

# The Making of the Making of “Amazing Grace”



# **“The Making of the Making of ‘Amazing Grace’”**

**... tells a story of African American culture and influence in the early 1970s...**

**A singular achievement in the history of American popular music...**

**The birth of modern gospel...**

**A defining moment in the history of Soul music...**

**The re-crowning achievement for the “Queen of Soul” ...**

**An end to an era of African American music at Atlantic Records...**

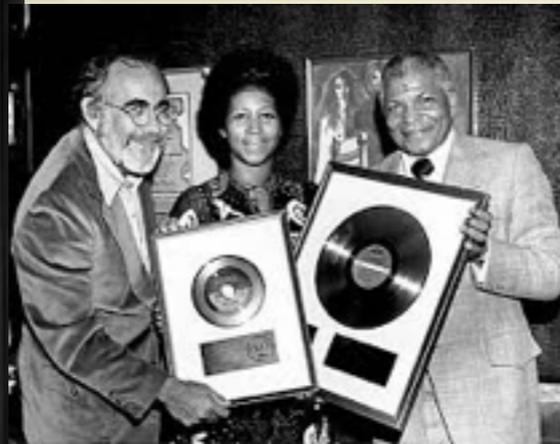
**And how the premier document of American popular music ever filmed...**

**came together...**

**disappeared...**

**and came together again.**

In 1971, Aretha Franklin was the Queen of Soul, America's biggest singing star. As the culmination of five years of chart-topping hits, she and her producer, Jerry Wexler of Atlantic Records, decided her next recording would take her back to the music of her youth, to the world of American Gospel music.





Recorded live at Rev James Cleveland's church in Watts, California...

"Amazing Grace" would become the biggest selling album of Aretha Franklin's career... and the biggest selling Gospel album of all time.





What remained a secret was that the session, which took place in front of a shouting, Amen-ing and dancing audience/congregation, had been filmed by Oscar-winning director Sydney Pollack.

40 years later, this film is a testimony to the greatness of Aretha Franklin and a time-machine window into a moment in American musical and social history.

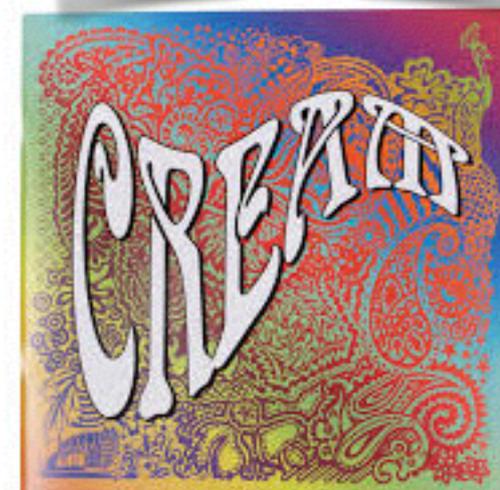


**CROSBY STILLS  
NASH & YOUNG**

Atlantic, the pioneering home of Ray Charles, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, Otis Redding, Led Zeppelin, Cream, Roberta Flack, John Coltrane and scores of other great jazz, r&b and pop artists, had by 1970, become part of Warner Communications, America's media conglomerate.



Alerted about Aretha's plans...Warner Brothers Films readily agreed to film the session – corporate synergy was coming to life!



**LED-ZEPPELIN**



Warner Brothers' Director of Music Services Joe Boyd, newly arrived in LA after making his mark as a producer in Britain (Nick Drake, Pink Floyd, Fairport Convention etc) proposed hiring Jim Signorelli, a documentary film-maker and his team of 16mm cameramen, all veterans of shooting live music. Before Signorelli's deal could be signed...

Warner Brothers' CEO Ted Ashley mentioned the project during a meeting with Pollack, who had been recently been nominated for an Academy Award as Best Director for "They Shoot Horses Don't They" and whose film, "Jeremiah Johnson" was about to be released by Warner Brothers.



A big fan of Aretha's...

Pollack enthusiastically signed up to film "The Making of Amazing Grace".



INTER-OFFICE MEMO

WARNER BROS. INC.

