

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Don Was Picks 6 Seminal Detroit Tunes

Don Was · Wednesday, August 14th, 2013

For the past 35 years, few people have had as much impact on the music we love as legendary record producer Don Was, who's now the president of Blue Note Records. His genius in the studio is second to none, validated by numerous Grammy nominations and wins, and by the roster of acts that have continually sought his ability to bring out the best in their creative process: The Rolling Stones, Bonnie Raitt, Bob Dylan, Bob Seger, Iggy Pop, Joe Cocker, Willie Nelson, Roy Orbison, B.B. King, John Mayer, Elton John. Need we say more?

We recently caught up with Don and asked him to provide our readers with his personal history of the musical heritage of Detroit, his hometown. Don obliged, choosing one song for each of six genres that represent the music of the Motor City, along with a brief commentary on each selection.

We hope the music that moves him does the same for you.

BLUES: Boogie Chillen – John Lee Hooker

“A seminal, influential blues track, set in Detroit’s Black Bottom district, that lays a groundwork for the spirit of party rebellion that characterizes all subsequent rock n roll: if the boogie woogie is in you, it’s GOT to come out! Yes, people.....have a ball!”

ROCK: Kick Out The Jams – MC5

“This awe-inspiring Detroit anthem – propelled by an unparalleled wall of raw sonic power – blurs any remaining distinction between sex and rock n roll. It builds to a crescendo with a haiku-like Declaration of Independence that encapsulates the Zen ethos of the Motor City: Let me be who I am....and let me kick out jams!”

JAZZ: Mode For Joe – Joe Henderson

“On this mid-sixties Blue Note classic, native son, Joe Henderson, pierces the sophistication of NY modal hard-bop with a raw, animalistic saxophone cry that could only emanate from the streets of Detroit.”

MOTOWN: What’s Going On – Marvin Gaye

“Marvin’s eloquent tome about the absurdity of human beings being pitted against each other is about much more than just the Viet Nam War and is as timely today as it was in 1968: *War is not the answer/For only love can conquer hate.*”

HIP HOP/RAP: Lose Yourself – Eminem

“A vibrant chronicle of living through hard times in Detroit and seizing the moment to change your life. The song’s universality was so celebrated that it received the Oscar for best original song in a motion picture. Co-writer Luis Resto accepted the award from Barbra Streisand wearing a Grant

Hill Detroit Pistons jersey!”

TECHNO: Big Fun – INNER CITY

“This Kevin Saunderson classic was a seminal track that helped forge the Detroit Techno sound. I love it because it reminds me of the late, great motor city DJ, Ken Collier, who is a largely unheralded figure of international import in the shaping of 80’s dance music. I can still picture him spinning this record at the legendary after-hours club Heaven, on Seven Mile & Woodward.”

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