

CHAPTER X-2



THE HARDEST WORKIN' MAN ...

Circa 1964

'Soul music' or 'rhythm 'n blues' was King in Baltimore. So much so that it seemed like the folks actually *hated* the other stuff.

Example?

Lou Christie made an appearance at one of my record hops, performing his Top Ten hit, "Two Faces Have I."

The kids 'pennied' him.

Really embarrassing.

True confession? I hated that record but Mr. Christie deserved much better.

Godfather

Topping the list of 'soul music' artists was the 'Godfather of Soul' himself, Mr. James Brown, whose hit single, "Prisoner Of Love" was high on the charts when I arrived in Baltimore in 1963.

Now it's 1964. He's booked for his first appearance at the Baltimore Civic Center.

I can't recall how this happened but I think it was Johnny Dark's idea. Johnny sez to Kerby (Scott) and me, "We gotta go to this show."

First 'Concert'

Johnny scored three tickets from one of the record promotion men. Being the top radio DJs that we were (...ahem...) we scored seats in the mezzanine section, overlooking Stage Left, right on top of the action.

Fantastic!

The bill featured Dionne Warwick, Solomon Burke, The Orlons, and of course, James Brown.

I was super-excited. I was a huge fan of James Brown, plus it would be my first 'concert.'

Show Time!

The place was packed to the walls!

We're in our seats when from behind the gigantic red curtains covering the stage we began to hear the faint rhythmic sounds of the James Brown Band, warming up for the excitement that was to follow.

The house lights flickered and a lone spotlight shined at Stage Right. Into the beaming light stepped Danny Ray, the EmCee and official 'Cape Man' for James Brown.

Resplendent in various shades of grey he was.

Grey suit, grey shirt, grey tie, grey suede shoes.

Dude looked like he'd just finished a multi-page photo shoot for GQ.

Cool-ness indeed.

Can you dig it?

Anyway...after a brief welcome to the crowd Mr. Ray broke into the introduction of the opening act.

"Ladies and Gentlemen...

...it's my distinct pleasure to present to you...

... America's newest singing sensation...

...Let's hear it for MISS DIONNE WARWICKKKKK!!!!!!"

At this a beautiful young woman stepped into the spotlight from Stage Left. She was adorned in a form-fitting, full length red-sequined gown, fluted at the neck

and the ankles. The ankle-fluting was so tight she could take only 'baby steps' as she moved across the stage toward the mike stand.

Yeah man!

Ms Dionne Warwick was a vision in this form-fitting tightly-tailored red gown that covered what one could only conclude was...well, a magnificent 'form' ('wink, wink').

She had a beautiful figure, all of which seemed to be 'moving around' as she tip-toed to the mike, eliciting waves of appreciative wolf whistles every step of the way.

Baltimore men know a beautiful woman when they see one.

Ms Warwick sang 'Don't Make Me Over' and 'Anyone Who Had A Heart' and the crowd went wild. She was sensational.

The crowd gave her a Standing O.

Note: I had the great good fortune to play the majority of her hit songs on the air, most of which were written by Burt Bacharach (music) and Hal David (lyrics).

Burt Bacharach's melodies are complicated and difficult to sing but Ms Warwick made 'em smooth and easy. Hal David was more than a lyricist...he was a poet. If you're unfamiliar with the work of these folks I highly recommend that you get into their music. Start by visiting them on Wikipedia.

Solid Gold

"Annnd now Ladies and Gentlemen.....

...please welcomm-muh...

...Mister Sol lo mon Burke!!!!!!!"

Solomon Burke was an Atlantic Records recording artist whose career spanned many decades and included twenty-six *Billboard*-charted songs, mostly ballads.

To the general public he was 'under the radar.' For lovers of 'soul music' Burke was Top Drawer.

Mr. Burke walked out on the stage regaled in gold: A gold suit, a gold shirt with gold cuff-links, a gold tie, gold shoes...and gold rings on at least five fingers.

At five feet seven and weighing around 250, Solomon Burke resembled a giant golden tomato.

He knocked it out of the park with 'Just Out Of Reach (Of My Two Open Arms)' and 'If You Need Me.'

So...Can You Do The Wah Watusi?

The last of the 'opening acts' was The Orlons, three girls and a guy from Philadelphia - the same group I saw on WARM Day in the summer of 1962.

Each of their first three releases ('62 and '63) were Top Ten hit records: 'South Street', 'Don't Hang Up', and 'The Wah Watusi'.

I liked their hit records, but given the depth of talent evidenced by the likes of Dionne Warwick, Solomon Burke and James Brown I thought it a bit of a stretch for them to be included on this bill.

Note: The Orlons last charted record was August, 1964, 'Knock Knock (Who's There?).' It 'peaked' at #64 on the Billboard Hot 100 and by year's end they were gone from the scene.

Half Time (aka 'Intermission')

After The Orlons the house lights came up and many in the crowd made their way to the snack bars and/or restrooms...or maybe both. 'Twas then I noticed a celebrity sitting two rows in front of us.

