

## **Rhythm and Blues**

Rhythm and Blues, often called R&B, originated in African-American communities in the 1940s and the term was originally used to describe music marketed to African Americans. R&B developed from electric blues and incorporated elements of gospel and soul music, and led directly to Rock and Roll. Commercial R&B bands often consisted of piano, one or two guitars, bass, drums, one or more saxophones, and sometimes back-up vocalists. The term came to have other meanings in later years and was used to describe many American artists who were not African-American as well as British bands.

### **R&B in Missouri**

In Missouri, like other parts of the country, Rhythm & Blues grew out of electric blues and blues-inspired jazz bands played in clubs by bands most notably in cities and larger towns. In St. Louis, some of these artists included Little Milton, Oliver Sain, Fontella Bass, and, of course, Ike and Tina Turner. More recent artists who included R&B in their sets, along with blues, jazz and other genres have included Kim Massie, Michael McDonald, and Anita Jackson. In Kansas City, Big Joe Turner, known as "Boss of the Blues," was a dominant figure who sang everything from traditional blues and jump blues to rhythm and blues and early rock and roll.

### **R&B Bios**

#### **Tina Turner**

Tina Turner (born 1939) is a singer, songwriter, dancer, author, and actress. She rose to fame singing Rhythm and Blues (R&B) in the Ike & Tina Turner Revue before launching an even more successful solo career in Rock and Roll.

Turner was born Anna Mae Bullock, the youngest of three girls. Her father worked supervising farm workers in Nuttsville, Tennessee. During World War II, her parents left her with her grandparents while they relocated to Knoxville, Tennessee to work at a defense facility. Her grandparents were deacon and deaconess at the Woodlawn Missionary Baptist Church in Nuttsville, where she undoubtedly heard and sang gospel music and spirituals.

After the war, her parents split up, and her mother moved to St. Louis, where Anna Mae eventually followed. She graduated from Sumner High School in St. Louis in 1958, and after her graduation, worked as a nurse's aide at Barnes-Jewish Hospital. She began going to bars and clubs in St. Louis and East St. Louis, where she met Ike Turner and later joined his R&B band, the Kings of Rhythm.

Turner began her recording career with the Kings of Rhythm under the name "Little Ann." She was introduced as Tina Turner in 1960 with the hit single, "A Fool in Love". She married Ike Turner in 1962 and they went on to release hits such as "River Deep – Mountain High" and the Grammy-winning "Proud Mary." Ike and Tina disbanded in 1976 and divorced in 1978. In her first autobiography, *I, Tina: My Life Story*, published in 1986, Turner revealed that she had been subjected to domestic violence.

In the 1980s, Turner launched one of the greatest comebacks in music history, as a solo Rock and Roll artist. Her 1983 single, "Let's Stay Together" was followed by the release of her 1984 multi-platinum album, *Private Dancer*. The album contained her hit song, "What's Love Got to Do with It", which won the Grammy Award for Record of the Year.

In 1986, Turner met German music executive Erwin Bach. After a 27-year romantic relationship, they married in Küsnacht, Switzerland, where they currently live and hold citizenship. In 1993, *What's Love Got to Do with It*, a film adapted from Turner's autobiography was released. Turner also acted in the films *Tommy* (1975), *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985), and *Last Action Hero* (1993). *Tina: the Tina Turner Musical*, a musical based on her life, opened on

Broadway in November 2019 to positive reviews and received several Tony nominations. As of March 2020, the show has suspended production due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Having sold over 100 million records, Turner is one of the best-selling recording artists of all time. She has received 12 Grammy Awards, including a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. She was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame with Ike Turner in 1991, and is a 2005 recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors. *Rolling Stone* ranked her among the 100 Greatest Artists of All Time and the 100 Greatest Singers of All Time. She has her own star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and the St. Louis Walk of Fame.

### Fontella Bass

Fontella Bass (1940-2012), a Rhythm and Blues (R&B) singer and song writer, was born in St. Louis, Missouri to a musical family. Her mother, Martha Bass, was a gospel singer, and her younger brother, David Peaston, became an R&B singer as well. Fontella showed her own musical talent from the age of five, when she earned money by playing piano for her grandmother's singing at funeral services. By the time she was nine, she had accompanied her mother on gospel music tours throughout the South.

As a teenager, she began singing R&B at local contests and fairs while attending Soldan High School, where she graduated in 1958. At 17, she began working at the Showboat Club near Chain of Rocks, Missouri. It was during this time that she was heard by vocalist Little Milton and his bandleader, Oliver Sain, who hired her to back Little Milton on piano. One night Milton didn't show up on time, so Sain asked her to sing and she was soon given her own featured vocal spot in the show.

With the support of Bob Lyons, the manager of St. Louis station KATZ, Bass recorded several songs released through Bobbin Records. She was produced by Ike Turner when she recorded on his labels Prann and Sonja. Her single "Poor Little Fool," released from Sonja in 1964, features a duet with Tina Turner. It was also during this period that she met and married the avant-garde jazz trumpeter Lester Bowie.

Two years later, she quit the Milton band and moved with Bowie to Chicago. There she auditioned for Chess Records, and was immediately signed on to their Checkers label. Her first recordings with the label were several duets with Bobby McClure. Their single, "Don't Mess Up A Good Thing," found immediate success, reaching #5 on the *Billboard* R&B chart.

Bass and McClure followed their early success with "You'll Miss Me (When I'm Gone)", a song that reached the Top 30 on the R&B chart. In 1965, Bass co-wrote and recorded the song, "Rescue Me" which was an immediate hit. After a month-long run at the top of the R&B charts, the song reached #4 on the US pop charts and gave Chess its first million-selling single in a decade. Although Bass had been assured that her contribution to co-writing the lyrics would be acknowledged, this was never done, and she received only a small performing royalty for the hit. Disillusioned with Chess, she decided to leave the label.

She and Bowie left America in 1969 and moved to Paris where she recorded two albums with Bowie and the Art Ensemble of Chicago. In 1972, Bass retired temporarily from music to concentrate on raising a family; she had four children with Bowie. In 1990, she recorded a gospel album with her mother and brother called *Promises: A Family Portrait of Faith* and undertook a tour of the US West Coast, called "Juke Joints and Jubilee", which featured both traditional gospel and blues performers. During the 1990s, she hosted a Chicago radio talk show, and released several gospel records on independent labels. In May 2000, Bass received a star on the St. Louis Walk of Fame.

On New Year's Day 1990, Bass was astonished to hear her own voice singing "Rescue Me" on an American Express television ad, for which she had received no royalties. After a legal battle, she received a settlement awarding her \$50,000 plus punitive damages.

In the 2000s, Bass toured Europe with her brother until her health began to deteriorate. On December 26, 2012, she died at a St. Louis hospital from complications of a heart attack. She is remembered for channeling the power of gospel music into some of the greatest R & B hits of the golden age of soul.