

WHEN LIKE-MINDED POWERHOUSES JOIN FORCES, GREAT THINGS HAPPEN!

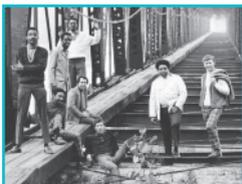
THE SHOALS THEATRE
FAME GANG REUNION
featuring
CANDI STATON
TRAVIS WAMMACK
WILLIE HIGHTOWER

TRIBUTES TO THE LEGENDS OF THE FAME GANG AND THE MAN THAT PUT THEM TOGETHER.
THE MUSCLE SHOALS WATERWHEELS RICK HALL

SATURDAY JULY 28TH
DOORS AT 7:00PM - SHOW AT 8:00PM

SHOALS THEATRE 123 N. SEMINARY STREET FLORENCE, AL 36909

That's why the W.C. Handy Music Festival is excited to partner this year with FAME to present the 2018 Handy Headliner!



THE FAME GANG: When the members of the second FAME house band, known as the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section, struck out on their own, Rick Hall organized the newest (and largest) combo, the FAME Gang. This group of hitmakers was the third FAME studio crew, and featured Junior Lowe on guitar and bass (who had also been in the previous two studio bands), Travis Wammack on guitar, Jesse Boyce on bass, Clayton Ivey on keyboards, Freeman Brown on drums, Harrison Calloway on trumpet and trombone, Aaron Varnell on tenor and alto sax, Ronnie Eades on baritone sax, and Harvey Thompson on tenor sax and flute, with studio manager and producer Mickey Buckins on percussion and engineer on many tracks. Later Bob Wray, Roger Clark, and Randy McCormick worked their way into the roster. This group cut hits on artists such as Little Richard, Lou Rawls, Bobbie Gentry, the Osmonds, Candi Staton, Clarence Carter, Donnie Osmond, Wilson Pickett, Mac Davis, Paul Anka and many others. The group's primary responsibility was backing the FAME Studio's clients but, unlike the studio's other rhythm sections, they released records of their own under the name the FAME Gang. Hall had launched the FAME Record Label, and the FAME Gang became one of the label's artists. In 1969 they released an album, *Solid Gold* from Muscle Shoals, in which they covered sixteen hit songs of the day. They also released many singles. In 2015, the U.K. label Ace Records released a collection of the Fame Gang's rhythm section called *FAME Gang Sides, Grits & Gravy: The Best of the FAME Gang*. (Rodney Hall)



CANDI STATON: Over the course of her 50-year career, Staton has scored hits in every decade of that span, in styles ranging from R&B ("I'm Just a Prisoner" and her iconic cover of Tammy Wynette's "Stand by Your Man") to disco (the oft-covered "Young Hearts Run Free" and her song-stealing version of the Bee Gees' "Night on Broadway") to electronic dance music ("Hallelujah Anyway," "You Got the Love"). Along the way, she's had more comebacks than a prize fighter, garnered four Grammy nominations, and won over generations of fans with her powerhouse voice and timeless songs. Candi came out of the gate in the early '70s with a string of hit R&B records, produced by her great friend, the late Rick

Hall of the legendary FAME Studios in Muscle Shoals: "I'd Rather Be an Old Man's Sweetheart (Than a Young Man's Fool)," "I'm Just a Prisoner (of Your Good Lovin')," "Sweet Feeling," "Stand by Your Man" and a cover of "In the Ghetto" that remains nearly as celebrated as Elvis Presley's original. In the late '70s, she reinvented herself as a disco diva, returning to the charts with "Young Hearts Run Free." She then returned to her gospel roots, a move that unexpectedly led to her career resurgence in the '90s and 2000s, with two songs originally written as Christian anthems, "You Got the Love" and "Hallelujah Anyway." In 2014, Staton's career came full circle with the release of *Life Happens*, which featured Rick Hall's final production before his retirement and eventual passing earlier this year: "I Ain't Easy to Love," which paired Staton's soulful

croon with two of the many artists she's influenced, Jason Isbell and John Paul White. "Maybe it was God's will that I was his last project," Staton ponders. "Rick loved me more than just as an artist. We had a great relationship. I still miss him."



