

James Brown Band: "Almost Like a Kinston Band" ^[1]

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James Brown discovered musicians in eastern North Carolina who helped his band develop its distinctive sound.

Dick Knight, a Kinston resident and musician, recalled that the James Brown Band "was almost like a Kinston band":



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^[2]**Dick Knight**

There was Maceo Parker, Nathaniel Jones, Melvin Parker, Levi Rasbury, and myself. There were five—five from Kinston. Nat Jones was the music arranger. He was very talented. And he was also playing the alto saxophone. Maceo was do

Nathaniel "Nat" Jones

Nathaniel "Nat" Jones was one of the first Kinston musicians Brown hired. Jones studied with the [Adkin High School](#) ^[3] band teacher, Geneva Perry, who had been a professional saxophonist touring with the International Sweethearts of Rhythm before she settled in Kinston. Perry was a life-changing figure for Jones and many other musicians from Lenoir County.



Nathaniel "Nat" Jones. Courtesy of Edwin Jones.

^[3]Nat Jones graduated from Adkin High in 1955, the class valedictorian. He went on to receive a degree in music with *cum laude* distinction from North Carolina Central University in Durham, and then served as band director at several eastern North Carolina high schools, including Adkin. When school was not in session, Jones played professionally up and down the East Coast.

In the spring of 1964, he auditioned for James Brown, and left teaching to become a full-time touring musician. He became the musical director of the James Brown Band and co-wrote songs with Brown. When the James Brown Band appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1966, Jones played the famous saxophone solo on "I Got You (I Feel Good)."

Jones led the way for other young musicians from eastern North Carolina to tour and record with James Brown. Jones's student, the trombonist Levi Raspberry, followed, as did the trumpet-playing Florida native and Kinston resident Dick Knight, the drummer Sam Lathan from Wilson, and Kinston's own Parker brothers, the drummer Melvin and Maceo, a saxophonist.

Melvin Parker

Melvin Parker recalls meeting James Brown in Greensboro, North Carolina, when he and Maceo were students at North Carolina A & T University:



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While my group was onstage playing, these musicians were in the audience talking about the musicians in my group, and trying to determine whether or not the guys would add something to their groups. So James Brown wanted to hire me. Anyway, after we finished that night, I called my dad. I said, "Hey, Dad." He said, "What?" This is about 1:30, 2 o'clock in the morning. I said, "Guess who was in the club and heard me play and liked the way I play and wants me to join him?" But James Brown said, "Listen, Melvin. I understand you're in school, and your dad is right, you need to stay in school. But whenever you get out of school and you finish school or, you know, whenever the opportunity arises that you're not in

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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.13-16.

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Heagins, Titus Brooks. *Dick Knight with the Monitors* In *African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina* (China, 2013), p.XIV.

Heagins, Titus Brooks. *Drummer Melvin Parker*. In *African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina* (China, 2013), p.19.

Nathaniel "Nat" Jones. Photo courtesy of Edwin Jones in *African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina* (China, 2013), p.17.

Subjects:

[Black and African American People](#) ^[6]

[Music](#) ^[7]

[Musicians](#) ^[8]

Origin - location:

[Lenoir County](#) ^[9]

[Kinston](#) ^[10]

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