

The Future of Soul Music

by

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Abstract

This paper discusses the origins of the rhythm and blues genre in the United States and how it has shaped the soul music of today. Discussed are pioneering artists in the rhythm and blues genre of the 1960s through 2022. The genre of r&b has always been a combination of other genres. As decades pass, new styles are created and combined with others to create a “new” style of soul music.

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Introduction to Rhythm and Blues

Rhythm and blues, better known simply as r&b, is a broad music genre that got its start in the United States during the mid-1900s. The term r&b was first used to refer to all popular music made by black artists, regardless of its genre. The term now refers to a specific genre that is typically recorded by black artists, but it no longer encompasses all the music performed by black artists. R&b is especially unique because it started as a melting pot of a few genres such as gospel and blues. Today, many r&b songs incorporate styles like pop, funk, hip-hop, and gospel while inspiring new styles.

Rhythm and blues can trace its roots back to both European and African musical traditions. When Africans were enslaved in America, they kept many of their own musical traditions, but also incorporated some European musical traits. Rhythm and blues can be described as “one of the descend[ants] of a long-standing African-American musical tradition that includes spirituals, ragtime, blues, jazz, and gospel music” (Ripani 17). R&b is not just one concrete style, but a combination of several musical traditions. Though, it is true that much of the core characteristics found in r&b come from early African American folk and popular music (Ripani 19). Early r&b often overlapped with other popular genres such as jazz or blues. In the 1940s, it was common to see jazz, blues, and r&b artists listed on the same music charts (Ripani 20). At times, there seems to be no clear defining factor between the three genres. Besides jazz and blues, r&b also encompassed rock & roll with prolific black artists such as Little Richard and Fats Domino. The connecting factor of each style is the use of a backbeat, the rhythmic accentuation of the second and fourth beats (Gulla xi). The backbeat is still a defining factor of r&b songs.

With its deep roots, rhythm and blues has been around long before it had a name. The use of the term “rhythm and blues” in the recording industry can be traced back to 1949. The record company Okeh is credited with coining the term “race records” in 1929. The term was used to catalog the music made for and by black Americans. The race music category included blues, gospel, black vaudeville, and jazz (Ripani 18, 19). After World War II ended in the 1940s, the term “race” was seen as offensive. Therefore, the record industry needed to update its terminology. The company RCA Victor began cataloging black music under the phrase “blues and rhythm” in 1948. Soon after, *Billboard* journalist Jerry Wexler switched the words around and coined the term “rhythm and blues” (Gulla xi, xii, xviii). *Billboard* officially changed the name of their black record sales chart from “Best Selling Race Records” to “Best Selling Retail Rhythm & Blues Records” in 1949. Although the term r&b was first used by *Billboard* in 1949, the company has altered the name of the rhythm and blues chart several times since in order to better fit society and the connotations of words such as “blues,” “soul,” and “black” (Ripani 4, 15). Regardless of the exact title of *Billboard’s* r&b chart, the change of terminology signified a new era in black music.

During the 1950s, soul music began to emerge. By 1969, soul music became so popular that *Billboard* changed the name of their r&b chart to reflect that popularity (Lordi 20). The definition of soul music is not clear and has been talked about for decades. There are many articles from the 1960s that contain interviews of prominent black writers and entertainers attempting to explain soul music. In 1968, comedian Godfrey Cambridge said in an interview for *Time* magazine that, “soul is getting kicked in the ass until you don’t know what it’s for . . . It’s the language of the subculture; but

you can't learn it, because no one can give you black lessons" (Lordi 23). Early soul music can be compared to gospel in the way it evokes intense emotional responses from the listeners. In fact, many of the first big classic soul hits were originally gospel songs with altered lyrics (Lordi 20). For example, in 1954, Ray Charles released the song "I've Got a Woman (Way Across Town)," which was a reworked version of the gospel song "I've Got a Savior (Way Across Jordan)." Soul music continued into the 1970s and paved the way for funk and other sub-genres of r&b.

In the 1990s, soul music experienced a revival through new artists like D'Angelo, Erykah Badu, and Lauryn Hill. The term neo-soul was coined by music executive Kedar Massenburg in the 1990s to describe the unique sound his artists were creating (Cunningham). Neo-soul harks back to the classic soul era of the 1960s and 1970s while also combining elements of jazz, pop, hip-hop, funk, and gospel. The 1990s and early 2000s were the peak of neo-soul before it disappeared for a few years without any big hits. Today, neo-soul is making a comeback with artists such as Daniel Caesar, Kyle Dion, and Lucky Daye.

