BOOKER T. & THE M.G.'s

Title: Back To Back

Label: Atlantic

Release Date: 1967

Medium: CD

Availability: Good

Venue: Olympia, Paris, France

Recording Date: March 17, 18, and 21, 1967

Lineup: Booker T. Jones - Keyboards
Steve Cropper - Guitar
Donald "Duck" Dunn - Bass
Al Jackson Jr. - Drums
Wayne Jackson - Trumpet
Andrew Love - Sax
Joe Arnold - Sax

Set List: Green Onions
Red Beans And Rice
Tic-Tac-Toe
Hip Hug-Her
Philly Dog
Grab This Thing
Last Night
Gimme Some Lovin'
Booker Loo
Outrage

Booker T. & The M.G.'s were the principle architects of what came to be known as the Memphis Sound. As the house band for Stax Records, they backed such Stax stars as Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, Wilson Pickett, Albert King, Eddie Floyd, and Rufus and Carla Thomas. While this might have been enough to land them in the Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame, they also carved out a very successful career as an independent band. They have placed twelve albums on the American pop albums chart and seventeen singles on the U.S. pop singles chart. Seven of these singles cracked the top forty.

The band was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame in 1992, the Musicians Hall Of Fame and Museum in 2008, the Memphis Hall Of Fame in 2012, and the Blues Hall Of Fame in 2019. In 2007, they won a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. They were one of the first racially integrated rock bands of their time and were instrumental in the development and acceptance of southern soul music. Rolling Stone Magazine has ranked the band at number 93 on their list of the 100 Greatest Artists of All Time.

On top of all this, the individual members like Booker T. Jones, Steve Cropper, Al Jackson Jr., and Donald "Duck" Dunn are legends in their own right. While the band broke up and reformed many times, they have not played under their name since 2012, when Dunn passed away. Since then, the music world has also lost Steve Cropper (12/3/2025), leaving Booker T. Jones as the last surviving member.

The roots of the band go back to two musicians, Booker T. Jones and Steve Cropper. Jones was born Booker Taliaferro Jones Jr. on November 12, 1944 in Memphis, Tennessee. His father, Booker T. Jones Sr. was named in honor of the legendary educator, Booker T. Washington. Like his namesake, he also pursued a career in education and became a science teacher at Memphis High School. His mother worked as a secondary in the same school. She was the lead soprano in the church choir which also included his father.

His parents discovered that their son was musically inclined at a very young age and they encouraged and supported his first efforts to express himself through music. When he was a toddler, they bought him a cheap drum to bang on. By the age of five, he had taught himself how to play chords on a ukulele and

piano. When Booker was nine years old, they bought him a clarinet, which he quickly mastered and joined his junior high school band in fourth grade. When the band needed an oboist, he agreed to switch to the difficult instrument. He soon learned to play the saxophone and flute and by the time he was in high school, the musical prodigy could also play trombone and baritone horn.

Booker absorbed all the music being played in Memphis, including r&b, soul, and pop. He began to sneak into Memphis clubs when he was fourteen and was hooked. At the time, he was attending Booker T. Washington High School, which was the alma mater of Rufus Thomas. His classmates included David Porter, Andrew Love, William Bell, and Maurice White. The five formed their own band and competed in local music competitions.

At this point, Jones was the Director of his high school band, organized the school dance orchestra which played proms at numerous schools in the mid-south. He also excelled at academics and was listed in the Who's Who of American High Schools. Aside from his usual studies, he also studied music theory and harmony. He would later study classical music composition at Indiana University. He also began to write his own songs.

Despite Jones' considerable accomplishments, it was Porter who wound up paving the way into a professional music career for him and his three other friends. He was working in the Big D grocery store which was located across the street from Satellite Records and went over to check out the Satellite Record Shop, which was located upstairs from the recording studio. The label had been founded in 1957 by a white entrepreneur named Jim Stewart who was a country music fiddle player and worked at Union Planters Bank. He decided to launch his own label to record country music and rockabilly artists and initially financed it through his sister, Estelle Axton, who mortgaged her home. The label's first location was in a local garage.

In 1959, Stewart moved the label into the former Capitol Movie Theatre in Memphis. At that point, Estelle opened the record shop, which specialized in recordings of all genres. When Stewart hired Chips Moman as his recording engineer, Moman introduced him to r&b and soul music. Seeing an opportunity, he began to transition to r&b artists. As such, the timing of Porter's visit was perfect.

Estelle took an instant liking to the young man and introduced him to her brother. Stewart then introduced him to Moman, who was impressed with the young man's energy. Moman quickly recognized his musical talent and encouraged him to continue to work on his songwriting, pointing him to Estelle, who began to tutor him by playing him records featuring songs written by up and coming songwriters like Burt Bacharach and Hal David, as well as Holland/Dozier/Holland.

By this point, Satellite had already released their first r&b recordings, including "Fool In Love" by the Veltones. While promoting the song, Stewart met Memphis disc jockey Rufus Thomas and the two became unlikely friends. In 1960, both Rufus and his daughter, Carla, wound up recording singles for the label, which led to a temporary distribution deal with Atlantic Records through their Atco subsidiary. In addition, a huge piece of the label's future was also waiting in the wings.

