

Kelsey Bennett's 'Black Velvet The Godfather of Soul' ft Charles Bradley



Anyone fortunate enough to witness singer Charles Bradley's tribute performance to James Brown (under the stage name of Black Velvet) knows that two dimensions are not enough to contain the force he brings to his audience. Photographer Kelsey Bennett defies these odds in her latest series, Black Velvet The Godfather of Soul, the result of which is a suite of indelible images showcasing the transformative powers of music and identity.

Shot over Summer and Fall 2010, with an astounding reciprocal trust between subject and photographer, The Godfather of Soul offers a remarkable glimpse into the personal life of Charles Bradley and showcases the genuine devotion to the craft of this one-of-a-kind performer.

This summer Charles – who has been a singer since the age of 16 is now in his 60ths and at the height of his career – will be performing his original material, opening for Stevie Wonder at the Hollywood Bowl. As Bradley's fame as a singer in his own right continues to rise, his local gigs performing James Brown's material as Black Velvet has become less frequent. Transitioning from playing local gigs in Bed-Stuy, he is now touring the world and hopes to merge both his original songs and Black Velvet's (James Brown) material on the same stage one day. Bennett's photos offer an immediate and much deserved reverence for a local legend.

In 2010, Bennett had her first and critically acclaimed solo exhibition with The Christopher Henry Gallery, Hypnogogia. Her

second solo show *On The Lam* soon followed, hailed as a compelling visual autobiography of Bennett's ongoing exploration of her own identity and a documentation of the collective desire to escape ordinary life. Bennett's work has also been featured at The Lu Magnus Gallery, as well as the Scope and Fountain art fairs.

Most recently she has been working with her grandfather, singer Tony Bennett, documenting his upcoming album, *Duets II*. This project afforded her the opportunity to photograph music icons such as Aretha Franklin, Amy Winehouse, Willie Nelson, and of course Tony himself. When she is not on the road with her camera, Bennett works as a newborn photographer in a Brooklyn maternity ward . . . and brings art to the people with *El Camino ARTRV*.

To view more photos from the series visit Kelseybenett.com.

More about Charles Bradley: *Black Velvet* (Charles Bradley) was born in Florida in 1948 and grew up in Brooklyn. In 1962, when Charles was 14, his sister took him to the Apollo to see James Brown in concert. He was so taken by the show that when he returned home he put on a James Brown record, tied a string to a broomstick and practiced whipping the microphone back like James Brown did with his microphone stand.

Two years later Charles left home. Living on the street and struggling to find a way to support himself he enrolled in a program called Job Core. It was in Jobs Core's auditorium, at the age of 16, where Bradley first bowled over an audience. Hitchhiking across the Country, Charles landed in San Francisco and got a regular gig performing (among others) Otis Redding, Sam Cooke, and James Brown material. Charles had gotten used to people asking "you look like James Brown, can you sing like him?" and the public always liked it best when he performed James Brown. So Always knowing how to please his audience Charles created the stage name *Black Velvet*.

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BLACK VELVET

THE GODFATHER OF SOUL

JULY 21 – AUGUST 14

CHRISTOPHER HENRY GALLERY

127 ELIZABETH STREET, NYC

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