Rhythm and Blues has been around for decades and has evolved in several ways with the help of several profound artists. R&b and soul music is a genre of experimentation. This is exemplified through the neo-soul sound. The future of the genre will be defined by various "neo-soul" artists who experiment with production, instrumentation, and lyrics. Through my research of r&b, I will focus on how experimentation in the genre of r&b has influenced contemporary soul music and how it will continue to influence future artists in the genre.

Defining Soul Music

Soul music can be defined as a hybrid of several music styles, such as rhythm and blues, jazz, and gospel. But how does one know if the music is really “soul” music. There is not a universal definition for soul. Soul can mean different things to different people. For example, writer Lerone Bennet once stated, “Soul is not even a music. It is the feeling with which an artist invests his creation.” Soul was something that “white artists could not learn or appropriate” (Lordi, 19). James Brown said that his cape routine was the definition of soul: “Being involved and they try to stop you and you just don’t want to stop” (Lordi, 127). Brown would be nearing the end of his performance when he would be so exhausted for giving it all he had. He would collapse on the stage. Someone from his team would come out and put a cape on Brown to comfort him. Just when the audience least expects it, Brown suddenly rises, throws off the cape, and continues to sing and dance. Soul is subjective to everyone. Soul is about pushing boundaries and breaking the status-quo.

The Golden Era of Soul

During the 1960s, there were three record labels who were the primary promoters of soul music: Motown, Atlantic, and Stax. Each label had their own unique sound and structure. Although each label featured mainly black artists, only Motown was black owned. Motown, located in Detroit, was founded and run by Berry Gordy. Motown was not just a label; it ran just like an automobile factory. All music that came out of the label had a very specific sound. Motown’s renowned house band, The Funk Brothers, helped

craft the “Motown Sound” which often included tambourines, driving basslines, gospel harmonies, a heavy drum backbeat, and horns (Nero). Berry Gordy also made sure all his acts had a clean and polished image. He believed this would help his artists achieve crossover success with white audiences. Gordy was extremely successful in producing popular acts such as The Temptations, Diana Ross and The Supremes, Smokey Robinson and The Miracles, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, and The Jackson 5.

Motown had the Funk Brothers, but Stax Records had Booker T. & the M.G.’s for their house band. Booker T. Jones was the organist of the four-man “Memphis Group.” The Memphis Sound is often described as more laidback than other styles of soul music. Booker T. and the M.G.’s played on recordings for the King of Soul Otis Redding, Bill Withers, Wilson Pickett, and more. Stax was started by brother-sister duo Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton in Memphis, Tennessee. In 1960, Stax entered a distribution deal with larger label New York based Atlantic Records, run by Ahmet Ertegun and Herb Abramson. Atlantic Records was home to Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, and others. The label started in New York City. Because of the close relationship of the two labels, Booker T and the M.G.’s started backing Atlantic’s artists (Lukasavitz). Through this, the group was able to bring the Memphis Sound to a national audience.

Pioneering Soul Artists

Soul singer Al Green once stated that many soul artists learned their techniques from the church. Nina Simone, the High Priestess of Soul, credited the start of her musical training to the church. Other artists who started out in the church were Aretha

Franklin, Sam Cooke, and Ray Charles (Lordi, 20). It is often said that if you change the lyrics of a spiritual, it turns into an r&b song. As previously mentioned, Ray Charles' hit, "I've Got a Woman" borrowed from the gospel song "I've Got a Savior (Way Across Jordan)."

Sam Cooke

Sam Cooke, the Father of Soul Music, began his career as a gospel singer in Chicago. Cooke was the son of a preacher, so he was surrounded by gospel music at an early age. When he was young, Sam and his siblings formed their own gospel group. After the sibling group stopped singing, Cooke joined a local gospel quartet (Hoskyns). In 1950, Sam was asked to join gospel quartet the Soul Stirrers as their new lead man. Even as a gospel singer, he was a sex symbol. His good looks helped attract women to his shows. Still, his smooth vocals were the main attraction. In 1957, Cooke left the Soul Stirrers and gospel music completely. He successfully crossed over to pop/r&b in 1957 as a solo artist. His first big hit, "You Send Me" was successful with both black and white audiences. One of Cooke's most famous songs that is still covered today is "A Change is Gonna Come." Released in 1964, this is a timely song that speaks to the identity of African Americans in the 1960s. Tragically, Cooke's life was cut short before he could have an even greater impact on the genre.