Porter solidified his position within the label by bringing in Jones to play sax on Rufus and Carla's first recording session, which yielded "Cause I Love You" (1960). Jones was only sixteen years old at the time and instantly became an in demand session player. He was then hired to join singer Willie Mitchell's band, playing both sax and bass. Significantly, one of the other members of Mitchell's band at the time was drummer Al Jackson Jr. (born Albert J. Jackson Jr. on November 27, 1935 in Memphis, Tennessee).

Like Jones, Jackson was a musical prodigy. He was playing drums at the age of five and was a member of his father's band at the age of fourteen. Jones knew a great musician when he heard one and was determined to continue to work with him. It would take a while but he eventually convinced him to come over to Stax Records in late 1961/early 1962 when the label agreed to pay him a salary. Meanwhile, Jones had formed a trio with Maurice White and Porter where he played another new instrument, guitar. He also met Cropper for the first time when both were hanging around the Satellite Record Shop.

Cropper was born Steven Lee Cropper on October 21, 1941 in Dora, Missouri. He moved with his family to Memphis when he was nine years old, where he was first exposed to gospel music. When he was fourteen years old, he bought his first mail order guitar and learned to play. His guitar style was influenced by artists like jazz guitarist Tal Farlow, fifties r&b/rocker Chuck Berry, country pickers Jimmy Reed and Chet Atkins, r&b guitarist Lowman Pauling, and soul/jazz guitarist Billy Butler. With these varied influences, Cropper could play literally any style of music.

Cropper and fellow guitarist Charlie Freeman formed a band called the Royal Spades. Cropper and Freeman's friend was Duck Dunn (born Donald Dunn on November 24, 1941 in Memphis, Tennessee). When they decided to form the Royal Spades, he switched from guitar to bass. The three rounded out the band with drummer Terry Johnson. The group went through a series of changes over the years while Cropper also began to do session work with Sun, Duke-Peacock, and Hi Records.

One of the later members of the Royal Spades was Charles "Packy" Axton, who was Estelle Axton's son. She convinced her brother to sign the group to Satellite in the summer of 1961. At that point, the lineup included Cropper, Dunn, Johnson, Axton, keyboardist Jerry Lee Smith, and trumpeter Wayne Jackson. The label put together a modified version of the band, adding horn players Floyd Newman and Gilbert Caple and renamed them the Mar-Keys, in part because Estelle did not like their original name.

Under Moman's direction, the new lineup recorded an organ and saxophone driven instrumental called "Last Night" (#3-1961), which had been written by Packy, Caple, Newman, Smith, and Moman. Oddly, Moman did not want any guitar on the recording so Cropper played second organ. The song was released in June, 1961 and caught on locally, before quickly crossing over to a national audience. By the middle of July, it was in the U.S. pop chart top forty and rose all the way to number 3 during a twelve week top forty chart run. It also reached number 2 on the r&b singles chart and sold over one million copies.

During the Mar-Keys first tour, Cropper quit and returned to Memphis, where he became a studio fixture. In September, 1961, Stewart was served notice of trademark infringement by a California based label also called Satellite Records and had to change his label's name. He combined the first two letters of his last name with the first two letters of his sister's married name and Stax Records was born.

The stars finally lined up in the spring of 1962 when Jones, Cropper, Jackson Jr. and bassist Lewie Polk Steinberg (born September 13, 1933 in Memphis, Tennessee) were asked to back rockabilly singer Billy Lee Riley during a recording session. Steinberg had first met Jones during the Rufus/Carla Thomas recording session in 1960 and the two became friends. He first learned to play the bass in his Brother Luther's band. After a stint in the Army, he found his way to Stax, where he became one of their preferred session bassists.

The recording session with Riley finished quickly and the four musicians began to jam to pass the time. Unbeknownst to them, Stewart liked what he was hearing and continued to run the tape. They were jamming off a bluesy riff created by Jones. The four musicians managed to shape the riff into an actual

song, which became “Behave Yourself”. It was so good that Stewart encouraged them to write a second song so that he could release both as a single.

Cropper reminded Jones of another twelve bar blues riff that he had heard him play and the four shaped it into “Green Onions” (#3-1962). Once the single was pressed, Stewart wanted to release it with “Behave Yourself” as the A side. However, Cropper thought that “Green Onions” was the stronger song. In order to settle the impasse, Cropper took the still not released pressing to Memphis radio station, WLOK, and they began to play it. Call in listeners leaned heavily to “Green Onions” so it was made the A side, with “Behave Yourself” in the B slot when it was released nationally in May, 1962. Stewart decided to release it on his newly formed subsidiary, Volt Records.

Needing a name for the new band, Stax and the band members chose Booker T. and the M.G.s. At the time, Stax’s publicity arm explained that the M.G. meant “Memphis Group”. However, Moman owned a M.G. sport car at the time, which really inspired the name. Because of potential trademark infringement issues with the car manufacturer, the label came up with the “Memphis Group” explanation. There was also some intrigue about the final title of their first single. The band initially called it “Funky Onions” but Estelle Axton was not happy that because it sounded too close to “Fucking Onions”.

