

SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE

Title: Thee Encyclopedia Of Ecstasy

Label: Big Fro

Release Date: 2003

Medium: Double CD

Availability: Poor

Venue: Fillmore East, NYC, NY

Recording Date: October 5, 1968 (early and late shows)

Lineup: Sly Stone	- Vocals, keyboards, harmonica	Cynthia Robinson	- Trumpet, vocals
Freddie Stewart	- Guitar, vocals	Rosie Stone	- Keyboards, vocals, percus.
Larry Graham	- Bass, vocals	Jerry Martini	- Sax, vocals
Greg Errico	- Drums		

Set List: Life (1)	Are You Ready? (2)
Color Me True (1)	It Won't Be Long (2)
It Won't Be Long (1)	Color Me True (2)
Are You Ready? (1)	Dance To The Music (2)
Dance To The Music (1)	Love City (2)
M'Lady (1)	Turn Me Loose (2)
M'Lady (2)	Outro
Life (2)	

Without question, the music of Sly and the Family Stone is as influential as anything recorded during the sixties. The group fused black rhythms and rock into a pop/soul/rock hybrid which led directly to the formation of seventies funk, which led directly to disco. Their unquestioned leader, Sylvester Stewart, practically rewrote black music. Eschewing the existing formulas, Stewart took the rhythmic innovations of James Brown and added his own elements like quick horn bursts, disembodied group vocals, and short instrumental breaks that featured various instruments.

He also wrote songs that dealt with various social issues well before artists like the Temptations, Marvin Gaye, Curtis Mayfield and others tackled the same kinds of subjects. Add the fact that Sly and the Family Stone was one of the first racially and sexually integrated groups and you had one of the true innovators of the sixties. While Stewart would ultimately prove to be his own worst enemy, his accomplishments were vast, influencing countless musicians of his time and generations to follow.

All of this resulted in tremendous record sales. Overall, the band charted nine albums, with three certified platinum in the U.S. and another two reaching gold sales. They also placed 18 singles on the U.S. pop singles chart, including eleven top forty hits. Four of these sold over one million copies. They also were stars in Canada and England.

At their peak, Sly and the Family Stone was one of the best live acts in music. They played all the major festivals of the sixties and were known for their ability to bring the largest crowds imaginable to their feet. Rolling Stone Magazine has ranked them number 43 on their list of the 100 Greatest Artists Of All Time. They were inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 1993, the Vocal Group Hall Of Fame in 2007, and have been awarded a R&B Foundation Pioneer Award. With the death of Sly Stone on June 9, 2025, this incredible journey has come to an end.

Sylvester Stewart was born on March 15, 1943 in Denton, Texas. He was the second of five children born to K.C. and Alpha Stewart, a janitor and a homemaker. Both were members of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). It is the largest Pentecostal denomination in the United States, with a predominantly African-American membership. They were initially an offshoot of Baptists. The Church is very conservative, teaching modesty in dress and appearance but allowing moderate participation in secular entertainment. Profanity, alcohol, substance abuse, and immoral behavior are strictly prohibited.

Music was an important part of any public gathering. The COGIC doctrine encourages lively worship, the use of choirs, and gospel music. Sister Rosetta Tharpe was a COGIC parishioner as are Andrae and Sandra Crouch, BeBe and CeCe Winans, and Deniece Williams. Like other musicians and singers raised in the Baptist faith, music was an important part of the Stewart household. Sylvester, his brother Freddie (born June 5, 1947 in Vallejo, CA), and his two sisters Rose (born March 21, 1945 in Dallas, Texas) and Vaetta (born May 2, 1950 in Vallejo, CA) were all encouraged to sing and play instruments. Sylvester's older sister, Loretta, was the only one of the five children not to become a musician.

K.C. moved his family to Vallejo, CA in the mid-forties. Once there, it became clear that Sylvester was a musical prodigy. He was playing piano and organ in the church by the age of seven. In the late forties, early fifties he teamed with Rose, Freddie, and Vaetta to form The Stewart Four. They performed gospel music in COGIC churches and even recorded a single called "On The Battlefield"/"Walking In Jesus' Name" in 1952. As the group began to develop a following, Sylvester continued to become proficient on a wide range of instruments. By the time he hit his teens, he could also play the guitar, bass, and drums.

While still in high school, Sly joined a series of bands. One of the first was The Webs, which merged with another group called the Viscounts. They discovered that there was another group using the same name so they changed their name to The Viscaynes in 1961. The group included two white females, a Filipino male, and Stewart. The interracial and male/female lineup would become a trademark of his later bands. The doo-wop based group released five singles in 1961 under various monikers, including The Viscaynes, The Viscaynes and the Ramblers, The Vi-Tones, and the Biscaynes and the Continental Band.