Another profound artist whose life was cut short was Otis Redding. Just like so many other r&b/soul artists, Redding began his musical training in the church. He got signed to Stax Records in 1962. In 1967, Otis Redding performed at the Monterey Pop Festival. This festival allowed Redding to take his r&b catalog and present it to a mostly white audience. Tragically, Redding's life was cut short by a fatal plane crash in

December that same year. His song “Sittin’ on the Dock of the Bay” was released after his death, making it history’s first Number 1 song released posthumously. Redding’s impact on r&b and other genres rightfully earned him the title King of Soul.

Otis Redding

Otis Redding may have been the King of Soul, but Aretha Franklin was undoubtedly the Queen. Franklin’s father, preacher and gospel singer C.L. Franklin often had famous visitors over, including gospel legend Mahalia Jackson, Sam Cooke, Clara Ward, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (Houston Symphony). In 1967, Aretha Franklin officially earned the title Queen of Soul. While some artists tend to reject these titles given to them, Aretha embraced hers, stating, “Who wouldn’t want to be called Queen?” That year she released her eleventh studio album, *I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You*. This album included her rendition of “Respect,” originally written and performed by the King, Otis Redding. When Redding performed at the Monterey Pop Festival he stated, “This is a song that a girl took away from me, but I’m still going to do it anyway.” At the time of that festival, Aretha’s version was Number 1 on the charts.

James Brown

James Brown was dubbed the Godfather of Soul. Brown began his career singing in gospel quartets and later turned gospel songs into secular music. He was often recognized as the hardest working man in show business. His live performances were incomparable. His dancing and vocals always wowed the audience. Aside from being the Godfather of Soul, he was also often introduced and Soul Brother Number 1. In 1968, James Brown released the song “I’m Black and I’m Proud.” In his 1986 autobiography,

Brown stated, “You shouldn't have to tell people what race they are, and you shouldn't have to teach people they should be proud . . . But it was necessary to teach pride then, and I think the song did a lot of good for a lot of people” (Smithsonian). On April 5, 1968, the day after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., James Brown had a concert scheduled at the Boston Garden. Although there was unrest throughout the country, Brown still performed. During his performance, fans began to rush the stage and the police began to forcefully intervene. Thankfully, Brown was able to stop the police and eventually settle the crowd saying, “Now I ask the police to step back because I think I could get some respect from my own people” (“Live at Boston Garden”). This is another example of how soul music and black identity tie together. You cannot have one without the other. Although James Brown’s peak may have been in the late 1960s, he continued to have a profound impact throughout the coming years. While James Brown is the Godfather of Soul, it is impossible to imagine funk music without James Brown. He had strict control over his band and by the later 1960s he began giving the horns more percussive parts than harmony. His funk style can clearly be heard in his 1976 song “Get Up Offa That Thing.” James Brown is the definition of soul. Even in his 60s, Brown’s live performances were still so full of soul.

Post-Soul Era

Of course, soul music never went away. That classic soul sound just was not dominating the music charts as it once had. By 1968, the classic soul sound began to evolve into new genres of music. In the 1970s and 80s, soul music was being influenced by psychedelic and progressive rock. This led to funk music taking over with groups such

as the Commodores, Funkadelic, Parliament, and Earth, Wind, and Fire. Soul Brother Number 1, James Brown is credited making funk music what it was. He was one of the first to use horns as percussive instruments, giving the music that funky beat. In turn, soul music also paved the way for disco, electronic music, and even hip-hop (MasterClass).

In October 1971, the television show *Soul Train* debuted. The show ran until 2006. Don Cornelius started his career in the late 1960s as a substitute disc jockey on a Chicago radio station. Cornelius would go on to host the show until 1993. Before *Soul Train*, *American Bandstand* was the popular music and dance show in America. Cornelius took that idea and turned into *Soul Train*, which African American artists as well as an African American audience (Akbar). The show became an immediate hit. For 60 minutes, *Soul Train* would play soul music and the Soul Train Gang, the group of young black people who would dance to the music being performed. Some of the artists featured on the show were the Isley Brothers, Earth, Wind, and Fire, Aretha Franklin, James Brown, and more. One of the most prominent parts of *Soul Train* in pop culture today is the Soul Train Line Dance. *Soul Train* helped make r&b music more mainstream.