TRAVIS WAMMACK: The inimitable Travis Wammack, born in Walnut, Mississippi, began his professional music career when he wrote and recorded his first record at the tender age of eleven. He became the youngest member ever voted into the musicians union. After moving to Memphis, Tennessee, the young guitarist made his mark on the music world at the age of sixteen with his 1963 number one hit "Scratchy". He was the first to develop and use the fuzz tone for an electric guitar. By 1969, Wammack's skills landed him in Muscle Shoals, where he teamed with legendary producer Rick Hall at Hall's FAME Records. Travis' guitar licks can be heard on hit records that have sold over sixty million copies! These songs were recorded by artists such as Aretha Franklin,

Wilson Pickett, Little Richard, Mac Davis, Clarence Carter, the Osmond Brothers, Bobbie Gentry, Candi Staton, Delbert McClinton, Liza Minnelli, Narvel Felts and many more. Wammack's solo artist career (produced by Hall) also sky rocketed. He released albums in 1971 and 1975, traveled the world as Little Richard's band leader from 1984 until 1995, and performed on nationally syndicated television programs and at President Bill Clinton's inauguration party. Travis now works with Muscle Shoals Music Marketing and has added "Producer" to his resume. He is a member of the Memphis Music Hall of Fame, and in 1999 received the Professional Musician Award from the Alabama Music Hall of Fame. In 2005, he was inducted into The Southern Legends Entertainment and Performing Arts Hall Of Fame. In May 2006, Gibson Guitars presented Travis with a new Gibson ES-335 guitar as part of their documentary honoring legendary Gibson ES series players. In 2011 Travis was inducted into the Rockabilly Hall of Fame.



WILLIE HIGHTOWER: Heard in the backroom of what was at one time one of London's hippest clubs was Willie Hightower's version of Joe South's "Walk A Mile In My Shoes". The 'southern soul' single was described as an irresistibly propulsive record with a loping, yet undeniably funky beat. The choruses are an explosion of horns, rhythm and vocals - and it's the vocals that are the crowning glory. Sounding like a cross between Sam Cooke and Little Richard, Willie preaches as much as sings the words. The song starts with Willie doing his best roughed-up Sam Cooke vocal, but as things progress he starts to scream the words whilst the bass, drums and piano dance around him. It's musically and emotionally as perfect a three and a half minutes of music as you're ever likely to hear.

It's a record that... was born to be heard booming from open windows on hot summer days, cracking and exploding from the speakers of radios and boom boxes. It was producer Rick Hall's idea that Willie record "Walk A Mile In My Shoes". In a Swedish TV documentary filmed at the FAME studio in 1969 during the song's recording, Rick says, "I don't think the production on the original record is very good, even though it's a big hit record, so I want to get an R&B version on it... In fact, I think I've cut a better record than the (original) version." It's hard to disagree with that. After other record label deals came to an end, Willie was picked up by the Alabama-based FAME operation owned by Rick Hall, who had already made a name for himself working with such big-name soul acts as Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding and Etta James; and who by the end of the decade had made the sleepy, richly musical backwater of Muscle Shoals as important a centre of Soul as Memphis or Detroit. Willie Hightower only released three singles whilst contracted to FAME, but they're three of the greatest soul records ever made, six simple songs that contain all that's magical about southern soul. They stand alongside anything to come out of Rick Hall's small studio, which is saying something when you count in classics like Etta James' "I'd Rather Go Blind", Otis Redding's "You Left The Water Running", Aretha Franklin's "Do Right Woman, Do Right Man". That's not (and other) records that Rick released on his own FAME imprint by artists like Candi Staton, Clarence Carter, and George Jackson. He's currently planning his long-awaited second album. "I still sing the old songs, pretty much all of them in fact. I still do "Walk A Mile In My Shoes". It's good that Willie's still out there because the world needs singers like him, singers with real grit and belief, and genuine soul in the way they sing. (Tim Tooner)

W.C. HANDY HEADLINER: THE FAME GANG REUNION

*Featuring: Candi Staton, Travis Wammack, and Willie Hightower
With special guests SNL Band Vocalist Christine Ohlman & Grammy Award Winner John Paul White*

A TRIBUTE TO THE LEGENDS OF THE FAME GANG & THE FATHER OF THE MUSCLE SHOALS SOUND, RICK HALL

Shoals Theater, Florence (doors open at 7 pm)
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