

BOBBY WOMACK

Robert Dwayne "Bobby" Womack (pron.: /'wɒmək/; born March 4, 1944) is an American singer-songwriter and musician. An active recording artist since the early 1960s where he started his career as the lead singer of his family musical group The Valentinos and as Sam Cooke's backing guitarist, Womack's career has spanned more than 50 years and has spanned a repertoire in the styles of R&B, soul, rock and roll, doo-wop, gospel, and country. Womack wrote and originally recorded The Rolling Stones' first UK No. 1 hit, "It's All Over Now" and New Birth's "I Can Understand It" among other songs. As a singer he is most notable for the hits "Lookin' For a Love", "That's The Way I Feel About Cha", "Woman's Gotta Have It", "Harry Hippie", "Across 110th Street" and his 1980s hit "If You Think You're Lonely Now". In 2009, Womack was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Biography

1944-1966: Early life and career: The Valentinos

Main article: The Valentinos

Born and raised in Cleveland's East 85th & Quincy area to Naomi Womack and Friendly Womack, Womack was the third of five brothers. Raised Baptist, their mother played organ in their church and their father was a minister and musician, often known to play guitar though he advised his sons to not touch the instrument while he was away. One night, eight-year-old Bobby, who was often playing it, broke a guitar string. After Friendly replaced the string with a shoelace, he let Bobby play the guitar for him. According to Bobby later, Friendly was shocked by his son's talents as well as the talents of his other sons. Soon afterwards, he bought Bobby his own guitar and formed The Womack Brothers. The group toured the gospel circuit with their parents accompanying them on organ and guitar respectively. In 1954, the group under the moniker Curtis Womack and the Womack Brothers, the group issued the Pennant single, "Buffalo Bill". Bobby was only ten years old at the time.

Even though Curtis Womack often sang lead, Bobby Womack was allowed to sing alongside him showcasing his gruff baritone vocals in contrast to his older brother's smoother tenor. During performances, Bobby would sometimes imitate the role of a preacher. Sam Cooke discovered the group performing while he was still in the Soul Stirrers in 1956 and began mentoring the boys, promising them that he would help with their careers once he established himself. Within four years, Cooke had formed SAR Records and signed the quintet to the label. Bobby was sixteen. The group recorded two gospel sides before Cooke decided to have the boys switch over to pop music. Upon telling his father of the decision to go secular, an emotional Friendly Sr. told them that they had to leave the house. Cooke had the brothers move to Los Angeles.

Changing their name to The Valentinos, Cooke produced and arranged the group's first hit single, "Looking for a Love", which was a pop version of a gospel song they had released titled "Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray", written by Bobby. The song became a R&B hit and helped land the group a spot on

James Brown's Revue. The group's next hit came in 1964 with the country-tinged "It's All Over Now", co-composed by Bobby. Their version was rising on the charts when The Rolling Stones covered it. Bobby was initially angry until he saw his first royalty check for the single after it had become a hit. The Valentinos' career was left shaky after Sam Cooke was shot and killed in a Los Angeles motel. Devastated by the news, the brothers disbanded and SAR Records folded. Bobby forged on a solo career, releasing sides for the Him and Checker labels without much success no thanks in part due to the controversy of his marriage to Cooke's widow, Barbara Campbell. By 1966, Womack had settled on session work.

1967-1972: Early solo career

Womack worked at Chips Moman's American Studios in Memphis and played on recordings by Joe Tex and The Box Tops. Womack played guitar on several of Aretha Franklin's albums, including Lady Soul, but not on the hit song, "Chain of Fools", as erroneously reported. His work as a songwriter caught the eye of music executives after Wilson Pickett took a liking to some of the songs and insisted on recording them. Among those songs included the hits, "I'm a Midnight Mover" and "I'm in Love".

In 1968, he signed with Minit Records and recorded his first solo album, Fly Me to the Moon, where he scored his first major hit with a cover of The Mamas & The Papas' "California Dreamin'". In 1969, Womack forged a partnership with Gábor Szabó and with Szabó, penned the instrumental, "Breezin'", later a hit for George Benson. Womack also worked with rock musicians Sly and the Family Stone and Janis Joplin, contributing vocals and guitar work on The Family Stone's accomplished album, There's a Riot Goin' On, and penning the ballad "Trust Me", for Joplin on her album, Pearl. Womack was one of the last people to speak to Joplin before her death in October 1970.

After two more albums with Minit, Bobby switched labels, signing with United Artists where he changed his attire and his musical direction with the album, Communication. The album bolstered his first top 40 hit, "That's the Way I Feel About Cha", which peaked at number two R&B and number twenty-seven on the Billboard Hot 100 in the spring of 1972.

