

What is Soul Music?

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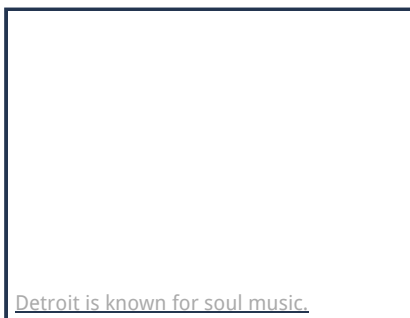
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["Praise and worship" is a popular style of gospel music that is sung in some churches.](#)



[Philadelphia is known for its contributions to soul music.](#)



[Detroit is known for soul music.](#)

Soul music is a popular style of music created by African American musicians that first gained a following during the 1950s. At that time, musicians like Ray Charles and James Brown blended familiar gospel singing with rhythm and blues to produce the first soul sounds. Some found this early music almost sacrilegious, as depicted in the biopic film *Ray*. To take gospel, one of the great African American contributions to Christianity, and use the singing style to talk about love, women, and good times, seemed to some a trifle risky.

Yet these early soul music stylings proved immensely popular. The familiar music of gospel that spoke to the soul was blended with early rock and roll and rhythm and blues. A number of record companies quickly jumped on the bandwagon of producing the increasingly popular soul [genre](#), and some companies were founded on their production of this musical form. While mainstream labels like Atlantic Records quickly signed soul artist Solomon Burke, new companies like Stax Records and Goldwax Records helped the popularity of soul along by recording artists like Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin, and James Carr.

By the 1970s, soul music had changed forms to incorporate more message-based music and also some of the stylings of [psychedelic rock](#). One of the standout albums of this time period is Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*, which thematically deals with continued strife between races in America and the onset of the Vietnam war.

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This genre also jumped to funk and disco styles. While singing styles remained similar, the more syncopated danceable beats of disco and funk left an indelible mark on soul. The Commodores and Earth, Wind and Fire were two extremely popular bands of the disco movement, bringing soul to the forefront of public attention and creating many mainstream hits.

White singers also began to capitalize on the popular soul style, and their music, often called blue-eyed soul, was appreciated. Of these bands, perhaps the best known is Hall & Oates, who became later better known for their 1980s New Wave hits like "Private Eyes." Many 1970-1980s bands were influenced by soul music and included full horn sections in their band ensembles.

Soul music continues to exist in numerous forms, and old soul songs may be incorporated into hip-hop music or rap. Vocal tracks by hip-hop artists like Mary J. Blige continue to combine gospel singing roots with contemporary music. Detroit Soul, Deep Soul and Memphis Soul all emerged in the 1960s. Artists in these early forms include Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross, Smokey Robinson, Otis Redding and Rufus Thomas. Philadelphia Soul is also an early form, usually incorporating large orchestra parts and performed by singers like Patti LaBelle.

Psychedelic Soul leaned heavily on late 1960s psychedelic rock and funk with soul vocals and was performed by bands like Sly & The Family Stone, and The Fifth Dimension. New soul music of the 1990s and onward is often called neo-soul. While gospel singing roots are strongly in evidence, this music tends to have modern rhythmic expressions, such as those found in hip-hop. Neo-soul artists include India Arie, Alicia Keyes, Babyface, and Joss Stone.

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