

Throwback: James Jamerson

James Jamerson's bass anchored numerous hits for Motown records and has been an endless inspiration for so many players after him. As a member of studio musician band The Funk Brothers, his sound became part of the company's identity. The Temptation's "My Girl," Stevie Wonder's "I Was Made To Love Her" and Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" are a handful of songs made whole by Jamerson's touch. He played on every Motown project from 1963 to 1968 and was the most recognized member of the Hitsville USA studio musicians. His jazz-influenced style was improvisational and he was one of the first to use the electric bass which became his trademark instrument. Jamerson showed future bass players how to create on the spot,Â build bass lines from the melody and make the bass a leading instead of a background instrument. Jamerson thrived with Motown until the early '70s when the company relocated to Los Angeles, California. In his post-Motown days, he recorded with Smokey Robinson, The Sylvers, Bonnie Pointer and Robert Palmer.Â His reign as the most popular bass player in pop music had long ended by the time music changed in the '80s. Jamerson never found his professional footing again and was no longer working as a session musician.Â Â His role as an innovator did not mesh with the commercial sounds of the new decade.

In 1983, he passed after being sick with heart failure, pneumonia and cirrhosis of the liver at age 47. The work he left behind caused him to be recognized by so many as the father ofÂ the modern bass. He is one of few supporting musicians to haveÂ been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, receive a Hollywood Walk of Fame star and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2021, 38 years after his death, his grave at Woodlawn Cemetery in Detroit, MI was outfitted with a proper headstone.Â