TO: KEN MANCEBO FROM: JACK E. FREEDMAN

SUBJECT: ARETHA FRANKLIN PROJECT - Sanford Productions

DATE: March 14, 1972 COPIES TO: F. Wells B. Wallace  
P. Knecht  
C. Greenlaw D. Brown  
E. Morey S. Kiwitt

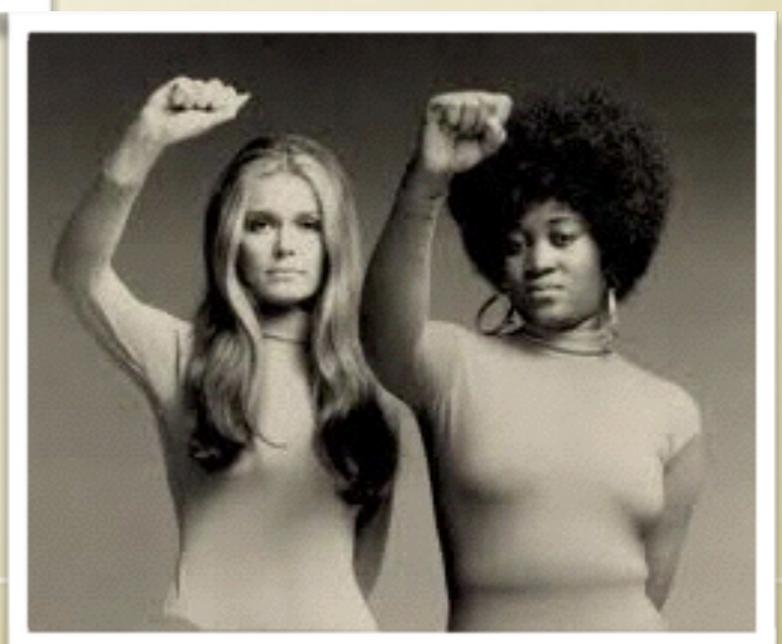
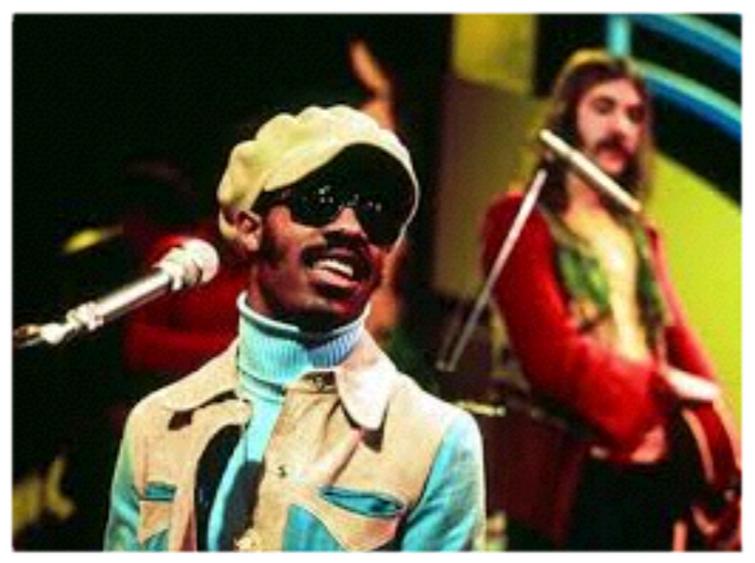
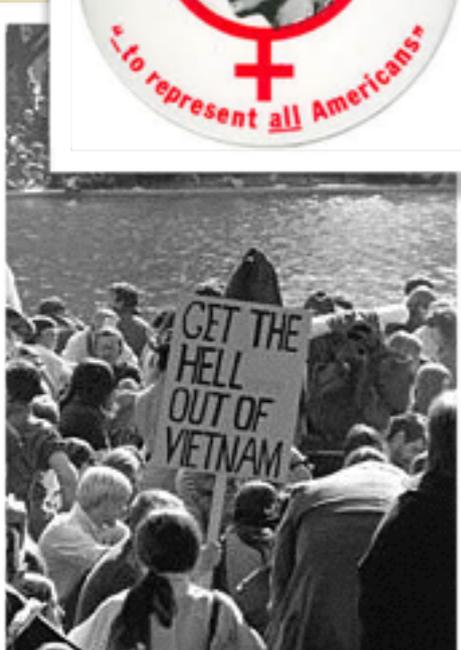
We have agreed to pay to Sanford Productions the sum of \$1,500 for Sidney Pollack's services in producing and directing this project. We will be billed later for DGA contributions.

Please prepare the check and send it to me for transmittal with an appropriate letter.

