

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

Passionate Etta James Remembered

Legendary singer was embodiment of refined soul

(AP)—Etta James' performance of the enduring classic "At Last" was the embodiment of refined soul: Angelic-sounding strings harkened the arrival of her passionate yet measured vocals as she sang tenderly about a love finally realized after a long and patient wait.

In real life, little about James was as genteel as that song. The platinum blonde's first hit was a saucy R&B number about sex, and she was known as a hell-raiser who had tempestuous relationships with her family, her men and the music industry. Then she spent years battling a drug addiction that she admitted sapped away at her great talents.

The 73-year-old died on Friday from complications of leukemia.

"It's a tremendous loss for her fans around the world," said her manager Lupe De Leon. "She'll be missed. A great American singer. Her music defied category."

James' spirit could not be contained — perhaps that's what made her so magnetic in music; it is surely what made her so dynamic as one of R&B, blues and rock 'n' roll's underrated legends.

"The bad girls ... had the look that I liked," she wrote in her 1995 autobiography, "Rage to Survive." "I wanted to be rare, I wanted to be noticed, I wanted to be exotic as a Cotton Club chorus girl, and I wanted to be obvious as the most flamboyant hooker on the street. I just wanted to be."

Despite the reputation she cultivated, she would always be remembered best for "At Last." The jazz-inflected rendition wasn't the original, but it would become the most famous, and the song that would define her as a legendary singer. Over the decades, brides used it as their song down the aisle and car companies to hawk their wares, and it filtered from one generation to the next through its inclusion in movies like "American Pie." Perhaps most famously, President Obama and the first lady danced to a version at his inauguration ball.

The tender, sweet song belied the turmoil in her personal life. James — born Jamesette Hawkins — was born in Los Angeles to a mother whom she described as a scam art-



Etta James (left) and Beyonce arrive at the 2008 premiere of "Cadillac Records" at The Egyptian Theater in Hollywood, Calif.



Etta James in 1965.

ist, a substance abuser and a fleeting presence during her youth. She never knew her father, although she was told, and had believed, that he was the famous billiards player Minnesota Fats. He neither confirmed nor denied it: when they met, he simply told her: "I don't remember everything. I wish I did, but I don't."

She was raised by Lula and Jesse Rogers, who owned the rooming house where her mother once lived. The pair brought up James in the Christian faith, and as a young girl, her voice stood out in the church choir. James landed the solos in the choir and became so well known, she said that Hollywood stars would come to see her perform.

But she wouldn't stay a gospel singer for long. Rhythm and blues

lured her away from the church, and she found herself drawn to the grittiness of the music.

"My mother always wanted me to be a jazz singer, but I always wanted to be raunchy," she recalled in her book.

James recorded a string of hits in the late 1950s and '60s including "Trust In Me," "Something's Got a Hold On Me," "Sunday Kind of Love," "All I Could Do Was Cry," and of course, "At Last."

In 1967, she cut one of the most highly regarded soul albums of all time, "Tell Mama," an earthy fusion of rock and gospel music featuring blistering horn arrangements, funky rhythms and a churchy chorus. A song from the album, "Security," was a top 40 single in 1968.

Her professional success, however, was balanced against personal demons, namely a drug addiction. "I was trying to be cool," she told the AP in 1995, explaining what had led her to try heroin.

After recovering, James performed well into her senior years, and it was "At Last" that kept bringing her the biggest ovations.

But it was superstar Beyonce who serenaded the Obamas, not the legendary singer. Beyonce had portrayed James in "Cadillac Records," a big-screen retelling of Chess Records' heyday, and had started to claim "At Last" as her own.



President Barack Obama at a campaign event Thursday at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem. (AP Photo)

Soul Singer in Chief

(AP)—President Barack Obama took a brief and unexpected turn as a soul singer at a New York fundraiser, crooning a bar from an Al Green classic, and then joking that he hadn't been ushered off-stage.

It happened at Manhattan's Apollo Theater on Thursday, when the Commander in Chief stepped to the podium and veered from prepared remarks to thank Green for warming up the crowd.

Apparently not content with

simply praising him, Obama suddenly launched into Green's "Let's Stay Together," starting with the vibrato "I" and pausing for enthusiastic applause before finishing up with the line "so in love with you."


Obama said his staff didn't believe he'd really do it.

Then he joked that the Sandman hadn't come out — a reference to Sandman Sims, the tap dancer who chased unpopular acts offstage at the Apollo for decades.

Your Care Our First Priority



**Dr. Marcelitte
Failla**
Chiropractic
Physician



We are located at
1716 N.E. 42nd Ave.
Portland, OR 97213
(Between Broadway and Sandy Blvd.)



- Automobile accident injuries
- Chronic headache and joint pain
- Workers Compensation injuries

Call for an appointment! (503) 228-6140