Old school hip-hop of the late 1970s to the early 1980s, often sampled funk and disco tracks as someone rapped over the beat. Sometimes the genre was called disco rap. Ironically, the rise of hip hop also contributed to funk and disco's decline. For example, Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," largely considered to be the first big hit to bring hip-hop to a wider audience, can also be classified as a funk or disco song because of its bassline beat. The group uses the groove and bassline from Chic's song, "Good Times."

Hip-hop influenced many genres including the newly emerging neo-soul genre of the 1990s.

The Return of Soul/Neo-Soul

In the mid-1990s, neo-soul began to emerge. It is usually described as a blend of 1970s soul-style vocals with contemporary r&b sounds and hip-hop beats. It is almost ironic that the neo-soul genre is labeled. Artists like Erykah Badu did not want their music and creativity to be labeled and put into a box. These artists were experimenting with a new sound while still using soul-music traditions. As record producer Kedar Massenburg stated in a 2002 interview with *Billboard Magazine*, “[A] lot of people don’t like the term...because they don’t want this music to be looked at as a genre. Because, when you classify music, it becomes a fad, which tends to go away.” Songwriter Andre Harris said, “[Neo-soul] isn’t a fad. It’s going to be here.” Still this idea of soul music is nothing new. Massenburg goes on to say that “[S]oul music is soul music. There’s nothing really new under the sun” These “neo-soul” artists were just carrying on tradition of soul music from 50 years earlier. Mike McArthur, half of the management/production team at Mama’s Boys, stated that “the only thing new [about soul music] is the artists making the music.” Raphael Saadiq, a member of Tony! Toni! Tone! said that the term neo-soul was disrespectful in his opinion. “When did [soul music] stop? It never stopped...You either have soul or you don’t” (Mitchell). Still, many people in the industry, including Saadiq understand that term for marketing reasons. In the same *Billboard* interview, Massenburg said that “[T]here’s a need to categorize music for

consumers so they know what they're getting." That is why he coined the term neo-soul in the late 1990s.

D'Angelo

D'Angelo seems to have ushered in the neo-soul era with his 1995 album *Brown Sugar*. Throughout the album he pays homage to the greats of the past such as Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, Curtis Mayfield, and Smokey Robinson. In the 1990s, hip-hop songs dominated the r&b *Billboard* chart, but D'Angelo was able to combine classic soul with modern-day hip-hop to make it on the charts himself. He had the look of a hip-hop artist, but his music was reminiscent of 1970s soul. On *Brown Sugar*, D'Angelo covered Smokey Robinson's 1997 song "Cruisin." The lyrics and basic structure of the song is the same, but D'Angelo's version has a slightly more upbeat tempo and a stronger drum kick, which adds to the 1990s r&b feel. He also adds in more vocal riffs which were popular with 1990s r&b singers. D'Angelo's *Brown Sugar* paved the way for a new movement, specifically in black music.

Erykah Badu

Another artist credited with pioneering neo-soul is Erykah Badu. Sometimes referred to as the Queen of Neo-Soul, Badu released her Grammy-winning debut album *Baduizm* in 1997. Many critics acknowledged several influences that can be heard on the album. In a 1997 *Rolling Stone* review of *Baduizm*, the critic notes he can hear the influences of Diana Ross, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, and more. When asked about her album, Badu stated, "It's an expression of me and the way I feel . . . Badu is my last name, 'izm' is what should get you high and *Baduizm* is the things that get me high"

(Okoth-Obbo). This soul music had a different message than classic soul. Badu made this album for herself, not a group of people.

Lauryn Hill

Hip-hop also influences neo-soul. One of the most prominent examples of this is Lauryn Hill. Originally a member of the progressive hip hop group, Fugees, Hill released her first and last solo studio album in 1998. *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* is the best-selling neo-soul album of all time, although some may not consider this album or Lauryn Hill as neo-soul. Instead, they classify her solely as a hip-hop artist. There is no doubt that she is clearly both. Her solo album obviously contains heavy hip-hop influences. In 2012, Drake is quoted as incorrectly calling himself “the first person to successfully rap and sing” (Poupard). Not only did Hill rap on her debut album, but she was also one of the first to combine rapping and singing on a single track. Hill’s album combines many different influences besides hip-hop. On her song “To Zion,” she features Latin guitar player Carlos Santana, giving the song a Latin jazz feel. The term neo-soul was created to classify artists like Lauryn Hill who were experimenting in the field of r&b. Many of Hill’s works are sampled in hip-hop songs today. For example, Drake sampled Hill’s “Ex-Factor” on his Number 1 Song “Nice for What” and Kanye West sampled Fugees “Doo Wop (That Thing)” on his 2021 song “Believe What I Say.”

