

**Maceo and Melvin Parker: Early Influences** <sup>[1]</sup>

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Maceo Parker. Photograph by Cedric N. Chatterley for *African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina*. Copyright, North Carolina Arts Council. Published with permission.

<sup>[2]</sup>Saxophonist Maceo Parker (born in 1943) and drummer Melvin Parker (born in 1944) are brothers born in Kinston. Rising from a musical family -- their father played piano and drums and their mother sang at church -- they both became key members of James Brown's band in the 1960s. Melvin Parker contributed a unique drumming style that helped define Brown's funk innovations, and he is considered a legend in funk and soul. Saxophonist Maceo Parker later formed his own band. After playing on and off with James Brown in the 1960s, Melvin Parker joined his brother's band.

Maceo Parker continues to tour and has received numerous awards. These include induction into the North Carolina Music Hall of Fame in 2011 and receipt of the North Carolina Heritage Award <sup>[3]</sup> in 2016.

Kinston musicians helped shape the sound that became known as funk and propelled the James Brown Band to new levels of performance and recognition. Nat Jones, Dick Knight, Levi Raspberry, and the brothers Melvin and Maceo Parker were influential members of the James Brown Band. Maceo Parker, still a very popular musician, has a busy schedule of performances around the world.

Maceo and Melvin Parker trace their own musical beginnings to childhood experiences (growing up in Kinston).

Maceo recalls:

At a very early age, I knew people in your [own] family are going to be a little bit partial. You could sound like frogs, but it's, "Oh, that's cute! Oh, my goodness!" You know? But then when you get that from somebody on the other side of town

Melvin Parker, too, remembers that in their family, music started at an early age:

Mom and Dad used to have us give a play, a program, and it had to include music, and we would do that every Sunday morning on the front porch of the house—a little house at 121 Railroad Street. We used to do poetry and songs that we h



Melvin Parker at the former site of the Sahara Club in Kinston. Photograph by Titus Brooks ~~Heagins, Titus Brooks. Melvin Parker at the former site of the Sahara Club in Kinston, North Carolina. In African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina. Copyright, North Carolina Arts Council. Republished with permission.~~ Delon. And D

When they were children, Melvin, Maceo, and Kellis Parker found a place for their band to perform at the movie theater. Melvin Parker tells the story:

On Saturday mornings, we found a little talent show at the "colored" theater, the State Theater. We won that talent show a couple of times. It was sponsored by Maola ice cream. We wrote a little song about Maola ice cream, and we became

Maola  
Maola ice cream  
Maola ice cream is a treat  
It really is hard to beat

Everybody at school and all the kids in the neighborhood knew that song.

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**References**

Bryan, Sarah, Beverly Bush Patterson, Michelle Lanier, and Titus Brooks Heagins. *African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina*. (China, 2013), p. XI, 7-12.

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Heagins, Titus Brooks. *Melvin Parker at the former site of the Sahara Club in Kingston, North Carolina* In *African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina* (China, 2013), p.14.

Chatterley, Cedric N. *Maceo Parker, legend of jazz and funk, holding a saxophone* In *African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina* (China, 2013), p.6.

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