence Clearwater Revival at their legendary January 31, 1970 Oakland Coliseum show, recorded and released as *The Concert*. The next year Booker T. & the M.G.'s put out what would be their last Stax single and album, both titled "Melting Pot." It featured groove-oriented jams that would become go-to samples for DJs in years to come. Shortly after the album, the band parted ways. On October 1, 1975, Al Jackson Jr. was murdered in his home -- merely nine days after the band had a successful meeting in regards to a possible reunion.

The band has done numerous gigs in the time since their drummer's death, both together and on their own. In 1980, Cropper and Dunn were featured in *The Blues Brothers* film as part of the backing band for Jake and Elwood. In 1992, Booker T. & the M.G.'s, with Anton Fig on drums, were the backing band for a celebratory concert of Bob Dylan's 30 years in the industry. Numerous guests were on stage that night, including Neil Young, Eric Clapton, and Johnny Cash. After the show, Young asked the band to back him on his upcoming tour. After getting inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame to cap off an exciting 1992, the band spent '93 touring with Neil Young. In 2004, *Rolling Stone* named the band #93 on their 100 Greatest Artists of All-time list.

Thus, the career and influence of Booker T. & the M.G.'s far exceeds that of most bands. Their timeless sound will echo through the minds of R&B musicians, blues musicians, Hammond organ players, and many others for years to come.



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