At that point, they came up with “Green Onions”, which was inspired by the name of a cat in the Green Badger comic strip. However, Jones has also stated at times that he called it “Green Onions” because it was the nastiest food he could think of. It first entered the U.S. Billboard Top 100 chart in August and the top forty in early September. It rose all the way to number 3 during a twelve week top forty chart run, peaking at the position by the end of the month. It has generated sales of over one million copies in the United States. It also topped the r&b singles chart for four weeks.

The song is now ranked at number 181 on Rolling Stone Magazine’s list of the 500 Greatest Songs Of All Time and is in the Grammy Hall Of Fame. In 2012, it was added to the National Recording Registry of the Library Of Congress and was inducted into the Blues Hall Of Fame in 2018 in the Classic of Blues Recording (Song) category. All four band members at the time are credited as songwriters.

With the single storming the charts, the band released their debut album, *Green Onions* (#33-1962), in October, 1962. It entered the American pop albums chart in November and rose to number 33 during a seventeen week chart run. It also reached number 11 in England. Their second single, “Jellybread” (#82-1962) followed by the end of the year. It made the lower levels of the U.S. pop singles chart, peaking at number 82. The band did some limited touring in support but since they were one of the first racially integrated rock band in music, they had difficulty booking shows in the south.

After not charting with “Home Grown” (1963), the band returned to the U.S. pop singles chart in the summer of 1963 with “Chinese Crackers” (#78-1963), which peaked at number 78. They ended 1963 with another minor pop chart single, “Mo’ Onions” (#97-1963), which reached number 97.

Between 1962 and 1965, the members of the M.G.s were part of Stax’s in-house band. That famous group included Jones, Cropper, Dunn, Jackson, David Porter, and Isaac Hayes, as well as horn players Andrew Love and Wayne Jackson. They played on nearly every recording made at Stax between 1962 and 1970. During the time that Jones attended Indiana University in the early to mid-sixties, he would spend the week at school, then return to Memphis to record and play live shows with the M.G.s. Hayes would often substitute for him on keyboards when he was at school.

During this period, Stax had chart success with records by Otis Redding, Rufus Thomas, the Mar-Keys, and Booker T & The M.G.s. However, outside of these three artists, they had limited success, with only three singles by William Bell, the Mar-Keys, and Barbara & The Browns even making the charts between January, 1962 and December, 1964.

When Jim Stewart finally signed a formal national distribution deal with Atlantic Records in 1965, there was immediate pressure on Stax to increase their output. The new deal allowed Carla Thomas to return to the label where she had started, and led to the signing of new artists like Sam & Dave, Eddie Floyd, The Astors, and The Mad Lads. The label also hired Al Bell as a full-time promotions man. The core Stax acts also needed to do their part, and by extension, that included Booker T & The M.G.s.

The band had taken their time before they began work on their second studio album. They finally pulled the album together in late 1964 and *Soul Dressing* (1965) was released in March, 1965. The title track had been released as a single in July, 1964 and managed to reach number 85 on the U.S. pop singles chart. In late 1964, Steinberg decided to move on from the label. He joined Willie Mitchell's band and would continue to work with him for years during notable residencies at the Plantation Inn, the Flaming Room, and Club Paradise. At that point, Donald "Duck" Dunn, who had been doing session work at Stax for years and been a member of the Mar-Keys, joined the group to replace him.

One of the first recordings made with Dunn was "Boot-Leg" (#58-1965), which was released in April, 1965. The single reached number 48 on the U.S. pop singles chart and hit number 10 on the r&b singles chart. Bell and Stewart also sent a traveling revue out to the West Coast. They arranged a series of shows at the 54 Ballroom in the Watts area of Los Angeles that included Booker T. & The M.G.'s, Rufus and Carla Thomas, The Mar-Keys, William Bell, The Astors, and The Mad Lads. This residency was the first Stax Revue, which would become one of the most popular touring ensembles over the next few years. Since the M.G.s were playing their own set, they also were available to back all the other artists, an ideal situation for Stax.

While in L.A., the four members of the M.G.s reunited former Mar-Key, Charles Axton, who was living there at the time. At the suggestion of disc jockey Nathaniel Montague, the five musicians recorded an instrumental called "Hole In The Wall" (#43-1965). Montague released it as a single under the moniker The Packers in October, 1965. It was a surprise hit, reaching number 43 on the U.S. pop singles chart and number 5 on the r&b singles chart.

In 1966, Stax signed more new artists including blues legend Albert King and the Bar-Kays. Bell also put Hayes, Porter, and the four members of the M.G.s on salary, an unprecedented act by a label but allowed the six musicians to not have to supplement their income with outside projects. The six also received a small portion of the royalty payments being earned by the artists they backed. From that point on, they played on virtually every recording released by Stax during their glory years.

Despite their now constant studio presence, Booker T & The M.G.s managed to release a new single, "My Sweet Potato" (#85-1966), in July, 1966. It reached number 85 on the U.S. pop singles chart and number 18 on the r&b singles chart. In November, 1966, they released a new album, *And Now!* (1966). They also released a holiday album called *In The Christmas Spirit* (1966) during the same month. While And Now! did not chart, the holiday set reached number 13 on American pop albums chart and has become an annual fixture on the Christmas charts.