Also in 1961, Stewart released a single, "A Long Time Alone/I'm Just A Fool", on Luke Record Company under the moniker Danny Stewart. He followed with another single, "Help Me With My Broken Heart" in 1962 on G&P Records in 1962. While none of these singles did anything beyond Vallejo, they introduced Stewart to the studio and to other musicians. One of them was saxophonist Jerry Martini (born Gerald L. Martini on October 1, 1943 in Denver, Colorado). He was another musical prodigy, mastering the ukulele, the accordion, the clarinet, and the sax by the age of 13. He was playing in bars at the age of 15. He later joined Joe Piazza and the Continentals, who backed the Viscaynes on one of their singles.

When Sly graduated from high school, he enrolled at Vallejo Junior College and studied music theory. He then enrolled at a broadcasting school and wound up getting a job in 1964 as a disc jockey at KSOL, a r&b oriented radio station in San Mateo, California. He uniquely included white pop/rock artists in his playlists, including The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. On the side, he also began to produce records at Autumn Records, working with San Francisco based groups like the Beau Brummels and The Mojo Men. He produced Bobby Freeman's "C'mon and Swim" (#54-1964), which was released in June, 1964 and made the U.S. pop singles chart, peaking at number 54.

In addition to all of this, Sly released three more solo singles in 1964 and 1965 on Autumn Records. Once again, they did not break out. In 1966, he returned to the group format and formed Sly & The

Stoners. One of the other members was Cynthia Robinson (born January 12, 1944 in Sacramento, CA). She had played flute, then clarinet, then trumpet in school. Around the same time, Freddie had formed a rival band called Freddie & The Stone Souls. His group included Gregg Errico (born September 1, 1948 in San Francisco, CA) on drums.

It was Martini who first suggested that the two groups combine into one entity, resulting in the formation of Sly Brothers and Sisters in November, 1966. They played one show at Winchester Cathedral in Redwood City before changing their name to Sly and the Family Stone. The initial lineup included Sly on keyboards, Freddie on guitar, Robinson on trumpet, Errico on drums, Martini on sax, and new recruit, Larry Graham (born Larry Graham Jr. on August 14, 1946 in Beaumont, Texas) on bass.

Graham's father, Larry, was a guitarist and his mother, Dell, was a pianist and singer. Young Larry was a music prodigy as a child, learning how to play piano at a young age. He then moved to clarinet and sax in his school band and played drums in the school orchestra and marching band. When he was eleven years old, his father gave him his guitar and he quickly taught himself how to play. When he was 15, his mother formed a trio with him and drummer Ruben Kerr. Playing under the name The Dell Graham Trio, they booked gigs throughout the Bay Area.

While playing in the trio, Graham would sometimes play the organ and learned how to use the instrument's bass pedals to provide a bottom end. Everyone liked the bass heavy sound so Larry rented a real bass when the organ broke down and could not be repaired. A short time later, Larry's mother decided that they should continue as a piano/bass duo. In order to make up for the lack of drums, Graham learned to pluck the strings to create a backbeat. One night, the duo was playing at a club called Relax with Yvonne at the corner of Haight and Ashbury in San Francisco when Sly showed up. He loved Graham's bass playing and asked him to join his new band. Graham would quickly become one of the most influential bass players in rock history.

Sly's sister, Vanetta, also wanted to join and became one of the group's three backup singers. Sly named the trio Little Sister. They also included Mary McCreary and Elva Mouton, who had sung with Vanetta in a gospel trio called The Heavenly Tones. It did not take long before the new band was the rage of San Francisco. They were certainly unique. They were a self contained multi-racial band which included both men and women. They were merging soul, r&b, rock, and pop in a way that no one else was doing and would soon add funk elements.

The band may or may not played on a single called "Life And Death in G&A" which was released by Joe Hicks in 1967 for A&M Records. Stewart did produce the single. Clive Davis and David Kapralik quickly signed the band to Epic Records that same year and they went into the studio in June to record their debut album. *A Whole New Thing* (1967) was released in October, 1967. The album was not well received by critics or record buyers. It did not chart, which prompted Davis to ask Sylvester to make his next album more commercial. At that point, Sly added his sister Rose to the band on keyboards and vocals.

The second album, *Dance To The Music* (#142-1968), was released on April 27, 1968. The title track was released on November 17, 1967, somewhat at the objection of Sly and the rest of the band who felt the track was too toned down. However, it began to get airplay and entered the U.S. pop singles chart. It continued to rise and cracked the top forty in early March. It wound up going all the way to number 8 during a twelve week top forty chart run. It also hit number 9 on the r&b singles chart and number 7 in England.

The single uniquely featured four lead vocalists, a rock guitar riff, a funky bass line, and a syncopated drum pattern. Sly played the organ gospel style and the horns were featured in short bursts. It was unlike anything ever released and set the standard for a new sound that would be copied by artists like The Temptations, Diana Ross & The Supremes, The Impressions, The Four Tops, The 5th Dimension, and War over the next few years. They also had a huge influence on Bay Area groups like Tower Of Power and Cold Blood.