1972-1985: Solo success

Following Communication, Womack's profile was raised with two more albums, released in 1972. The first of which was Understanding, noted for the album track, "I Can Understand It", later covered by the funk band New Birth and a three-sibling lineup of Bobby's old group, the Valentinos, and two hit singles, "Woman's Gotta Have It" and "Harry Hippie", the latter song was written for Womack by Jim Ford in a country version, in which Womack re-arranged in an R&B version. "Harry Hippie" later became Womack's first to be certified gold. Contrary to popular belief, the song was not about Womack's brother Harry. "Woman's Gotta Have It" became Womack's first to hit number-one on the R&B charts.

Another hit album released after Understanding was the soundtrack to the blaxploitation film, Across 110th Street. The title track became popular during its initial 1972 release and later would be played during the opening scene of the film, Jackie Brown, years later. In 1973, Womack released another hit album, Facts of Life, and had a top 40 hit with "Nobody Wants You When You're Down and Out", an older song Sam Cooke had done years before.

In 1974, Womack released his most successful single during this period with a remake of his first hit single, "Lookin' for a Love". Bobby's solo version of the song became even more successful than the original with the Valentinos', becoming his second number-one hit on the R&B chart and peaking at number ten on the Billboard Hot 100, becoming his only hit to reach that high on the pop chart. The song was featured on the album, *Lookin' for a Love Again* and featured the minor charted "You're Welcome, Stop on By", later covered by Rufus & Chaka Khan. Womack's career began stalling after Womack suffered from the tragic news of his brother Harry's death. Womack continued to record albums with United Artists through 1975 and 1976 but with less success than previous albums. In 1975, Womack collaborated with Rolling Stones member Ronnie Wood, on Wood's second solo album, *Now Look*.

Womack languished with his own recordings during the late 1970s but continued to be a frequent collaborator with other artists, most notably Wilton Felder of The Crusaders. In 1981, Womack signed with Beverly Glen Records and had his first R&B top ten single in five years since the 1976 single *Daylight* with "If You Think You're Lonely Now", which peaked at number three on the R&B singles chart. He had two more R&B top ten singles during the 1980s including the Patti LaBelle duet, "Love Has Finally Come at Last" and "I Wish He Didn't Trust Me So Much". He had a hit featuring on the Wilton Felder single, "(No Matter How High I Get) I'll Still Be Looking Up to You".

1985-present: Later career and current work

Womack's solo career started to slow down, however, after 1985, partially due to Womack's issues with drug addiction. After sobering up in the mid-1990s, he released the album, *Resurrection* and continued his performing career.

In 1989, Womack sang on Todd Rundgren's "For the Want of a Nail" on the album *Nearly Human*. In 1998, he performed George Gershwin's "Summertime" with The Roots for the Red Hot Organization's compilation album *Red Hot + Rhapsody*, a tribute to George Gershwin, which raised money for various charities devoted to increasing AIDS awareness and fighting the disease.

In 2010, Womack contributed lyrics and sang on "Stylo" alongside Mos Def, the first single from the third Gorillaz album, *Plastic Beach*. Womack was told to sing whatever was on his mind during the recording of "Stylo". "I was in there for an hour going crazy about love and politics, getting it off my chest", said Womack. He also provides vocals on the song "Cloud of Unknowing" in addition to the song "Bobby in Phoenix" on their December 2010 release "The Fall".

A new album was released on June 12, 2012 by XL Recordings of London. The album, *The Bravest Man in the Universe* was produced by Damon Albarn and Richard Russell. The first Song "Please Forgive My Heart" was offered as a free download on XL Recordings' official website on March 8, 2012. Contact Music reported that Womack was working on a blues album, called *Living in the House of Blues*, featuring collaborations with Stevie Wonder, Snoop Dogg and Rod Stewart. In an interview with *Uncut*, Womack revealed that the follow-up is now called *The Best Is Yet To Come* and also features Teena Marie and Ronnie Isley.

Legacy

Jodeci's K-Ci Hailey, a notable admirer of Womack's work, covered "If You Think You're Lonely Now" in 1994. Hailey again covered Womack in 2006 with his rendition of "A Woman's Gotta Have It". The song is referenced in Mariah Carey's song "We Belong Together", a number-one hit in June 2005. Carey sings "I can't sleep at night / When you are on my mind / Bobby Womack's on the radio / Singing to me: 'If you think you're lonely now.'" In 2007, R&B singer Jaheim interpolated the song as "Lonely" on his album "The Making of a Man". Neo Soul Singer, Calvin Richardson also covered many of Womack's tunes. The song was covered by the late R&B musician Gerald Levert and fellow singer Mary J. Blige from Levert's 1998 album *Love & Consequences*.

