

THE FIRST FAMILY...

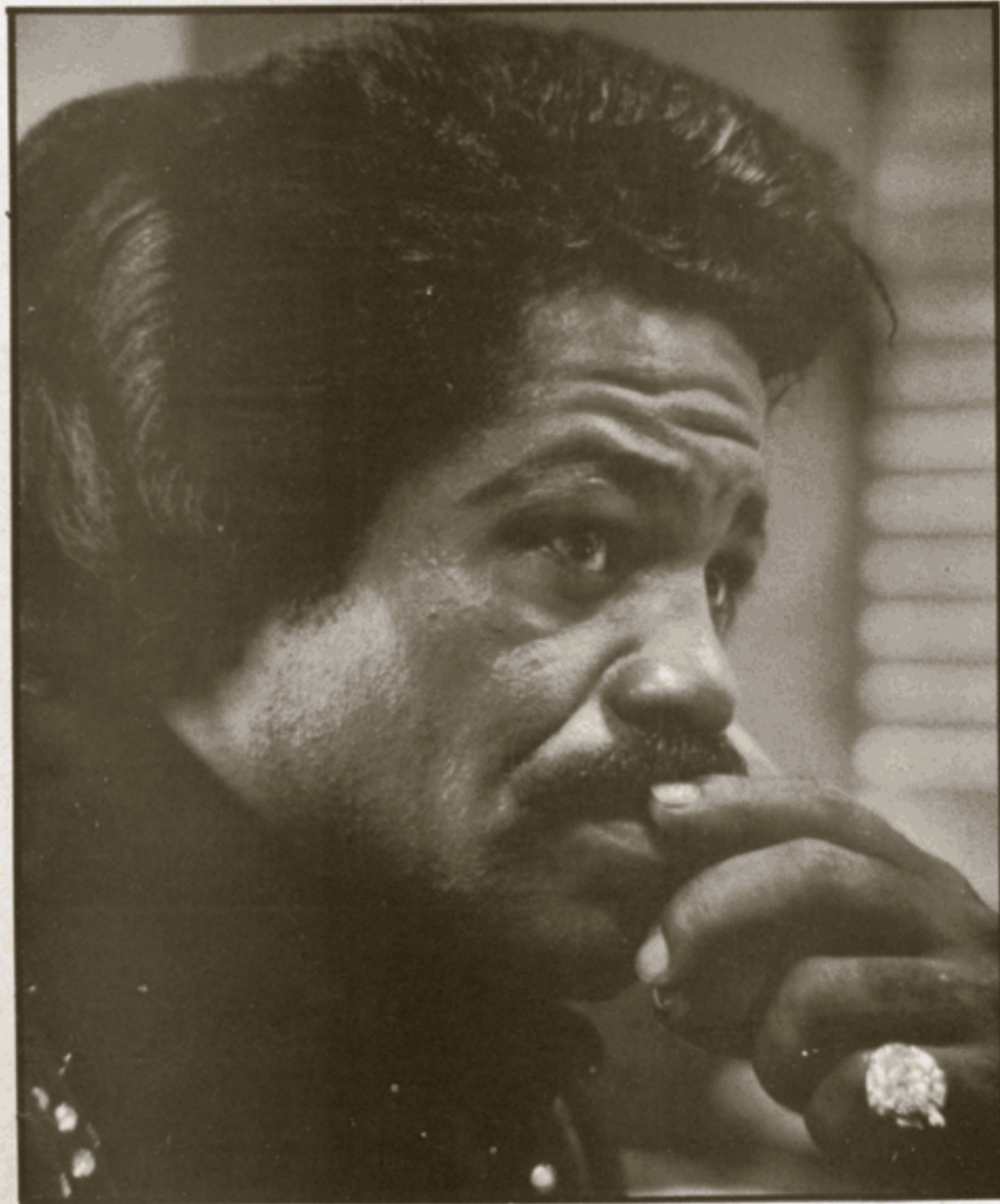
JAMES BROWN, THE MAN

JAMES BROWN is perhaps the biggest single influence on the soul world today. He is the rarity in that his music is listened to and danced to with equal ease. As a man, he has proven himself over the years to be

a man of great principle, a man of great humility and a man of greatness. He is a man worthy of the greatest respect — both as a human being and as an entertainer.