JEF:jf

  
J.E.F.

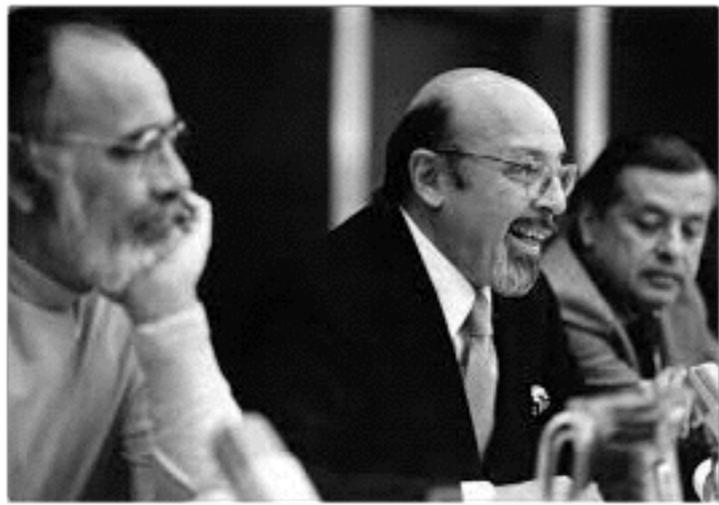
At the time of the recording of "Amazing Grace" in February 1972, Atlantic Records, "Soul" music, Gospel music, the music business in general and the relationship of African-Americans to society as a whole were all in a state of flux.



# Atlantic Records



Atlantic had pioneered the selling of black music to white audiences: The Coasters, The Drifters, Ruth Brown, Ray Charles, Solomon Burke, Otis Redding, Sam & Dave, Wilson Pickett head a huge list of African-American stars the label marketed during the 1950s and 1960s.

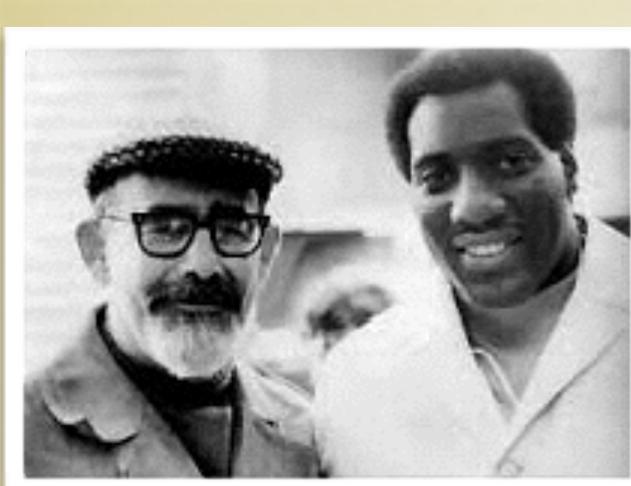


Aretha had originally been signed to Columbia Records by the great John Hammond, talent-spotter of Billie Holiday, Count Basie, Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen.

When her Columbia career failed to ignite, Atlantic took her on and, under the brilliant guidance of Jerry Wexler (the man who invented the term ‘rhythm and blues’) transformed her career.

Starting in 1967, her string of hits – “I Never Loved A Man”, “Respect”, “Baby I Love You”, “Chain of Fools”, “Think”, “Don’t Play That Song” – kept Atlantic at the top of both the pop and r&b charts. Aretha’s success disguised the fact that the label was losing touch with its r&b heritage following the death of Otis Redding and Ray Charles’ defection to a rival company.

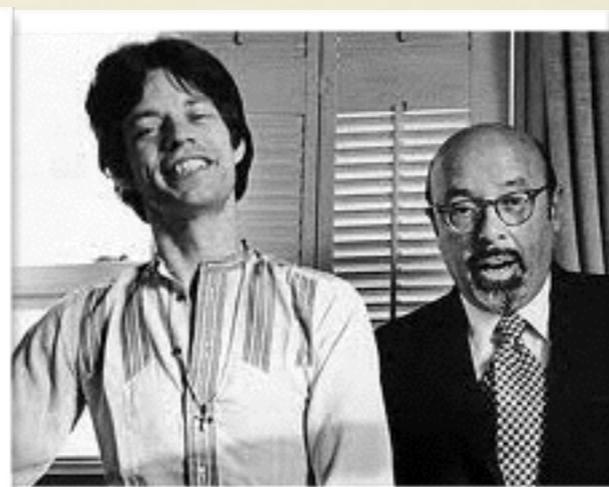




Love of Soul Music, from the Supremes to Al Green, had united America across racial lines.