The album did not do as well but made the American pop albums chart upon release, but stalled at number 142 during a short seven week chart run. It did much better on the r&b album chart, peaking at number 11. The group had been touring since their formation, initially in and around California. On February 12, 1967, the band played the Fillmore Auditorium. They then established a residency at the Wayne Manor Club in Sunnyvale, CA where they played continuously in April and May. They also frequently played Frenchy's in Hayward, CA along with the Fireside Lounge in San Mateo in the second half of the year. In February, 1968, they played an extended residency at the Pussycat A Go Go in Las Vegas in February and March.

The band traveled East for shows in Detroit in late March, then wound up in NYC at the Electric Circus. When *Dance To The Music* was released, they toured nationally in support through the end of year, visiting NYC, Pittsburgh, Phoenix, Dayton, Decatur, Indiana, Montreal, Cleveland, Westport, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Las Vegas, West Hollywood, San Carlos, Philadelphia, Syracuse, Boston, Anaheim, and Columbus. In mid September, they traveled to England for the first time but their stay was cut short when Graham was arrested for marijuana. Once back in the States, they played the Fillmore East in early October. The group ended the year with a multi night stand at the Fillmore West.

In between all this touring, the group recorded a new studio album in May, 1968. *Life* (#195-1968) was released in September, 1968 and again went virtually nowhere. It only hit number 195 on the American pop albums chart during the five weeks it was on the chart. The one single was a double A side containing "Life" (#93-1968) and "M'Lady" (#93-1968). They both made the lower levels of the U.S. pop singles chart, peaking at number 93. Oddly, both of them did well in England, with the two peaking at numbers 37 and 32.

By the start of 1969, the mania surrounding the band had not resulted in album sales. They needed a commercial breakthrough and got it with a new single, "Everyday People" (#1-1969). The song was written by Sly and addressed various solo issues, including peace and equality among races. It also represented a change in style, with a mid tempo beat and more mainstream pop elements. Graham also incorporated a slap bass technique for the first time, giving the song more of a rhythmic structure.

The song's message was exactly what was needed in those turbulent times and single immediately got airplay. It entered the U.S. pop singles top forty in early January, 1969 and rose all the way to the top, where it remained for four weeks during a 14 week top forty chart run. It also reached number 2 in Canada and number 36 in England. The song was the first group single in music history to top the pop and r&b singles charts at the same time. Rolling Stone Magazine has ranked it number 145 on their list of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time. The single passed the one million sales mark in the U.S. in February, 1969.

The B side, "Sing A Simple Song" (#89-1968), also made the lower level of the U.S. pop singles chart, peaking at number 89. It also reached number 28 on the r&b singles chart. Both songs anchored the band's third studio album, *Stand!* (#13-1969), which was released on May 3, 1969. It immediately made the American pop albums chart and rose to number 13 during a 102 week chart run. It also hit number 3 on the

r&b albums chart as well as numbers 9 and 11 in Australia and Canada. The album was certified gold in the U.S. in December, 1969. It would later pass the one million sales mark in November, 1986.

The album also included another U.S. pop singles chart top forty hit, "Stand!" (#22-1969). It was released in March, 1969 and entered the top forty in late April. It peaked at number 22 during a six week top forty chart run and hit number 14 on the r&b singles chart. The B side, "I Want To Take You Higher" (#60-1969), also made both charts, reaching number 60 on the pop chart and number 24 on the r&b chart.

In addition to the four chart singles, *Stand!* was Sly's first overtly political album. It contained other songs like "Don't Call Me Nigger Whitey", "Sex Machine", "You Can Make It If You Try", and "Somebody's Watching You". These songs established Sly and the Family Stone as an uncompromising group who stood up for what they believed.

The success of the singles and the album made Sly and the Family Stone a must see concert attraction through 1969. They were soon playing colleges and arenas, then festivals. The first festival was the Toronto Pop Festival on June 21, followed by the Hampton Jazz Festival on June 28. Gigs at the Newport Jazz Festival (July 5), the Spectrum Pop Festival (July 11), the Laurel Pop Festival (July 12), and the Schaefer Music Festival (July 26) brought them to larger and larger audiences. In late July, they played three nights at the venerable Apollo Theater in NYC. They also play stadium gigs in Detroit and Patterson NJ during this time period.

However, none of these shows was as significant as their appearance at Woodstock. The band was initially scheduled to take the stage on Saturday, August 16, at 5:15 in the afternoon, following Santana. However, they had gotten so big so quickly that they were pushed back to a nighttime spot. As the schedule fell farther and farther behind, the band waited backstage. The Grateful Dead had played an endless set lasting nearly two hours which pushed thing back even further. After Creedence Clearwater Revival and Janis Joplin played their sets, it was 4:00 am when Sly and the Family Stone finally took the stage.

The band then delivered one of the most explosive live sets in the history of music. They played nine songs over the next hour and managed to wake up nearly 500,000 people. Seemingly right from the start, they had everyone on their feet and Sly managed to engage all of them in the largest concert call and response section ever captured on tape. Their performance of "I Want To Take You Higher" was the stuff of legend. It was captured on the film and in the soundtrack, elevating Sly and his band to superstar status when both were released in early 1970. While the band was only paid \$7000 for their appearance, the associated value turned out to be in the millions of dollars.

