

books

Best-sellers

FICTION

1. **Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage**, by Haruki Murakami; Knopf, \$25.95 (first week on list). A young man's loss has unintended consequences for all of us.
2. **Love Letters**, by Debbie Macomber; Ballantine, \$26 (1). Jo Marie Rose wants to learn about handyman Mark Taylor's life, but first she must face her past.
3. **The 6th Extinction**, by James Rollins; Morrow, \$27.99 (1). A military research station sends out a frantic call: Kill us all!
4. **A Perfect Life**, by Danielle Steel; Delacorte, \$28 (4). When TV icon Blaise McCarthy's blind daughter returns from boarding school, there are challenges.
5. **Tom Clancy: Support and Defend**, by Mark Greaney; Putnam, \$28.95 (4). Dominic Caruso, nephew of President Jack Ryan, is the only one who can stop secrets from falling into enemy hands.
6. **Big Little Lies**, by Liane Moriarty; Putnam/Amy Einhorn, \$26.95 (3). Three women are at a crossroads about a murder.
7. **The Heist**, by Daniel Silva; Harper, \$27.99 (5). Gabriel Allon searches for a stolen masterpiece.
8. **The Lost Island**, by Douglas J. Preston; Grand Central, \$27 (2). Gideon Crew gets an eyebrow-raising mission.
9. **Invisible**, by James Patterson, David Ellis; Little, Brown, \$28 (8). Emmy Dockery finds evidence that attacks and murders are connected.
10. **The Goldfinch**, by Donna Tartt; Little, Brown, \$30 (38). A 13-year-old boy clings to a painting years after surviving an explosion.

NONFICTION

A distinctly Southern sound

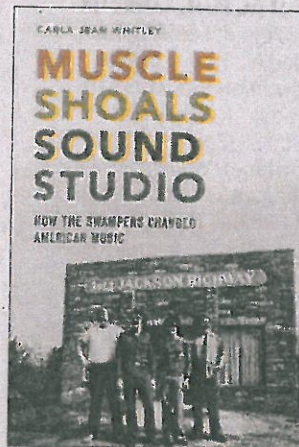
Remembering how black and white came together for an Alabama groove

By Michael Hoffman
For the Times-Union

Three months ago, a veteran "sound doctor" emailed me about a new documentary titled "Muscle Shoals" that was about to be shown on PBS and then briefly archived on the PBS website. This excellent film by Greg "Freddy" Camalier focuses primarily on Rick Hall and his pioneering FAME studio, which recorded numerous tracks by musicians from Duane Allman to Aretha Franklin, to name but a very few, and became synonymous with the Muscle Shoals Sound.

Two months later, I received a new book by Mandarin High School and Florida State University graduate Carla Jean Whitley, who is now the managing editor of Birmingham magazine. The book is titled "Muscle Shoals Sound Studio: How the Swampers Changed American Music." Whitley's book is a perfect complement to Camalier's documentary. Whitley focuses on the Swampers, studio musicians from the Muscle Shoals area who are immortalized in Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama."

The Swampers originally were Rick Hall's house band, and it was them playing behind Duane, Aretha, Percy Sledge and Wilson Pickett. However, a spat between Hall and Jerry Wexler, a music producer of some renown, led to the Swampers striking out on their own as the



MUSCLE SHOALS SOUND STUDIO

Author: Carla Jean Whitley
Data: The History Press, 2014, \$19.99

Muscle Shoals Sound Studio. The Swampers quickly became well known (and far wealthier) recording tracks with the Rolling Stones ("Brown Sugar" single), Bob Dylan ("Slow Train Coming" album), the Staples Singers, Traffic, Jimmy Cliff and two Paul Simon recordings, to name but a few.

Whether there actually exists a Muscle Shoals "sound" depends on who you ask. Muscle Shoals is among four small communities in two counties in northwest Alabama: Tuscumbia; Florence, the county seat; and Sheffield, where the Sound Studio originally was located. The area's claim to fame formerly came from the Tennessee Valley Authority Dam at Muscle Shoals on the nearby Tennessee River, which was one of many such dams that minimized the seasonal floods on the river and brought electricity to the valley in the 1930s. (An old Chickasaw myth has

it that the river is magical, and sings to those who can hear it.)

Even today, there is little to do although the two counties are now "wet," during their recording heyday, they were dry. The music performed in the area typically was performed in church or on someone's porch. It's a hard-scrabble region. One of the many things that set it off from its urban counterparts in Nashville and Memphis — besides the lack of bars and clubs — was the work ethic. The Swampers and the other studio musicians in the Muscle Shoals area have always had a great work ethic, and they don't stop working until the recording seems right.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the Muscle Shoals recording scene in the halcyon decade of the 1970s was the easy camaraderie of the musicians, who were both white and black. Many of those early artists who came to record tracks at Muscle Shoals did so because they were impressed and intrigued by the funky grooves laid down by the rhythm sections, and they were surprised to see that the Swampers and FAME pickers were native whites who frequently were joined by blacks from the area and beyond.

Watch Freddy Camalier's documentary, which is available on Blu-ray. Then, read Whitley's book, and you are assured of making a passing grade on the Muscle Shoals era when quizzed on that subject in the College of Musical Knowledge.

Michael Hoffmann is a historian who lives in Atlantic Beach.