The success of the holiday set pushed the band to do even more things independently. In February, 1967, they released a new single, "Hip Hug-Her" (#37-1967). The instrumental was written by the four band members and entered the U.S. pop singles top forty in May, 1967 and released number 37 during a three week top forty chart run. The song also peaked at number 6 on the r&b singles chart. Four months later, they released a cover of the Young Rascals' "Groovin'" (#21-1967), in June. It did even better, cracking the top forty in early September and rising to number 21 during a seven week top forty chart run. It also reached number 10 on the r&b singles chart.

Both singles were included on their new studio album, *Hip Hug-Her* (#35-1967), which was released in June, 1967. It immediately entered the American pop albums chart and rose to number 35 during a twenty nine week chart run. The album also reached number 4 on the r&b albums chart. During this same period, the group toured Europe as part of the Stax/Volt Revue. In June, 1967, they performed a solo set and backed Otis Redding's legendary set at the Monterey Pop Festival. Two of Redding's songs were featured in the documentary movie and the group's individual set was captured on subsequent CD compilations.

In July, 1967, the band released a new live album with The Mar-Keys called *Back To Back* (#98-1967). It was recorded during the European revue tour, with seven of the ten songs featuring Booker T. & The M.G.'s and three featuring the Mar-Keys. At the time, the Mar-Keys consisted of the four M.G.s plus the horn section of Wayne Jackson, Joe Arnold, and Andrew Love. In the fall of 1967, the band toured independently and ended the year with an appearance at a festival at Miami Marine Stadium.

The band's next studio album, *Doin' Our Thing* (#176-1968), was released on February 23, 1968. It did not make the American pop albums chart until mid-May and stalled at number 176 during a four week chart run. They quickly followed with *Soul Limbo* (#127-1968) in September, 1968. While it only peaked at number 127 on the American pop albums chart during a nine week chart run, it yielded two U.S. pop chart top forty singles.

"Soul Limbo" (#17-1968) was released well before the album. The instrumental was written by the four band members and entered the top forty in early August, rising to number 17 during a seven week top forty chart run. It also peaked at number 30 in England and number 10 in Australia. The song has been certified gold in the United States. The second single, "Hang 'Em High" (#9-1968), was a cover of the title song of the Clint Eastwood movie of the same name. It was written by Dominic Frontiere for the movie. The M.G.s version entered the U.S. pop singles top forty in late December and rose to number 9 during an eleven week top forty chart run. It also hit number 35 on the r&b singles chart and number 98 in Australia. The band supported the singles and album by continuing to play rock venues like The Matrix, the Fillmore Auditorium, Winterland, and Miami Pop Festival in 1968.

In February, 1969, they scored again with "Time Is Tight" (#6-1969), which they recorded for the 1968 movie *Up Tight*. It entered the U.S. pop singles top forty in early April and rose all the way to number 6 during a ten week chart run. The song was written by four band members and also hit number 4 in England, number 10 in Australia, and number 7 on the r&b singles chart. The band also recorded the soundtrack for the movie and released it as *Up Tight* (#98-1969) in January, 1969. It quickly entered the American pop albums chart and peaked at number 98 during a twenty seven week chart run.

In May, 1969, they released a new cover of Paul Simon's "Mrs. Robinson" (#37-1968). It entered the U.S. pop singles top forty in early July and reached number 37 during a three week top forty chart run. It also reached number 35 on the r&b singles chart, number 35 in England, and number 57 in Australia. It was featured on their new album, *The Booker T. Set* (#53-1969), which was released in May, 1969. It

entered the American pop albums chart in mid-June and peaked at number 53 during an eighteen week chart run. In July, 1969, they released a new single, "Slum Baby" (#88-1969). It reached number 88 on the U.S. pop singles chart and number 46 on r&b singles chart.

In 1969, they continued to do the same, performing at festivals like Newport '69, the Miami Jazz Festival, the Hampton Jazz Festival, the Atlanta International Pop Festival, the Festival Field in Newport, Rhode Island, the Rutgers Jazz Festival, and the Atlantic City Pop Festival. They were asked to play Woodstock but Jackson Jr. was deadly afraid of flying in a helicopter and they refused.

While the band's members were committed to playing in the group, they found it increasingly difficult to balance their outside schedules and play together. Jones was still attending Indiana University, where he was pursuing an advanced degree in music. He also was carving out a career as a songwriter, having written "Born Under A Bad Sign" for Albert King, "I've Never Found A Girl" for Eddie Floyd, and "I Love You More Than Words Can Say" for Otis Reading.

Cropper was involved in production, his own solo career, and writing. In fact, the guitarist co-wrote many of Stax/Volt's biggest hits of the sixties including "In The Midnight Hour", "Knock On Wood", "Soul Man", and "(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay". In total, he received writing credits on 20 Stax/Volt hits. Also, as Stax's fortunes as a label declined, the band felt more and more uncomfortable.