While the band was on the road, a new single, "Hot Fun In The Summertime" (#2-1969), was released in early August. It entered the U.S. pop singles top forty in late August and rose to number 2 during a thirteen week top forty chart run. It also reached number 3 on the r&b singles chart. While it was scaling the charts, the group continued to do high profile shows. They played a stadium show in Albuquerque, New Mexico four days after Woodstock, then played the LA Forum, the Texas International Pop Festival (September 1), the Monterey Jazz Festival (September 20), and the Palm Beach Pop Festival (November 29/30) before the end of the year. They closed 1969 with a multi night stand at Winterland in San Francisco.

In December, 1969, the band released one of the most influential singles of their career, "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)" (#1-1970). The song entered the U.S. pop singles top forty in early January

and rose to number one, where it remained for two weeks during a twelve week top forty chart run. It also topped the r&b singles chart and generated U.S. sales in excess of one million copies by early February. It featured another evolution in Graham's bass playing, with the distinctive slap and pop style that later became the hallmark of nearly all funk and many disco songs. The song was ranked number 410 on Rolling Stone Magazine's 500 Greatest Songs Of All Time.

In late 1969, Sly began to experiment with a wide array of drugs, including cocaine and PCP. As the band members and their leader became increasingly focused on partying, no new material was recorded for eighteen months. During this time period, they continued to perform live but Sly became increasingly erratic, usually showing up for gigs late and in some cases not at all. It is estimated that he missed nearly one third of the band's shows that year. The Black Panther Party also became increasingly involved with Sly and at one point demanded that he fire all the white members of the band as well as his white manager. The party also became increasingly involved with the career of Jimi Hendrix during this same time period.

In connection with the hit Woodstock documentary and soundtrack, Epic reissued "I Want To Take You Higher" (#38-1970) as a single in May, 1970. It cracked the U.S. pop singles top forty in late June and peaked at number 38 during a three week top forty chart run. Meanwhile, the band continued to tour, now almost exclusively playing arenas, stadiums, and large outdoor venues. On July 3, 1970, they played the Atlanta International Pop Festival then closed the Strawberry Fields Festival in Canada on August 9. They flew over to England a couple of weeks later and played the 1970 Isle Of Wight Festival. They followed that with a U.K. and European tour before finishing the year with more shows in North America.

With Sly taking drugs every minute of every day, the group did not record any new music between the summer of 1969 and the beginning of 1971.. Frustrated and with no album in sight, Epic included "Hot Time In The Summertime" and "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)" on the band's first compilation, *Greatest Hits* (#2-1970), which was not released until November 21, 1970. They had wanted the band to make stereo mixes of both of them, along with "Everyone Is A Star", but could not get the singer in the studio long enough to finish them. They wound up using the mono single versions and artificially recreated a stereo mix.

With fans of the band now dying for any product, the album soared all the way to number 2 on the American pop albums chart during a 79 week chart run. It shipped gold in the U.S. and has passed the five million sales mark as of September, 2001. Rolling Stone Magazine has ranked it as high as number 60 on their 500 Greatest Albums Of All Time.

With their singer's physical and mental condition in rapid decline, tensions arose within the band. Sly and Freddie did not trust Graham and the singer hired two of his street friends to become his personal manager. He also surrounded himself with gangsters as bodyguards. By this point, Sly had isolated himself either in a private studio in Sausalito, CA or in his home studio and was reportedly working on a new album by himself.

Sly wanted a darker, conceptual work that would deal with the death of the sixties, politics, police brutality, social abandonment, and civil rights. Somehow, he wound up creating a masterpiece despite virtually working alone. *There's A Riot Goin' On* (#1-1971) was released on November 20, 1971. The album consisted of hard funk rhythms, most of which were recorded on a primitive drum machine. Sly overdubbed it extensively and created a dense mix that reflected the mood of the songs. Some of his lyrics were nearly indecipherable, which added to the mood. The band did not play as a unit on the recording, but

did participate in creating the overdubs. Both Rose and Graham did provide vocals along with the Little Sister trio.

The album debuted at number one on the American pop albums chart, where it remained for two weeks during a 31 week chart run. The album also topped the r&b albums chart, reached number 4 in Canada, and hit number 31 in England. It was certified gold in the U.S. in November, 1971 and passed the one million sales mark in September, 2001. It was ranked number 82 on Rolling Stone Magazine's 500 Greatest Albums Of All Time.

The lead single, "Family Affair" (#1-1971), cracked the U.S. pop singles top forty in mid-November and also rose to number one, where it remained for three weeks during a thirteen week top forty chart run. It also topped the r&b singles chart and reached number 15 in England. The song passed one million in U.S. sales in November, 1971 and is ranked number 139 on Rolling Stone Magazine's 500 Greatest Songs Of All Time. In addition to Sly, the only other people to play on the record were his sister Rose, Billy Preston, and Bobby Womack.

