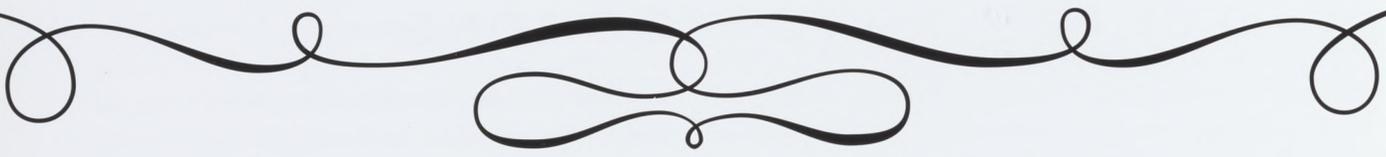


PERFORMERS
THE LEGENDARY GROUPS



THE BLUE CAPS • THE COMETS
THE CRICKETS • THE FAMOUS FLAMES
THE MIDNIGHTERS • THE MIRACLES



ROBERT BURKE WARREN
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FROM POWERFUL HARMONIZERS
TO TREND-SETTING INSTRUMENTALISTS,
THESE **INFLUENTIAL ARTISTS** BLAZED
THE ROCK & ROLL TRAIL



roll abandon in the minds of awkward teens everywhere.

Guitarist Sonny Curtis had recorded with Holly and Allison on the unsuccessful Decca sessions, and after Holly's death in 1959, Curtis returned to the group as lead singer-guitarist for a time. The ensuing decades would see him become a hugely successful songwriter, penning greats from "I Fought the Law" (covered by the Bobby Fuller Four and the Clash, among others) to Keith Whitley's smash "I'm No Stranger to the Rain" (1987's CMA Single of the Year) to the theme from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. He still gigs on occasion with Mauldin and Allison, as a Cricket.

R . B . W .

THE FAMOUS FLAMES

James Brown is forever linked with the sound and image of the Famous Flames vocal/dancing group. They backed him on record from 1956 through 1964, and supported him onstage and on the King Records label credits (whether they sang on the recording or not) through 1968. He worked with a rotating cast of Flames in the 1950s until settling on the most famous trio in 1959, as the group became his security blanket, sounding board, and launching pad.

Brown met group founder Bobby Byrd in 1952, when the upstanding Byrd family helped secure Brown's parole from reform school in Toccoa, Georgia. After his release, Brown sang in church with Sarah Byrd and joined her brother Bobby's group the Gospel Starlighters, who were not quite



FROM TOP Bobby Bennett, "Baby" Lloyd Stallworth, Bobby Byrd, and James Brown (from left), on *The T.A.M.I. Show*, 1964; Johnny Terry, Bennett, Byrd, and Brown (from left), the Apollo Theatre, 1963.

as sanctified during the week as they were on Sundays. Apart from a sideline venture running bootleg liquor from the Carolinas into Georgia, they began playing secular gigs under various aliases.

By 1955, the group was calling itself the Flames and consisted of Brown, Byrd, and Sylvester Keels taking turns singing lead and playing piano and drums. Johnny Terry (whom Brown had met in juvenile detention), Nashpendle Knox, and Nafloyd Scott sang and danced, with Scott also playing guitar. With Brown emerging as the frontman, the Flames stirred up a flurry on the circuit with a repertoire of reinterpreted R&B hits: Their show-stopper was a fervent, gospelized gutting of the Orioles' 1952 hit "Baby, Please Don't Go"—in turn an adaptation of an earlier country blues song generally ascribed to Big Joe Williams—that the group called "Please, Please, Please." With Little Richard's manager, Clint Brantley, in their corner, the Flames cut a demo of the song in late 1955, sending it out to several independent labels.

First on the scene was producer and talent scout Ralph Bass, then in charge of his own imprint, Federal, for King Records. Signing the group, he summoned them to Cincinnati for their first King recording session in February 1956, cutting four songs. But Bass, impressed with the audacious lead singer, renamed the group on the label of its debut single, "Please, Please, Please"—"JAMES BROWN With the Famous Flames"—surprising the rest of the members and imprinting the name for the ages.