Film director Quentin Tarantino used "Across 110th Street" (which, in a different version, had been the title song of the 1972 movie) in the opening and closing sequences of his 1997 film *Jackie Brown*. His work has been used in several other popular films, including *Meet the Parents* (2000), *Ali* (2001) and *American Gangster* (2007). A 2003 Saab commercial used Womack's interpretation of "California Dreamin'". In 2005, "Across 110th Street" appeared in the hit Activision video game *True Crime: New York City*. "Across 110th Street" was used in Rockstar Games video game *Thug'z Depression: Live Or Die*.

On the 1994 release *1-800-NEW-FUNK*, Nona Gaye covered "Woman's Gotta Have It," produced by Prince and backed by his band, *New Power Generation*.

During the spring of 1997, R&B singer Rome covered the original song from his self-titled debut album.

In 2008, Kelly Rowland of *Destiny's Child* recorded her own version of his R&B hit "Daylight" with Travis McCoy of the *Gym Class Heroes*, which became a hit in the UK Singles Chart, where it was previously released as a single by Womack in 1976.

In 2009, Calvin Richardson was chosen to record a tribute album to Womack to coincide with Womack's induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. The Grammy-nominated album was entitled *Facts of Life: The Soul of Bobby Womack*. It reached #30 on the US R&B chart.

In early 2012, Womack's career was the subject of the documentary show *Unsung* on TV One.

Personal life

Barbara Campbell scandal: In March 1965, just three months after Sam Cooke's death, Womack created scandal by marrying Cooke's widow, Barbara Campbell. Womack claimed he initially went to Barbara's side to console her following Cooke's death for fear that, if she were left alone, she would "do something crazy". They divorced in 1970. Rapper Nas later mentioned the incident in his song "Blunt Ashes". The controversy derailed Womack's singing career for a time.

Bobby Womack's younger brother, Cecil, later married Linda, the daughter of Sam Cooke and Campbell. Womack and Linda collaborated on the hit song "Woman's Gotta Have It" and he applied background vocals for his brother and Linda as the pair teamed up as *Womack & Womack*. *Womack & Womack* are also the artists of the song "Baby I'm Scared of You".

Family

Womack was married twice and is the father of six children, two of whom died young. With Barbara Campbell-Cooke, Womack had a son, Vincent, who committed suicide in 1986 at the age of 21. Vincent Womack was featured alongside his father on the cover of Bobby's 1972 album, *Understanding*. With his second wife, Regina Womack, he had a son, Truth, who died as an infant, which devastated the singer. They later had two children, Bobby Truth and Gina. Womack also had two boys from a 1990s relationship named Cory and Jordan. Cory is a senior in high school, and Jordan is a 7th grader. Womack currently lives in Los Angeles.

Drug addiction and health problems

Womack opened up about his frequent drug use in his memoirs, *I'm a Midnight Mover*. Womack said he began using cocaine sometime in the late 1960s. His cocaine use turned into an addiction by the late 1970s. Womack partially blamed his habit for his son Truth's death as an infant in 1976. At the end of the 1980s, Womack went into a rehab facility to get over his cocaine addiction, which he said he conquered. Womack contracted diabetes in his later years. In early 2012, Womack entered several hospitals with health problems including pneumonia, for which he was successfully treated. It was revealed in March that Womack was diagnosed with colon cancer after Bootsy Collins reported it on his Facebook page. Womack announced afterwards that he was undergoing cancer surgery. On May 24, 2012, it was announced that Womack's surgery to remove a tumor from his colon was successful and he was declared cancer free. On January 1, 2013 Womack admitted that he has struggled to remember his songs and other people's names, leading doctors to suggest that he is in early stages of Alzheimer's disease.

Use in film

Womack's 1968 cover of "California Dreamin'" featured prominently in 2009 British film *Fish Tank* by Andrea Arnold, where the main character Mia dances to it and uses it as her audition piece. The collection CD on which the song appears also plays a role, and is *The Best of Bobby Womack* (2008), on which "California Dreamin'" appears on track 17, as Mia requests at her audition. Womack's "Across 110th Street" featured in the opening and elsewhere in the film *Jackie Brown*, directed by Quentin Tarantino. It is used to emphasise the blaxploitation tone of the film. It was used again in the Denzel Washington film, *American Gangster*, which depicted the actual circumstances described in the song. This song is also used for the closing credits of Season 2, Episode 3 of TV show *How to Make It in America*.
