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There has been no shortage of writing about the seminal singer, bandleader, and self-appointed “Godfather of Soul” James Brown. Brown is a fascinating figure, larger than life, often serving as a lightning rod for controversy throughout his career. Personally, I found myself looking forward to picking *The One* up from my bedside nightly as I journeyed through Smith’s fascinating narrative, drawn along by his recounting of James Brown’s long, productive, yet troubled life. In many ways, Brown looms as large as Louis Armstrong in the pantheon of genre-establishing, original American musical and cultural voices of the twentieth century. However, much of what has been published by and about Brown was filtered through his own prodigious PR, marketing, and hype machine. Refreshingly, RJ Smith’s biography offers an engaging, thoroughly objective, and vivid portrayal of this deeply flawed, but supremely gifted artist,

showman, and entrepreneur. As did Armstrong, Brown grew up on the fringes of society, and learned how to fight to defend himself. That scrappiness and willingness to go head to head with anyone in authority that he perceived as a threat or disagreeing with his frequent and sometimes eccentric edicts is one of the threads that tie *The One* together.

Brown's rise from the depths of abject poverty, his imprisonments, battles with state and federal tax authorities, and his frequent brushes with the American legal system are not romanticized in any way, instead they provide the reader with a solid basis for understanding Brown's lifelong insistence on being wholly self-sufficient and trusting of very few persons. This story is told in a manner that allows the reader to draw one's own conclusions about Brown's business acumen, which seemed to vary throughout his career. Smith explains that Brown built up his extensive financial empire and investments without the help of the well-connected lawyers, accountants, and managers that we take for granted in today's music world. Nearly all of his close advisors lived in or near his home in Georgia. Not long before his 2006 death, Smith reports that Brown had set up two trusts, leaving the substantial receipts that his songs, image, likeness, royalties, and annuities would generate to benefit his grandchildren and impoverished children near the region he called home on the Georgia-South Carolina border. He also continued to draw a salary of \$100,000 per month in his dotage, illustrating that even at the last stage of his career, he had marshaled his resources carefully enough to provide for himself and his extended family.

For a student of the music business, the book is a rich repository of Brown's dealings with all levels of the industry. Brown had an innate sense of where his money was coming from and how he was using it, even if he sometimes used his down-home mannerisms to give the impression that he was just an entertainer, another parallel to Louis Armstrong's public and private personae. Especially interesting is how he dealt with his various band members, most of whom were extremely talented artists in their own right, but subjected themselves to Brown's harsh treatment willingly, not only for the steady paycheck, but because they realized that as a concert performer, Brown was without equal and they were a part of making musical history. Tales of his nearly instantaneous music creation in the studio, using a riff or beat to build an iconic funk song such as *Get on the Good Foot*, while conducting the musicians to produce the music he heard in his head also makes for compelling reading.

This volume would be useful not only as a case study for a self-made artist, but also for any course in popular music, African American studies, or sociology that looks at the cultural or societal impacts of popular music. Brown's legacy includes many outpourings of social activism, lyrics, and interviews that addressed black self-reliance and entrepreneurship, convincing young Americans to stay in school, and a host of anti-drug songs and initiatives. The fact that Brown was a staunch Republican who corresponded regularly with politicians, presidents, and other power brokers provides rich material for discussion with students about music's and musicians' roles in our world. *The One* stands as a notable achievement providing a more balanced and well-researched look at one of the most interesting artist-entrepreneurs in American popular music, for which RJ Smith can be justifiably proud.

Keith Hatschek



KEITH HATSCHEK is Professor of Music and Director of the Music Management Program at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. Prior to joining academia, he worked in the music business for more than twenty-five years. He is the author of two music industry books: *The Golden Moment: Recording Secrets of the Pros* and *How To Get a Job in the Music Industry*, which provides career development tools and strategies for young

music professionals. He contributes monthly music industry commentary for the music blog, *Echoes-Insights for Independent Artists*. Among his research interests are music industry curriculum and pedagogy, student-led music businesses, recording and music technology, and the life and work of jazz pianist, Dave Brubeck. He has presented a number of conference papers and talks about Brubeck's role in Cold War jazz diplomacy, the Civil Rights movement and musicians' collaborative efforts to address segregation in the mid-twentieth-century United States.