In 1970, the completed an ambitious project called *McLemore Avenue* (#107-1970). The album was named for the street where Stax was located and consisted of instrumental cover versions of the thirteen songs on the Beatles' *Abbey Road*, condensing twelve of them into three long medleys. The album cover was even a parody of the famous *Abbey Road* cover. Jones and Dunn were huge fans of the Beatles, which led to the project.

While the album did fairly well, reaching number 107 on the American pop albums chart during a fifteen week chart run and number 70 in England, it was an indication that their desire to stay within the confines of the Memphis Sound was waning. Their cover of "Something" was released as a single and reached number 76 on the U.S. pop singles chart.

Even more ominously, Jones had gotten married in 1969 to Rita Coolidge's sister, Priscilla, and the couple moved to California. At the same time, he stopped doing session work for Stax, feeling that he was being treated as an employee and not a musician. While still under contract with Stax, he appeared on Stephen Still's debut solo album (1970).

However, he did tour with the band during the first half of 1970 and did record a new single and album with the band in late 1970. The single, "Melting Pot" (#45-1971), was released in February, 1971. It was written by the band members and nearly reached the U.S. pop singles top forty, peaking at number 45 and also hitting number 21 on the r&b singles chart.

The associated album, *Melting Pot* (#43-1971), was also released in January and did very well, peaking at number 43 during a thirty eight week chart run. Just before the album was released, Stax released the group's first compilation, *Booker T. & The M.G.'s Greatest Hits* (#132-1970), in the fall of 1970. It entered the American pop albums chart in mid-November and reached number 132 during an eight week chart run. The band did some limited touring in early 1971 then Jones left. The remaining three musicians released one final single, "Jamaica this Morning" (1971) in October, 1971. When it did not chart, the band broke up.

Jones and Cropper had left Stax but Dunn and Jackson Jr. remained with the label and continued to do extensive work. Jackson Jr. was particularly successful, writing songs with Al Green and appearing on the singer's recordings. In 1973, the two decided to resurrect the M.G.s moniker. They teamed with session guitarist Bobby Manuel (born Dale Yard on November 13, 1945) and organist Carson Whitsett (born May 1, 1945) and released a new album, *The MG's* (1973) in the summer of 1973. It did not chart and the project was abandoned. However, it did yield a minor r&b chart single called "Sugarcane" (1973), which reached number 67.

Meanwhile, Jones had teamed with his wife and released two minor U.S. chart albums, *Booker T. & Priscilla* (#106-1971) and *Home Grown* (#190-1972). A third album did not chart. Cropper concentrated on production and session work. In September, 1975, the four ex members had a meeting and decided to reform. They decided to form a new version of the band called Booker T. Jones & The Memphis Group at the beginning of 1976 after each of them wrapped up their current projects.

Incredibly, Jackson Jr. was shot and killed in his home by a burglar on October 1, 1975 just nine days after the meeting. The remaining trio ultimately decided to record a new album in honor of Jackson Jr. They recruited drummer Willie Hall (born Willie Clarence Hall on August 8, 1950 in Memphis, TN) and recorded *Universal Language* (1977), which was released in 1977. The album was released on Asylum Records but was not well received and did not chart. One single, "Sticky Stuff" (1977), was a minor r&b chart success, peaking at number 68. In November, 1979, the UK division of Atlantic Records re-issued "Green Onions" (1979) and it peaked at number 7 in England.

Between 1977 and 1990, the group only reformed for special occasions. The first took place in 1980, when they appeared as the house band backing the Blues Brothers in the hit film *The Blues Brothers* (1980). The second took place in May, 1988 when Jerry Wexler asked to be the house band at Atlantic's 40th Anniversary show at Madison Square Garden. Anton Fig filled in for Jackson Jr. and Paul Shaffer filled in for Jones, who came down with food poisoning the night before the show. The rehearsals went so well that the four played some limited shows after the show.

In early 1992, Jones, Cropper, Jackson Jr., Steinberg, and Dunn were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame by Jim Stewart. The exposure from this resurrected their career. After the show, Bob Dylan asked them to be the house band at his 30th Anniversary Concert on October 16, 1992 at Madison Square Garden. Jones, Cropper, Dunn and drummer Anton Fig and Jim Keltner played the show. In 1993, Neil Young hired them as his backing band for his tour. Keltner was featured on drums.

Columbia Records then signed them to a record deal which resulted in a new studio album, *That's The Way It Should Be* (1994), which was released on May 24, 1994. Steve Jordan played drums on most of the album, with James Gadson manning the skins on three tracks. One of the tracks, "Cruisin" won a Grammy for Best Pop Instrumental Performance. It was written by Jones, Cropper, Dunn, and Anton Fig.

During the supporting tour, an August 25, 1994 show from Cooper River Park in Pennsauken, New Jersey was aired live by a Philadelphia radio station WXPN. It was the favorite of European bootleggers for many years until it suddenly showed up on streaming platforms in April 2024 under the title *Livin' Is Easy (Live New Jersey '94)*. It turned out that it was "grey market" release, with a third party label (Atlas Records) packaging a public radio broadcast without the permission of Jones or Cropper.