Current Soul/Neo-Soul Artists

Although soul music has changed over the years, it has also retained many of the same qualities. Many themes are the same such as love and sex, but there are also more

songs with a personal meaning. For example, many people can relate to Motown songs, but many current write about personal experiences. Current soul artists include Solange, Frank Ocean, Janelle Monae, Lucky Daye, Kyle Dion, Daniel Caesar, and many others. Some artists stick closer to traditional r&b/soul form, while other push the boundaries.

Daniel Caesar

Daniel Caesar is a great example of a current soul, or neo-soul, artist. He was born in Toronto, Canada to a musical family. Because his father was a gospel singer, Caesar began his musical training in the church like many soul singers from the 1950s and 1960s. It was due to a crisis of faith that caused him to leave his home in Canada. Caesar's music seems to be how he worked through this crisis. This gospel and spiritual influence can be clearly heard in his music. He released his first EP, *Praise Break*, in 2014, to critical acclaim. He made the link clear between his gospel upbringing and his music to *Billboard Magazine* where he described the title:

The phrase [Praise Break] has a double meaning. Usually in church, when the congregation is overcome by the Holy Spirit for a moment, the people will interrupt the sermon to yell their praises, and dance for joy. I think the idea of a break from praise has taken on a more literal meaning in my life today. I was raised in an intensely religious, household, and I think the influence shows through my music...

He followed this release with another gospel inspired EP, *Pilgrim's Paradise*, in 2015.

In 2017 he released a full-length LP, *Freudian*, which continued to portray this gospel influence. The website *Genius* quoted Caesar saying, "In writing, in general, a

major influence is the Bible, since I spent so much time reading it growing up. It uses a lot of beautiful language, and a lot of it, or at least religious music and stuff like that, it's like a love story, but just between God and man sort of thing" (Caesar). As the album title implies, Caesar also references Freudian psychological theory, bringing a new facet to Caesar's music. The word "Freudian" references the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud and his theories about the human psyche and psychosexual development. Freud believed that human behavior is motivated by life instincts (survival, reproduction, and pleasure) and death instincts (humans unconscious wish for death). Caesar could also be referencing a Freudian slip, an unconscious mistake in speech usually with sexual undertones, but I believe his "slips" are purposeful (Cherry). He combines Freudian concepts with the gospel influence to create multilayered meanings within his lyrics and music.

The title track of *Freudian* has a dual meaning. The official music video for this song is split screen and enhances the duality of the song. This song is a direct reference to Freud's theory of children having an attraction to the opposite-sex parent. The first verse of "Freudian" seems to be asking for forgiveness from a lover while the second verse addresses his mother:

You're the reason I sing. I have to preserve you 'cause you're my
everything.

Babe, I know I fucked up . . . But you got your friends too. You are the
reason I am alive, I must bring you honor, if I don't, I'll die. Ma, I know I
brought shame, put a mark on your name. But you got your things too.

(Caesar)

He conflates the Freudian Oedipus Complex with the soul cliché of a cheating girlfriend in the consequences of his actions. This cliché is balanced by the woman's transgressions, meaning that he hurt the relationship by cheating on his lover, but she also has cheated on him with her "friends." Interestingly, this line, "Babe, I know I fucked up. Fucked with some empty cups," first appears on the album in Caesar's song "Neu Roses (Transgressor's Song)," which is another biblical and psychology reference. Transgress in a religious context has a biblical meaning of willfully violating God's moral law. Neu roses is a homophone for neurosis, a mild mental illness that includes symptoms of stress and anxiety. Like Ray Charles and other early soul artists, in a kind of soul contrafact, Caesar also continues the tradition of taking original gospel songs and changing the words just enough to make them secular. This is the case with his song "Hold Me Down," also from *Freudian*. The song's bridge and title reference the 1998 song, "Hold Me Now" by Kirk Franklin. Caesar changes the last word from Franklin's original lyrics, "I was wondering, can you hold me *now*" to "*down*." Although only one word is different, the meaning changes completely. While Franklin's version sings about God, Caesar sings about the one he loves. The first part of the song is Caesar asking this person to tell him that they love him. The second part is calmer and asking for the person to be his anchor. There are other gospel influences that are clear on this album, including "We Find Love" which makes use of a vamp, choir, and gospel-style piano. This song seems like a message to an ex-lover. The message seems wholesome and caring. Caesar is not trying to hurt her or bash her. Instead, it sounds like even though they broke up, he still wishes her well and still cares for her. This song has a clear gospel influence in the instrumentation. A contributor to Genius stated:

