

# William Bell - Biography

The man who co-wrote one of the most covered songs in blues/rock music history is also an original “soul man,” and he’s back! William Bell, who wrote “Born Under a Bad Sign” with Booker T. Jones, a tune first recorded by Albert King and made legend by Eric Clapton and Cream, has returned to Stax Records and is ready to retake the limelight. Fresh off of his featured role in the Memphis music documentary “Take Me To The River,” where William and Snoop Dogg performed another of his compositions, Bell is teaming up with Grammy-winning producer John Leventhal (Rosanne Cash, Rodney Crowell, Shawn Colvin) to record his first major label album in over 30 years. One of the last of the original soul singers still standing, his quintessential voice and evocative performances still wow audiences all these years later.

William Bell was an early signing by the same legendary label that later released recordings by Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, Isaac Hayes, and The Staple Singers. Bell’s 1961 solo debut for Stax Records, “You Don’t Miss Your Water (Until Your Well Runs Dry),” became one of the fledgling label’s first major hits. The song is now considered one of the finest early examples of soul music, and was covered by many artists, including Otis Redding and The Byrds. But just as his career was taking flight, Uncle Sam came calling via the draft and Bell did a tour of duty in the Army.

After returning to Stax, William released his first full-length album, 1969’s definitive “The Soul of a Bell,” which included the Top 20 single, “Everybody Loves a Winner.” That same year, the original version of “Born Under a Bad Sign” hit it big. The song has since been covered by many cultural icons, from Jimi Hendrix to Homer Simpson. Among Bell’s other hits at Stax were “Any Other Way” (also a hit for Chuck Jackson), “A Tribute To A King” (written on the death of his friend, Otis Redding), “I Forgot to be Your Lover” (later covered by Billy Idol), “Private Number” (a duet with Judy Clay that was a Top 10 hit in the UK), and the Christmastime favorite, “Every Day Will Be Like a Holiday” (recently covered by Warren Haynes and also by Carole King).

After moving to Atlanta (where he is still based today), William struck pay dirt again in 1977 with “Tryin’ to Love Two” on Mercury Records, which became a top ten pop hit and went to #1 on the R&B charts. Since then, Bell has continued to enjoy a distinguished career as a singer, songwriter and producer. He has produced many albums, and his songs have been recorded by such diverse stars as Linda Rondstadt, Rod Stewart and Etta James, among many others. Additionally, his recordings have been sampled by an impressive list of hip-hop and R&B artists including Kanye West, Ludacris, Jaheim and more.

Bell has received the R&B Pioneer Award from Rhythm & Blues Foundation, the W.C. Handy Heritage Award from the Memphis Music Foundation, and the BMI Songwriter’s Award. He is a member of the Georgia Music Hall of Fame and the Memphis Music Hall of Fame, and is featured prominently in the Stax Museum.

Some of William’s recent live performance highlights include the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC, the Memphis Symphony Orchestra, Lincoln Center in New York City, Ronnie Scott’s in London, the Porretta Soul Festival in Italy, Billboard Live in Tokyo, and at The White House for the PBS broadcast of ‘In Performance At The White House: Memphis Soul.’ On New Years Eve 2015, William sang three of his songs on “Jools Holland’s Annual Hootenanny’ for the BBC in London, including a duet with Joss Stone. He has also filmed a segment for the upcoming Cinemax TV series “Quarry,” which will debut in 2016. Likewise, 2016 will see the release of Bell’s new album, **This Is Where I Live**, on the relaunched Stax Records. See album bio for more details.

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