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MALACO RECORDS TO BE HONORED WITH BLUES TRAIL MARKER

JACKSON, MISS, (April 8, 2008) – Malaco Records will be honored with a marker on the Mississippi Blues Trail, which was developed under the leadership of Governor Haley Barbour and is designed to preserve the state’s musical heritage through more than 100 historical markers and interpretive sites. The ceremony will take place at 3023 West Northside Drive on Tuesday, April 8 at 3:00 p.m. in Jackson.

“With a long history of representing blues and gospel artists, Malaco Records has a company history that has long been intertwined with that of the Mississippi Blues. Even today, Malaco continues to be a major force in the Southern market of soul music, with acts like the Mississippi Mass Choir and Bobby Rush recording for the company,” Governor Barbour said. “I proudly welcome their addition to the Mississippi Blues Trail.”

The roots of Jackson, Mississippi-based Malaco Records stretch back to 1961, when co-founder Tommy Couch, Sr., began booking R&B bands at the University of Mississippi while serving as social chairman of his fraternity, Pi Kappa Alpha. After graduation Couch, a native of northwest Alabama, moved to Jackson to work as a pharmacist and formed the booking agency Malaco Productions together with his brother-in-law, Mitchell Malouf. The operation moved into recording in 1966, by which time Couch’s fraternity brother Gerald “Wolf” Stephenson had joined Couch and Malouf as a partner.

After several initial sessions at a local studio, Malaco moved to their present location at 3023 Northside Drive.

In their first years Malaco released few recordings, concentrating instead on leasing masters to other labels. One of the most notable—if untypical—productions resulted in the 1970 Capitol LP *I Do Not Play No Rock’N’Roll* by down-home bluesman Mississippi Fred McDowell.

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The label gained momentum the same year when an association with New Orleans arranger Wardell Quezergue resulted in two hits: Jean Knight's Mr. Big Stuff on Stax Records, which reached #1 on the R&B charts and #2 Pop charts, and King Floyd's Groove Me on Malaco's Chimneyville label. Groove Me marked the beginning of a distribution and production arrangement with Atlantic Records, which used the Malaco studio and house band to record artists including James Carr, but the relationship ultimately did little for Malaco's shaky finances. Salvation came in the form of Dorothy Moore, whose ballad Misty Blue, released on Malaco, reached #2 on the R&B charts and #3 on the Pop charts in early 1976; she subsequently had many other hits for the label.

The company finally found its niche in the early '80s following the signing of Texan Z.Z. Hill. The success of Hill's 1982 Down Home Blues, penned by Memphis/Muscle Shoals songwriter George Jackson, alerted the record industry to a seemingly untapped, mostly Southern market for "soul/blues." Malaco's eventual conquest of this market can be attributed to a number of factors: the hiring of veteran record promotion man Dave Clark; the development of a distinctive studio "sound," aided by Malaco's purchase of Muscle Shoals Sound in the mid-'80s; and a pool of talented songwriters, including Jackson, Larry Addison, Rich Cason, and Frederick Knight.

With the advent of disco and the "urban contemporary" radio format, veteran soul stars including Denise LaSalle, Little Milton, Johnnie Taylor, Latimore, and Bobby "Blue" Bland no longer had secure status at major labels. Malaco, aided by Dave Clark, was able to fill a void in the market and build an impressive roster. At Malaco these artists generally didn't achieve the same level of success they had previously enjoyed, but they were the main stars of the regional "chitlin' circuit" as mainstream R&B moved in new directions.

During the 1990s Malaco added veterans including Shirley Brown and Tyrone Davis, and Tommy Couch, Jr., a University of Mississippi graduate and booking agent like his father, started the Waldoxy subsidiary, bringing aboard artists including Artie "Blues Boy" White, Carl Sims, Mel Waiters, Bobby Rush, and blues comedian Poonanny.

Today, Malaco continues to maintain a large presence in the southern soul market with releases by artists including Marvin Sease, Mel Waiters, Billy "Soul" Bonds, and Willie Clayton.

In addition to its blues/R&B releases, Malaco has maintained a strong presence in the gospel field since they released the first of many albums by the Jackson Southernaires in 1975. Some of the many gospel artists who have recorded for Malaco include the Mississippi Mass Choir, Dorothy Norwood, Willie Neal Johnson, the Soul Stirrers, the Highway QCs, and Maurette Brown Clark.

The Mississippi Blues Trail markers are funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and by support from the Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Mississippi Department of Transportation, Delta State University and the Mississippi Development Authority.

For further information on the Mississippi Blues Trail, go to www.msbluestrail.org.

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