

JAMES, ETTA

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ELIZABETH FORTSON ARROYO (1996)  
Updated bibliography

## JAMES, ETTA

JANUARY 5, 1938

Rhythm and blues singer Etta James, born Jamesetta Hawkins in Los Angeles, sang during her childhood in the choir of Saint Paul's Baptist Church. She began to sing professionally at the age of fourteen, when she worked with a rhythm and blues ensemble led by Johnny Otis. Her first recording, "Roll with Me Henry" (1954), was originally banned by radio stations because of its salacious content. However, the record became a hit, and it was rereleased in 1955 under the title "Wallflower."

In the mid- to late 1950s, James was one of the most popular singers in rhythm and blues, trailing only Dinah Washington and Ruth Brown in the number of hit rhythm and blues records she had. Nominally a blues shouter, her gospel-influenced voice was also by turns sweet, pouting, or gruff. Among her hit records, many of which were recorded for Chicago's Chess Records, were "Good Rockin' Daddy" (1955), "W-O-M-A-N" (1955), "How Big a Fool" (1958), "All I Could Do Was Cry" (1960), "Stop the Wedding" (1962), "Pushover" (1963), and "Something's Got a Hold on Me" (1964). James toured with Little Richard, James Brown, Little Willie John, and Johnny "Guitar" Watson.

Heroin addiction forced James to quit recording in the mid- to late 1960s. She eventually entered a rehabilitation program that enabled her to return to the music industry in 1973 with the album *Etta James*, which won a Grammy Award. James then recorded numerous albums, including *Come a Little Closer* (1974), *Etta Is Betta Than Evvah* (1976), *Deep in the Night* (1978), *Blues in the Night with Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson* (1986), *Seven Year Itch* (1988), and *Stickin' to My Guns* (1990). Nonetheless, her pioneering role as a rhythm and blues singer was often overlooked until the 1990s. In 1990 she won an NAACP Image Award, and in 1993 she was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

In 1998 James published her memoirs, *Rage to Survive: The Etta James Story*. James had suffered from a lifelong weight problem and in recent years was forced to perform in a wheelchair because of her weight. In 2003 she

had gastric bypass surgery and lost two hundred pounds, bringing new energy and enthusiasm to her performances. In 2003 she received a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame.

**See also** Rhythm and Blues

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ROBERT W. STEPHENS (1996)  
Updated by publisher 2005

## JAMISON, JUDITH

MAY 10, 1943

Born the younger of two children in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, dancer Judith Jamison studied piano and violin as a child. Tall by the age of six, Jamison was enrolled in dance classes by her parents in an effort to complement her exceptional height with grace. She received most of her early dance training in classical ballet with master teachers Marion Cuyjet, Delores Brown, and John Jones at the Judimar School of Dance. Jamison decided on a career in dance only after three semesters of coursework in psychology at Fisk University, and she completed her education at the Philadelphia Dance Academy. In 1964 she was spotted by choreographer Agnes de Mille and invited to appear in de Mille's *The Four Marys* at the New York-based American Ballet Theatre. Jamison moved to New York in 1965 and that same year joined the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT).

Jamison performed with AAADT on tours of Europe and Africa in 1966. When financial pressures forced Ailey briefly to disband his company later that year, Jamison joined the Harkness Ballet for several months and then returned to the re-formed AAADT in 1967. She quickly became a principal dancer with that company, dancing a variety of roles that showcased her pliant technique, stunning beauty, and exceptional stature of five feet, ten inches. Jamison excelled as the goddess Erzulie in Geoffrey Holder's *The Prodigal Prince* (1967), as the Mother in a revised version of Ailey's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* (1968), and as the Sun in the 1968 AAADT revival of Lucas Hoving's *Icarus*. These larger-than-life roles fit neatly with Jamison's regal bearing and highly responsive emotional

center, and critics praised her finely drawn dance interpretations that were imbued with power and grace. Jamison and Ailey's collaboration deepened, and she created a brilliant solo in his *Masekela Language* (1969). Set to music of South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, Jamison portrayed a frustrated and solitary woman dancing in a seedy saloon. Her electrifying performances of Ailey's fifteen-minute solo *Cry* (1971) propelled her to an international stardom unprecedented among modern dance artists. Dedicated by Ailey "to all black women everywhere—especially our mothers," the three sections of *Cry* successfully captured a broad range of movements, emotions, and images associated with black womanhood as mother, sister, lover, goddess, supplicant, confessor, and dancer.

In 1976 Jamison danced with ballet star Mikhail Baryshnikov in Ailey's *Pas de Duke* set to music by Duke Ellington. This duet emphasized the classical line behind Jamison's compelling modern dance technique and garnered her scores of new fans. Jamison's celebrity advanced, and she appeared as a guest artist with the San Francisco Ballet, the Swedish Royal Ballet, the Cullberg Ballet, and the Vienna State Ballet. In 1977 she created the role of Potiphar's wife in John Neumeier's *Josephslegende* for the Vienna State Opera, and in 1978 she appeared in Maurice Béjart's updated version of *Le Spectre de la Rose* with the Ballet of the Twentieth Century. Several choreographers sought to work with Jamison as a solo artist, and important collaborations included John Parks's *Nubian Lady* (1972), John Butler's *Facets* (1976), and Ulysses Dove's *Inside* (1980).

In 1980 Jamison left the Ailey company to star in the Broadway musical *Sophisticated Ladies*, set to the music of Duke Ellington. She later turned her formidable talent to choreography, where her work has been marked by a detached sensuality and intensive responses to rhythm. Jamison founded her own dance company, the Jamison Project, to explore the opportunities of getting a group of dancers together, for both my choreography [and] to commission works from others. Alvin Ailey's failing health caused Jamison to rejoin the AAADT as artistic associate for the 1988–1989 season. In December 1989 Ailey died, and Jamison was named artistic director of the company. She has continued to choreograph, and her ballets include *Divining* (1984), *Forgotten Time* (1989), *Hymn* (1993), *Double Exposure* (2000), and *Here . . . and Now* (2002), all performed by the AAADT.

Jamison has received numerous awards and honors, including a Presidential Appointment to the National Council of the Arts, the 1972 *Dance Magazine* Award, and the Candace Award from the National Coalition of One Hundred Black Women. Her great skill as an administra-

tor has led the AAADT to the forefront of American dance, operating consistently without a large deficit, and in residence at the largest single facility devoted to dance in the country. Her greatest achievement as a dancer was an inspiring ability to seem supremely human and emotive within an elastic and powerful dance technique.

**See also** Ailey, Alvin; Ballet; Dove, Ulysses; Ellington, Duke

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THOMAS F. DEFRANTZ (1996)  
Updated by author 2005

## JAZZ

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This entry consists of three distinct but interrelated articles.

#### OVERVIEW

Leonard Goines

#### JAZZ IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE

John Gennari

#### JAZZ SINGERS

Linda Dahl

### OVERVIEW

Despite complex origins, the status of jazz as a distinctively African-American music is beyond question. Nonetheless, in its development from folk and popular sources in turn-of-the-twentieth-century America, jazz has transcended boundaries of ethnicity and genre. Played in every country of the globe, it is perhaps twentieth-century America's most influential cultural creation, and its worldwide impact, on both popular and art music, has been enormous. Jazz has proved to be immensely protean and has existed in a number of diverse though related styles, from New Orleans- and Chicago-style Dixieland jazz, big band or swing, bebop, funky cool jazz, hard bop, modal jazz, free jazz, and jazz rock. One reason for the variety in jazz is that