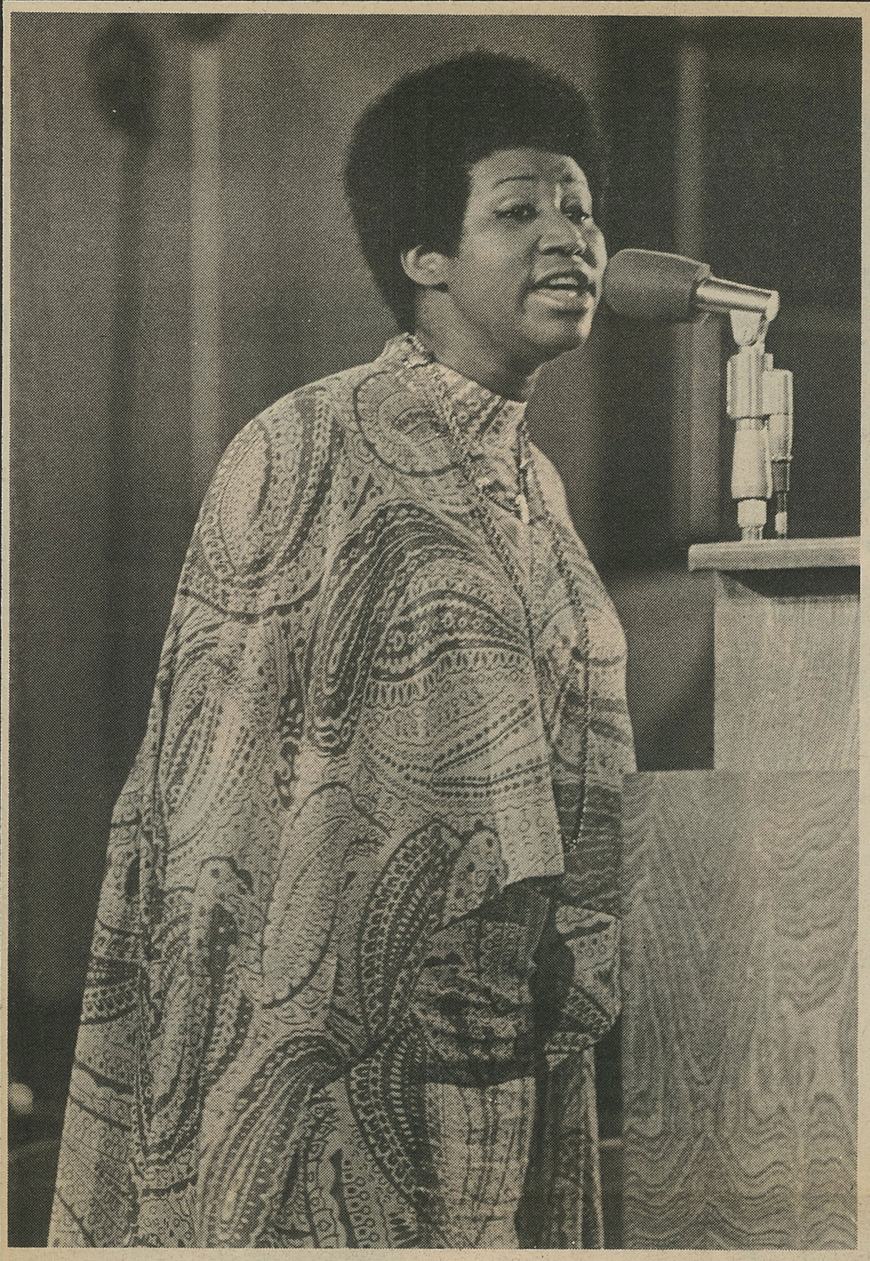

Recording at New Missionary Baptist Church, Aretha wore African influenced gowns of silk

Rock star Mick Jagger joined Jerry Wexler in studious appreciation of Aretha's style

people at the New Temple Missionary Baptist Church surprised. The converted movie theater was wired for sound, lights, and camera as the entire session was recorded by Warner Brothers Studio on film for an as yet unspecified use.

Jerry Wexler greeted guests and ticket-holders at the door. By eight-thirty the show, for that's what it really was, had begun. Candice Bergan, Altovise Davis (Mrs. Sammy), Mira Waters, and Carolyn Franklin were all in the audience. The film crew, press photographers, and record technicians were all scampering about, vying for positions as Reverend James Cleveland rose to the pulpit.

Addressing the assemblage he asked God's blessing on the venture, and profoundly thanked Aretha for her choice of his choir to record with her.

The choir marched down the aisle and then Aretha entered, and the magic of the evening began. Rev. Cleveland's choir lived up to its reputation. The voices, rich and splendid, gleamed almost visually as Alexander Hamilton's ballet-like directorial style guided them through the arrangements. At times, he seemed rather to float on their voices, somewhere above them.

The song "Amazing Grace" highlighted the first recording session, seconded by "You've Got A Friend," and then, too soon, it was over . . . until Friday night.

Rehearsal was called for 2:30 on Friday. Rough spots were worked out of the filming operation and some of the tunes. A rear camera was set up above the Baptismal behind and beneath a magnificent mural and the choir stand.

Aretha wore African styled gowns both nights, her hair in the neat and most becoming natural she has been wearing lately. The second night, Aretha's audience included her father, Reverend C.L. Franklin, who flew out after hearing about what Thursday night was like. He sat with Clara Ward, whose mother was also there. The two ladies remember Aretha from infancy and both beamed with pride at her talents.

One of the tunes Aretha chose was "Never Grow Old" and the spirit seized the church. Aretha "went in" and drew with her Clara Ward and most violently her mother, who ran to the singer, moved by the music and the spirit. All was captured on film and the depth of the reality of the church feeling is all there . . . a Black

Choir Director Alexander Hamilton clutches Aretha's hand near the conclusion of the recording sessions