

There was some controversy back then about how this album was supposed to be the movie score for *Hell Up in Harlem*, but it got rejected by the producers.

Yes, it was rejected by them. We finished all the music for it, and the songs were supposed to be for *Hell Up in Harlem* movie soundtrack. We tightened up the music, and we wrapped it up. I took the music to Los Angeles, California, because that's where I lived at that time. I took it to the movie producer, and the producer listened to it and shook his head and said, "This ain't funky; this isn't what I wanted." So I was sitting there and I said, "Wait a minute. Let me call Mr. Brown, and you tell him what you just told me." I dialed the phone and I put James on the phone, and he was talking to the producer. All of sudden, his face started to turn a bright red color and then he put me back on the phone. James was yelling, "Bring the music back home! Bring it back here now!" So, I got the music back from the producer, and I didn't even go to my house. I went from the airport to the producer's studio back to the airport and went back to Augusta to the studio. [laughs] When I got back, I added a bunch of sound effects to "The Payback" like the crowd noise. We put it out as his album, and it was the biggest one of his career.

Obviously, you and James Brown had a close relationship. By this time, you had been with him for a number of years. What was your creative approach in making the music for this album?

Some of the music on this album is totally mine. James would tell me to come up with a couple of tunes to fill out the album. I was highly influenced by him, because he would tell me, if I wanted to be original, then I should be original. So I tried to be as original as possible. Some of my tunes wouldn't sound like his, but they wouldn't sound like anyone else's either. The things I did and the things James did were totally different, but the things we did together were a cross between the two ideas. This album was a movie score. I don't know if James saw this movie or not, but he would give me ideas for what I should do for the chase scene, love scene, and other scenes. I would go back and write the music after he gave me some ideas to write for each scene. I know he didn't see the *Black Caesar* movie at all. He fired me after he heard the music for that. [laughs] He told me to use some of his old music for that soundtrack and that

was unheard of back in those days, because he had just won an award for music. Using old music in movies today would be right on point, but at that time, they wanted new music, so they could get a big album out of it.

It was all me in the studio. I never felt so much pressure in my life. I was trying to please the producers of the movie and James at the same time, and [James's manager] Mr. Charles Bobbit was between them. I created music that I thought the producer and James would like at the same time. I was really under a tremendous amount of pressure during that time. I would go to the studio, and I had some of the best musicians in the world sitting in there waiting for me to give them some music to play, and they would come up with some magic. That process was very successful. Then, James would come in the studio with his band. When I was in there with his band, I had to please the producer and him, and when I was in there with the studio band, I had to please James and the producer. I didn't know what to do, so I ended up producing music that sounded totally like me. I was trying to please everybody at the same time.

What was it like working with two separate bands?

It was different because I had a separate technique I used when I worked with the studio band. I would write the string section, horn section, and the rhythm parts all out for the band. But with the James Brown band, we used to talk things out in the studio and remember all the music from memory. It would all be done from memory.

What was the creative dynamic between the studio band where you wrote out all the music and the James Brown band where everything was played from memory?

I had to make it work; I had to make them sound like each other. The music was faster when it was written out. I used to stay up all night writing the music, but it came out really fast. With James Brown, I would stay up writing out my parts, so I could relay it to the band, and that was slower. It all had to sound alike. It had to sound like one big band. It was difficult to do, but we did it. I used to be with the studio band from ten o'clock in the morning to six o'clock in the evening. With the James Brown band, James used to come in around four o'clock in the afternoon and that was usually the time he woke up, and we would run from two to



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three o'clock in the morning. It worked out all right. We got used to it. We tried to have everything ready for him, so he could adjust. We would go into the studio around twelve o'clock to run the music down to make sure it was as tight as possible. The track for "The Payback" was done when James came in the studio. He came in the studio and looked at the words I came up with for the track, and he did it one take. That's why it sounds the way it does. He took ideas from the words I had written and made up some rhythmic lyrics to the words.

When you came back for the second time, what was your personal relationship like with James Brown?

For some reason, he trusted me. I never did anything behind his back. I did exactly what he told me to do. I was learning stuff on my own, but I was doing what he wanted me to do. I was his go-to guy for arranging and stuff. What I got out of my relationship with him is, I learned how to arrange and record music. What he got out of it was, that he got his music to sound the way he wanted it to sound because he had me to do it. He would put it through me and knew that it was going to turn out right. He didn't like everything I did. Some things he wouldn't, but I believe that he liked it, but he would say he didn't like it to keep me from becoming uppity. We both benefited from our collaboration. I learned so much from him. When I came back in 1971, I didn't know much about music, but I did know how to do some basic four-part writing and four-part horn writing. I took that, and James Brown had some ideas, and I took his ideas to create songs. "The Payback" had grooves in it that no other song had then and even now.