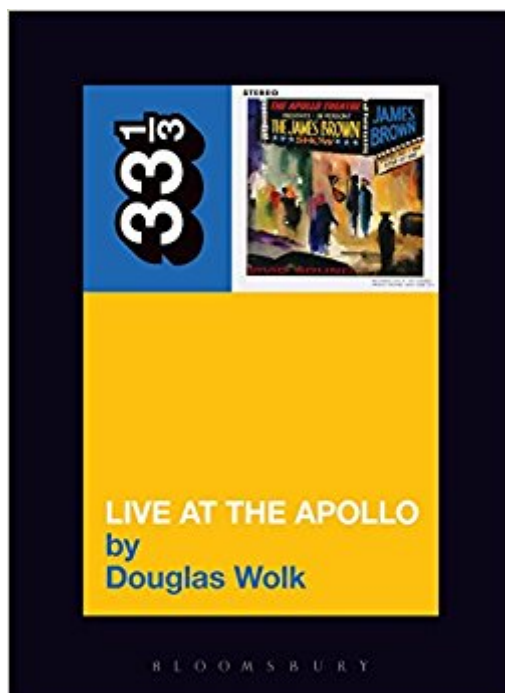


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# James Brown's Live At The Apollo (33 1/3)



## Synopsis

In this remarkable book, Douglas Wolk brings to life an October evening in 1962, at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem: an evening at the height of Cold War tensions. In great detail, Wolk pieces together what took place (and what was recorded) that night, and illustrates beautifully the enduring power of one of James Brown's - and popular music's - defining moments: Live at the Apollo. EXCERPT Standing on the stage of the Apollo at a sold-out show on the night of October 24, 1962, screaming, James Brown would have looked out and seen 1500 people screaming back at him in the audience, split between the floor and the balconies. The walls behind them were a dark crimson; the balconies were decorated with the laurel wreaths that are the emblem of Apollo the god, recalling Daphne, who became a laurel tree to escape his lust. Most of the audience thought there was a good chance they'd be dead within the week.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

James Brown's Live at the Apollo is famed as the best concert recording of his raw showmanship. Taped in fall 1962 at the venerable, and even legendary, showcase for black performers, the Apollo Theater of Harlem, the recording captured Brown when he was still something of an underground phenomenon. With a series of hits on the R&B charts to his credit, he was poised to move in on the pop charts. The show recorded was Brown's twenty-fourth that week--testimony in itself that he was indeed, as his publicity claimed, "the hardest working man in show business." Wolk neatly assesses the record's context and its function as the fuel for Brown's ascent to the pop stratosphere. Mike

"The highlight is Douglas Wolk's examination of James Brown's Live at the Apollo, which reads like a hypertext book. He moves moment-by-moment through the recording of the album, stopping every few paragraphs to elaborate, explain or digress. In the process, he opens up not only the particulars of Brown's live shows at the time, but how the Apollo show fits into Brown's legendary career, how Brown and his material fit into the history of R&B, and how the album fits into American culture, being recorded on the eve of the Cuban Missile Crisis." —Alex Rawls, Gambit Weekly (New Orleans) 10/26/04 —"slim, elegant volume" —Observer (UK Music monthly) November 2004"James Brown's Live at the Apollo is famed as the best concert recording of his raw showmanship. Taped in the fall of 1962 at the venerable, and even legendary, showcase for black performers, the Apollo Theater of Harlem, the recording captured Brown when he was still something of an underground phenomenon. With a series of hits on the R&B charts to his credit, he was poised to move in on the pop charts. The show recorded was Brown's twenty-fourth that week — testimony in itself that he was indeed, as his publicity claimed, "the hardest working man in show business." Wolk neatly assesses the record's context and its function as the fuel for Brown's ascent to the pop stratosphere." Reviewed by Mike Tribby in Booklist, Sept. 15, 2005"The setup's a stretch — "Most of the audience thought they'd be dead within the week" — but Wolk makes the case that the then-brewing Cuban missile crisis had something to do with why this is the most explosive live album ever. Wolk's writing is so evocative and his observations on Brown as the artist who becomes the art are so keen that you'll have the CD blaring in the background before he goes into his meticulous cut-by-cut analysis. And you'll hear things you never noticed before. A" —Austin American-Statesman, 10/17/04"James Brown's Live at the Apollo has often been cited as the first live album to make the concept commercially viable. Author Wolk races through the record like Brown through a set, splitting his ideas into very small sections, often barely a paragraph long, and capturing the electricity of the recording. He links to aspects of Brown's wider career "one of the strangest is 'The Knees of James Brown'), but these breaks don't interrupt the flow." —Jason Draper, Record Collector (UK) Feb. 2005"Live recordings are something we often take for granted. We forget that what we're hearing is more than music. That it's an event, something that happened in a specific time, at a specific place. Douglas Wolk, through piecing together the events of the evening in 1962 where James Brown recorded his classic Live at the Apollo performance, brings the event, the place, the music to life. If you haven't heard Live at the Apollo, do so now — it's essential. Then read this book, which promotes an even deeper love

