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**40 years later, 'Respect' remains anthem of era**

By Kelley L. Carter Gannett News Service

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Forty years ago "Respect," the saucy track from Aretha Franklin, captured the No. 1 spot on Billboard's Pop Singles chart, and in the four decades since its release, folks have been singing it — at times off-key — ever since.



Franklin is seen in a circa 1960 Detroit Free Press photograph.

"Respect," as Franklin sang it, has been featured on the soundtrack of more than a dozen films, been heard in numerous TV shows and has been belted out on many a karaoke night. The Grammy award-winning song has passed down through generations, crossed cultural divides and volleyed through musical genres.

The Queen of Soul's rendition of "Respect" is one of the most influential recordings in pop music history and one of the most indelible songs to come out of the rock and roll era. The single and the album it was featured on catapulted Franklin, who was 25 at the time, to global fame.

Timing played an integral role. The song added to a 1960s soundtrack of music, a grouping of songs that served as a backdrop to the pain and glory of a tumultuous time. It gave an anthem to the civil rights movement and ultimately, it served as a call to arms for women everywhere.

"When Aretha Franklin released 'Respect,' it was a time where there was a lot of segregation in the music industry. Even though that segregation existed, she was able to rise above that segregation. 'Respect' touched every life that was breathing and had a pulse rate," says Dr. Lyn Lewis, a sociology professor at the University of Detroit-Mercy.

"It didn't matter whether you were male, female, black or white. Everybody can relate to 'Give me some respect.'"

It wasn't until 1967 that Franklin's career really took off. That was the year she recorded and released "I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You," the album that featured "Respect." The album is regarded as a soul music masterpiece.

Franklin worked with Jerry Wexler, an Atlantic Records producer who also is credited with coining the term "rhythm and blues." She went into the studios at Atlantic Records in New York on Valentine's Day of '67 to record the song, despite having a cold. The title track had already been released and had soared to No. 8 on Billboard's Pop Singles chart. Fans wanted more.

And Franklin gave it to them.

Before that day's session was over, Franklin recorded four singles for the album, including "Respect." She was more than familiar with the song before that day. She'd been performing it for nearly a year during her live shows, giving the song her own funk and making it almost unrecognizable from the original version, written and recorded two years earlier by Otis Redding.

"My sisters and I decided to add the sock-it-to-me's," Franklin said earlier this year, almost downplaying her role in the recording of the song. (She declined an in-depth interview for this story.)

Wexler says it was Franklin who brought the song to him, wanting to record it. He says she ultimately produced the track — like she did on about 60 percent of the material they worked on together — with her sister Carolyn Franklin doing the vocal arrangements.

Perhaps the standout of the song was the way Franklin spelled it out — R-E-S-P-E-C-T — asserting her position with great vocal power. Franklin also added to the track a slang term popular in the black community at the time, "TCB," short for "take care of business."

Wexler says while he was in the studio laying down the track, Redding came by and instantly knew the song would do far greater things than his version.

"Little gal stole my record," the 90-year-old Wexler recalls Redding saying ruefully.

On its surface, "Respect" dealt with male-female relationships, with Franklin giving Redding's original piece of work a feminist twist. But the song meant more.

Many treated it as a call to arms, a chance to right wrongs and level the playing field.

"We always sang songs about things we didn't have. We said, 'We shall overcome.' We hadn't overcome, but we sang 'We shall overcome.' And when Aretha came out with 'Respect,' we weren't getting any respect," said Ben Chavis, a civil rights activist who worked with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a youth coordinator and is the former chief executive officer and executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.



Gannett News Service photos 2007 marks the 40th anniversary of Aretha Franklin's "Respect."

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