

BOOKER T. JONES

Stax's keyboard legend brings it back home to Memphis

As the house band for Memphis' legendary Stax Records throughout the '60s, Booker T. and the MG's—organist Booker T. Jones, guitarist Steve Cropper, bassist Donald "Duck" Dunn and drummer Al Jackson Jr.—was perhaps the most prominent and influential R&B band of the era. Providing backup for such soul titans as Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, Albert King, Eddie Floyd and Carla Thomas, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees were at the heart of hundreds of era-defining recordings.

For his new solo album, *The Road From Memphis*, Jones has attempted to reach even farther back than those days to retrace



the earliest steps of his journey. "The first stop is Indiana, where I explored classical music for four years," he says. "That was a big influence on what happened later. My foundations were formed in Memphis in so many ways, but my journey also took me to Los Angeles, New York City, Detroit and Philadelphia."

Jones recruited some sympathetic collaborators, including producers Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson (of the Roots) and Rob Schnapf, and the team elected to go old-school with its sound. "It was recorded to tape, with everyone in the same room, no digital processing," Jones says. "It's very similar to what happened at Stax 40, 50 years ago." The potent, MG's-esque collection includes guest appearances from Lou Reed, Sharon Jones and My Morning Jacket's Jim James.

Jones' new effort is on shelves alongside a just-released reissue of 1970's *McLemore Avenue*, the classic set of Beatles covers by

Booker T. and the MG's. "I wanted to pay tribute to the Beatles because they were doing earth-shaking, groundbreaking things," Jones recalls of the album's motivation. "They were making music that was timeless." The group broke up a few years later, but has reconvened periodically ever since (sans Jackson, who was killed by a burglar in 1975). Jones went on to record under his own name and to produce others—one of his most successful efforts being Willie Nelson's 1978 multiplatinum album of standards, *Stardust*. Jones has also teamed repeatedly with Neil Young, who he calls "the rock guitar guy."

As to whether there will ever be another MG's reunion, Jones won't even hazard a guess. He's too busy with the present to think about the future. "I'm riding this wave and not planning anything," he says. "Things are falling in my lap, and I'm enjoying it."

—Jeff Tamarkin

