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James Brown, 1933-2006: 'Godfather of Soul' made us all feel good

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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA -- James Brown, the undeniable "Godfather of Soul," told friends from his hospital bed that he was looking forward to performing on New Year's Eve, even though he was ill with pneumonia. His heart gave out a few hours later, on Christmas morning.

The pompadoured dynamo whose classic singles include "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" and "I Got You (I Feel Good)" died Monday of heart failure, said his agent, Frank Copsidas of Intrigue Music. He was 73.

With a scratchy, husky voice defined by its piercing shrieks and guttural groans, James Brown didn't own the most beautiful pipes in music.

Although he wrote songs that touched on just about every aspect of the human experience -- love, heartache, joy, pride, even revenge -- few listened to his music for the lyrics. In fact, his often incomprehensible singing style may have been the most mimicked aspect of his persona.

And though he was an amazing dancer, his moves were far from choreographed -- they had a raw, unpolished aspect that seemed to be devised as his propulsive beats unspooled.

Perhaps that's what made Brown so captivating, so riveting -- that raw emotion that characterized every aspect of his career, from his vocal style to his frenetic dancing. Brown was an explosive force who managed to redefine and reimagine music with the sheer power of his one-of-a-kind sound.

There are plenty of superstars in the entertainment galaxy, but only a select few have had the ability to transform an art form. Brown was so dynamic, he did it several times over.

Those classic rap songs on your iPod? Many would not be classics without that sample from a James Brown beat.

Michael Jackson's confounding dance moves? He got his inspiration as a child while watching Brown (even Mick Jagger borrowed from Brown's dynamic stage showmanship with his trademark struts).

Those funky horn arrangements and shrieks that define many a Prince song? They defined Brown's music years before.

Though soul music was around long before James Brown came on the scene, it was never the same after he arrived. His electric delivery made a love song a full-on testimonial delivered with the fervor of a sermon. His intricate horn arrangements inspired many imitators.

Brown earned his title "Godfather of Soul," but he was never limited to one genre. He inspired rockers, his

funk was part of the early seeds of a disco movement and his oft-used spoken-word delivery made him a forefather of rap.

Although his music seemed to have a combustible, unrehearsed tone, he was a consummate professional who carefully orchestrated everything, from his shows to his songs. He wasn't known as a songwriter, but he wrote or co-wrote most of his hits.

The empowering lyrics to songs like "Say It Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)," "Papa Don't Take No Mess" and "The Big Payback" show he was about more than yelps and moans.

Brown kept pushing until the end. In an interview three years ago, Brown appeared a bit tired. He hinted that he might be nearing the end of his performance years, citing a litany of medical problems weighing him down.

But a question about retirement was quickly shot down.

"Things are going good," he said in 2003, "and all I got to do is just hold up."

And he did, almost until the end. He was scheduled to perform a New Year's Eve date at the B.B. King Blues Club in New York's Times Square.

Brown is survived by his fourth wife, Tomi Rae Hynie, one of his backup singers, and at least four children -- two daughters and sons Daryl and James Brown II, Copsidas said.

REMEMBERING JB

"What James Brown was to music in terms of soul and hip-hop, rap, all of that, is what Bach was to classical music. This is a guy who literally changed the music industry. He put everybody on a different beat, a different style of music. He pioneered it."

-- the Rev. Al Sharpton

"He was an innovator, he was an emancipator, he was an originator. Rap music, all that stuff came from James Brown."

-- Little Richard

"He was a whirlwind of energy and precision ... I've always been a huge admirer of him as a performer and a band leader. His passing is a huge loss to music."

-- Mick Jagger

"People already know his history, but I would like for them to know he was a man who preached love from the stage. His thing was 'I never saw a person that I didn't love.' He was a true humanitarian who loved his country."

-- Charles Bobbit, a friend who was with Brown when he died

"Last night, he said: 'I'm going to be there. I'm the hardest-working man in show business.'"

-- Agent Frank Copsidas, on Brown's comments the night before he died about a scheduled New Year's Eve performance in New York

"He was dramatic to the end -- dying on Christmas Day. ... He'll be all over the news all over the world today. He would have it no other way."

-- the Rev. Jesse Jackson

HIS BIGGEST HITS

"Please, Please, Please"

This 1956 begging ballad about a man trying to keep his woman took on a raw, sensual tone as Brown growled and yelped through the burning track.

"Night Train"

Released in 1962, it's one of the first songs to feature the tight, jumping horn section that would become a cornerstone of most of his major hits.

"Papa's Got a Brand New Bag

(Part I)"

Another classic 1965 dance track about -- what else -- dancing.

"I Got You (I Feel Good)"

Perhaps Brown's most famous tune, and one of the all-time greatest songs in rock's canon. Cut in 1965, it's an instant party starter. If you've never heard this, you've never heard music.

"Get Up (I Feel Like Being a) Sex Machine" (Part 1)"

Despite its somewhat risqué title, this frenetic 1970 groove is more of a call to move your feet. Perhaps Brown's second most-famous song, its signature is its slamming rhythm section.

"Get Up Offa That Thing"

A killer bass instead of horns are the real glue of this classic 1976 dance groove.

"Living in America"

This rousing, patriotic song from 1985's fourth installment of the "Rocky" movie franchise re-established Brown as a hit maker in his fifth decade.

"Static, Pts. 1 & 2"

(with Full Force)

As his music was being sampled right and left by rappers, Brown showed how it should be done with this sizzling collaboration with the group Full Force.

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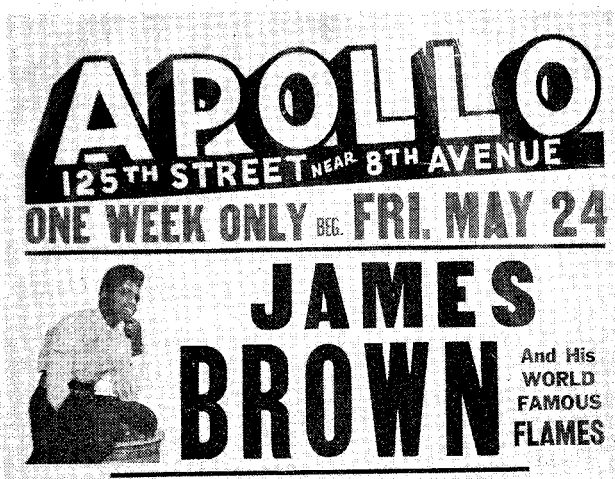
JAMES BROWN: 1933-2006

of Soul' made us



AFP / GETTY IMAGES

James Brown's legendary stage presence inspired performers such as Mick Jagger and Michael Jackson. Above, "the hardest-working man in show business" performs in 1971 at the Olympia Hall in Paris.



MARIO TAMA / GETTY IMAGES

A James Brown concert poster from the Apollo Theater was part of a June music memorabilia auction in New York.

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