for James Brown's landmark album.' [Zack Adcock, The Hub Weekly, 1/13/05](#)"This dissection of James Brown's Oct. 24, 1962, show at the Apollo and the resulting album is a resplendent work for both the amount of research and the passion Wolk provides. This short album history is not only a vivid recollection of Brown, but a colorful illustration of the time." [Mark Baumgarten, Willamette Week, 1/5/2005](#)["Slim, elegant volume."](#) [Observer \(Music Monthly\)](#)["Wolk breaks down the show minute by minute, song by song, to get at what made it such a transformative event."](#) [Washington Post, 2/13/05](#)["exemplary analysis of James Brown's legendary LP"](#) [MOJO, Jon Harrington, 1st March 2005](#)["...he advances, word by word, through the centerpiece of the disk, "Lost Someone," he tracks the cries emitted from the audience by a mysterious "little old lady," and then he speaks very well about the knees, the microphones, and the capes of James Brown the tragedian. Written in clear and precise language, the book is ideal while listening to the recording in, for example, the Deluxe edition brought out last year with notably improved sound."](#) [Soul Bag 178 \(French music magazine\)](#)Extract from Word, April 2007"The highlight is Douglas Wolk's examination of James Brown's Live at the Apollo, which reads like a hypertext book. He moves moment-by-moment through the recording of the album, stopping every few paragraphs to elaborate, explain or digress. In the process, he opens up not only the particulars of Brown's live shows at the time, but how the Apollo show fits into Brown's legendary career, how Brown and his material fit into the history of R&B, and how the album fits into American culture, being recorded on the eve of the Cuban Missile Crisis." [Alex Rawls, Gambit Weekly \(New Orleans\) 10/26/04](#)"James Brown's Live at the Apollo is famed as the best concert recording of his raw showmanship. Taped in the fall of 1962 at the venerable, and even legendary, showcase for black performers, the Apollo Theater of Harlem, the recording captured Brown when he was still something of an underground phenomenon. With a series of hits on the R&B charts to his credit, he was poised to move in on the pop charts. The show recorded was Brown's twenty-fourth that week" ["testimony in itself that he was indeed, as his publicity claimed, "the hardest working man in show business."](#) Wolk neatly assesses the record's context and its function as the fuel for Brown's ascent to the pop stratosphere." Reviewed by Mike Tribby in Booklist, Sept. 15, 2005

I learned more about 1962, as well as what happened before and during James Brown's performance at the Apollo. Love it.

## Get On Up!!

A simple but effective running of the history, with comments on the individual recordings, of the songs that appear on James Brown's first major album hit, "Live at the Apollo" recorded in October 1962 alongside the then occurring critical world event of the Cuban Missile Crisis, makes for an effective time capsule telling by Douglas Wolk of the making of this classic recording. While the author veers towards the over stated at times (did the 1,500 in the audience based on the limited public news released really behave as they did based on the belief they could die in a week!) he does a much better job of nailing the history of James Brown. These include how he got to make this recording against his record company's indifference; his on balance limited hit record success to date offset by his constant touring of an all action performance, but most of all that what was on show here was one man's personal and stylistic interpretations of a suite of songs that covered black music across the 20s to the early 60s. Some songs had undergone numerous adaptations and recordings by others plus JB before the versions done here (the ripping of of other peoples songs seems almost to have been a lifelong JB hallmark). What was really being performed was an exercise where songs could only last for less than a minute to over ten minutes as JB backed by his ever tight band riding on their leaders moods and his reading of the audience emotions laid down one of the truly original live recordings made. The fact that the LP was in popular demand for many months after to be played in full on R&B radio stations at a time when single hits were paramount was testament that something unique that connected with the black audiences of 1962/1963 had occurred and it was to be some time before JB reconnected in such a way again (and certainly never again with another live album, despite several attempts). Wolk also does a very good expose of Brown's ego and resulting mis-treatment of all around him plus how the recording was not a true full recording from having to be adapted and edited from the true JB live revue show, which while visually spectacular would not have translated into such an effective audio format. A story telling which is certainly "on the good foot" throughout.

A great short read about the live recording sessions that led to the creation of one of the seminal R&B albums. The writing is punchy, respectful, and never overwrought -- except for the glaring and jarring detours into the Cuban missile crisis. The episode is clearly relevant to the story, because the concert in question took place in roughly the same 24-hour time span that the crisis was unfolding, but while everyone in the Apollo that night may have had the crisis on their minds, the digressions into what the fighter planes and the decision makers were doing at exactly the same

time that James Brown was wiping sweat off his brow as he switched gears and tore into another song are distracting and ultimately tell us little about why the crisis made the night charged. Wolk should have stuck to the performances and the music or else found a better way of weaving the crisis into the book.

Given a book-length space to fill, many magazine writers do what comes naturally: they write a book-length magazine article. Wolk, however, approaches his narrative from the top down, treating the long form with the reverence and intricate attention of a clockmaker god. His story moves chronologically in an evening's frame, but it's also shot through with a series of gears and patterns, nibble-sized pieces, and odd bits of synchronicity that align in unexpected choruses. Gliding across it all, of course, is the electric, eccentric energy of James Brown. Scrapbookers, beware: this is more than simple homage. It's a work that stands independently, with one hell of a soundtrack to boot!

I like good music writing -- it can be as lyrical and inspiring as the music it is about, albeit in another art form -- but sometimes, some music defies the written word -- Volk has worked hard here and brings us lots of facts -- but James Brown on this record in particular defies the written word -- all you can say is that some yowling and howling is so other-worldly that you gotta hear it to get it -- thanks for this valiant attempt -- but I think that after all is said and done, maybe words are not much help when it comes to this particular transcendent experience....

Fans of James Brown will find Douglas Wolk's slim but hard-hitting classic, *Live At The Apollo: 33 1/3*, brings to life Brown's performance in 1962, piecing together what took place, what was recorded that night, and Brown's musical heritage and contributions as a whole. *Live At The Apollo* recommended pick for any avid fan of Brown and a welcome contribution to 20th Century American Music History collections.

the cuban missile crisis almost brought an end to life on earth as we know it. who saved the day? maybe it was j.f.k.... or maybe it was the number one soul brother james brown. douglass wolk makes a good case for the godfather of soul in this well-researched, compelling, funky good time book.

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