This interview was carried out in

James' office high above New York's Broadway on the evening before he left with his entourage to headline the Zaire Music Festival, which was built around the fight between Ali and Foreman.



B&S: I'd like to start, if I may, by asking you about your childhood.

JB: Well, as a kid, I came up in the Deep South. As you know, opportunities there are very limited for Blacks. No good jobs and very little education. Even today, education is somewhat secondary down there. My people were very, very poor and my father, being unskilled and uneducated, worked wherever and when ever he could. He was a filling station worker, he worked in a sawmill and a lot of labour jobs. He was a farmer for a while. That was outside of Augusta and in South Carolina as well.

When I can first remember my father working in Augusta, he was making four and a half dollars a week. That was delivering groceries in a basket. Then he went from four and a half to seven a week.

The first time I ever played a musical instrument, he bought me a harp for ten cents. And later on, he got me an organ that had no legs on it. A furniture store gave it to him, they were gonna throw it away. So he brought it home and I learned how to play it in about two weeks. I must have been about nine at the time, I guess.

B S: Did your family have any musical background?

JB: No, only from the church, just singing.

B&S: But right from day one, you were interested in music. Born with it, one might say.

JB: I would think so — but also it became a necessity. It was my only way out of poverty, out of the ghetto. It was my best way of getting a message across after I found myself in a position to help other people.

B&S: At what age did you recognise this need to communicate with other people in this way?

JB: I never recognised it in terms of being successful but I felt that I had a lot of influence.

B&S: At school, were you like — how shall I put it — a ringleader?

JB: Yes, I was. But as a kid I was a juvenile delinquent. Not because I was a bad kid but because of the environment. I broke in a car and things like that — nothing violent.

B&S: It must be extremely hard not to be that way when you grow up in circumstances like that.

JB: Yes, it is because all I was trying to do was to get decent clothes and something to eat to put me on the same level as the other kids.

B&S: What are the most vivid recollections you have of your childhood now that you reflect?

JB: Well I had an uncle once who was selling untaxed liquor.

THE FIRST FAMILY...

And he got busted — somebody, what you might say, snitched! And somebody told him that I'd told the man he did it. And I think that hurt me more than most anything I can remember. But that is the type of thing you have to deal with when you're in that lower economical and educational environment.

I spent a lot of my life trying to straighten that thing out. But then, if they hadn't been trying to sell that liquor, I wouldn't have had the problem in the first place.

B&S: What about the happy times?

JB: My happy times were at school. The kids used to pay me ten cents to hear and see me sing when I was going to school.

B&S: Yeah? What type of things were you singing — gospel?

JB: No, Blues things. I was singing the Blues kinda heavy at that time.

B&S: Did you feel the Blues at that time or just sing them?

JB: I lived them — I lived them!

B&S: How old were you when you first started singing in public and started expressing yourself?

JB: Fifteen. I had to compete against other singers one night at a soldier camp — one fella was about nineteen, the other around twenty four. I got the job, anyway, so I felt then that I'd got something.

B&S: Were you acrobatic at the time, too?

JB: Well, I was a professional fighter. I had three professional fights. I was a super athlete, very loose limbed. And I had a chance to play professional baseball. But I was a juvenile delinquent and I was out on parole and, at that particular time, I couldn't play, because I had to serve my parole.

I was extra-extra good in football but I didn't have quite enough weight. Even so, I played and got my leg broke a couple of times. Everything I've ever tried, I've excelled in.

B&S: What about things that as a kid you weren't good at — did you tend to leave them alone?

JB: I guess so! The one thing I wish I'd done and always seemed hard to me — maths! Maths to me was just figuring — but then that's what it is anyway, I guess! I never liked figures that much. And now I find myself dealing with nothing but figures.