The album also yielded a second U.S. pop singles top forty hit. "Runnin' Away" (#23-1972) cracked the top forty in late February, 1972 and peaked at number 23 during a six week top forty chart run. It also reached number 15 on the r&b singles chart and number 17 in England. A third single, "(You Caught Me) Smilin'" (#42-1972), just missed the top forty, stalling at number 42. It also reached number 21 on the r&b singles chart.

The album was the last recording to include Errico, who left in 1971 because of all the turmoil within, and around, the band. The group had been playing live shows during the year, including a festival appearance in the Pocono Mountains, a show at Tanglewood, and three nights at Madison Square Garden, followed by two nights at the Spectrum in Philadelphia and two nights at the Forum in LA. They continued to tour in 1972 from January until early April. Errico had been replaced by Gerry Gibson, who lasted around one year before he was replaced by Andy Newmark (born July 14, 1950 in Port Chester, New York). Errico would go on to have a very successful career playing with Weather Report, David Bowie, Santana, The Grateful Dead, Larry Graham, Journey, and the Pointer Sisters, among many others.

The tenuous relationship between Larry Graham and the Stone brothers finally blew up in 1972. The year had started badly when Martini audited his share of the band earnings, leading Sly to temporarily replace him with Pat Rizzo before he changed his mind and kept both in the band. Later that year, a post-concert brawl broke out between Graham and Sly's street associates, Bubba Banks and Eddie Chin, who believed that Graham had hired a hit man to kill Sly. Graham and his wife barely escaped, climbing out of a hotel room with Rizzo waiting below to drive him away in a car. The bassist immediately left the group and started his own band, Graham Central Station. He was replaced by Rustee Allen (born March 3, 1951 in Monroe, Louisiana).

The band continued to tour in 1972, albeit on a more limited schedule. They did play some major venues like Madison Square Garden and The Forum in the fall. They also began to record a new studio album, *Fresh* (#7-1973), which was released on June 30, 1973. It was lighter and more accessible than *There's A Riot Goin' On* and was another hit. Graham wound up playing on two tracks while Allen played on three. Newmark handled all drums. The album made the American pop albums chart immediately, peaking at number 7 during a 33 week chart run. It also topped the r&b albums chart and hit number 17 in Canada. It was certified gold in the U.S. in August, 1973.

The lead single, "If You Want Me To Stay" (#12-1973), was another monster hit. It cracked the U.S. pop singles top forty in mid-July and peaked at number 12 during a thirteen week top forty chart run. It also reached number 3 on the r&b singles chart and passed the one million sales mark in the U.S. in September, 1973. It was the fourth million selling single of the band's career. A second single, "Frisky" (#79-1973), made the lower levels of the U.S. pop singles chart, peaking at number 79. It also reached number 28 on the r&b singles chart. The B side, "If It Were Left Up To Me" (1973), reached number 57 on the r&b singles chart.

Once again, the band toured in support, including a visit to Germany in the summer of 1973. They also played Madison Square Garden in early December. In July, 1974, they returned with a new studio album, *Small Talk* (#15-1974). It peaked at number 15 on the American pop albums chart during a fifteen week chart run. It also hit number 13 in Canada. It was certified gold in the U.S. in November, 1974. The album marked another change in musical styles for the singer, with the use of strings softening the overall mood. The lead single, "Time For Livin'" (#32-1974), reached number 32 on the U.S. pop singles chart during a 3 week top forty chart run August. It also hit number 10 on the r&b singles chart. A second single, "Loose Booty" (#84-1974), also made both charts, peaking at number 84 on the pop chart and number 22 on the r&b chart.

Just before the album was released, Sly married Kathleen Silva on stage at Madison Square Garden on June 5, 1974. She is the mother of his son, Sylvester Jr., who was born in late 1973. The marriage did not last long, with the couple separating in 1976. Like in previous years, the band toured sporadically during 1974. In January, 1975, they played a poorly attended seven night stand at Radio City Music Hall in NYC, then broke up. Only Freddie, Robinson, Martini, and the Little Sisters would work with him on his next few recordings, even though some were released under the Sly and the Family Stone moniker.

The first of these was *High On You* (#45-1975), which was released on November 8, 1975. It was issued under his name, Sly Stone, and reached number 45 on the American pop albums chart. It also hit number 11 on the r&b albums chart. However, it dropped off the pop albums chart after only 10 weeks and was his first album since *Life* not to be certified gold in America. It yielded his last U.S. pop chart single, "I Get High On You" (#52-1975), which stalled at number 52. It also peaked at number 3 on the r&b singles chart. A second song, "Le Lo Li" (1975), only hit number 75 on the r&b singles chart.

Due to his reputation for frequently missing shows or showing up late at those that he did attend, no concert promoter would book Sly for the remainder of the decade. Instead, he released a series of albums with limited success. They included *Heard Ya Missed Me, Well I'm Back* (1976), which hit the record stores on December 18, 1976. It was released under the Sly and the Family Stone moniker but only contained Robinson and Vaetta/Elva Mouton from the original band. It did not make the American pop album chart and only peaked at number 33 on the r&b album chart. Only one single, "Family Again" (1976) charted, with it stalling at number 85 on the r&b singles chart. It was his last album for Epic, who knew that they could not count on him to do anything productive.

