

Atlantic City Walk Of Fame To Be Unveiled Next Week

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ATLANTIC CITY — Some entertainers who have wowed crowds in America's Favorite Playground have died.

Venues that no longer exist fade from memory.

The city will publicly honor those entertainers who used to or still dazzle crowds on the resort's stages at 1 p.m. April 24 when the Atlantic City Walk of Fame will be unveiled in a ceremony at Brighton Park.

"We are just really excited about this. The first one will be a jump-start. They will see that we are serious. Our hearts are in this," said Vanessa Jordan, president and CEO of the National Rhythm & Blues Music Society.

The first inductees to the Atlantic City Walk of Fame, who will be honored with a 9-by-12-inch plaque embedded in the ground, will be the late James Brown; the late soul-jazz saxophonist Grover Washington Jr.; the New York City soul vocal group Little Anthony and the Imperials; and the Philadelphia soul vocal group the Delfonics.

Originally, the idea was to induct 12 performers in the inaugural class — three bands, three vocal groups, three pop acts and three jazz artists — but one of the rules to be inducted into the Atlantic City Walk of Fame is that the artists themselves, their family members, management or legal representatives must come to accept the honor in person, Jordan said.

In some cases, Walk of Fame organizers reached out to the representatives of a particular artist, but they don't know whether the invitation ever made it to the artists themselves, Jordan said.

“Frankie Valli, his people, we reached out to,” Jordan said, adding overtures were also made to representatives of the R&B group the Isley Brothers and the late singer, songwriter and pianist Nina Simone. “Dionne Warwick, we tried to get her.”

The five-person committee, who came up with the names for induction, were Jordan; former Mayor Lorenzo Langford; Marc Berman, an Atlantic City-based celebrity interviewer; Stuart Bascombe, a founding member of the R&B vocal group Black Ivory; and Henrietta Shelton, founder and president of the Chicken Bone Beach Historical Foundation.

The plan is to have another induction ceremony next year, but the event doesn’t always have to be held in April, Jordan said.

Future ceremonies will be based on the availability of the artists or their representatives — they all have to be present on the same day — the city and the National Rhythm & Blues Music Society officials, she said.

Deanna Brown, one of James Brown’s daughters, will be coming from Atlanta; Clarence Collins, a founding member of Little Anthony and the Imperials, will fly in from Nevada; and Jerome “Little Anthony” Gourdine will travel from Florida, Jordan said.

Little Anthony and the Imperials have performed in just about every city casino, except Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, Little Anthony said.

In 1993, Little Anthony and the Imperials reunited to perform their first live show in more than 20 years with a concert at Resorts Casino Hotel. Over the decades, Little Anthony has performed live as both a member of the Imperials and as a solo act, which is what he is doing currently.

Little Anthony and the Imperials had hits from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s with such songs as “Tears on My Pillow,” “Hurt So Bad,” “I’m on the Outside Looking In” and “Goin’ Out of My Head.” They were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2009.

"I didn't even know they even had (a Walk of Fame). My son is my manager. ... My son told me about it," Little Anthony said. "We had a great success in Atlantic City."

Washington was one of the few jazz artists to experience pop chart commercial success, which allowed him to perform in casino showrooms.

The jazz saxophonist's collaboration on the song "Just the Two of Us" with the late soul artist Bill Withers reached No. 2 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1981. His full-length recordings, "Mister Magic" and "Feels So Good," were both No. 1 albums on the R&B charts in 1975.

Washington entertained at Tropicana and the Claridge during the 1980s and the casino-less Trump Regency Hotel, the former Trump's Castle and the former Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort during the 1990s.

The saxophonist's daughter, Shana Bly Washington, will be at the ceremony to accept the accolade on her father's behalf. She remembers being a 16-year-old and seeing her father perform during the early 1990s at the Taj Mahal.

"It's important to me. My dad was the best human being on the planet and the best musician," Shana Bly Washington said about the Walk of Fame honor. "Teenagers (today) never got a chance to see him. It's really for the legacy. I loved my dad. He was so humble."

Formed in 1965 in Philadelphia, the Delfonics performed during the 1960s and 1970s at such now defunct resort venues as Club Harlem and the Wonder Garden. The Delfonics entertained during the 2000s at the now defunct Sands casino, the Tropicana, Borgata and during the 2010s at Historic Gardner's Basin and the Tropicana and the 2020s at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City.

The Delfonics had two top-10 pop hits during their career, "La-La (Means I Love You)" in 1967 and "Didn't I (Blow Your Mind This Time)" in 1970.

Wilbert Hart, the last surviving member, who still performs live, will be at the ceremony to accept his group's honor.

"We're still alive and kicking," Hart said, adding he has been told many babies have been conceived to his group's music. "We get that all the time."

In addition to being an inaugural inductee to the Atlantic City Walk of Fame, James Brown was one of the 10 inaugural entertainers in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1986.

The Godfather of Soul originated funk music with his 1965 single "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag," which reached No. 8 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. Other top-10 pop hits include "Cold Sweat" and "I Got the Feelin'," both in 1967, and "Living in America" in 1985.

In the resort, Brown performed at Club Harlem, Steel Pier, Boardwalk Hall and the Taj Mahal. He last performed in the city May 28, 2006, at the now defunct House of Blues inside the Showboat when it was still a casino. He died Dec. 25, 2006.