

the bo-Keys

musician bios



Organist **Ronnie Williams** played his first gig when he was just sixteen years old, backing R&B sax man Johnny London on Beale Street. An insurance salesman by day, Williams was a regular on the local soul scene at night, playing private parties and pick-up gigs when he wasn't hanging out in the studio. At Stax, Williams played on and produced dozens of tracks – that's his piano you hear on Rufus Thomas' smash hit "Do the Funky Chicken," and his organ on the Rance Allen Group's *Up Above My Head*. The first African-American to graduate from the University of Memphis' music program, Williams is currently a musical director at his church. Most recently, he's backed Stax songwriter Sir Mack Rice on stage, and the sultry-voiced Carla Thomas on her 2002 *Live In Memphis* album.

Drummer **Willie Hall**'s first Stax session was for the brilliantly underrated *Rated X* album by Art Jerry Miller. He held down the backbeat for the Bar-Kays' '70s albums, and added the funky rhythms to Isaac Hayes' *Hot Buttered Soul* sessions. After a stint with John Belushi and Dan Ackroyd in the Blues Brothers – he appears in both *Blues Brothers* movies – Hall moved to Atlanta, Georgia. He returned to Memphis in the late '90s, and began working with at-risk youth at the Stax Music Academy. Today, Hall is still in great demand as both a session man and a live performer.



Although guitarist **Charles "Skip" Pitts** also played on many Stax records, he got his start in Washington, DC. Before he was even fifteen, Pitts was part of a doo-wop group that auditioned for Ahmet Ertegun at Atlantic Records; soon after, he backed northern soul great Gene Chandler on his "Rainbow '65" hit single and performed on Chandler's *Live at the Regal* album. By age sixteen, Pitts was playing with the Isley Brothers, then, a few years later, he joined Wilson Pickett's Midnight Movers. Of course, Pitts is best known for the mighty wah-wah chords that cut through the opening of Isaac Hayes' seminal "Theme from *Shaft*," as well as his onstage work backing the Black Moses.

Born in Missouri and raised in Arkansas, trumpeter **Marc Franklin** has played professionally on Beale Street since he was eighteen years old, backing up such greats as Ann Peebles and Don Bryant, and Rufus and Carla Thomas, as well as honing his chops as a member of Bobby "Blue" Bland's road band. A veteran of the Chad Anderson Quintet and the Cooper Young Sextet, Franklin is also no stranger to the studio.



Like most of the Bo-Keys, saxophonist **Jim Spake** has been making a living playing music in Memphis since he was in high school. On the road, he's backed such legends as Jerry Lee Lewis, Levon Helm, and Ike Turner, while in town, he's played shows with Ray Charles, Chuck Berry, and Ben E. King. Spake has also played on sessions for artists as varied as Alex Chilton, Screaming Jay Hawkins, Tony Joe White, and Al Green. After winning the National Academy of Recording Arts & Science's regional

Premier Woodwind Player Award eight consecutive times, Spake has been declared ineligible for further awards and inducted into the Premier Players' Hall of Fame.

Twenty-eight year old bassist and producer **Scott Bomar** is the driving force behind the Bo-Keys. A veteran of such area garage bands as Impala and the Tearjerkers, Bomar formed the Bo-Keys to back such musicians as Sir Mack Rice, jazz guitarist Calvin Newborn, and Sun pianist Rosco Gordon. A few years after forming the band, Bomar met Willie Hall and Skip Pitts at the Stax Music Academy, where he was teaching a summer camp session. A longtime admirer of the Stax session musicians (and a devoted fan of Memphis instrumental groups like the Packers and the Martinis), Bomar soon recruited his newfound friends for a revamped version of the Bo-Keys. Not much later, they entered the recording studio, and *The Royal Sessions* was born.