While the set is preserved in the Internet Archive's Live Music Archive and can streamed or downloaded legally for free, it cannot be sold. Someone found out that it was now on major platforms like Apple and Qobuz and filed a withdraw complaint and it was immediately removed.

When the Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame opened their museum in Cleveland in 1995, the M.G.s served as the house band for the opening ceremonies. Several years later, Jones, Dunn, and Jackson Jr's cousin, drummer Steve Potts, backed Neil Young on his 2002 album, *Are You Passionate?*. After that, the band played sporadic live shows, mostly with Potts on drums. Two years later, Clapton hired Jones, Cropper, and Dunn to be the house band for his first Crossroads Guitar Festival in Dallas, Texas.

In 2008, Cropper, Dunn, and Steve Potts toured Australia as the MGs. Cropper and Dunn also spent time in the various incarnations of the Blues Brothers. On May 13, 2012, Dunn passed away in his sleep after playing a show with Cropper and Eddie Floyd in Tokyo the night before. The last show by the MGs was in April, 2013 at Eric Clapton's 4th Crossroads Guitar Festival at Madison Square Garden in NYC. Jones, Cropper, and Matt Murphy participated. Steinberg passed away on July 21, 2016 from cancer. He was 82 years old.

The death of Steinberg left Cropper and Jones as the last surviving members. The guitarist toured with The Original Blues Brother Band into 2017, then pretty much retired from the road. He celebrated his 80th birthday with an all-star concert on September 7, 2021 at the Ryman Theatre in Nashville. Guests included Billy Gibbons, James Burton, Jeff "Skunk" Baxter, Eddie Floyd, Mike Mills, Phil Vassar, Jason Scheff, Randy Owen, and Henry Cho.

Cropper continued to release studio albums up to his death in December 2025. They include *The Last Shade of Blue Before Black* (2017), *Telemasters* (2018), *Fire It Up* (2021), and *Friendlytown* (2024). The first was recorded with Lou Marini and the Original Blues Brothers Band and the second was recorded with noted guitarist Arlen Roth. *Fire It Up* was nominated for a Grammy for Best Contemporary Blues Album. And *Friendlytown* was also nominated for Best Contemporary Blues Album and included guest guitarists Billy Gibbons, Brian May, and Tim Montana. The album received very strong reviews.

Cropper did not tour in support of any of his last few albums but did make occasional live appearances. In June 2023, he performed a live set at the WMOT Roots on the Rivers Festival in Nashville. It was his last live performance. While Cropper would continue to make nonperforming appearances at events celebrating the release of his last album and industry related events, he confined his live playing to studio sessions right up to his death on December 3, 2025. He had suffered a recent fall and was staying at a rehabilitation facility in Nashville when he passed away from non-disclosed circumstances. He was reportedly working on new music the day before he died at the age of 84.

Jones has released four solo albums since 2009, including *Potato Hole* (2009), *The Road From Memphis* (#85-2011), *Sound The Alarm* (2013), and *Note By Note* (2019). He also continued to perform live with a band including guitarist Ted Jones (his son), bassist Melvin Brannon Jr., and drummer Darian Gray into early 2020, when he was shut down by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, he published his autobiography **Time Is Tight: My Life, Note By Note**.

After the pandemic ended, Jones returned to the road and has maintained very active, with live shows in 2023, 2024, and 2015. He is presently touring a with a show called *Booker T. Jones: A Stax Revue*. As of December 2025, the 81 year old has several live shows set for 2026.

Booker T. & The MG's are featured on numerous compilations. Stax's 1970 set, *Greatest Hits*, contains 11 tracks. Rhino's 1994 release, *The Very Best of Booker T. & The MG's*, includes 16 tracks. Stax's 1998 box set, *Time Is Tight*, contains 65 tracks, including a number of live tracks. Finally, Rhino's 2006 set, *The Definitive Soul Collection*, contains 28 tracks.

The group's first official live album is *Back To Back*. It was released by Stax in 1967 as a joint album with the Mar-Keys. The 10 track set was recorded in Paris during the famous 1967 Stax/Volt Revue European tour. Seven of the tracks are credited to Booker T. & The M.G.'s while the other three are credited to the Mar-Keys. However, those tracks feature the M.G.s along with three horn players.

In addition to *Back To Back*, Booker T. & The M.G.'s are featured on a number of secondary live recordings, including several associated with their work with the Stax/Volt Revues. I wound up compiling a number of live tracks from the band through these kinds of sources.

My first live recording of the band is from the 1967 Atlantic set, *Back To Back*, which includes seven tracks from Booker T. & The M.G.'s and three from the Mar-Keys recorded during the famous spring 1967 Stax/Volt Revue tour of Europe. In addition to providing backup for all the other acts, Booker T. & The M.G.'s played a solo set, then added Wayne Jackson, Andrew Love and Joe Arnold for more songs, billed as the Mar-Keys.

