

**The following interview with
SAM MOORE
was conducted by the Library of Congress
on May 10, 2022**



Sam & Dave

Library of Congress: Where were you when you were first presented with the song “Soul Man” to record? What was your immediate reaction to it?

Sam Moore: When I was in Memphis, Dave and I were getting ready to do another single. And, at the time, there was this magazine called “Sepia” and I recall David Porter having it there on the piano and looking through the book and there was these words that struck them—“soul man.”

So Isaac and he started working and coming up with the title... So, it was race-related but I thought, at the time, that the song was about girls--gettin’ girls, you know, “You know, *‘I’m a soul man’...*” [laughs]. But it turned out to be an anthem, sort of like “Blowin’ in the Wind” or one of those. And, I tell you, it doesn’t matter where I sing--perform it--at the end of the night, if we didn’t do “Soul Man,” the room would go up in smoke!

[Later], Isaac would explain that it was the first time that [the term] “soul man” had ever been used like that, and it was used by Sam and Dave! The first time EVER.

LC: How did you and Dave work out the verses in terms of which ones you would do and which ones he would do?

SM: By me at that time being the dominate one—and I’m not bragging here—I always sang the high parts. We went back with Isaac and he took us back and forth [with the verses]. Isaac was like, “Sam, try something like this.” I remember him saying, “We want it bright. Not a dull opening.” That’s why you hear all the high. Isaac was the one that suggested that.

LC: Where did you record the song and can you tell me about that exclamation of yours in the song—“Play it, Steve!”?

SM: In Memphis at Stax in 1967.

Yes, we were doing another take and that’s the one where you hear me yell, “Play it Steve!” They were working on the opening and having a problem with the instrumental part. And I was just standing there and I recall Mr. Porter: “Say something, don’t just stand there!” He was yelling in my ear—“One of y’all do something!” So that’s what I came up with. That was to Steve [Cropper] playing behind the screen.

Later, we went to the engineering room. We had started about 6 [pm] and at 12 o'clock we were still debating if that should say in or not. Jim [Stewart, of Staxx] finally said to Isaac, "It's not hurting anything. Just put it in." So we just put it in. He was like, "Here's what we'll do: Sam, I want you to time it. Go back and time it. Don't make it sound like a rehearsal."

"Play it Steve!" So why did I say that? Why? 'Cause they asked me.

And they were like, "That's the best you can do?" Yeah, that's the best I could do. *[laughs]*

LC: "Soul Man" has been covered by many other artists...

SM: You know... everybody. You know, my nephew, he has a band in Ohio, he just went to Kentucky, and he told me, "We were playing ["Soul Man"], Uncle, and the audience, they don't relate it to Sam and Dave!" They relate it to Danny and John Belushi, the Blues Brothers.

That is why I let people know this—we were the original!

I remember back in the day, Dave and I played in New York and, I swear, when we finished and we were coming out, these college kids came up to us and said, "'Soul Man'! You guys do a better job than the Blues Brothers!" I let them know that's not their song, that's our song. We recorded it. They were like, "Yeah, okay." No one relates it to us anymore.

LC: Well, I'll tell you one thing, it's not the Blues Brothers version that is in the Library of Congress's National Recording Registry. It's YOUR version!

SM: I know, when I learned this: Holy sh--! I got something now! You can say all you want to say but I got the proof. I don't care how you relate to it; I know where the song belongs. It's there. And I'm proud to be amongst—and I'm serious about this—such great artists and songs! And I am part of that!

LC: Well, for all those other musicians to have recorded "Soul Man," it must mean that the original is pretty darn good. Why do you think it has so connected to people over the years?

SM: I don't know... I mean, people do have their own version of what it represents. It's about segregation, subjugation...liberation. It's a song like "Blowin' in the Wind" or "You've Got a Friend" or whatever, it has really become something of great meaning.

I never imagined but I'm proud. I gotta tell you—God has been good to me.

Whatever they say: here [I am] a man who comes from...never had no education as far as musical education; I come from the church. I never in my life thought about Grammys or all that stuff and we've had other hits, but that song has become the song of a lifetime. And I'm going to brag about that!