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New day for Sly and Family Stone

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By **Steve Jones, USA TODAY**

The music of Sly and the Family Stone never faded away, despite the star's 30-year disappearing act. Not only do *Everyday People* and *Dance to the Music* still crop up on radio and in TV ads, but the groundbreaking music that influenced Motown and P-Funk continues to shape rock and hip-hop.

Legacy Recordings marks the 40th anniversary of the band's signing to Epic Records this week with *Sly and the Family Stone: The Collection*, a limited-edition box set of seven newly remastered classic albums. Each also will be available individually on April 24, expanded with previously unreleased tracks and fresh liner notes.

"This is part of a long-term commitment to bring this artist back into the music fan's consciousness," says Adam Block, Legacy's senior vice president/general manager. "He has existed in our subconsciousness through samples and his enduring influence. We felt it made sense to celebrate him in a way that hadn't happened before."

The reissues come at a time when the famously reclusive Stone has been slowly emerging from decades of seclusion. He recently took the stage for 30 minutes at the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas with the Family Stone, his first public appearance since a cameo on the 2006 Grammy Awards.

Sly and the Family Stone, the rock era's first major multiracial band, bloomed in San Francisco in the late '60s with a potent mix of psychedelic soul, rock and R&B. Led by keyboardist/producer Sylvester Stewart, the band included his brother Freddie on guitar and vocals, his sister Rose on keyboard and vocals, plus trumpeter Cynthia Robinson, drummer Greg Errico, saxophonist Jerry Martini and bassist Larry Graham.

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After mastering everything from urgent dance tracks to searing social anthems, the band began to fray in the early '70s because of internal friction and rampant drug abuse. Concert dates became erratic, and the band dissolved in 1975.

Stone joined occasional reunions and released albums off and on until 1987 when he was convicted of cocaine possession.

"The fact that this story was tumultuous at times has obscured the band's brilliance somewhat," Block says. "But as people are listening to these records again or for the first time, the past is now the past, and there is an appreciation of the undeniable, unavoidable impact of this group's statement."

More music is on the way. The label is remastering 1970's *Sly & the Family Stone: Greatest Hits* and assembling a formal boxed set. The reissue program started four years ago with the release of the two-disc *Essential Sly & the Family Stone* and continued with 2006's *Different Strokes by Different Folks*, which featured covers by Will.i.am, The Roots, Maroon 5, John Mayer, Isaac Hayes and Janet Jackson. *Family Affair* by John Legend, Joss Stone and Van Hunt won a Grammy.

"These reissues offered the first new Sly and the Family Stone music in 30 years, and the vault still holds some really wonderful surprises," Block says.



By Bob Cato, Sony BMG Music Archives

Enlarge

They are family: Clockwise from center front, Sly Stone, Rose Stone, Larry Graham, Greg Errico, Freddie Stone, Cynthia Robinson and Jerry Martini.

LISTEN TO THE VOICES -- AND MUCH MORE

A Whole New Thing (1967) -- *Underdog*, *Trip to Your Heart*, *Let Me Hear It From You* and *Run, Run, Run* helped introduce the groundbreaking band.

Dance to the Music (1968) -- One of the funkiest tunes ever, the hard-driving title track sets the tone for the rest, including *Soul Clappin'* and *Higher*.

Life (1968) -- The band's sound grows more assured on this precursor to their breakthrough. *M'Lady* and *Dynamite!* are highlights.

Stand! (1969) -- Title hit, *I Want to Take You Higher*, *Sing a Simple Song* and *Everyday People* are the keepers on this dense and danceable set.

There's a Riot Goin' On (1971) -- Considered the band's finest work, with key tracks (*You Caught Me Smilin'*, *Runnin' Away* and *Family Affair*).

Fresh (1973) -- More upbeat than the heavy *Riot*, with *If You Want Me to Stay*, *Frisky* and *If It Were Left Up to Me*, plus a cover of *Que Sera, Sera*.

Small Talk (1974) -- The last album from the original lineup includes *Mother Beautiful*, *Can't Strain My Brain*, *Time for Livin'* and *Loose Booty*.

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