But by the early '70s, the Civil Rights movement had fractured, its failures coupled with the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X led to the growth of the Black Power movement and a growing alienation of blacks – and their music – from the white mainstream.

Labels like Atlantic saw their future more and more in the exploding market for white rock groups and singer-songwriters.

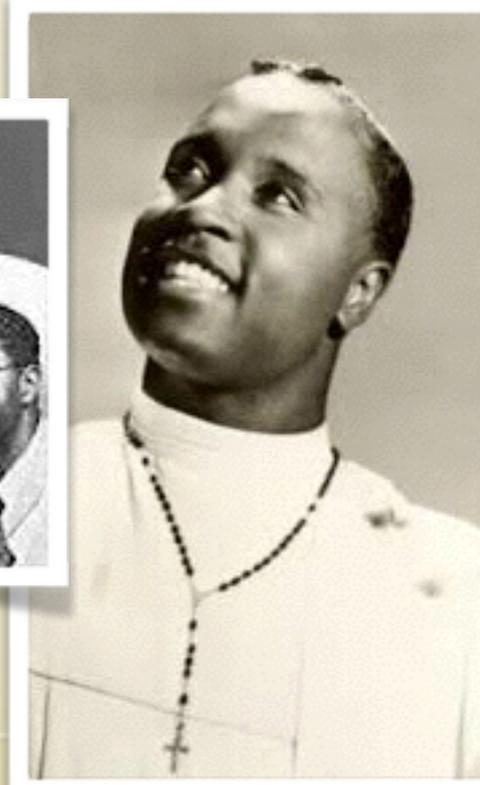




“Amazing Grace” was not intended as a swan song...  
but it would turn out to be an elegiac moment in American musical  
history...  
a salute to the gospel heritage that had transformed American music  
in the 1960s at the last moment such a tribute was still possible.



Aretha resembled so many Afro-American singers in having done her formative singing in church. Sam Cooke, Little Richard, Otis Redding, Dinah Washington, Jackie Wilson, the Staples Singers, Ray Charles... the list of singers whose secular singing was informed by their church background is endless. And for those who might not have grown up on of the Protestant churches of the American South or the cities of the North, it was impossible to escape the influence of Mahalia Jackson, Alex Bradford, Clara Ward, Marion Williams, the Swan Silvertones and the other great figures of the Golden Age of Gospel.





But while all were deeply affected by Gospel, Aretha had a special background: her own father, C. L. Franklin, was arguably Gospel's greatest preacher and shouter and a great singer besides, a friend and colleague of Martin Luther King and a powerful figure who toured the country with a Gospel show that included his brilliant daughter as soon as she was old enough to peer over the pulpit.

Aretha learned directly from Mahalia, from Clara Ward and from Sam Cooke on whom she had a girl-hood crush. "Amazing Grace" was her return home, her tribute to her father and to the childhood that had shaped her.