"Please" slowly became a nationwide R&B hit. But nine followup singles on Federal were flops, and the original Flames became disillusioned and resigned in March 1957. Though Brown subsequently recruited



a new set of Famous Flames—J.W. Archer, Louis Madison, and Bill Hollings—it appeared his career had stalled, until “Try Me” became a Number One R&B hit in 1958. Reinvigorated, Brown got his first-ever booking at the Apollo Theatre in New York, where he knew he needed the tight vocal and visual support only a permanent set of Flames could deliver. Right under his nose were “Baby” Lloyd Stallworth, a young valet who could sing a bit, and Bobby Bennett, a roadie who showed promise as a dancer and could handle a cape routine during the finale. Johnny Terry, a cowriter with Brown on “Please, Please, Please,” was still around, too. What they needed was a coach. Brown told Brantley that only one man could handle the job: the originator, Bobby Byrd.

Byrd became more than the coach; he re-emerged as Brown’s musical collaborator, foil, and the most-recognizable co-lead singer for the next several years. Debuting on record with the October 1959 release “Good Good Lovin,’” the new unit—Bennett, Byrd, and Stallworth, with Terry acting as a stage sub and studio vocalist as needed—became the best-known incarnation of the Famous Flames, shimmying into Star Time right alongside Soul Brother Number One. You hear them providing the crucial backdrop to Brown’s incendiary performances on *Live at the Apollo* (Vols. 1 and 2); you see them on *The T.A.M.I Show*, *Ski Party*, and *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Their final appearance on record was “Maybe the Last Time,” the throwback flip side to “Out of Sight,” a 1964 single, although the Famous Flames remained onstage and their artist credit remained on record releases through the summer of 1968.

Byrd, who also issued several solo singles, stayed with the Brown entourage for years after. As cowriter and co-vocalist of Brown hits “Licking Stick-Licking Stick,” “Get Up (I Feel Like Being a) Sex Machine,” and “Get Up, Get Into It, Get Involved” and as the leader of his own 1970s releases, “I Know You Got Soul” and “I Need Help (I Can’t Do It Alone),” he is likely the second-most sampled voice in pop music history behind Brown. Byrd, who married Brown vocalist Vicki Anderson, died of cancer in 2007, at age 73. Baby Lloyd Stallworth had a couple of minor solo appearances; he died in 2001. Bobby Bennett also issued a solo single. Johnny Terry, seen with James on the cover of the live LP *Pure Dynamite*, remained with the show on and off in various capacities through the years.

H.W. WITH CLIFF WHITE



FROM TOP Sonny Woods, Henry Booth, Hank Ballard, guitarist Cal Green, and Lawson Smith (clockwise from top left), 1955; Ballard, Norman Thrasher, Booth, and Smith (dressed in white, from left), 1957.

THE MIDNIGHTERS

To see how vocal groups helped form the music that would come to be known as rock & roll, one need only look to Detroit’s the Midnighters. As the Four Falcons in late 1950/early 1951, the vocal group initially consisted of lead singers Henry Booth and Charles Sutton, harmony vocalists Lawson Smith and Sonny Woods, and guitarist Alonzo Tucker. A solid live act very similar to the silky-smooth Orioles, the group changed its name to the Royals and was signed to Federal Records in 1952 by Johnny Otis. It did not distinguish itself, however, until Hank Ballard replaced Smith in 1953.

Ballard, a 16-year-old assembly-line worker from Alabama, had the gumption to fuse raunchy lyrics with gospel harmonies and rhythms, bringing grit and edginess to the Royals’ slick presentation. His first composition for the group—the suggestive “Get It”—was banned by several stations, yet still went to Number Six on the *Billboard* R&B chart. To avoid confusion with another rising vocal group from North Carolina called the Royals, they renamed themselves the Midnighters. (And Carolina’s Royals became the “5” Royales.)

The peak year for the Midnighters was 1954. Ballard’s “Work With Me Annie” and sequels, “Annie Had a Baby”