



Dowd in the studio, 1976

1925-2002

Atlantic's Master

Tom Dowd, pioneering producer for Clapton, Coltrane, Allmans, Aretha

STORY BY GAVIN EDWARDS

PRODUCER AND ENGINEER Tom Dowd died of emphysema on October 27th in Aventura, Florida. He was seventy-seven. On staff at Atlantic Records for more than twenty-five years, he engineered classic sessions with countless legends, including Ray Charles, Otis Redding, John Coltrane, Aretha Franklin and Charles Mingus. As a producer, he shaped some of the best work from Eric Clapton (*Layla*), Lynyrd Skynyrd (*Street Survivors*) and the Allman Brothers Band (*At Fillmore East*). "He turned microphone placement into an art," says Jerry Wexler, the famed Atlantic executive and producer. "And he knew music formally — he wrote the horn charts for Dusty Spring-

field's 'Son of a Preacher Man' on the plane from New York, and they're fucking brilliant."

A physics major at Columbia University, Dowd later worked on the Manhattan Project. As an assistant at a New York recording studio after World War II, his skill impressed Atlantic founder Ahmet Ertegun. "It was one-track recording, so your life depended on the nimbleness of your fingers," says Ertegun. "Tommy was the master."

Dowd received a lifetime-achievement Grammy this year; a documentary about him is due out next year. Says Allman Brothers drummer Butch Trucks, "Tom forced people to find the best they had in them. He was the best producer, bar none, that rock & roll has ever seen or will see."