

## Blow By Blow - Maceo Parker on James Brown, George Clinton, And Love

Written by Charles Waring

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*"It's kind of like spin the bottle,"* laughs veteran funk saxophonist **Maceo Parker**, *"and wherever it lands, it lands."*

He's attempting to describe how he decides what to serve up in terms of music and entertainment for the British public when arrives in London's

### **Roundhouse**

venue on Friday July 5th as part of the UK capital's

### **Innervisions Festival**

*"It will be a little bit of this, a little bit of that, like I do always when I perform. And maybe some surprises, too... but it will all be Maceo."*

Originally from a small town called Kinston in North Carolina, Maceo Parker is 76 now (he was born on February 14th 1943) but talks with the energy and enthusiasm of a much younger man.

*"I was born into music,"*

he says, casting his mind back to his formative years back in the 1950s.

*"We had a piano at home and because of that, the adults - my mother and father, and friends in the choir - would come and have rehearsals, which as little kids we'd stand around and listen to."*

It also turned out that his mom's brother, his Uncle Bobby, led a professional big band called Bobby Butler's Mighty Blue Notes. *"We would go to their rehearsals and see all the music stands and different instruments like the trombone, trumpet and guitar,"*

he says. Inspired by seeing their uncle's band in action up close, Maceo took up the saxophone while his older brother, Kellis, opted for the trombone. Younger brother, Melvin, was drawn to the drums. They joined forces and formed their own rhythm and blues group as youngsters in high school.

*"We called ourselves the Junior Blue Notes, trying to pattern ourselves after my Uncle's band,"* says Maceo, who also reveals that the siblings were earning money doing gigs while still in school.

*"We gave the bulk of the money to mom, but then we would keep a little bit and would buy*

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*albums and 45s that we liked that we heard on the radio."*

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Listening to the radio opened up a whole new musical world to Maceo and his brothers. In fact, when they should have been in bed sleeping, they were under the covers secretly tuning in to a radio show by a US DJ called John R (aka John Richbourg, who would go on to become a noted R&B record producer). He was renowned for coining his own street-slang vocabulary and famously describing records as "a gas" or a "smasheroonie." Remembers Maceo: *"He came out of Nashville, Tennessee, and played late-night music. He had rhythm and blues, some jazz, rock 'n' roll. And we stayed up late at night listening to this John R. And if we liked something he played, we'd go buy it."* □

Ray Charles was a favourite recording artist of Maceo's in the late 50s as was **James Brown** and he had the opportunity to see both in concert during that time. The saxophonist says that while the audience around him were screaming and going crazy, he was studying everything with an eagle-eyed fascination, particularly in regard to James Brown, whom he would later work with. "

*I'd seen his shows several times and I was learning his style seeing him. I learned his concept way before I joined him while I was in high school. I knew it all. I knew how fast he liked to do stuff and we tried to imitate some of that stuff when we are doing our own thing with our own little band."*

Maceo, of course, rose to fame in James Brown's band in the mid 1960s, and his jabbing saxophone solos became a key feature of "The Godfather's" live shows during the Georgia singer's hard funk period. He says that it was his younger brother, Melvin, who helped to put him on Brown's radar. By this time, the Parkers were in college in Greensboro, North Carolina (Maceo was studying music), but playing in different bands. One night Melvin was playing a gig in a local club with his own band when James Brown, fresh from playing a concert at the city's Coliseum venue, dropped in for some much-needed R&R after an arduous night entertaining others. Says Maceo: *"I remember that I learned later that James said to the club owner, 'wow, I like this group, but I especially like the drummer. Tell him I'd like to meet him when they take a*









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*my name rhymes with blow - as in 'blow, Maceo.' 'Blow Kellis' doesn't really fit. But 'Maceo, we want you to blow,' fits. It rhymes and it makes sense."*

***Maceo Parker is due to play at the Roundhouse on Friday July 5th 2019 as part of London's Innervisions Festival.***

Ticket info: <https://www.roundhouse.org.uk/whats-on/2019/innervisions-festival-2019/>