Sly essentially disappeared until 1979, when he signed a new deal with Warner Brothers Records and released *Back On The Right Track* (#152-1979) under his own name on November 3, 1979. It was highly advertised by Warner and immediately made the American pop albums chart. However, it dropped off after only 3 weeks, only peaking at number 152. The album did better on the r&b albums chart, reaching number 31. The lead single, "Remember Who You Are" (1979), hit number 38 on the r&b singles chart. The only members of the original band who participated in the project were Robinson, Rose and Freddie, with the last two only providing backing vocals. Sly played a handful of live shows in support.

In 1981, Sly appeared on the 1981 Funkadelic album, *The Electric Spanking of War Babies*. He was featured on one track, "Funk Get Stronger (Killer Millimeter Longer Version)", where he sings and plays guitar, keyboards, and drums. He also co-wrote the song with George Clinton. The collaboration went well enough that Clinton agreed to record a joint album with Sly for Warner Brothers. However, Clinton had a falling out with the label and left the project. Sly promptly disappeared and Warner hired producer Stewart Levine to try to salvage something from what had been recorded. The resulting album, *Ain't But The One Way* (1982), was released in 1982 and died a fast death.

In June, 1983, Sly was arrested for cocaine possession in Ft. Myers, Florida. He was sentenced to a court order rehabilitation program but the stay did not take hold. He would spend the rest of the eighties trying to reestablish his career while he continued to fight with his drug problems. In 1986, he appeared on Jesse Johnson's minor hit single, "Crazy". Encouraged, A&M gave him a record contract, which led to his last single, "Eek-A-Bo-Static" (1987). That same year, he also released a duet with Martha Davis called "Love & Affection". However, as had been the case since the early seventies, he managed to negate these small gains with his personal problems. This time he was arrested and jailed as a result of another cocaine bust. By the time he got out of jail, his career was over.

Things were so bad for Sly in the wake of his second arrest that by 1993, when Sly and the Family Stone was inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, he was living in a sheltered housing complex. In 1995, Avenue Records gave Sly a record contract but as of the present, he has not recorded anything for them. Sly did make an appearance at the 2006 Grammys, appearing on stage and singing during an ensemble performance of his hits. He walked off mid song, showing that after these many years, nothing has changed.

In the wake of the Grammy tribute, Rose, Robinson, and Martini organized a reunion tour, which lasted through 2007. Sly joined them on stage during a number of dates. Initially, he seemed confused and walked off the stage mid song several times. But as the tour progressed, his confidence grew and he seemed more comfortable. The tour also visited Japan in 2008. After the tour ended, Sly disappeared until he unexpectedly agreed to an hour long radio interview in May, 2009. In 2010, he initiated a lawsuit against Jerry Goldstein for 50 million dollars in back royalties.

On August 16, 2011, Sly released a new album on Cleopatra Records called *I'm Back! Family & Friends* (2011). It featured remixes and covers of his old catalog, along with three new tracks. It included guest appearances by Jeff Beck, Ray Manzarek, Bootsy Collins, Ann Wilson, Carmine Appice, and Johnny Winter. It did not sell well and remains his last new album.

One month after the release of the album, reports surfaced that Sly was homeless and living in a van in Los Angeles. It turned out that Sly was living in a full size motor home by choice. Meanwhile, Goldstein had launched a countersuit and the case would drag on until early 2015, when a jury awarded Stone five million dollars. Unfortunately, Goldstein appealed and a higher court ordered that the five million dollars had to be deposited into a production company the singer had set up in 1989 with Goldstein. While Sly owns 50% of the production company, when, or if, he ever received that money.

On November 24, 2015, Cynthia Robinson passed away from cancer. She and Sly had a daughter, Sylvette, who was born in 1976. He also has another daughter, Novena Carmel who was born on 1982. In 2015, the singer released a new Sly and the Family Stone live set from two October, 1968 shows at the Fillmore East. Sly also performed one track on Sal Filippelli's 2015 album, *This Day In Music History*.

Once Sly moved in with his daughter, his life stabilized. In January 2017, filmmaker Michael Rubinstone released a new documentary film called *On the Sly: In Search of the Family Stone* premiered at the Slamdance Film Festival. The film had taken over twelve years to complete and was culled from over 500 hours of footage. During the previous year, Greg Zola's documentary, *Small Talk About Sly* (2016), also premiered. Zola had started working on the film in 2006.

The two documentaries helped motivate the Roots' iconic drummer, Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson to started production on his own definitive documentary, *Sly Lives! (aka The Burden Of Black Genius)*, in 2021. In January 2023, Questlove sold the rights to the film, which was still unfinished, to Hulu and Onyx Collective, which was a subsidiary of Disney Entertainment. Ten months later, Sly published his autobiography, **Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)**, in October. Questlove wrote the foreword. His documentary was finally released in January 2025. It premiered at the Sundance Film Festival on January 23 and was released internationally on February 13.

