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## World Traveler



## DIVA DETROIT

Up Close with **Anita Baker**  
and the Motor City's Hottest Stars:

The White Stripes  
Motown's Funk Brothers  
Blues Legend Eddie Kirkland  
The Von Bondies

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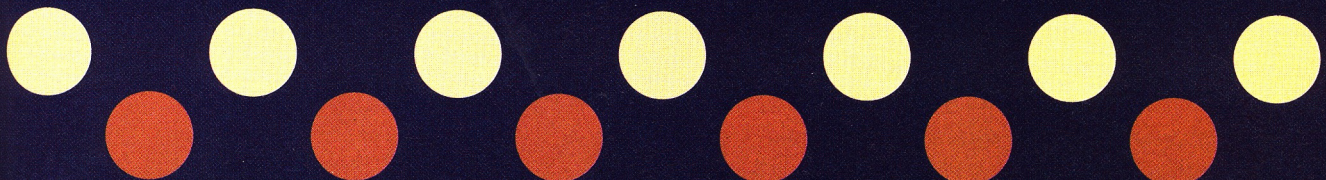
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# Detroit Rock City

by Tamara Warren



Join us as we catch up with five of the  
Motor City's most important artists.



# Go ahead

and ask any music lover about “the Detroit sound”—

just be prepared to stand back. First the eyes will go wide. Then you’ll get a knowing smile. And then, depending on whom you’re talking to, you’re going to hear about the genius of the classic Motown bass line or maybe the bluesy power of garage-rock crunch.

But while the Detroit sound means something a little different to every set of ears, there is a unifying essence to its best music. Like the city itself, it’s soulful, hard working and unpretentious. Maybe it all springs from the mechanized backbeat—*ca-chunk ca-chunk*—of the city’s famous assembly lines. Could it be that we have Henry Ford him-

**Most of the writing and recording on Anita Baker’s most-recent album “My Everything” was completed between picking up and dropping off her sons at after-school activities.**

self to thank for laying the rhythm track to the Temptations’ “My Girl,” or creating the atmospheric grit behind The White Stripes’ “Hotel Yorba”?

Whatever the source, the Detroit sound can be heard today from several generations of musicians. And though Motown Records may be gone, Detroit is still home to the long-proclaimed Queen of Soul Aretha Franklin, the raw and enigmatic hip-hop icon Eminem, gospel’s first family the Winans, the down-home rapping countryman Kid Rock and youthful R&B singers Kem and Dwele. And it’s these musician—and others—that make the Detroit sound so special.

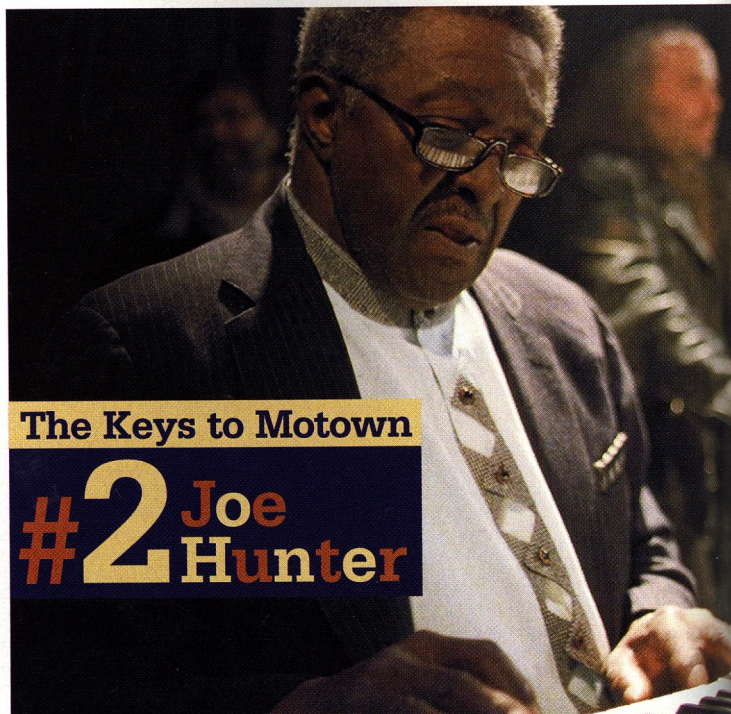
## **Diva Detroit: Anita Baker**

Overlooking the Detroit River’s swirling waters, songstress Anita Baker takes a moment to ponder a comeback that has exceeded her wildest expectations. It’s still sinking in, even for a woman who has recorded several of this era’s most powerful love songs, including those on the album, “Giving You the Best That I Got,” (Elektra) which peaked at number one on the Billboard Charts in 1988.

