

who is team?

producing team:

- patrisse cullors
- danny gabai
- james lassiter
- jay z
- damon turner

alan elliott will direct, produce and co-write.

al bell will produce, co-write and of course star.

dr. todd boyd will co-write.

"al bell: testimony."

"al bell: testimony." is the humorous, hilarious, sanctified, dignified, electrified, informed, aware, timeless, timely, musical journey of american soul that is the life journey of alvertis isbell, better known to the world as al bell.

told over four episodes, "al bell: testimony." will be uniquely presented, hip shakingly, head noddingly accompanied, and will revel in the details of a once in a generation musical community- created, enabled and ennobled by al bell.

"al bell: testimony." tells the story of how al bell helped create the second largest independently black owned record company in the world; helped create a company focused on hits centered on a profound examination of blackness in society; only to have his life's work seized at gunpoint by the united states government.

through unparalleled success both monetarily and spiritually with stax records, blaxploitation films, television, radio and music publishing- and with his legendary finger snap- al bell refocused civil rights through the lens of black economic empowerment.

as president of the stax organization, al bell defined black culture for a generation.

"al bell: testimony." takes us through a journey:

from memphis to the world; from dr. rev. martin luther king, jr. and al bell alone discussing biblical meaning and its limitations on nonviolent protest– to federal agents storming stax records and holding al at gunpoint to seize and shut down one of the last black owned record companies...

“al bell: testimony.” is THE american music story- untold and heretofore misinterpreted. a story of race, culture, success, love, loss, heartbreak and soul.

“al bell: testimony.” three acts:

the al bell story unfolds like a greek tragedy.

the first act features al looking back on himself as a young man. at a private meeting the night after pulling a knife at a non-violent peaceful protest, al directly challenges his hero the rev. martin luther king, jr. on the bible’s duality and the inherent flaws of non-violent protest.

shortly thereafter, al becomes a singular trusted voice of the black community as a dj. al’s journey accelerates as his fame and knowledge grows- culminating when al comes to memphis and joins jim stewart and estelle axton- a white brother and sister- to make the fledgling stax records the premier example of racial harmony in america. stax’s success defines soul music and black america and spreads from local radio to throughout the world.

the second act comes with a confluence of tragedies: the death of stax’s biggest star, otis redding; the ending of stax’s distribution agreement with atlantic records; the ceding of ownership of all of stax’s previous recordings; the death of rev. dr. martin luther king, jr. just blocks from the stax studios.

despite all these griefs, al snaps his fingers and martials the stax community to rebuild and, within months, become the second largest black owned record label in the world.

the third act is the fall of stax. the little independent stax label signs for major label distribution with cbs records and clive davis. davis is fired, leaving stax without an advocate- and cbs seizes on stax. cbs siphons off stax and refuses to pay for records sold. it is later evidenced that cbs was intent to force stax out of business so they can claim the assets. concurrently, union planter’s bank, stax’s main source of borrowing capital, becomes embroiled in schemes and malicious intent toward stax. finally, the government comes in to shut down stax- with al held at gunpoint.

storytelling:

al will lead us everywhere. we will walk through this story with al as our sherpa.

the movie must feel like an extension of al- we are reliving the story with al.

at stax: al in the studio. al in the office. al on the phone. in a radio station: al as a dj.

al will lead us through the importance memphis... what music and djs and a radio station mean to a community... what a hit record feels like... how the system of the music business functions, and how the system must be worked... what it means to be a successful black man with integrity, ingenuity and principal- and the perilous nature of taking on responsibility towards your community.

we will introduce those still alive and available for testimony- and al is with them (literally). and those that are not with us, al can make us feel they are still with him.

those who are not here: otis, al jackson, jr., al's three brothers, al's father, johnny baylor, duck dunn... all will benefit from al being in conversations with steve cropper, booker, jesse jackson, david porter and hopefully jim stewart.

the stories, the detail of characters- and of the times- will inform the song performances and vice versa.

"hold on, i'm coming," "sittin' on the dock of the bay," "when will we be paid," "i'll take you there"- all of these can be read almost like musical theater when properly set up- these songs tell the interior story of the people and their lives and times. these songs are extensions of these times and these people.

the visuals- video, film, pictures, documents- will feel contemporaneous and blend with the cinematography and editing so that we feel we are in the story- not jumping in and out of time.

what it will look like:

"al bell: testimony." will look like a feature... feel like a feature... it must NOT feel like a reenactment EVER. it isn't. it's sense memory. it's truth. voices, pictures, old footage.

al should go in and out of focus... we should be able to blend text and film and stills so they have a texture that is continuous.

what are assets?

publishing: east memphis music is with universal music publishing. music supervisor brooke wentz has given us a preliminary estimate of \$7k per song for world wide in perpetuity license which she feels we can get a discount on with a group rate of songs.

interviews and performances are with (amongst others):

bob sarles (who has an extensive library of stax interviews for the no-longer-in-circulation bbc/pbs/morgan neville directed doc).

reelin' in the years has a great deal of stax performances including the norway show featuring otis redding, sam and dave, booker t. and the mgs, the markets and arthur conley.

lou adler has the monterey footage of otis and booker t. and the mgs.

photos including terry manning, the don nix collection, the stax museum archive and the deanie parker archive as well as the personal collection of al bell.

there will be other archives for stills (getty images) and for film and interviews including the rob bowman archive.