

Farewell



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Thousands line Harlem's streets to pay their respects to the Godfather of Soul at the Apollo Theater

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The soul of James Brown seemed to flow through the streets of Harlem yesterday.

Along Lenox Avenue and 125th Street, vendors blared his songs all day from tinny speakers. People swapped stories of where they were when they heard their first Brownian wail. Some danced, trying to mimic those slipping, sliding intricate steps that were Brown's trademark.

As the Rev. Al Sharpton said during a memorial speech last night, "One era had Bach. Another era had Beethoven. We had Brown."

The last New York appearance of the soul legend, who died in Atlanta of congestive heart failure on Christmas at age 73, began with a crowd of mourners awaiting his arrival from Georgia.

Outside of Sharpton's National Action Network building on 145th Street, Leroy McDonald talked about Brown's power to raise black consciousness through songs like, "Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud."

"When that came out, it made me proud," said McDonald, 52, a Harlem resident who works at Home Depot. "I went to school and sat at the front of the classroom."

Brown's gleaming gold coffin, too heavy for flight, was driven from Georgia to Harlem and placed in a white horse-drawn carriage.

Sharpton, Brown's personal manager, Charles Bobbit, his agent, Frank Copsidas, and other family and friends walked behind the carriage as it headed south on Lenox Avenue. An estimated 2,000 people lined the streets.

"The Apollo was always his home because that's where it all started," Copsidas said, "and the people of Harlem were his family."

When asked how he was feeling, Bobbit said, "Not really good." Brown's longtime friend, Bobbit was the last person to see him alive and drove him to the hospital the night he died, according to friends.

"There's a lot of love, but he's not here," Bobbit said.

The procession moved toward the Apollo Theater trailed by a dancing, singing, chanting crowd a block long. The voyage was a sonic homage to the Godfather of Soul, with his own music as the soundtrack.



Top, the gold coffin carrying Brown arrives at the Apollo Theater. Above, Tommie Rae Hynie, who married Brown in 2001.

At Lenox Avenue and 129th Street, Leon Irving stood outside a barbershop with shaving cream still on his head, a towel on his shoulder and an incomplete haircut. "My barber just came out. We stopped to pay our respects to James Brown," Irving, 33, of Harlem, said.

Kim Khan said it was so important to see Brown that she took a day off from work.

"I just wanted to make this walk through Harlem with him," said Khan, 49, a database consultant from Huntington.

Brown's coffin was kept open during the viewing so that visitors could see him in his purple sequined satin suit with white gloves, silver boots and a silver turtleneck.

Doug Hollingsworth, 50, of Williamsburg, said he thought the outfit was appropriate, just like the ones Brown wore in concert.

"I've always loved the man," said Hollingsworth, a native of Georgia, like Brown. He recalled watching Brown perform at a halftime show at the University of Georgia in 1973. "Before that, my brother and his friends used to do James Brown" with splits and howls, he said, demonstrating a move.

Sharpton stood by the coffin during most of the afternoon viewing, from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. After the overnight drive with the body, Sharpton said he was tired, but he seemed pleased with the turnout and the celebration of Brown's life.

Sharpton gave a stirring speech about Brown's life that at times brought the audience to their feet with thunderous applause.

Tommie Rae Hynie, the 36-year-old woman whose 2001 marriage to Brown is under dispute by his estate because she may have been married to another man at the time, sobbed over his coffin and spoke tearfully at the memorial. "He has taught me how to love," she said, insisting that he was her husband to the end.

As night fell over Harlem, the lines persisted outside the Apollo Theater, and Sharpton announced they would extend the viewing one more hour for the hardest-working man in show business.

"I think he'd be happy," he said. "I used to tell him about the lines outside the Apollo. I think he'd like the lines."

Staff writer Emi Endo and The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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