Stone had been battling a number of health issues, including COPD, while he worked on a screenplay about his life. He had just completed it when he passed away from a combination of health factors on June 9, 2025 at his home in Granada Hills, Los Angeles. He was eighty two years old.

There are a number of compilations that are available that capture Sly and the Family Stone's music. Epic's 1970 set, *Greatest Hits*, remains one of the era's best albums. The 12 song set includes all their hit singles, as well as some album tracks. A 1980 Epic set, *Anthology*, is more comprehensive, consisting of 20 tracks. Finally, Sony's 2002 release, *The Essential Sly & The Family Stone*, contains 35 tracks. Each of these compilations is available at any large music retailer.

Amazingly, Sly and the Family Stone did not release a live recording until late 2003. Epic/Legacy's set, *Live At The Fillmore East 1968*, includes 14 tracks from two separate shows held on October 5. The same material and new live recordings from the previous night were released by Epic/Legacy in 2015 as *Live At The Fillmore East October 4th & 5th, 1968*. The four CD set contains 34 tracks. Cotillion's 2009 set, *The Woodstock Experience – Sly and the Family Stone*, includes 9 tracks recorded at Woodstock.

My first live recording from the band is Epic/Legacy's *Live At The Fillmore East 1968*, which captures a concert from early in their career, but has been out of print almost from the time it was released. I have a foreign release of a October 5, 1968 show at the same venue. Given the quality of the recording, I think it is the same show that was featured in the Epic/Legacy release. No matter, this double CD captures the group when they were the rage of the industry. They had just released *Dance To The Music* and *Life*, and were rightfully considered to be one of the hottest live band around. These blistering sets prove that beyond a shadow of a doubt.

As was the case with all performers who played the Fillmore East in the late sixties, Sly and the Family Stone performed two sets. The early set contains six impeccably played songs. There are fantastic versions of "Life", "Color Me True", "Are You Ready?", and "Dance To The Music". Cynthia Robinson takes a rare lead vocal on "It Won't Be Long". The set ends with an explosive version of "M'Lady", which contains a sequence of vocal effects that are amazing.

All six songs are well played, with vibrant, tight horn work and unbelievable bass/drum work by one of the best, if not the best, rhythm sections in the business at the time. Larry Graham's bass work and Greg Errico's drums drive the songs at an incredible pace. This is funk at it earliest, and most pure. Freddie Stewart shows off his guitar playing on "Are You Ready?" and Sly is right on with his organ playing and

singing. The ensemble harmony vocals are also something to behold. During a twelve minute plus version of “Dance To The Music”, the band includes “Music Lover” and an audience sing along to “I Want To Take You Higher”. This same sequence would be the highlight of the group’s set at Woodstock, which would take place in less than a year.

The second set repeats the six songs from the earlier set and adds exciting versions of “Love City” and the Otis Redding classic, “Turn Me Loose”. There is also a closing jam called “Outro” that features the guitar work of Freddie Stewart. While the second set is looser than the first, it is still funk at its best. “Love City” contains another audience sing along and the Redding cover shows just how versatile this lineup was. Performance quality is just as high as the first set, with the Graham/Errico rhythm section once again setting the pace. Graham uses a slapping bass technique throughout, proof that he was doing this far earlier than contemporaries like Bootsy Collins.

While neither of these sets includes their big hits, they showcase just how innovative and trend setting this lineup was at the time. No one, including George Clinton, was doing this. That makes this recording a must have in any collection. While this particular set will be almost impossible to find, the two night, four show release by Epic/Legacy is readily available.

Title: The Woodstock Experience – Sly and the
Family Stone
First Great Rock Festivals of the Seventies

Label: Cotillion
Columbia

Release Date: 2009
1971

Medium: CD
Triple Album

Availability: Very Good
Rare

Venue: Bethel, New York
Isle of Wight, England

Recording Date: August 17, 1969
August 30, 1970

Lineup: Sly Stone	- Vocals, keyboards, harmonica	Cynthia Robinson	- Trumpet, vocals
Freddie Stewart	- Guitar, vocals	Rosie Stone	- Keyboards, vocals, percus.
Larry Graham	- Bass, vocals	Jerry Martini	- Sax, vocals
Greg Errico	- Drums		

Set List: M’Lady
Sing A Simple Song
You Can Make It If You Try
Everyday People
Dance To The Music
Higher/Music Lover

I Want To Take You Higher
Love City
Stand!
Stand! (Isle Of Wight)
You Can Make It If You Try (Isle of Wight)

My second live recording of Sly and the Family Stone is their full Woodstock set. I also have two songs they recorded at the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival. At 4:00 am in the morning on Sunday, August 17, 1969, Sly and the Family Stone took the stage at Woodstock and pulled off one of the festival’s most electrifying sets. Parts of that set were captured on the official movie soundtrack, in the movie itself, and on a follow up

set titled *Woodstock Diary* but the whole set was not made available until 2009 as part of a series of 40th anniversary Woodstock related releases.