With the release of “My Everything” (Blue Note), she has been nominated for two Grammys (two more wins would bring her Grammy total to 10) and scored a number one album on the Billboard R&B/Hip-Hop Charts. “They don’t nominate 47-year old mommies from the Midwest,” she chuckles. Yet, Baker has once again wooed fans and critics with her intoxicating contralto vocals, complimented by producer Barry Eastmond’s rich acoustic piano melodies.

“My Everything” is her personal triumph, composed after a 10-year hiatus from music. She devoted the past decade to caring for her ailing parents and raising her children. In fact, she often uses her married name, Anita Bridgeforth, and the song “Men In My Life” acknowledges her main priorities—her husband and her two sons.

Despite the pressures of balancing a career with family, Baker successfully carved out her own little Motown on Detroit’s Eastside on “My Everything,” where most of writing and recording was





completed between picking up and dropping off her sons at after-school activities. "There's a part of me that wants to belong to that tradition," she says. "It's why I do what I do, being in the shadow of Motown all my life."

Though she's returned to the limelight, she's intent on staying grounded in her home state. "I married a hometown guy and settled in [Detroit's] Eastern suburbs." While her choices differ from what's expected of an R&B diva, her songs resonate with the uncanny sincerity of a woman whose life experiences and resolve are reflected in words and music. "It's part in parcel of this town," she explains. "You learn to keep getting up."

### **The Keys to Motown: Joe Hunter**

Keyboardist Joe Hunter was the first bandleader of the Funk Brothers, the Motown studio band that brought the legendary recording empire's greatest hits to life. Motown founder Berry Gordy hired Hunter in 1958 and he quickly became an integral part of early Motown's magical formula, helping to arrange songs like Martha and the Vandellas' "Come and Get These Memories" and Marvin Gaye's "Pride and Joy."

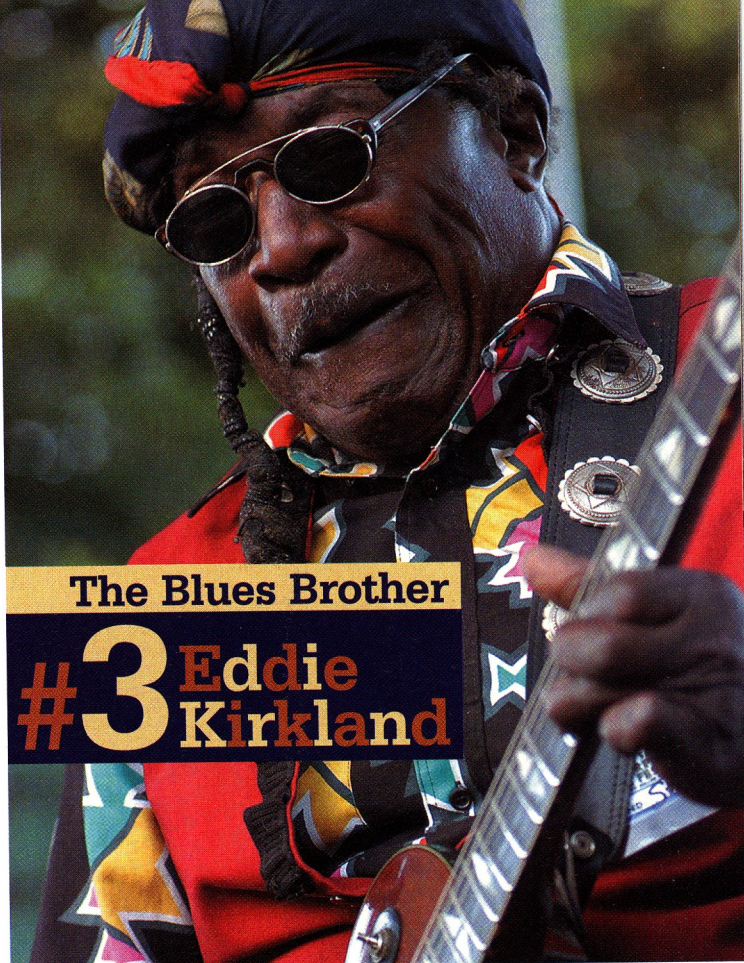
Hunter, as part of the Funk Brothers, is finally getting his props. The group recently won two long-overdue Grammys, including a Lifetime Achievement Award, and a spot in the Rock n' Roll Hall of Fame, following the 2002 release of the award-winning documentary "Standing in the Shadows of Motown." A spunky personality on and off the camera, Hunter still writes music and performs with the Funk Brothers at age 77.