I find the whole world is figures. Or should I say the world is numbers. But I really should have gotten into that and it'll go down as my biggest regret.

B&S: Was your family a religious and close one?

JB: Yes. They were very religious.

B&S: Do you still retain their beliefs?

JB: Yes, I have my belief, I believe in a supreme being. Yes, I do.

B&S: Do you believe in what you were brought up to believe in?

JB: I believe in what I feel. But I value a lot of the things they taught me and I always will because that was my early code to my life.

B&S: Do you still feel any bitterness in the way that you were raised down south and the circumstances you were raised in?

JB: Not really bitter — it's more like I feel disgusted, that human beings could use other human beings and live off the fat of the land. They succeed at



James Brown — an early picture

other people's expense, you could say. **B&S: Is it a situation that has improved — even if not fast enough?**

JB: It can't improve fast enough. Because minorities — not just Blacks but minorities period — can't get a decent education. It's like a man participating in a race and you tell the man the race starts at seven o'clock and when he gets there he finds it started at six thirty. But still you intend for him to be at the finishing line when everybody else is there.

B&S: This may be a very delicate question and you might prefer not to answer — but how do you feel personally about the situation in Africa where the Black Africans are emerging, if you like, at the expense of the white settlers?

JB: Well, I would like to see — personally this is — that the Black man has his own country. But I do believe he needs technical know-how. But at each man's own discretion.

B&S: Can you understand the bitterness of the whites over the development that now forces them to leave Africa and do you think they are justified in that feeling?

JB: That's gonna be hard for me to answer because I can only answer in one way. That's because I'm a Black man and I've been living oppressed. I cannot foresee or can I understand from the past how I could come into your house and take it over. But if I say, let me live in your house and I'll pay you, that is different. But not where there'll be a part of your house that I can't go in. Maybe it's the wrong

"Music was my only way out of poverty, out of the ghetto"

parallel but you can see what I'm driving at.

If he (the white man) had respected that this was another man's house and acted accordingly, it would have all been different today. All through history, oppressed people have been made free and that's all that is happening there today. But the people in South Africa, they should've known but I'm sure they know now. A handful of people like that — I don't see how they could have gone that far.

B&S: And they still believe they're right?

JB: That's very sad, isn't it? But one day, they'll have to leave if it continues the way it is today. I've played right near South Africa...

B&S: There's a thought — would you play actually in the Republic of South Africa?

JB: No, no way. But, you know, the whole world is up in arms because each native feels that his native land is his and his only. I don't want to take up every little part of the world — why, we could go right into your home, right?

B&S: You've been to Europe many, many times and you are very much respected there by both black and white. Do you feel that Europe is perhaps more racially civilised?

JB: Much more. Much more!

B&S: Do you have an explanation for that?

JB: Yes. In the United States, it's greed, it's that simple. They don't hate the Black man here but they love his ignorance. And they love to keep him ignorant.

B&S: That must add to the bitterness, knowing that?

JB: Nooo — because if I become bitter, then I'm no better than the man who is the oppressor. If I can look at a man and he is doing me wrong and I can smile... then he has the problem, not me! But I'll tell you the basic problem. It's like I said earlier, there's no way that I can have as much going for me in another's home as I could

have in my own. Other people's homes are nice to visit but not to live in.

B&S: Do you consider yourself to be an American, Afro-American...

JB: I have to, I have to. I'm an Afro-American.

B&S: Would you like to see a day when the Black man goes home to Africa?

JB: I'd like to see the day when the Black man identifies himself with Africa because it is impractical for all to go back there. Then this country of America could live out its true meaning, too. Because everybody here is from a different place.

B&S: What about the plan someone had a while back of giving a section of the south over to Black America?

JB: I really can't elaborate on that except that I feel that if I'm going to pay tax on the whole country, then I'll enjoy the whole country.

B&S: Back to your music, though, who would your earliest influences have been?