The nine tracks from Woodstock include all the elements that made Sly and the Family Stone so revolutionary. There are multiple, short lead vocals from four members of the band. The James Brown influenced rhythms are powerful and the songs are dominated by staccato horn bursts and short instrumental breaks featuring organ, guitar, trumpet, sax, bass, and harmonica.

The vocal work is exemplary, with powerful lead vocals and tight harmonies. And, while the music is complicated and often played at a furious pace, the musicians put on a flawless, energetic performance. The set contains the only live version of “Everyday People” that I am aware of as well as a solid version of “Stand!” that leads off the show and managed to get the massive crowd on their feet. But, as good as this performance and set list is, what makes it unique is Sly’s incredible audience interaction sequence.

Let’s place this in context. Because of scheduling delays, Sly and the Family Stone did not take the stage until 4:00 in the morning. By that point, the crowd had been at the festival for two long days and had just listened to a long day of continuous music. They had to be exhausted yet Sly manages to get everyone on their feet and chant in unison. Despite his rambling, nearly incoherent exhortations, Sly somehow convinces half a million people to shout “higher” at exactly the right time over and over again. It is a feat of master showmanship that is unparalleled in rock history.

The crowd is so into the set that they chant nearly as loud as the band is playing and by the time the sequence is over, give the group one of the most tumultuous ovations I have ever heard on record. That makes this is one of the most exciting recorded live segments in rock history and a must have in any live music collection.

A little over one year later, Sly and the Family Stone played the Isle of Wight Festival. By this point, the group was one of the biggest acts in the world, dominating both the singles and album charts. *Stand!* was still riding high on the album chart and the group was considered to be rock’s premier live band.

While much has been written about the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival and both a film and a double CD set have been released documenting the festival, few realize that Sly and the Family Stone played there in the early morning hours of Sunday, August 30. For some reason, they were left out of the film and do not appear on the *Message To Love* double CD set that was released in the nineties. However, two songs from their set were included on the 1971 Columbia release, *The First Great Rock Festivals of the Seventies*. This triple album captures performances from the 1970 Atlanta Pop Festival and Isle of Wight. Sly and the Family Stone are featured on “Stand” and “You Can Make It If You Try”.

The two Isle of Wight tracks show how much the group had matured since their show stopping performance at Woodstock. “Stand” is a serious call to arms, representative of the socially relevant material Sly started writing in the late sixties. It is performed slowly and with passion before it veers into one of the group’s patented funky sequences. This flows directly into “You Can Make It If You Try”, another song with a serious message.

Like the tracks at Woodstock, the band is outstanding, giving an energetic and relatively flawless performance. Errico and Graham drive the band like their lives depend on it and the songs are filled with short, individual instrumental breaks and repetitive passages. There is a different, more serious, feel to these

cuts than the ones at Woodstock, a harbinger of the kind of material that the group would explore on *There's A Riot Going On*, which was released the following year.

While the Epic/Legacy set captures the excitement of an early Sly concert, these eleven tracks represent the best the band had to offer. The only thing that would be even better is if Epic found a 1970 era full performance.

My last live recording of Sly and the Family Stone comes from a 1973 *Don Kirshner Rock Concert* broadcast. The group performs three songs, including "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)", "Stand", and "Dance To The Music". Recording quality is good.

By 1973, Sly and the Family Stone were a shell of the band that had rocked the music world in the late sixties and early seventies. Larry Graham and Greg Errico were gone and Sly was heavily involved with drugs. The dire state of things is clearly reflected in this three song set. Stewart is stoned out of his mind throughout but somehow manages to get through the first two songs, although both dissolve into seemingly endless jams. The funk classic, "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)" is the better of the two. The band sounds good and Stewart contributes some rare guitar work, even playing a solo that features some tandem guitar and scat singing. "Stand" is even more drawn out. Stewart is featured on keyboards and actually sounds good on vocals.

Both songs contain Sly's now infamous audience exhortations. It's almost as if he tried to recreate the magic of Woodstock at each subsequent live show, assuming he showed up. The two songs are fascinating from a train wreck sort of perspective, you just don't know what to expect, but are surprisingly well performed. The last piece, "Dance To The Music" is a total mess. Stewart is completely out of things by this point in the show and the band flounders through the song without his leadership. It is clear that a 1973 era Sly show had good and bad moments. This one is no exception. While this set will be nearly impossible to locate, it would be a great find. I found the entire 34 minute video of this show on YouTube.

I also have another live performance of "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)" from the band's appearance on *The Midnight Special* in 1974. It is much tighter than the Kirshner version, with Sly in better form on vocals. Once again, Sly is featured on guitar, pulling off a solo similar to the one he performs on the Kirshner show. This song will be easier to find than the Kirshner material, since it has been included on *Midnight Special* compilations.