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AL GREEN

A&M PRESS DEPARTMENT

BIOGRAPHY

For many years now, folks have tended to divide Al Green's career into two distinct halves. There's Al Green, the smolderingly soulful singer who turned out gold singles and albums with amazing consistency in the early '70s/ And there's the Reverend Al Green, ordained Baptist minister, offering up what one critic called "a voice of unearthly beauty in the service of the heavens."

The thing is, even the critics have agreed that no matter what he's singling, Al Green is "still one of the most exciting singers around," as a *Newsweek* writer said. And that's just Green's point: these stylistic dividing lines don't matter anyway.

"I started out singing gospel music as a child," Green says. "But I always wanted to sing pop, too. I wrote pop, and I'd been singing pop for ten years by the time I was born again in 1973. I didn't know what dividing lines were."

Green's last album, *Soul Survivor,* showed that he could transcend those lines with no problem as as he recorded both "23rd Psalm" and secular hits like "You've Got a Friend" and "He Ain't Havy, He's My Brother." Now, with *I Get Joy*, his third album for A&M, Al Green is harder to pigeonhole than ever.

"I'm more comfortable now than I was when I first went into the ministry, " Green admits. "I did ten years of rhythm and blues; I did ten years of gospel. Now I'm weighing them both against the other, and putting the whole package together."

Indeed. Just check out Side Tow of *I Get Joy:* "As Long As We're Together" --- a hip-hopping state-of-the-art jam mixed specially by singing sensation Al B. Sure! --- is followed directly by "Praise Him," a rollicking stong gospel rave-up.

Green's career in music has come full circle --- again. A native of Forest City. Arkansas, he is one of nine children, whose earliest exposure to music came in the church. His father, bass player Robert Green, formed a gospel group titled the Green Brothers. Al joined at age nine, and toured extensively on the gospel circuit, first in the South and later in the Midwest, after the Green family moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Green's sting with his father's group ended when he was discovered listening to the "profane" music of the great Jackie Wilson. At 16 he formed a pop group, Al Green and the Creations, with some Michigan high school friends. His professional career began in '67, when his group, now called Al Green and the Soul Mates, recorded a tune called "Back Up Train" on their own Hot Line label.

Green was working small clubs from Chicago to Baton Rouge, when he met Willie Mitchell in Midland, Texas, in 1969. Mitchell, a vice president for the Memphis-based Hi label, began producing Green's records and co-writing with t he singer, thus beginning a partnership that continues today.

The hits came in rapid succession after Green and Mitchell's first album together, 1970's *Green Is Blues.* After 1971's "Tired of Being Alone," Green's first gold record and significant pop hit,

he began a string of seven Top 10 records in just three years including "Let's Stay Together," "I'm Still In Love with You," and "Look What You Done For Me."

In October 1974, following his spiritual reawakening, Green joined the ministry, purchased a church building in Memphis, and was ordained pastor of the Full Gospel Tabernacle. For a time, he mixed his pop music career with his religious calling. With 1977's "Belle," he began producing his own records. That song, in which he sang, "It's you that I want, but it's Him that I need," mirrored his spiritual conflict, and in 1979, after narrowly avoiding serious injury in a fall from the stage during a gig in Cincinnati, he turned to gospel music exclusively.

Green's first all-gospel recording, the *Lord Will Make a Way*, was released by the Myrrh label in 1980. He joined A&M in 1985 with *He Is the Light,* which marked a reunion with Willie Mitchell and was described as "incandescent music, undeniably alive," by one writer.

Soul Survivor came next, and Green, working with an assortment of producers, drew on styles as old and earthy as the blues ("Jesus Will Fix It") and employed techniques as contemporary as drum machines and synthesizers. *I Get Joy* takes up where that album left off. Produced by Green, Paul Zeleski, and the team of Eban Kelly and Jimi Randolph (who were on hand for the last album's "Everything Will Be Alight" and "Soul Survivor"), *I Get Joy* includes eight tunes written or co-written by the singer himself --- only two covers this time --- and is a prime example of Al Green working into what he calls "the stress."

"I think everybody wanted to hear Al," he says. "They want to hear me, and they want to hear me in the stress. Not *distress*, but *the* stress, the stress of being able to pull it off, to make the connection, and do it under tight scrutiny. I was sayin' to Al, 'I want to see you sweat.'"

The album's juxtaposition of "As Long As We're Together" and "Praise Him" isn't all that's intentional. So's the slow build from the beginning of Side One, through the title track that ends the side, and then on Side Two, where "it picks up something fierce," says Al. "After 'I Get Joy,' I went into another gear of operation altogether. I went off."

Anyway you turn it, "As Long As We're Together" looks like a surefire Al Green hit. It's entirely appropriate that the song be given a contemporary touch by Al B. Sure!, who these days is knocking out the hits the way Al Green always has, and who even appears in the "Together" video with his longtime idol.

Green feels that "As Long As We're Together" is a fitting successor to one of his biggest records, "Let's Stay Together," too. "I think it will ad to 'Let's Stay Together' --- it does for me. The new song says 'As long as we're together, everything's gonna work out. The world can change --- ain't gonna make no difference. As long as we stay together, we can overcome, we can succeed.' To me, that adds to 'Let's Stay Together." Because if we are together, we can make it." And with *I Get Joy*, Al Green is definitely together.