

7. Charles Wright headed one of the great funk groups of the late '60s and early '70s, the Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band. Wright, who was born in Clarksdale, MS, was a singer, pianist, guitarist, and leader of the eight-member band, which had been recruited from Watts in Los Angeles. They were originally known as the Soul Runners. Bill Cosby helped get the band off the ground by giving them appearances at his gigs. They began recording for Keyman in 1967, then moved to Warner Bros. in 1969. While "Do Your Thing" and "Till You Get Enough" were Top 20 R&B hits, their finest selection was "Express Yourself," a song that expressed the urge for freedom as adroitly as the Isley Brothers' "It's Your Thing" had in the '60s. It has also been among the most sampled funk tracks for hip-hop and rap groups. "Your Love (Means Everything to Me)" was their final R&B hit in 1971, peaking at number nine R&B and number 12 pop. The group's best ballad, "Love Land," did better among pop fans than R&B ones, many of whom saw it as a bit soft. They continued recording for Dunhill in 1973 before disbanding. Drummer James Gadson and guitarist Al McKay, who later joined Earth, Wind & Fire, were among the instrumental corps of the Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band.

-Ron Wynn, All Music Guide

8. Hot, Heat and Sweat Groove is the debut album by the funky band led by the charismatic Charles Wright. The Wright brood moved to Los Angeles when Charles Wright was 12. In Watts, Wright befriended doo woppers and balladeers like Jesse Belvin, the Hollywood Flames, the Youngsters, and others who lived in the area. Propped by stars like Bill Cosby and publicized by two and a half years of sold-out crowds at the Haunted House (a local club), along with an unexpected local hit, the band was able to secure a contract with Warner Bros. Records. Nothing major came from this set that displayed a choppy rhythmic approach similar to Dyke & the Blazers. But this surprisingly hard-to-find album produced by James Carmichael, who went on to great success with the Commodores, features some thick funk: "Fried Okra," "Brown Sugar," and reworkings of "Yellow Submarine," "The Girl From Ipanema," and "Bring It on Home to Me." While not the most cohesive set, you can't knock the hot SoCal energy exhibited by Wright and his crew of young hopefuls, including future Earth, Wind & Fire member Al McKay, along with James Gadson, Melvin Dunlap, Big John Rayford, Bill Cannon, Gabriel Flemings, and Joe Banks. The LP's most popular track, "Spreading Honey," charted at number 44 R&B and number 73 pop in 1967. The Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band didn't even record the song. Wright cut the track with Bobby Womack, Leon Haywood, James Carmichael, and others as the theme song for DJ Magnificent Montague's radio show. But it smoked so much that Warner Bros. signed them on the dotted line and credited the single to the Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band; this album followed, and the rest is history.

-Andrew Hamilton, All Music Guide

-Author: Anna Fisher

9. Charles Wright the Master of Funk, expresses himself once again in this delightfully energetic release true to the magic of powerful spirit!

You will not be disappointed!

10. The original soundtrack to the civil rights/football drama Remember the Titans features classic rock, pop, and soul hits like Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell's "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," Norman Greenbaum's "Spirit in the Sky," and Buck Owens' "Act Naturally." Charles Wright & the Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band's "Express Yourself," Eric Burdon & War's "Spill the Wine," and Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Up Around the Bend" are some of the other high points from this rousing collection, which complements the film's tale of a recently integrated high school football team in the early '70s.

-Heather Phares, All Music Guide