There is considerable confusion regarding the number of live sets that Atlantic released in connection with this tour. Three different volumes are out there in addition to this set, which specifically focuses on Booker T. & The M.G.'s and the Mar-Keys. *Volume One – Live In London* was released in 1991 and includes one song from each of the two versions of the band, two songs from Eddie Floyd, one song from Otis Redding, two songs from Carla Thomas, and three songs from Sam & Dave.

Volume 2 – Live In Paris was also released by Atlantic in 1991 and features three songs from Carla Thomas, three songs from Eddie Floyd, three songs from Sam & Dave, and one song from Otis Redding. Finally, *The Stax/Volt Revue Hit The Road – Stax Volume 3 Live In Europe* was released by Stax in 1992 and features four songs from Booker T. & The M.G.'s, two songs from the Mar-Keys, four songs from Carla Thomas, three songs from Eddie Floyd, and six songs from Otis Redding. As a result, these ten tracks were repeated on Volume 3.

In addition, Atlantic released a solo Otis Redding album and this set, which features ten tracks from Booker T. & The M.G.'s and the Mar-Keys. Confused, well so am I. *Back To Back* was initially released on vinyl in 1967 but later transposed to CD. I have a copy of the CD.

This album contains seven Booker T. & The M.G.'s songs along with three others credited to the Mar-Keys. All of them are spectacular. They include a ferocious version of "Red Beans & Rice", along with great versions of "Booker-Loo", "Green Onions", and "Hip-Hug Her". The band also tackles Spencer Davis' "Gimme Some Lovin'", "Booker Lou", and a song called "Outrage". If you could pick just seven songs from the band that you wanted to hear played live, these would be the seven. When you combine them with the three Mar-Keys pieces, "Philly Dog", "Grab This Thing", and "Last Night", you have some of the best Memphis instrumentals ever recorded.

All the tracks are flawlessly played, with terrific solos from Jones, Cropper, and the Mar-Keys horns. The rhythm section of Duck Dunn and Al Jackson has always been considered as one of the best in music history and they are on fire here. They drive songs like "Red Beans & Rice", "Philly Dog", and "Last

Night" at a ferocious pace, then settle into a killer Memphis soul groove on the other tracks. Cropper is at the top of his game, playing one classic solo after another and Jones is a master of the B-3 organ. An entire label relied on these seven musicians and to hear them play alone is a special treat. Consider this to be a must have in any live music collection.

Title: The Stax/Volt Revue, Volume 3

Label: Stax Records

Release Date: 1992

Medium: CD

Availability: Very Good

Venue: Finsbury Park Astoria, London
Olympia, Paris, France

Recording Date: March 17, 18, and 21, 1967

Lineup: Booker T. Jones - Keyboards
Steve Cropper - Guitar
Donald "Duck" Dunn - Bass
Al Jackson Jr. - Drums
Wayne Jackson - Trumpet
Andrew Love - Sax
Joe Arnold - Sax

Set List: Red Beans & Rice
Booker-Loo
Green Onions
Philly Dog
Last Night
Hip-Hug-Her

These six tracks are undoubtedly repeats of the songs on *Back To Back* but this set also offers tracks from Eddie Floyd, Carla Thomas, and Otis Redding. It is worth purchasing just for them and the rare chance that these are different versions of the tracks reviewed earlier.

Title: The Monterey International Pop Festival

Label: Rhino

Release Date: 1997

Medium: 4 CDs

Availability: Good

Venue: Monterey Pop Festival, Monterey, CA

Recording Date: June 18, 1967

Lineup: Booker T. Jones - Keyboards
Steve Cropper - Guitar
Donald "Duck" Dunn - Bass
Al Jackson Jr. - Drums
Wayne Jackson - Trumpet
Andrew Love - Sax
Joe Arnold - Sax

Set List: Booker-Loo
Hip Hug-Her
Philly Dog

The second live recordings I have of Booker T. & The MG's are three tracks that appear on the Rhino four CD compilation of the Monterey Pop Festival, which were recorded in June, 1967. At the time, the band was at the height of their career, having decided to market themselves to rock audiences. When festival organizers booked Otis Redding, they got a two-for since they were Redding's backup group at the time. In addition to backing Redding during his groundbreaking set, Booker T. & The M.G.'s played a solo

set, performing “Booker-Loo” and “Hip Hug-Her”. They also brought Andrew Love, Joe Arnold, and Wayne Jackson on stage to play a hot version of “Philly Dog”. The compilation credits this performance to the Mar-Keys.

All three tracks are well performed, with strong rhythm work from Dunn and Jackson supporting the minimalist organ work of Jones and the gritty, r&b infused guitar work of Cropper. “Booker-Loo” has a gritty laid back groove and showcases some rock oriented guitar work from Cropper. Jones’ organ work is more r&b based and Jackson Jr. pulls off some great drum work. “Hip Hug-Her” is even stronger, with a swinging Memphis feel. Jackson Jr. and Dunn lay down a killer groove and both Jones and Cropper are featured during solos. The ensemble musicianship is as tight as a sealed drum.

The set hits an even higher level when Jackson, Arnold, and Love join the quartet, and they pull off an outstanding version of “Philly Dog”. The song is played at a blistering pace, with great tandem sax and trumpet work. Jackson pulls off a great trumpet solo and the sax work is outstanding. Cropper is featured on rhythm guitar and Dunn’s bass work is outstanding.

