

LET'S STAY TOGETHER  
Al Green and Ahmir  
"Questlove" Thompson  
at Legacy Studios



# Al Green

**The soul legend teams up with the Roots for his best disc in decades**

**ALBUM** *Lay It Down*  
**DUE OUT** May 27th

WHILE VISITING HIS record company in 2005, Roots drummer Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson picked up Loretta Lynn's 2004 *Van Lear Rose* album, the singer's late-career collaboration with Jack White. "I couldn't stop listening to it," says Thompson. "I thought, 'Why can't that happen on the black side of music?'"

He first attempted to work with reclusive soul singer Bill Withers, but an executive at Blue Note Records asked Thompson if he'd be interested in producing Al Green, who was looking to work with a member of the hip-hop community.

The pair's first meeting, in 2005 at New York's Electric Lady Studios, resulted in an epic evening that formed the core of the glorious *Lay It Down* (out May 27th). "Every time anybody did something else, I turned around and wrote another song," says Green. "We ended up with eight songs in

that one night. I hadn't had an experience like that, ever!"

The band, built around the rhythm section of Thompson and bassist Adam Blackstone and featuring the Dap-King Horns (best known for their work with Amy Winehouse), reconvened seven or eight times to complete the album. The final results—featuring duets with Corinne Bailey Rae, John Legend and Anthony Hamilton

## IN THE STUDIO

— sound looser, funkier and more emotional than anything Green has released in decades.

Green's last two albums (2003's *I Can't Stop* and 2005's *Everything's OK*) reunited him with producer Willie Mitchell, who led all of his classic sessions for Hi Records in the Seventies. Thompson describes those records as "solid but sonically frustrating," and says that he had a different ambition for *Lay It Down*.

Noting that new albums from legendary artists tend to go either the standards-filled "Tony Bennett route" or the cameo-stuffed "Santana route," Thompson strove for the opposite: a return to down-and-dirty grooves. "I told Adam [Blackstone] to play wrong

notes and to remember they didn't have tuners back then," says the drummer, who co-produced with keyboardist James Poyser. "We needed to undo the education we had in order to play that simply."

For his part, Green says it was no problem to stay loose. "I always write in the studio," he says. "While the band learns the song, I'm finishing the words." One day, Green was watching a nature program on television ("I watch a lot of wildlife," he says. "Animals make more sense than humans most of the time"). And the concept of wild animals turned into wild love—and, quickly, into the lyric for "I'm Wild About You."

By keeping things live and acknowledging Green's fleeting patience, Thompson and Poyser were able to capture Green's undiminished voice. "I wanted to make the true follow-up to [1977's] *The Belle Album*, which is considered the last quote-unquote real Al Green record," Thompson says. "And I do think this is his most heartfelt record since then." While guiding a force of nature like Al Green was daunting, Thompson eventually found the secret. "The key is that you have to mute everything else," he says, "and let Al shine." ALAN LIGHT

Preview tracks from Al Green's new record, and get more on other new albums at [rollingstone.com/inthestudio](http://rollingstone.com/inthestudio)

## STUDIO NOTES

■ **Peter Bjorn and John** recently finished recording an all-instrumental album of African, Brazilian and krautrock-influenced tracks in Stockholm. The disc is due later this year.

■ **No Doubt** have begun working on their first LP since 2001. The set is slated for release in 2009. Mark "Spike" Stent, who worked on Gwen Stefani's solo outings, is producing.

■ **R. Kelly** is currently cutting his ninth solo album, *12-Play: 4th Quarter* in his Chicago home studio. The first single is expected to be the slinky, vocoder-laced tune "Hair Braider."

# Bob Weir Rallies Deadheads at D.C. Fundraiser

**Get-out-the-vote effort targets jam-band fans**  
By Evan Serpick

SOME VERY INFLUENTIAL Deadheads gathered recently at a mansion near the Capitol building to catch a private set by former Dead guitarist Bob Weir and to support HeadCount, a grass-roots group that aims to register 100,000 new voters at jam-band concerts and festivals before this fall's election. Several congress-

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men, MSNBC pundit Tucker Carlson and FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein were among the 100 or so people who sang along as Weir performed "Ripple" and "Not Fade Away."

"It's become sexy to be politically involved again," says Weir, who has been on HeadCount's board of directors since its founding in 2004. "We're seeing a major upswing of youth interest in politics, and we have to serve them and get them involved in democracy."

HeadCount achieves this by creating television ads and e-mail campaigns, and by setting up registration booths at concerts by everyone from Wilco to John Mayer and at festivals like Bonnaroo and Farm Aid. In 2004, they signed up 48,500 voters, and they hope to double that total this year. "The live-music community is a little bit disaffected but has a lot to

say," says Andy Bernstein, who co-founded HeadCount with Disco Biscuits bassist Marc Brownstein in 2004. "We felt if we could get our community to the polls, that would have an impact." Guests paid \$500 to attend the fundraiser, which raised more than \$70,000. Fans waited in a long line to have Weir sign posters and photos before hearing his acoustic set.

The group is hoping to capitalize on the excitement generated by Barack Obama's campaign. "There's a new spirit of activism around this election that I've never seen," says Democratic New Hampshire Rep. Paul Hodes, who first heard the Grateful Dead as a student at Dartmouth in 1968. "Obama represents a generational change that is having a big impact on the activism of young people."

Although many of HeadCount's supporters—including Jack Johnson and Dave Matthews—are well-known liberals, organizers are careful to keep the group nonpartisan. "People walk up to our tables and say, 'I'm a Republican, can I register?' like they expect to get a negative reaction," says Bernstein. "Our volunteers are very well trained to say, 'Of course.' We've registered thousands of Republicans, and we're very proud of that."

"Democracy works best when everyone participates," says Adelstein, a self-described "huge Deadhead" who has been to at least fifty Dead shows. "HeadCount is another avenue to express that grass-roots activism that young people are rediscovering."



**TOUCH OF GRAY**  
Weir plays at a D.C. benefit on April 7th.