

Delta Sources and Resources

Walking in Memphis: A Trip to the Memphis Music Hall of Fame
126 S. 2nd Street, Memphis, Tennessee
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Memphis, Tennessee is music mecca. In fact, the name of the city appears in over one thousand songs, more than any other city. Memphis is well-known for its contribution to music and culture. Folklore portends that the Mississippi Delta gets its start in the lobby of Memphis's Peabody Hotel, ending on Catfish Row in Vicksburg, and that statement could be true. Memphis is a stopping point for travelers from all directions, including international visitors, proving the roots of Memphis to be a cultural and musical destination. Because of the artistic opportunities available in Memphis, recording studios popped up here, creating and shaping a multitude of musical careers, while developing innovative musical styles. For multiple decades, Memphis has been cooking a rich musical stew, blending the inherent tunes of blues, gospel, country with a melodic mix of downhome funk and rock and roll—and, it took the right chefs to gather the raw ingredients for the right sizzle. These now-legendary music makers are being honored annually with induction into the Memphis Music Hall of Fame.

The Memphis Music Hall of Fame was created in 2012 and is managed by the Memphis Rock 'n' Soul Museum, which is a non-profit 501(c)3 entity, researched and developed with the Smithsonian Institution, located down the street at 191 Beale Street. The Memphis Music Hall of Fame Museum and Exhibit Hall is housed in a historic building, located in downtown Memphis, adjacent to the corner of the world-famous Beale Street in the Beale Entertainment District. The mission of the Memphis Music Hall of Fame is to “pay tribute to, and



Outside the entrance to the Memphis Music Hall of Fame.
Photograph by LaDawn Lee Fuhr.

further educate the world about, the Memphis Music icons who shook the planet.” While the inductions began in 2012, the brick and mortar Memphis Music Hall of Fame Museum and exhibit hall didn't open its doors until 2015.

Many individuals have contributed to the success of the sounds from Memphis, but the nominating and induction process of the Memphis Music Hall of Fame is serious business. The nominating committee currently consists of well-known authors, historians, producers, and music industry professionals. The committee looks at people with varying ties to music including performers, songwriters, radio personnel, producers, historians, and other leaders in the field. The numbers may vary each year, both in total inductees and in performing and non-

performing status. A person's or entity's overall ties to the Memphis community, in addition to their overall impact on the world, are other considerations for inclusion in the Memphis Music Hall of Fame. The annual induction ceremony is both reverent with the honors and rollicking with the live performances and special guests. Each honoree receives the Mike Curb Award, also known as "The Mike," named after music visionary Mike Curb. Curb and his Curb Family Foundation are among the important contributors to the Memphis Music Hall of Fame.

With the 2019 induction ceremony, eighty-two Memphis music pioneers have been installed into the Memphis Music Hall of Fame, and their stories can be found in the museum and exhibit hall. The first class of twenty-five, included studio heads Sam Phillips of Sun Records, brother and sister entrepreneurs Estelle Axton and Jim Stewart of Stax Records, blues legends W.C. Handy and B.B. King, rock and roll stars Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis, radio disc jockey Dewey Phillips, soul sensations The Staple Singers, Otis Redding, Al Green, and Isaac Hayes, studio band Booker T. and the MGs, and many more. Subsequent inductions included American Sound Studio founder Chips Moman, musical powerhouses The Memphis Horns, The Memphis Boys, and Hi Rhythm Section, music legends Aretha Franklin, Tina Turner, Steve Cropper, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison, Howlin' Wolf, Charlie Rich, and "Cowboy" Jack Clement. The entire list to date is a veritable who's who of the architects of modern music and can be viewed on The Memphis Music Hall of Fame website.

Even the real estate neighbors in The Memphis Music Hall of Fame building are unique icons of music—the Hard Rock Café, and Lansky Brothers Clothiers, a famous retail landmark in Memphis who would later add "Clothier to the King" to its credentials because of Elvis Presley's notable dedication to the brand that began when he would admire the

clothing in the window. Mr. Lansky took a chance on the young singer and let him open an account for his wardrobe, beginning a lifetime alliance between the clothier and "The King." The building also has a storied past, adding to the ambiance of deep history associated here on many levels. The building once served as a destination for horses and carriage repair, evidenced by the ramps going into the exhibit hall.

