

blue note records

artist bio

AL GREEN

Al Green's extraordinary voice became known to the world through a string of legendary hits in the early 1970s, classics including "Tired of Being Alone," "Let's Stay Together," "I Can't Get Next to You," "I'm Still in Love With You," "Call Me," "Here I Am," "Let's Get Married" and "Love and Happiness." Recorded in Memphis with producer and arranger Willie Mitchell at Mitchell's Royal Recording Studios, those songs – and Green's falsetto screams, impassioned whispers, ecstatic cries and choked shouts – are etched into the minds of music fans everywhere.

For **I Can't Stop**, Al Green's debut album for Blue Note Records, the dynamic, inimitable singer triumphantly returns to that glorious sound, reaching new heights in the process. The recording marks the historic reunion of Green and Mitchell, bringing them together for the first time since 1985, when they recorded the gospel album **He Is the Light**, and only the second time since 1976's **Have a Good Time**. That album came at the end of an eight-year partnership that created some of soul music's most treasured recordings, released on Mitchell's Hi Records, including **Green Is Blues** (1970), **Al Green Gets Next to You** (1972), **Call Me** and **Livin' for You** (1973), **Al Green Explores Your Mind** (1974), **Al Green Is Love** (1975) and **Full of Fire** and **Have a Good Time** (1976).

On the new album, Green and Mitchell again capture the unique sound they created three decades ago – a perfect blend of Memphis soul, gospel, blues, and early rock & roll. To do so, Green returned to Mitchell's Royal studios to sing in the same vocal booth, on the same microphone (No. 9, an RCA ribbon mic reserved for Green's use only) and with many of the same stellar musicians who played on the original Hi Records sessions.

"It was magic," Green says of the collaboration. "We got together because Willie said he wanted to finish an aural painting. He said we've got to finish it and sign it."

As Mitchell recalls, "I told Al, 'You're getting a little older, so you should cut some music,'" he says with a laugh. "So he said, 'Let's go to work then,' and we started writing songs." The two worked for three weeks, co-writing eight songs in the studio (with Al penning four more on his own), then recorded several sessions during March and April 2003 to get the 12 tracks that make up **I Can't Stop**.

"Those sessions were the most amazing, paramount thing I've ever seen," says Lawrence "Boo" Mitchell, Willie's son and associate producer of the album. "Al is such a master of his voice – he was walkin' and dancin' all around that vocal booth, but you can still hear every note just perfectly."

Indeed, **I Can't Stop** shows that Green's vocal dynamism is as powerful as ever. He gets the spirit for the R&B strut of "Play to Win" and the soul-clap groove of "I've Been Waitin' on You," and he turns up the passion for "Million to One" and the pop-infused "I'd Still Choose You." He does some soul-searching on the album's slower tempos, digging deep on the achingly beautiful "Rainin' in My Heart," pleading over a wash of strings on "Not Tonight" and floating sweetly then swinging hard through the slow-burning blues of "My Problem Is You."

To re-create that authentic, unmatched Royal sound, Mitchell called in as many of the original musicians as possible, including such stylists as guitarist Mabon "Teenie" Hodges, bassist Leroy Hodges,

background vocalists Donna Rhodes, Charlie Chalmers and Sandra Rhodes (see especially "My Problem Is You"), tenor saxophonist Andrew Love and trombonist Jack Hale.

"You've got to use the same guys to get that sound," Green says. "When they play it, it sounds right. So we brought them in, and they just sat down and did it."

Green started singing professionally at age nine, when he and his brothers formed a gospel quartet, the Greene Brothers, in their hometown of Forest City, Arkansas. (Green dropped the final "e" from his surname when he went solo.) They toured the gospel circuits in the South, then began performing around Michigan when the family relocated to Grand Rapids. At 16, Green formed a pop group, Al Greene and the Creations, with high school friends, and the group released a single, "Back Up Train," in 1967 (under the new name Al Greene and the Soul Mates) that went to #5 on the national R&B chart.

Green and Mitchell's historic meeting took place in 1969, soon after Green decided to go solo. Mitchell – by then a renowned bandleader, arranger and trumpeter – hired the young singer to front his band for a gig in Midland, Texas, and hearing something special, approached Green after the show. "I told him, 'You come to Memphis and you can be a star,'" Mitchell says. "Al asked me, 'How long?' and I said 'Eighteen months, it's going to take a little work.' He told me he didn't have that much time," says Mitchell, laughing. Green quickly reconsidered, though. "I didn't have any money," Green says, "so I told him, 'About this star thing, if that's what you really wanna do, fine – but I need fifteen hundred dollars.'"

Mitchell forked over the money, signed Green to Hi Records and soon began recording him at Royal – arranging, producing and engineering the sessions himself. More important, Mitchell coached Green, pushing him to find his own, unique voice. "I was trying to sing like Jackie Wilson and Wilson Pickett and James Brown and Sam Cooke," Green says of those early days. "And Willie said 'Just sing like you.' I didn't know what that was, and so we just had to find that balance."

"It took a long time to find it," Mitchell adds, "but we did it by working from 11 am 'til two in the morning, every day. 'Can't Get Next to You' was close, but 'Tired of Being Alone' was it."

Indeed, Green and Mitchell collaborated to shape a sound that defines its own place in pop and R&B music. They recorded eight albums that sold over 20 million copies worldwide, working together until 1976. At that time, Green changed his focus to gospel music, founding his own congregation in Memphis – the Full Gospel Tabernacle, where he still preaches regularly – and recording a series of albums that have earned him eight Grammys in gospel categories.

Thirty years later, I Can't Stop returns to and updates that classic early-70s sound. Mitchell and Lester Snell's horn arrangements and string orchestrations go from a swagger to a sigh, while Green's voice is full of fire and sweet fervor. "His voice is like an instrument," Mitchell says. "He can do anything with it; he's the best I've ever heard."

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