JB: Well, I listened to several people. I listened to Louis Jordan. I listened to some of Basie's earlier stuff. Some Cab Calloway. But I would have to put Louis Jordan at the top of my list. He expressed a way of freedom.

That's what music is supposed to be about. A man like me is basically cut off from the world, though. The Black man is basically cut off. The reason I say that is simple — three words. Blues and Soul! You understand that. The one magazine that covers everything. The special magazine, right? But you know something, I don't want to be special. I know it's reality and I accept it as that — and politics! But if you take off your clothes and I take off mine, and if you can show me something different on you against what's on me, then I'll go with it. But we're fooling ourselves.

Even England has its problems, France has its problems in the same way that South Africa has its problems like we were saying. But we must respect each other's culture and that's why there is a 'Blues & Soul'. My point is that it is sad that it has to be done that way.

B&S: I disagree with you, though, and I'll tell you why. 'Blues & Soul' is devoted to a specific subject matter in the same way that a Country & Western magazine is. Or even an interior decorating magazine.

JB: Ok, but the thing I want is for the man to understand my culture. And I'll try to understand his. We're all human beings, like I say. But like the difference between the African and the American. They've got different traits. Look at the African teeth — now I've got a lot of work done on my mouth. But the African doesn't need any work doing.

B&S: So does that mean you've been unwillingly 'corrupted'?

JB: Unwillingly. But — and it's a big but — it's a great country. But it's a pity that some of the laws make the country what it is rather than what it could and should have been.

B&S: Do you think that America has failed in what it set out to do?

Continued on page 18

JAMES

MINISTER OF NEW NE



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2659 036



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and 9 other classics

2391 116

NEW SINGLE

It's Hell
Papa Don't Take No Mess
(Release Date October 11)
2066 513

Don't Forget
My Thang/The Payback
2066 485

Stone To The Bone/
Sexy, Sexy, Sexy
2066 411

BROWN

IN SUPER HEAVY FUNK

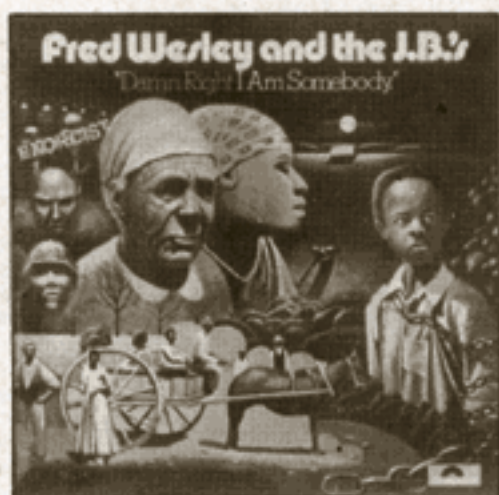
ALBUM CHECK LIST

- It's Hell* 2659 036 ■
 The Payback* 2659 030
 Slaughter's Big Rip Off 2391 084 ■●
 Black Caesar 2490 117 ■●
 Get On The Good Foot* 2659 018 ■
 Sex Machine* 2625 004 ●
 Revolution Of The Mind* 2659 011
 There It Is 2391 033 ■●
 Superbad 2310 089 ■
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THE FIRST FAMILY...



The JB's in action

people consider the Famous Flames to be the predecessors to the J.B.'s but in fact the Famous Flames name only referred to the back-up singers and the band was simply known then as the James Brown Orchestra.

It was in 1970 that James Brown actually got around to recording the J.B.'s for the first time. They made their debut with the introductory "These Are The J.B.'s" and continued into "The Grunt" and a string of other mini-hits until "Gimme Some More" carried the band to the top for the first time.

