

R.I.P. Thom Bell



Thom Bell, one of the creators of the Philadelphia soul sound, died last Thursday at age 79. Bell's earliest successes as an arranger go back to his days of working with the local group The Delfonics and producing their hits "La-La (Means I Love You)" and "Didn't I (Blow Your Mind This Time)?" He later joined Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff's record company and arranged music for The O'Jays, Archie Bell & The Drells, Dusty Springfield, Jerry Butler and Jerry Bell. The three of them also formed the Mighty Three Music publishing company. Bell's production genius went on to produce The Stylistics, The Spinners, James Ingram, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Dionne Warwick, Deneice Williams and The Temptations. Bell had formed a songwriting partnership with Linda Creed that was responsible for the hits with The Spinners and The Stylistics.

The sound Bell developed with Gamble and Huff had joyful orchestration, rumbling bass lines and what Fred Wesley described as "putting the bow tie on funk." Bell's training as a classical pianist gave him the vision to add violin and the oboe to his arrangements which was unheard of in R&B. His admitted influence from Burt Bacharach was so strong that he was called the Black Burt Bacharach. The songs he produced were the backbone of '70s soul and his work with Williams in the '80s was on two of her biggest songs; "Silly" and "It's

Gonna Take A Miracle.” Bell retired from music in the '90s around the same time Mighty Three Music was sold to Warner Chappell Music. He was inducted into the Songwriters Hall Of Fame in 2006, the Musicians Hall Of Fame and Museum in 2016 and in 2017 received a Grammy Trustees Award.