



**Al Bell, AKA: Alvertis Isbell** is considered the driving force behind Stax Records as a producer, songwriter, and executive during the company's most productive period, from 1965 to 1975. He was responsible for promoting the careers of such talent as the Staple Singers, Isaac Hayes, and Otis Redding, among many others.

Al Bell was born Alvertis Isbell on March 15, 1940, in Brinkley (Monroe County). One of his earliest musical memories was that of listening to his father's Louis Jordan records. In an interview published in 2001, Bell claimed Jordan, also a Brinkley native, as a distant relative. Bell's family moved to North Little Rock (Pulaski County) when he was five years old. After attending Catholic and Seventh-Day Adventist private schools, Bell attended Scipio A. Jones High School in North Little Rock, the public high school for African American students during the period of segregation. During his junior and senior years there, he presided over the state honor society, the student council, and the audio visual society. The latter post put him in charge of the record player during school dances. Borrowing records from his fellow students to play at these "sock-hops," Bell began to develop an ear for popular music. He organized a talent contest between Scipio A. Jones High School in North Little Rock and Dunbar High School in Little Rock (Pulaski County) held at the Dunbar Community Center, an event he named "Radio Station T-O-U-G-H, Tough." The general manager of KOKY, a judge in the competition, asked Bell to come by the station the following week. Bell did so and hosted a gospel music program the following Sunday morning, as well as filling in for another disc jockey on a jazz program that evening. He shortened his name from Alvertis Isbell to Al Bell while working as a disc jockey.

Among his many honors, Bell was inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame in 2002, named the chairman of the Memphis Music Foundation in 2009, received a Grammy Trustees Award in 2011, and was inducted into the Memphis Music Hall of Fame in 2014. The Grammy Trustees award is given by the board of trustees of the Recording Academy and is considered a top music industry award. In October 2018, Bell was named the McIlroy Family Visiting Professor in the Visual and Performing Arts at the University of Arkansas (UA) in Fayetteville (Washington County).