Bobby Womack

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"Everything I write now is about somebody or something I know personally," he emphasized.

FIRST TUNE SOLD 400,000

If you listen closely to Bobby Womack, listen to his plans and listen to some of his records and some of Sam Cooke's, you could make a case out of the theory that when he's groping for something surefire, Bobby turns to something related to his past experiences with Sam.

Their history goes all the way back to Cleveland when Cooke spotted the Womack brothers doing their gospel song bit and they struck up a friendship. Later when Cooke and James Alexander started their own record company, the Womack brothers joined them as the Valentinos. Their first tune, "Looking For Love," sold more than 400,000. The Valentinos moved to California.

Womack was beginning to make his presence felt as a guitarist and Cooke asked Bobby to tour with him. At the same time Womack was maturing as a song writer.

During the years Womack was working with Sam Cooke, they did some beautiful things, including what many consider to be Cooke's best album, "Sam Cooke At The Copa."

"That's the last album we cut," Womack recalled.

It was after Sam's death that Womack went out on his own, leaving the Valentinos. He started singing, writing and playing independently and developing songs for others.

By 1968 he had a contract with Minit Records, then a subsidiary of Liberty-UA Records. He moved up to the United Artists label after chalking up several hits.

His two most successful albums, "Communications" and "Understanding," have been on that label.

That last album Cooke and Womack cut together was replete with the kind of things fans find abundantly today in Bobby's work. Sam's mellow voice is gone but the guitar work and much of the style remains, although with an up tempo.

Cooke had a way of ad libbing things like: "look a here," "let me tell you," "yeah, oh, oh, yeah," "Lord have mercy," "come on, help me get the feeling" and just plain old slipping off to gospel tunes like "This Little Light of Mine" tied in with his "Amen" number.

In that Copa album Womack was particularly effective, in fact masterfully sensitive and on time with his guitar backup on numbers such as, "Try a Little Tenderness," "Nobody Wants You When You Down and Out," "If I Had a Hammer" and "Amen."

You not only hear similar ad lib phrases and the good guitar work (naturally) on Womack's albums, but you can pick them out during his stage performances.

What becomes more and more apparent is that Bobby Womack and Sam Cooke, with their similar gospel backgrounds and close musical relationship for nearly a decade, obviously made a tremendous impact on each other.

Womack's newest album, out in June, "Facts of Life," features a single entitled, "Nobody Wants You When You're Down and Out."

Reminded Cooke had done that with him as support musician, Womack explained, "It's a whole new trip. You won't recognize it."

That may be true.

But when old Sam Cooke fans listen to Womack's "Woman's Gotta Have It" lead-in, from his "Understanding" album ("Fellas, some time we have a tendency to forget what a woman needs") it is pretty close to what Cooke said in introducing "Try a Little Tenderness."

Another example of how closely the two men talk: Womack says you won't recognize his new song as something Sam Cooke did. On the Copa album when Cooke got ready to close out with "Tennessee Waltz," he cracked, "Patti Page did this; she wouldn't recognize it now."

RESPECTFUL OF SAM'S MEMORY

One of the many good things to be said about likeable Bobby Womack is that he does not attempt to run away from his closeness to Sam Cooke.

"He was a gentleman. I respected him. I liked to see people that carried some kind of weight," Womack observed. Bobby proudly introduces Cooke's daughter Linda. "That's my stepdaughter, Sam Cooke's daughter. I was married to her mother."

Linda, 19, plays guitar also and joined Womack in writing "Woman Got To Have It."

Because he feels many people view the Sam Cooke image in a negative light because of the way he died, Womack says he has been discussing with Chris Mitchell and others the possibility of a movie on Sam's life.

"I think I could really do it, the title role," he confided.

When you listen long enough to Bobby Womack, his records and those of Sam Cooke, you come to realize that instead of being a ghost of Sam, it easily could be that Womack simply is carrying on as best he can something they developed together.

It's probable that each guy's life included a considerable amount of the philosophy expressed in a record on Bobby Womack's "The Womack Live" album.

The song, sung often on tour by Womack, is "Laughing and Clowning," and of course, was written by the "late, great" Sam Cooke.

As either of them would say, it goes something like this:

"Have you ever had the blues?

"Well, if you should ever, 'cause you might never, but it you should ever get the blues, do this for me.

"Keep laughing and a clowning. But don't ever, ever, let them see you crying.

("Listen to me)

"I'm going to keep laughing and a clowning.

"But I'm not never, never, never, never going to let you see me crying."

What's Going On And Where

JUNE

Black Educators of Young Black Children, Central City Development Corporation, Milwaukee, Wisc.

JUNE

National Newspaper Publishers Association, Houston Oaks Hotel, Houston, Texas.

JUNE 29

Council of Independent Black Institutions, Frogmore, S.C.

JULY 2-7

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, Ind.

JULY 22-25

National Urban League, Washington Hotel, Washington, D.C.

JULY 22-25

National Insurance Association, Regency Hyatt Hotel, Atlanta, Ga.

JULY 29-AUGUST 2

National Dental Association, Detroit Hilton Hotel, Detroit, Mich.

JULY 29-AUGUST 9

National Beauty Culturist League, Denver Hilton Hotel, Denver, Colo.

JULY 30-AUGUST 5

National Bar Association, St. Francis Hotel, San Francisco, California.

AUGUST 12-16

National Medical Association, Americana Hotel, New York City.

AUGUST 13-17

National Association of Real Estate Brokers, Los Angeles Biltmore Hotel, Los Angeles, Calif.

AUGUST 14-19

National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Club, Inc., Statler Hilton Hotel, Buffalo, N.Y.

DAWN Quiz

1. Has a black ever been nominated on the convention floor for the presidency of the United States?
2. Who was the first black woman to be elected to the Congress of the United States?

Answers

1. The Rev. Channing Phillips of Washington, D.C. was nominated for the presidency of the U.S. at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.
2. Mrs. Shirley Chisholm was elected to the Congressional House of Representatives in 1970 and is currently serving her second term.

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