

R.I.P. James Mtume

James Mtume has died at age 76. The songwriter and musician from Philadelphia had a career as a percussionist, leader, songwriter and producer. In 1969 he recorded his first albums as a leader and those endeavors included players like his uncle Albert Heath, Herbie Hancock and Don Cherry. He spent most of the '70s working in bands with jazz luminaries Miles Davis, Art Farmer, Sonny Rollins, Eddie Henderson and McCoy Tyner. By the end of the decade, he and Reggie Lucas would collaborate on writing and producing songs for R&B stars. The two met in Davis's band and toured with Roberta Flack for a number of years. Their partnership crafted classic songs for Phyllis Hyman, Stephanie Mills, Lou Rawls, The Spinners and Flack.

Mtume was busy working with Lucas during this time in the '80s but he still managed to put together his own group. Tawatha Agee, also a Philadelphia native, was the main voice of Mtume and would record on all five of their albums. The title track from their 1983 album *Juicy Fruit* was a number one hit and signature song that had some controversy. Epic Records told James Mtume that radio would not play the song because of the line "You can lick me everywhere" which was replaced in the video with "Candy kisses everywhere." The song became even more famous in 1994 when it was sampled for "Juicy" by rapper The Notorious B.I.G. The song is now an essential sample continually used in pop music.

Mtume would eventually have 11 singles to chart including "You, Me & He," "Breathless" and "Give It On Up (If You Want To.)" They recorded five albums before disbanding in the late '80s. In the middle of the decade, he produced the album *You Might Be Surprised* for Roy Ayers. Mtume was musically active in the '90s writing and producing for Mary J. Blige and R. Kelly. He also composed the theme song to the television show *New York Undercover*. After retirin from the music industr he

hosted the Open Line radio show on WBLS for two decades until 2013 and continued his activist work.Â

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