

'Royal day in Harlem' for Brown's fans

BY LARRY NEUMEISTER

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — A white, horse-drawn carriage carried the body of music legend James Brown through the streets of Harlem on Thursday to the Apollo Theater, where a sea of people waited to say farewell to the "Godfather of Soul."

Friends and fans walked behind the caisson in the street, singing the chorus of Brown's anthem, "Say It Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud."

Just as when Brown was alive, the raucous throng of thousands cheered and applauded as pallbearers lifted his gold casket and carried it inside for Brown, who died of heart failure Christmas morning, to lie in repose on the stage where he made his 1956 debut.

As New Yorker Norman Brand waited for the procession to arrive, the 55-year-old recalled hearing Brown's anthem for the first time in his native Alabama.

"It really changed the attitude of most black people. It was like a wake-up call. Before that, if you were called black, it was like an insult," Brand said. "Just one song and one word can change a whole situation."

The Rev. Al Sharpton, Brown's close friend, raced through the night in a van with



MARY ALTAHEER / AP

Fans line up outside Harlem's Apollo Theater Thursday to pay their last respects to the "Godfather of Soul."

the late singer's casket, arriving in New York about three hours late a day after leaving Georgia, where the 73-year-old singer died. Logistical problems had made it impossible to catch a flight, he said.

"He was a superstar for common people, and I wanted to make sure that common people got to see him one last time," Sharpton said late Wednesday. "It's going to be a royal day in Harlem."

As the carriage rolled toward the Apollo shortly after noon on Thursday, Sharpton walked behind it.

A private ceremony was planned for Brown at a church near Augusta, Ga., his boyhood hometown, and another public viewing was scheduled Saturday at Augusta's James Brown Arena.

Outside the Apollo, fans began lining up shortly after midnight for the chance to say goodbye to a man whose hits such as "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" and "I Got You (I Feel Good)" left an indelible mark on soul, R&B, funk, disco and rap music.

The Apollo became famous for launching the careers of performers such as Brown, Billie

Holiday, Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald, and as a showcase for superstars Steve Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Diana Ross and a young Michael Jackson.

It had been used for public viewings several times before, but always for employees.

On Thursday, the marquee outside read: "Rest in Peace Apollo Legend The Godfather of Soul James Brown, 1933-2006," and Brown's epic "Live at the Apollo" album streamed from the marquee speakers.

"He seemed like family, a friend of mine," said New Yorker Brenda Harper, who was the first to arrive at the Apollo early Thursday. She recalled seeing Brown in concert 14 years earlier. "I jumped on the stage and he danced with me. I danced with the 'Godfather' that day," she said.

Edith Stewart flew to New York from Atlanta for the Apollo Theater viewing.

"I loved James Brown. He did a lot of things for people all over. Just a couple of days ago, in Augusta, he was passing out gifts. And then he's gone," she said.

Brown continued to work to the end, dying less than a week before he was to perform New Year's Eve in Manhattan at B.B. King's blues club. Chaka Khan, a Grammy Award-winning rhythm and blues performer, will play instead.