It was none other than Jim Parker, the Baltimore Colts* Hall-Of Fame left tackle, attending the concert with his wife. Neither left their seats during intermission which would prove fortuitous for all who were seated in that section.

About ten minutes into the intermission a 'disturbance' broke out in the walkway five or six rows up from (and behind) our seats. Four or five guys in their twenties were shouting and shoving each other around, using language that was unacceptable, especially with ladies present. I was hoping this wouldn't become something really nasty.

Sidebar: Have you ever had that feeling that you're being watched...mmm ...but you can't put a finger on it? Then...you look around...and BAM! Someone's staring at you? Ya know...right?)

A particularly eloquent run of foul language must have convinced Mr. Parker that 'enough was enough.'

Slowly unwinding his six-foot three-inch 280-pound frame from his seat, Mr. Parker stood, turned around, and from his spot eight rows below the budding fracas, he fixed a menacing upward glare at this group of young men who were, shall we say, behaving badly.

Five to seven seconds passed before one of the bad actors realized that he and his buds were being, ahmmm, *observed*. And that the *observer* was a very large man wearing on his face a *really serious* scowl of disapproval.

I don't know if the dude recognized that the glarer was Jim Parker.

What I *do* know is this: In an instant all was quiet...

...after which, with a wry smile, Mr. Parker nodded approvingly, turned, and sat down.

Beautiful.

*= The authentic Colts. Accept no substitutes.

Mr. Dynamite

The house lights flickered, reminding everyone to return to their seats. After a few minutes, from behind the curtain, we heard soft music and "*Boop..boop..shooo-eee-ooop. Boop..boop..shooo-eee oop.*" The Famous Flames were warming up.

The house lights flickered a time or two then went out altogether.

The crowd grew silent. Once again the spotlight fell on the curtain at Stage Right.

EmCee Danny Ray re-emerged.

"Ladies and Gentlemen are you ready?"

Crowd: "YESSSS!"

"I said ARE YOU REAAADY?"

"YESSSSSSSS."

(curtain begins to slowly open - The James Brown Band picks up tempo and volume)

"Are you ready for Mr. Dynamite?"

Crowd roars: "YESSSS!"

"He's gonna sing 'Try Me!' (band hits loud staccato 'Ba---Daa!)

"He's gonna sing 'Prisoner Of Love!' (band hits louder staccato 'Ba---Daa!)

"He's gonna sing 'Bewildered' (band hits even louder staccato 'Ba---Daa!)

"He's gonna sing 'Please Please!' (band hits loudest staccato 'Ba---Daa!)

"Ladies and Gentlemen..."

...the Harrrrdesst Workin' Man In Show Business...

...Mister Jaaames Brown!"

The Band erupted into the instrumental intro to 'Night Train...

...and James Brown appeared Stage Left, 'one-footin' it to the mic at Center Stage.

The crowd went berserk!

I joined 'em.

The Godfather did all his hits and never stopped moving – for at least ninety minutes, the crowd dancin' in the aisles the entire time.

The show ended with Brown's 'Signature Act.' He's on his knees begging '*Please, Please Don't Go*' as Danny Ray covered him with a cape and led him off stage. But the emotion got to him and he returned for more begging...'*Please, Please...*'

Again Ray covered him and led him away. Back he came for more – perhaps five times.

Finally, his emotions completely drained...he was led away.

With the capacity crowd roaring its approval the curtains closed and the show ended.

This was the most exciting show I'd ever seen, or ever *will* see. I will never forget it. At age 32 James Brown was at the pinnacle of his performing career.

This was amazing, incredible stuff that words on paper simply can't adequately describe. Ya gotta see for yourself.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OkRvO43rgj0>

Next - Here's a free dance lesson from James Brown.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zdz88MBWomo>

Now...The Ultimate Encore.

James Brown and Luciano Pavarotti with full symphony orchestra and dynamite back-up singers performing 'This Is A Man's World.' Truly an epic performance.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gb-B3lsgEfA>

'Nuff said!

Epilogue

Twenty years later Kerby and I were radio station owners living in the Augusta, Georgia metro...as did James Brown.

One very hot day in August, 1985, Kerby and I were at the Augusta airport awaiting the arrival of an interviewee for a GM's position with our company.

James Brown and his wife, Adrienne, were also at the airport; James in a perfectly-tailored grey suit with maroon dress shirt and matching tie, and Adrienne wearing – ulp! – a full-length mink coat. In August. In Georgia!

Mr. Brown once owned WEBB, a Baltimore radio station. He had also made an appearance on Kerby's TV show, plus we'd played his records on the air.

Using that as our 'intro' we initiated a conversation.

James said he was going to Russia for a series of performances (that would explain the mink coat), all of which were sell-outs. He then told us of his plan to buy a large piece of land in Beech Island, SC, just across the Savannah River from Augusta.

"You boys should take advantage of this news," he said. "Go over there and buy some land yourself 'cuz when the word gets out that James Brown is buying land the values will skyrocket."

What a fun conversation.

What th' 'H'! The man was a superstar!

I have only one regret.

I should've asked James to give me one of his 'Soul Shouts.'

"Ahowww! I Feel Good!"

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