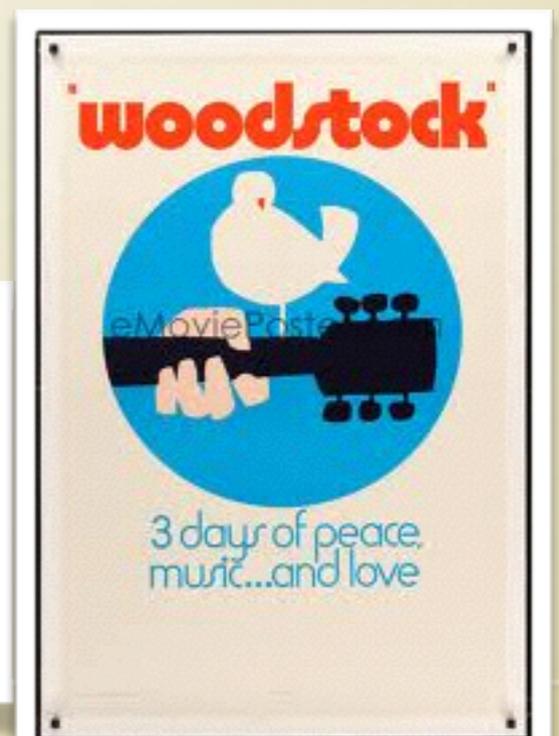
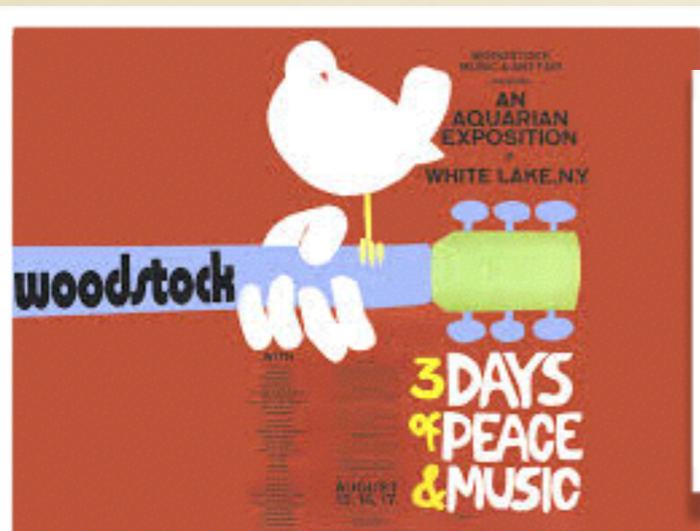




Warner Communications, parent company of Warner Brothers Films and the Warner, Reprise, Elektra and Atlantic labels, had reaped the rewards of that new buzz-word, “corporate synergy” with the success of the 1970 film and album of “Woodstock”. Warners had paid \$100, 000 for the rights; the film grossed \$17 million and the album sold three million copies.

Ever since “Woodstock”, that kind of synergy had been Warner Brothers’ Holy Grail.

Could “Amazing Grace” be that?





The answer turned out to be, “No.”  
Pollock’s film has never been seen.

Roll 1 = "walk in choir"

→ there are a few "mystery" rolls that do not have any info on them. They might be the ones we are missing

BEGINNING OF NIGHT (I)

REV CLEVE @ Podium

11:00:07 = LDC1, no choir - First night introduction - CHOIR files in behind him, sway back and forth - singing WE ARE ON OUR WAY > zoom into REV CLEVE \*nice\*

R 53-56 ★ T#5

REV CLEVE @ Podium

14:48:58 = Right 3/4 TU MCU - Evening's introduction "We want you to be a part of this session..." > zoom in without focusing

R 67 no T#6

HAMILTON

13:24:19 = Left aisle, back of room - Looks at us / CHOIR and motions for us to follow him - CHOIR files out, we follow \*good shot\*

R 60-64 ★ T#5

CHOIR

14:51:07 = HH, POV stage right - CHOIR feet 14:51:67 > to taking places at seats

R 67 no T#6

REV CLEVE @ Podium

14:52:00 = Singing WE ARE ON OUR WAY - CHOIR swaying in background (Quick)

R 67 no T#6

CHOIR

16:12: = Standing and singing WE ARE ON OUR WAY

R 71 no T#6

DRUMMER

13:25:21 = POV Band - as CHOIR settles in with WE ARE ON OUR WAY

R 60-64 ✗ T#5

ARETHA

13:25:21 = POV low left aisle - Walks out with Spotlight - sits at piano - Low rear 3/4 > zoom up to REV CLEVE

R 60-64 ✗ T#5

Sydney Pollack was a feature-film director. Sound is usually post-synched on the back-lot. After the remarkable two days of recording, the editors threw up their hands.