Since then, it's been a procession of hits, including "Giving Up Food For Funk," "Hot Pants Road," "Doing It To Death," "Same Beat" and continuing into their current winner, "Rockin' Funky Watergate." Now known as Fred Wesley and the J.B.'s the line-up is: **Fred Wesley**, leader and saxophone; **Maceo Parker** sax; **Jimmy Parker** (no relation to Maceo), alto sax; **St. Clair Pinkney**, tenor sax; **Darrell Jamison** and **Russell Crimes**, trumpets; **Johnny Griggs**, percussion/congas; **John Morgan** and **John Starks**, drums; **Fred Thomas** and **Sweet Charles Sherell**, bass; **Jimmy Nolan** and **Herman Martin**, guitars; **Lyn Collins** and **Martha High**, featured vocalists.

"It's certainly been an experience working with Mr. Brown," Jabbo Starks boasts, "and there are things that have happened that I will never forget. It's been the greatest education of my life and I have really learned so much in the way of business. You certainly say I'm a wiser man for having worked for James Brown."

"They've been fourteen years of learning," St. Clair Pinkney agrees, "but the most part of the time has been beautiful. He's certainly a beautiful guy to work for. He demands perfec-

"James Brown demands perfection and, as long as he gets that, it's easy"

tion, that's all, and as long as he gets that, it's easy." ■ (JA)

Sweet Charles

CHARLES SHERELL — or Sweet Charles as James Brown has dubbed him — is the latest protégé of the Godfather to be given his head as a recording artist under James' People Records banner. He has an album and a single out now, both of which have done fairly good business.

Charles was born in Nashville, Tennessee, on March 8, 1943. He has been a member of the world renowned J.B.'s since 1968 although during that period, he has made two solo records outside of the family. The first one was several years ago and was for Capitol. The deal was negotiated on Charles' behalf by a close friend of his, Country singer-guitarist, **Glen Campbell**.

The second was done through **Ray Rush**, who is **B.J. Thomas'** manager, and was released on the local company, Mecca Records.

However, despite Charles' Nashville roots, he really isn't a Country music fan. "My thing is ballads, plain and simple," he admits. "They can be Country or whatever as long as the

story line is good. I'm really into lyrics. But obviously, I'm also into the James Brown type of Funk!"

James Brown has already gone on B&S record as saying that Sweet Charles has the basic potential to become a super-superstar. And so it was only natural that I should ask Charles how the whole recording situation within the First Family had developed.

"Mr. Brown is a very big man in the industry," Charles began, "and I had been with the First Family for quite a while before he allowed me my break. Previous to being with the J.B.'s, I played bass for **Aretha Franklin** but with the J.B.'s, I alternated between bass and keyboards.

"Anyway, Mr. Brown seemed to appreciate my vocal style and he started to let me do vocals with the band within the revue. And he seemed to dig my style and he kept on that there was some kind of magic quality to my personality. And it has just progressed from there."

The album itself is a strange mixture of typical J.B. Funk and some very straight ballads. It has allowed James to branch out as far as producing is concerned and Charles seems happy



Sweet Charles

Mr Brown is strictly business and that's what has gotten him so far

enough with the whole project.

"I'm very satisfied with just about everything on the project," he enthused. "I particularly like "Strangers in The Night" and "Why Can't I Be Treated Like A Man", which I helped to actually write. I really appreciate some of the arrangements that **Fred Wesley** and **Dave Matthews** did, they're kind of a cross between Gamble and Huff and Barry White yet they have their own quality. The single is "Soul Man" and that has the driving James Brown funk sound although for the whole album we used something like thirty five musicians, twenty of whom were violinists. I guess the whole LP is really aimed more at Top 40 rather than R&B."

Obviously, Charles owes a great deal of his current success to James Brown and in praise of his boss, he says this: "One thing that I really appreciate about Mr. Brown is that he is strictly business and I believe that's what has gotten him so far and to where he is today. He is always thinking, just like a computer, and he's always coming up with ideas that are simply brilliant."

The other point I raised with Charles was the way that everyone around the James Brown organisation referred to each other as Mr this or Miss that. "It's Mr Brown's Idea," Charles smiled, "and I think it's a beautiful idea. He feels that it is a mark of respect and courtesy that any professional man or woman is worthy of." ■ (JA)