The original Rhino set has been recently reissued by Ode Sounds & Visuals under the title *The Monterey International Pop Festival, 30th Anniversary Set*. It is available via order from a large music retailer. Given that it also includes one of a kind performances from a series of musicians, it is an essential addition to any live collection.

Title: Winterland 1968

Label: Wolfgang’s Vault

Release Date: 2018

Medium: CD

Availability: Streaming (Very Good)

Venue: Winterland, San Francisco, CA

Recording Date: June 8, 1968

Lineup: Booker T. Jones - Keyboards
Donald “Duck” Dunn - Bass
Steve Cropper - Guitar
Al Jackson Jr. - Drums
Albert King - Guitar, vocals (3 tracks)

Set List: My Sweet Potato
(Sweet Sweet Baby) Since You’ve Been Gone
Expressway To Your Heart
I Don’t Mind
(Sittin’ On) The Dock Of The Bay
Knock On Wood
Groovin’
Booker-Loo
Ode To Billy Joe
Hey Joe
You Keep Me Hangin’ On
Green Onions
Summertime
Hip Hug-Her
Double Or Nothing
Born Under A Bad Sign
You Don’t Love Me
Overall Junction
Never My Love
The Sky Is Crying

My only full concert of this remarkable band came to me via Wolfgang’s Vault, which captured the band during early and late sets recorded at Winterland in San Francisco on June 8, 1968. They were opening for B.B. King and this was the final day of a three day stand. Typical of Bill Graham shows at the time, the artists played two shows each day. These twenty cuts come from both shows. The first nine tracks were

recorded during the early show and the final eleven come from the late evening show. Recording quality is excellent, with the only problem taking place in the set closer, “The Sky Is Crying”, where some of the track is missing due to a change mid song in the tape reel.

This show gives a listener the only opportunity that I am aware of to hear the group through a full concert. At the time that it was recorded, the group was at the height of their fame. They had made a conscious effort to broaden their fan base to rock music fans and were regularly charting albums and singles. This set captures most of their hits but also contains a number of covers that offer a fascinating glimpse into the band.

Their solo catalog is featured on songs like “My Sweet Potato”, “Groovin’”, “Hip Hug-Her”, “Booker-Loo”, and “Green Onions”, all of which made the U.S. pop singles chart. Each of these songs sound great and showcase their remarkable version of Memphis soul. The band also teams with blues legend Albert King on three more songs, including the Jones co-written classic, “Born Under A Bad Sign”.

On these three tracks, the group becomes Albert’s backup band and allows him to steal the show. The other two tracks played with King include a fast version of “Overall Junction” and a gritty cover of “The Sky Is Crying”. And, therein lies the magic of this remarkable group. While they could dominate any stage as a featured act, they were also the best backing band on the planet.

While these tracks are enough reason to track down this remarkable set, the cover versions of the other songs are incredible. Most of these songs showed up on their albums and many were written or co-written by one of the band members. Their version of “You Keep Me Hangin’ On” borrows more from Vanilla Fudge than the original r&b classic. During “Hey Joe”, Cropper sounds eerily like Jimi Hendrix. If you have any doubts about Cropper’s consummate guitar playing ability, you need to hear this one song.

The guitarist is also prominently featured on other tracks. He performs most of “Never My Love” with his tremolo turned so high that his guitar echoes. During “Green Onions”, he throws caution to the wind and produces some downright dirty guitar work. And, on “Ode To Billy Joe” he is at his soulful best. Of course, the man could also play with understated elegance as demonstrated during “Summertime” and “I Don’t Mind”,

Cropper’s solos during originals like “Booker-Loo” and “Hip Hug-Her” define both pieces while he unleashes early examples of power chords during a very good performance of “Knock On Wood”, which Cropper co-wrote. Cropper even shines on faster blues/rock songs like “Double Or Nothing”, “You Don’t Love Me”, and “Since You’ve Been Gone”. Overall, it’s a tour de force from one of the best guitarists to ever grace a stage.

Cropper’s main foil is Jones, who plays a prominent role in every song. He dominates “My Sweet Potato”, a funky “Expressway To Your Heart”, “Groovin’”, and “Knock On Wood”. He shares equal billing with the guitarist during “(Sittin’ On) The Dock Of The Bay”, “Summertime”, “Since You’ve Been Gone”, “I Don’t Mind”, and the three originals. Jones can play any style at any pace and is surprisingly quick fingered during some of his solos. It’s another master class in musicianship.

The rhythm section of Donald “Duck” Dunn and Al Jackson Jr. stays behind the scenes for the most part, but they are the real drivers behind the music. They kick things up a notch during furious versions of “Double Or Nothing”, “You Don’t Love Me”, “Since You’ve Been Gone”, “Knock On Wood”, and “Green Onions”. Whether they are asked to play fast, slow, or in between, they work in perfect harmony.

I was lucky to purchase both shows from Wolfgang's Vault during the period when they were selling downloads. While they can no longer do that, these two sets can be streamed on the site if you are a member. They are definitely worth a listen.