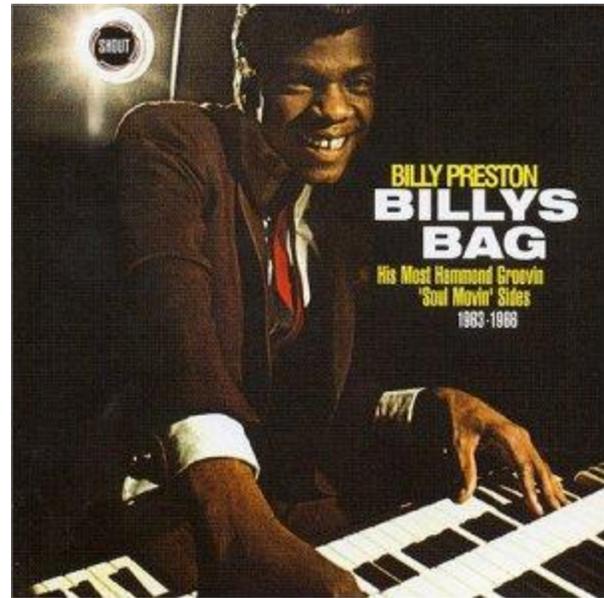


Billy Preston

Billy Preston was a soul singer and pianist who, in addition to having a successful solo career, collaborated with some of the greatest names in the music industry, including the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Little Richard, Ray Charles, George Harrison, Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan, Sam Cooke, Sammy Davis Jr., Sly Stone, Aretha Franklin, the Jackson 5, Quincy Jones, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Often called “the Fifth Beatle,” this former child prodigy left one of the most profound and prolific legacies in music.



William Everett Preston was born in Houston, Texas in 1946. He began playing piano at age three, and by ten he had joined the band of gospel great Mahalia Jackson. At age twelve he appeared in the 1958 film *St. Louis Blues*, portraying blues composer W.C. Handy as a young man. In the 1960s Preston performed with Little Richard and Ray Charles, and became a regular singer and pianist on the ABC television series *Shindig*.

Preston went on to a successful career as a session musician, including lending his talents to the Beatles' *Let It Be* album. That collaboration led to his signing to the Beatles' Apple label, and in 1969 his solo effort, produced by George Harrison, was released. The album *That's the Way God Planned It* and the single of the same name met with limited success, but in 1972 he released an instrumental funk single, "Outa-Space," that reached #2 in the U.S. and won the Grammy award for Best Pop Instrumental Performance. Over the next two years, Preston enjoyed more number one hits including "Will It Go Round In Circles" and "Nothing From Nothing." He was the first guest musical artist on the premier episode of the popular TV show *Saturday Night Live*.

Despite his monumental success as a solo act, Preston loved collaborating with other bands and musicians. He recorded five albums with the Rolling Stones, and toured with them throughout 1975 and 1976. The Stones showcased him and his songs by backing him in the middle of each concert on those tours.

Preston reached the top 10 again in 1980 with a duet with Syreeta White called "With You I'm Born Again," but his increasing addiction to alcohol and cocaine sent him into a downward spiral. He was arrested and convicted for insurance fraud after setting fire to his own house in Los Angeles, and in 1991 he was sentenced to nine months at a drug rehabilitation center and three months of house arrest.

Preston overcame his problems and mounted a comeback, touring and recording with a wide range of artists including Eric Clapton. He participated in the George Harrison tribute concert *Concert for George* at the Royal Albert Hall in London. In 2004 he toured with the Funk Brothers, Stevie

Winwood, and Eric Clapton, and later recorded with the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Neil Diamond, Eric Clapton, and J.J. Cale.

Preston battled kidney disease in his later years, and although he received a kidney transplant in 2002, his health continued to deteriorate. Billy Preston died on June 6, 2006 of kidney failure and other complications.