"That was a period of time when musicians were close," Hunter says in his Detroit home, reminiscing about the golden days. Though he did leave the band in 1964, he is considered a core member along with keyboardists Earl Van Dyke and Johnny Griffith; guitarists Joe Messina, Eddie Willis and Robert White; drummers William "Benny" Benjamin, Richard "Pistol" Allen and Uriel Jones; percussionists Jack Ashford and Eddie "Bongo" Brown; and bass players James Jamerson and Bob Babbitt. While Jamerson is often declared the world's greatest bassist, each Funk Brother brought his own brand of zest and a level of mastery to the Snakepit, where the Motown sessions were cut.

"There were many things that helped the music as far as the chemistry, reaching the pocket where everybody felt comfortable," Hunter muses. "It brought things out of ourselves that we didn't know we could do ourselves."

### **The Blues Brother: Eddie Kirkland**

"Blues is soul spirit music. People who don't like blues music, they don't know what spiritual soul is," proclaims



original bluesman Eddie Kirkland, who is forever tied to the smoky haunts of Detroit's legendary scene.

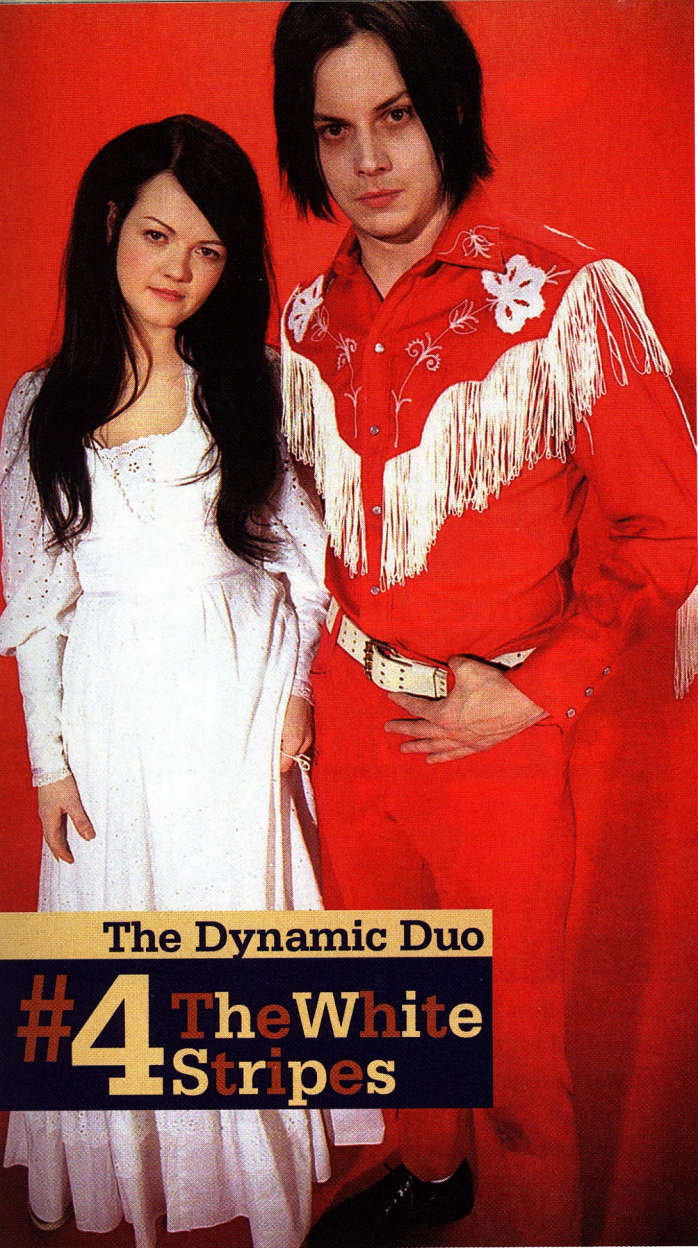
With an unrivaled passion for his art form, 81-year-old guitarist and vocalist Kirkland is still spreading his message. He has spent much of his life on the road, known as the Gypsy of the Blues, touring 42 weeks of the year.