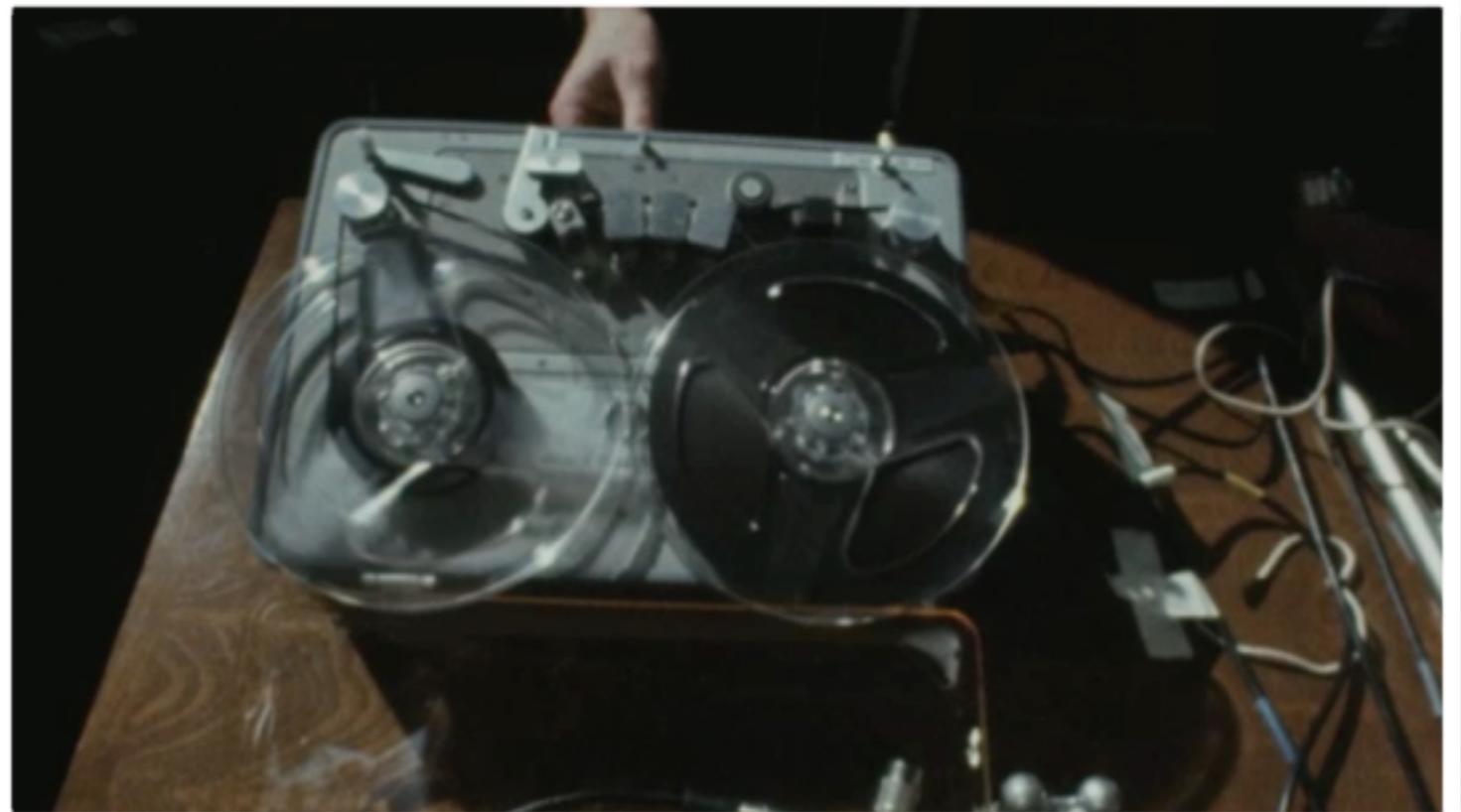
There were no clappers, no marks to guide the sound into synch with the picture.

I have enlisted the services of Alexander Hamilton, Choir Master on the ARETHA FRANKLIN project. He will be working with the editors to help sync the film.

Pollack hired lip-readers and specialist editors... with no luck.



Sydney Pollack filming  
“They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?”





The film languished in the vaults for almost 40 years before former Atlantic staff producer/Wexler protégé Alan Elliott came to Wexler and ultimately to Pollack... and together approached Warner Brothers about using new digital technology to match sound to picture and make a film out of the raw footage.

<15	WEXLER	So you know I should be a Co-Producer on this.	
16	ELLIOTT	Yes you should.	
17	WEXLER	Cause I Co- produced the whole mother fucker	
18	ELLIOTT	<u>Ahhh...</u>	
19	WEXLER	I wasn't just the Co-producer I produced	
20	ELLIOTT	I wouldn't do it with out you.	
21	WEXLER	Any how.	0:01:23
22	ELLIOTT	No I you know but you tell me what credit you want and I am putting you all over there.	
23	WEXLER	Producer.	
24	ELLIOTT	Okay.	
25	WEXLER	Cause I did!	
26	ELLIOTT	I understand.	



“The Making of the Making of ‘Amazing Grace’” tells a story of African American culture and influence in the early 1970s...and how the premier film document of American popular music... came together... disappeared... and came together again.