“We Find Love” is about the fallout of a relationship that is put back together in “Blessed.” In the context of the Freudian album, the song is connected thematically to “Loose” with Loose being about the relationship just before and during the breakup, and “We Find Love” being about the aftermath of that same breakup...the song demonstrates appreciation for the love and beauty that can be found in even failed connections.”

The titles of Caesar’s first two albums seem to have a common theme. On Caesar’s second album, *Case Study 01*, follows a path like many before him. A case study is detailed research of a particular situation in order to better understand it. On this album, Caesar enlists artists like Jacob Collier, John Mayer, and 1990s r&b legend Brandy. The first song on *Case Study 01* is “Entropy.” Immediately the sound is different from anything heard from Caesar before. Before Caesar even sings, there is a sound clip from an interview with theoretical physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer about the Trinity Test in 1945, which officially started the nuclear era. While witnessing the first nuclear bomb go off, Oppenheimer thought of the Hindu scripture, “Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.” In the chorus of the song, Caesar states how he is surprised that he has found peace, but he knows it will not last long. He also states that disorder is always present. August 2021, Caesar tweeted “Entropy is still the greatest song I’ve ever written.” He also stated that it was his first-time chopping drums and playing his own bassline. The bass line is reminiscent of a 1970s funk bassline, but that is the only part that is funk inspired. In the second song on the album, “Cyanide,” Caesar returning to his Jamaican roots. The song opens with a native Jamaican speaking in common vernacular. Throughout the song he refers to Jah, what God is often called in Jamaica. He later

released a remix of the song with Jamaican singer Koffee. The next song on the album “Love Again” is reminiscent of classic 1990s r&b and features Brandy, an icon from 1990s rhythm and blues. *Case Study 01* shows just how versatile Caesar’s sound truly is.

In a February 2022 phone interview with *Complex Canada*, Caesar made it known that the next album is almost done, and he will be releasing music in 2022. He also listed several creative influences on this new album including Radiohead, *Abbey Road* by the Beatles, *Even in the Quietest Moments...* by Supertramp, and *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* by Kanye West. Caesar also revealed that the album is not as collaboration heavy as *Case Study 01* (Wilson). There is no doubt that whatever Daniel Caesar releases next will be different than what he has previously released.

Kyle Dion

Another current r&b/soul artist is Kyle Dion. Dion was born in Connecticut to a musical family and grew up near Fort Lauderdale, Florida in the 1990s. His dad was rapper and his mother’s father was a famous Portuguese singer (Diaz). In an interview with *V Man*, Dion lists some of his musical influences as Michael Jackson, Prince, Usher, The Dream, and Whitney Houston. He also stated that he enjoys being an independent artist because it “allows [him] to be free” and “go against the grain and find different things that interest [him] in different times.” This notion is similar to Erykah Badu’s thoughts about being labeled as “neo-soul.” Neither Dion nor Badu want their music to be put into a box or to be confined to a one style. Dion stated in a 2021 interview, “I don’t want anyone to expect anything from me because I’m ever-changing, I’m ever-growing, and evolving” (Okon). Kyle Dion draws on many different genres and styles

while still being able to stay true to his r&b/soul roots. His high falsetto voice is reminiscent of the crooners of the 1950s and his fashion emulates Prince.

Kyle Dion released his first project, *Sixes n Sevens*, at 20 years old in 2014. This was followed by his EP *Painting Sounds* in 2016. His first full length project, *SUGA*, was released in 2019. In a 2018 interview with the *FADER*, Dion said that he likes to build an entire experience around a project release. He also revealed that he enjoys writing about things he has not gone through because “there aren’t any boundaries and it’s more fun.” A *RNGLDR* review on *SUGA* stated that Dion is “the definition of a Neo-Soul star. . .” revealing that he will probably influence many artists after him.