Jamaican-born Kirkland discovered blues as a youngster growing up in Alabama, hitting the road with the Sugar Girls Medicine Show. When he moved to Detroit as a young man in the mid-1940s he came into his prime igniting thriving joints like the 20 Grand with his smooth guitar licks. In Detroit in the mid 1950s he teamed up with John Lee Hooker, a partnership that lasted for seven years. He relocated to his current home in Georgia in 1962, to act as Otis Redding's bandleader.

As a solo artist, Kirkland boasts a rich catalog on a number of record labels, authoring classics such as "It's the Blues Man!" (Tru-Sound) and "Hawg" (Stax/Volt) in the 1960s. "If it wasn't for the blues, there wouldn't be no jazz, no rock," he explains. When the gigs were scarce, he played in rock bands to earn his keep, but rediscovered his roots in the mid 1970s recording "Front and Center" (Trix) and "The Devil and Other Blues Demons" (Trix). Though he had heart troubles last year, he released "Democrat Blues" (Blue Suit) and was back on the road two months later, performing in the United States and Europe.

"If you had a rough time in your life, blues will help you





The Dynamic Duo

#4 The White Stripes

forget your troubles,” Kirkland muses. “If you’re goin’ on down on the road, the blues allows you to make a change. Blues rides on.”

### The Dynamic Duo: The White Stripes

Southwest Detroit is the Motor City’s best-kept secret—a thriving Latino community neighboring Ford’s River Rouge Plant where The White Stripes’ guitarist Jack White (née John Gillis) spent his formative years playing summer

baseball with his brother-in-law, Morris Blackwell, in Clark Park. “He’s the youngest of 10. He’s a good kid and a good player,” says Blackwell.

When people talk about The White Stripes, they refer to Detroit cool—shaking up the establishment and twisting it with a dash of creative bravado—nothing new when it comes to rock n’ roll attitude. What’s authentic about The White Stripes is the mysticism that pervades their music and their curious two-person formula—a guitarist and a drummer brazenly playing with enough gutsy heart to replace a five-piece band.

Emerging in the late 1990s, when suburbanite youth were just beginning to stake out urban cool, they typified a distinct Detroit spirit—filling their stripped-down music with fantastical qualities to quell the slow pace that pervades the Midwest. Jack, who attended Cass Tech High School, was genuine in his inner city claim, while drummer Meg White (Jack’s one-time wife) hailed from the tony Grosse Pointe ‘burb. After divorcing in 2000, Meg’s last name remained in the equation along with her affinity for percussion, while Jack continued to create tantalizing guitar melodies. Though Jack’s romances with bandmate and once rumored-sister Meg and Hollywood starlet Renée Zellweger are fodder for gossip columns, it’s the Stripes’ brilliant thematic music that keeps them squarely in the limelight, and earned them two Grammys.

Their penchant for peppermint colored ensembles and rootsy country-inflected rock songs has proven a potent formula for success on three albums, including “Elephant” (V2), and production on Loretta Lynn’s 2004 comeback “Van Lear Rose” (Interscope). Their recently released DVD “Under Blackpool Lights,” is testament to their quixotic folksy style.

**The White Stripes:  
a guitarist and a  
drummer brazenly  
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