Walking into the Memphis Music Hall of Fame Museum and Exhibit Hall is a welcoming delight. Whether musicphile or novice, the excitement of the journey is evident through the vivid displays and clear lighting. Every exhibit is plainly marked and outlined, guiding the participant through each presentation of artist, studio, or event, as if they are flipping through the pages of a glorious book on Memphis music. The artifacts tell a story of the inductees and their contribution to the world of music, originating in the Bluff City of Memphis. From Isaac Hayes' mahjong set, Elvis Presley's early briefcase cell phone, or the tape machines that made Hi Records and Ardent Studios literally sing, the Memphis Music Hall of Fame Museum will have something of interest for everyone who visits. Scattered throughout are interactive stations with music history and listening centers together with interviews and music, "generously delivered by the FedEx Corporation." Memphis music plays throughout the building, adding to the overall experience of seeing Memphis music heritage firsthand.

The Memphis Music Hall of Fame Museum also showcases new music. Playing on a screen sponsored by the Mike Curb Foundation are new artists to the Memphis music scene. Bands like Marcella and her Lovers, who combine their Memphis and Louisiana Roots to create swamp soul, or the Motel Mirrors, an Americana duo with deep roots and a modern sound who continue the generations-old tradition of keeping Memphis music alive and vibrant. Other featured performers include Valerie June, a multi-instrumentalist singer-songwriter per-

forming “moonshine roots music,” Leo “Bud” Welch, who began his music career in blues and gospel in 2014 at the tender age of 81, and The PRVLG soul and R&B duo consisting of twin brothers Christian and Christopher Underwood. Additional new musicians are also showcased in the Memphis Music Hall of Fame Museum display.

Visitors to the Memphis Music Hall of Fame come from all over the world. Attendees hail from Brazil, France, Germany, Netherlands, Iran, with the majority coming from England. On an average day, close to one hundred guests can come through the doors with attendance growing during special activities in the city like Elvis Week or Memphis in May. And, while the staff is discreet, many high profile people have enjoyed the story of music and Memphis that unfolds during a visit to the Memphis Music Hall of Fame.

The musical heritage and legacy presented through the Memphis Music Hall of Fame Museum could not be made possible without the generous support from individuals and companies who see the importance of keeping the Memphis music story in front of the world. Including the aforementioned Mike Curb Foundation, the Memphis Music Hall of Fame sponsor roster includes The City of Memphis, The Assisi Foundation, the Hyde Family Foundation, Arts Memphis, the Kemmons Wilson Family Foundation, the Plough Foundation, Mike and Donna Glenn, Advance Manufacturing, and Gossett Motor Cars. Other supporters include Made in Tennessee-Tennessee Tourism, Hard Rock Café, The Recording Academy: Memphis Chapter, the Center for Southern Folklore, Graceland, Memphis Travel, Arts Memphis, the Blues Foundation, Beale Street Caravan Radio Show, Stax Museum, Sun Studios, and the Memphis Rock 'n' Soul Museum.

A visit to the Memphis Music Hall of Fame is an eye-opening and ear-pleasing experience. The Memphis music story literally plays out by chapter, entertaining and informing all who come to call. Don't miss this wonderful cultural

experience. The Memphis Music Hall of Fame is open daily from 10 am until 7 pm. Admission is \$8 for adults and \$6 for youth (5-17). Group rates and individual discounts are available. Combo tickets include admission to the Memphis Rock 'n' Soul Museum, located at Beale Street and Second Street, available for \$18 per person. For more information, please call (901) 205-2532. Websites: www.memphismusichalloffame.com; www.memphisrocksoul.org ▲▼▲



Hi Records tape machine.
TEAC 7030 reel to reel which recorded such stars
as Al Green, Ann Peebles, and O.V. Wright at
Willie Mitchell's Royal Studios.
Photograph by LaDawn Lee Fuhr.