Dear Ms. Franklin,

My name is Sydney Pollack and I am a film director. I'm also a huge fan of yours. A long time ago, I was asked by Warner Bros. if I would "help them out" and organize a way to film you and the James Cleveland choir during your recording of AMAZING GRACE. I had had no experience in documentaries, but I was excited to be able to watch you record and to try and film it. I came with five or six cameramen and we shot lots of footage those two incredible nights that you were recording.

I've often wondered about that footage over the years and so some months ago I called the studio to find out about it and to suggest that we try to put some of it together and see what's there. To that end, I have had a young man trying to synch up the tracks which is an enormous job since all five cameras were shooting at random.

There is wonderful footage of you, the choir, your father, and the audience. Some of it during the songs themselves, and some of it between the songs.



## Interviews:

(Los Angeles) Harry Belafonte  
(Los Angeles) Sydney Poitier  
(Los Angeles) Bill Cosby  
(Los Angeles) Dionne Warwick  
(Los Angeles) Carole King  
(Los Angeles) Smokey Robinson  
(Los Angeles) Bob Dylan  
(Los Angeles) Stevie Wonder  
(Los Angeles) Berry Gordy  
(Los Angeles) Diana Ross  
(Los Angeles) Quincy Jones  
(Los Angeles) Burt Bacharach  
(Los Angeles) Ernie Isley  
(Los Angeles) David Ritz  
(Los Angeles) Bob Dylan  
(Los Angeles) Robbie Robertson  
(Los Angeles) Oprah Winfrey  
—  
(New York City) Bernard Purdie  
(New York City) David Bowie  
(New York City) Tony Heilbut  
(New York City) Paul Simon  
(New York City) President/ Hillary Clinton  
(New York City) Reverend Al Sharpton  
—

(Dallas) Chuck Rainey  
(Detroit) Billy Kyles  
(Detroit) Herbert Picard  
—  
(Washington) President and First Lady Obama  
—  
(Chicago) Jesse Jackson  
—  
(Atlanta) M.L. King Family  
(Atlanta) Andrew Young  
—  
(Jamaica) Chris Blackwell  
—  
(London) Paul McCartney  
(London) Eric Clapton  
(London) Mick And Charlie  
(London) Joe Boyd  
(London) Adele

## **interviews & other clips**

(click on links in  
**BOLD** to view.)

### **soul sister720p**

aretha and martin luther king, her father and a rarely seen abc tv special from 1968.

### **The Atlantic Records Story - Hip To The Tip - Part 2 to 4**

jerry wexler discusses signing aretha and how they made records.

### **Clara Ward - from "A Time To Sing"**

clara ward (one of aretha's primary influences) makes her big screen debut in "a time to sing"... more

### **1 01 Aretha Franklin Live Performance & Interview**

aretha tells of how she started singing gospel with her father.

### **Aretha Franklin in Studio and Rehearsals -1968**

aretha at the piano...

in the studio cutting her sister carolyn's song "ain't no way&quo... more

### **Aretha Franklin Precious Lord (Martin Luther King Funeral)(1968)**

aretha sings "precious lord"- one of dr. king's favorites. it's part of the genesis of ar... more

### **25 Years: A History of Atlantic Records**

tom dowd talks about the changes in the atlantic records roster.

### **Early Blues, R&B & Jazz Musician of Atlantic Records Rare John Coltrane performance! Dolby**

the roots of atlantic records.

### **Jerry Wexler Part 4 GRAMMY Foundation® Living Histories Interview**

wexler talks of how paul mccartney wrote "let it be" for aretha... but she didn't do it.

### **Aretha Franklin - Guide Me Thy Great Jehovah**

this is from the television show "room 222." aretha came to los angeles to film this before makin... more

### **Medley- Clara Ward & The Clara Ward Singers (1971)**

clara ward, one of aretha's primary influences, and her mother... both of whom come to the filming of &... more

### **king curtis beatles**

chuck rainey (bass) and cornell dupree (guitar) became part of the "amazing grace" band. they tou... more

### **Aretha Franklin - Precious Lord Parts 1 & 2**

aretha's first recording (and the last song on the "amazing grace" movie... and dr. martin lu... more

### **Sam Cooke. Crossing Over . Documentary .**

sam cooke was the career map/blueprint for aretha.

### **president aretha ag**

president obama does an involved introduction to aretha at the white house.