Dion released his sophomore album, *Sassy*, in September 2021. In an interview with the website *UPROXX*, Dion says, “I’ll never make the same song or album twice.” The first song on *Sassy* is accurately titled “No Rules.” In his interview with Okon, Dion reemphasizes his intention. He wants to be different and push boundaries within his album. He does not concern himself so much with what others think. Of course, an artist wants others to enjoy their work, but Dion told Okon he “did this [album] unapologetically. . . people should do whatever they want.” Not only does Dion push boundaries with his music, but also with his fashion. In an interview with *Very Good Light*, Dion said, “I love gender bending fashion, I love wearing whatever I want. . . Women can wear men’s clothes, and men can wear women’s clothes.” In his song “I Could Be Your Girlfriend,” Dion sings “She wears my shirt . . . [I] got it from the women’s section.” Many artists today are pushing boundaries just like Dion. That is how it has always been in the industry and part of why genres are able to stay relevant

throughout the changing decades. Every genre is pushed forward by those who are willing to break the rules.

Lucky Daye

An r&b/neo-soul contemporary of Daniel Caesar and Kyle Dion's is Lucky Daye. Daye, born David Brown, was raised in a strict Christian sect in New Orleans, Louisiana. Like so many before him, Lucky Daye's musical education began in church singing hymns which turned into a love for r&b. Daye recognizes those artists that have paved the way before him. In an interview, Daye said, "I find that my music is a reflection of the classic r&b that I grew up with and have come to love . . . Paying homage to Black artists who have come before me comes naturally" (Milner). Even his name, Daye, is a tribute to 1960s r&b legend Marvin Gaye with the added 'e' at the end. Lucky Daye worked on writing songs with other artists before releasing his first EP, *I*, in 2018, followed by *II*, in early 2019. These two EPs made up the first nine songs of Daye's 13-track debut album, *Painted*. Many hip-hop, funk, and r&b influences can be heard throughout the album. The songs "Late Night" and "Extra" have heavy funk groove bass lines. "Late Night" also has high trumpet instrumentation, adding to the classic funk appeal. The bassline in Daye's "Karma" is so similar to hip-hop artist Ginuwine's 1996 hit "Pony," that Ginuwine is on the song's writing credits. Not only is Lucky Daye inspired by black artists who have come before him, but he is even featured on the 2021 single "You Want My Love" from 1970s funk group Earth, Wind, and Fire. Lucky Daye is nowhere near finished releasing music. He is set to drop a new album in 2022 that will further push the r&b genre.

Daniel Caesar, Kye Dion, and Lucky Daye are all r&b/neo-soul artists. They are some artists who represent the current state of soul in the 2022. Daniel Caesar has more gospel influences, Kyle Dion incorporates rock, and Lucky Daye brings funk vibes songs. All artists still are rooted in r&b traditions even though their styles differ. There is always something new that can be done from drawing in older traditions. Music today would not be the same without those artists who pioneered soul music.

Where the Genre is Heading

I believe in the future we get, there will be less labeling of music. Labels are already arbitrary and not as clearly defined as they once may have been. Many modern artists can be placed into several different categories. For example, Lucky Daye can fall under r&b, soul, or funk. If one searches to determine what genre Daniel Caesar or Kyle Dion are, the answer that comes up is r&b/soul. Still, soul is an ambiguous term. There is no one overruling definition. Soul, both classic and new, is about innovation and creativity. If artists continue to create new sounds, there will be no existing genre that accurately describes the type of music they are making. Kyle Dion is an artist who is outspoken about how music is categorized. He spoke about how many black artists will get placed in an “urban” category, regardless of the type of music they are creating. He tweeted, “[S]hout out to all black artists pushing boundaries and destroying boxes the industry puts them in.” This is like when Erykah Badu rejected being categorized as a neo-soul artist. These artists do not make music to fit into a specific category, but the industry needs to categorize them for business. Every artist is influenced by something or someone who came before them. It is a common theme throughout music history. It is no

different in the r&b/soul category. The earliest r&b artists were inspired by gospel music. The next wave of soul artists were influenced by those who came before them. Everything stacks on top of each other. There would be no hip hop without funk, funk without soul, or soul without gospel. There would be no neo-soul without everything that has come before it. Daniel Caesar, Kyle Dion, Lucky Daye, and many other current neo-soul artists will surely inspire the future generations. Future artists will continue to break the rules and push boundaries in the way they create music and even how they perform or distribute their songs.

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