

Entertainment

Book Tells Tale Of Stax Records; New DVD Set Features Edie Adams

By Tom Wilk
Contributing Writer

From "Green Onions" by Booker T. and the MG's and "(Sittin' on) The Dock of the Bay" by Otis Redding to "Soul Man" by Sam and Dave and "I'll Take You There" by the Staple Singers, **Stax Records** was the label behind those classic soul songs of the 1960s and 1970s.

Author and music historian Robert Gordon adeptly tells the story of the Memphis-based record company in the book "Respect Yourself: Stax Records and the Soul Explosion"

(Bloomsbury; \$30). Gordon, a filmmaker who also worked at The Philadelphia Inquirer in the 1980s, previously made a documentary on Stax ("Respect Yourself"). He recounts the label's star-crossed history against a backdrop of the civil rights movement in Memphis, where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in April 1968.

Co-founded by the brother-and-sister team of Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton in the late 1950s, Stax, a combination of the letters of their last names, was white-owned but black-ori-

ented. By 1964, Booker T. and the MG's, the label's house band, was half black and half white. It came at a point in Memphis history, Gordon writes, when "race mixing was nothing short of an assault on the social realm."

Stax drew on the untapped musical talent of Memphis, both black (Isaac Hayes and Rufus Thomas) and white (guitarist Steve Cropper and trumpeter Wayne Jackson) for a tougher, grittier sound than Motown Records, its Detroit-based counterpart. The end result was an

artistic triumph of integration as Stax billed itself as "Soulsville USA." Motown was known as "Hitsville USA."

Gordon captures the high and lows of Stax. They range from the death of the 26-year-old Redding and the Bar-Kays in a plane crash in December 1967 to the rise of Stax as a commercial powerhouse in the early 1970s with Hayes' Oscar-winning "Theme from Shaft" and the documentary film and soundtrack album for "Wattstax," the black counterpart to Woodstock.

The company's demise in the mid 1970s came about after signing a distribution deal with Columbia Records. That led to a series of lawsuits involving the New York-based label and Union Planters Bank in Memphis. It's a complicated tale that Gordon is able to deliver in an understandable account.

Stax has been reborn in the 21st century as a record label offering a mix of classic and young artists. The company's achievements in the 20th century will live on as long as people are willing to listen.

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In her long entertainment career, **Edie Adams** was a singer, comedienne and actress. "Here's Edie," a new 4-DVD box set, showcases all those facets of her work.

Subtitled "The Edie Adams Television Collection" (MVD Visual), the box set features 21 TV programs that aired between April 1962 and 1964 and comes with a 16-page booklet detailing the history of the project. The

show was initially titled "Here's Edie" and then renamed "The Edie Adams Show."

A native of Kingston, PA, Adams was a dynamic performer who earned a Tony Award for her performance as Daisy Mae in the 1956 staging of the musical "Lil Abner." She was married to comedian Ernie Kovacs, who made his mark in Philadelphia television in the 1950s before gaining national prominence in television and film. After Kovacs died at 42 in a car accident in January 1962, Adams needed money to support her family and turned to television.

Her variety shows reveal her as a natural performer who was at home on the small screen. Her guests included top names in the world of music (Duke Ellington, Stan Getz, Hoagy Carmichael, Nancy Wilson), comedy (Bob Hope, Soupy Sales, Rowan & Martin) and motion pictures and television (Peter Falk, Terry Thomas).

Adams, who had creative control of her program, offered shows built around a single theme, such as New York, Love or the Western.

The shows are an entertaining journey through the past, complete with commercials Adams made for Muriel Cigars. Extras include a selection of songs she performed on Kovacs' TV show with introductions by the comedian.

The shows previously have been unavailable since they aired so they provide a new look at a classic entertainer, who died at 81 in 2008.

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