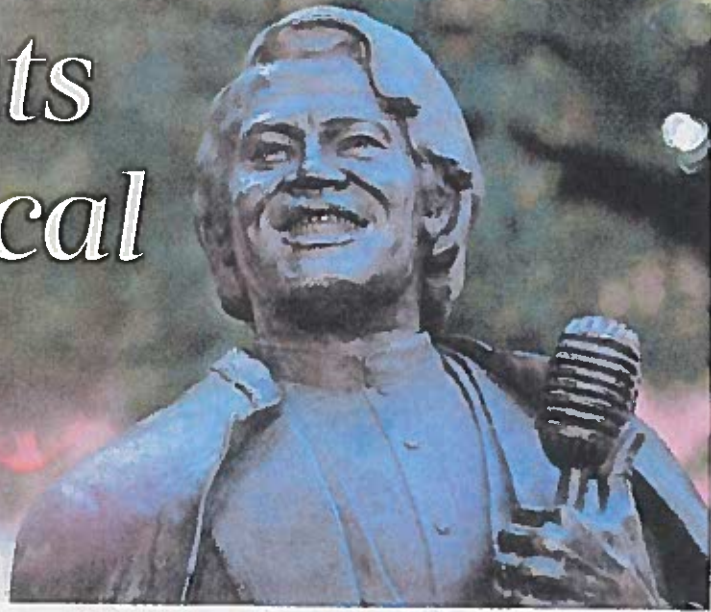


WHO'S WHO

Georgia touts its rich musical heritage



BY RANDY SOUTHERLAND
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From some of the great names of soul, southern rock and classical music to up and coming musicians, Georgia's rich musical heritage is getting noticed and giving tourists a reason to visit. Cities like Macon, Augusta and Athens, have started capitalizing on the artists who lived and made it big to draw in tourists and their dollars.

"In Macon we say if our walls could talk, they'd sing," said **Jessica Walden**, the owner of **Rock Candy Tours**. She founded the company to tell the story of the city's great musical heritage, but also to raise awareness about the danger faced by many of the city's historic musical landmarks like **Capricorn Studios** and **The Big House**, where the Allman Brothers band lived and worked.

This Middle Georgia city has long been a hot house for developing not just performers, but new musical genres. It was here that Little Richard and Otis Redding grew up and performed before recording the songs that would make them famous. In the late 60s two brothers and their friends moved into town and launched the Allman Brothers Band. They played a mix of blues, rock, gospel and jazz that would become known as "southern rock." The city also nurtured a host of other musicians including Bill Berry and Mike Mills of R.E.M., country star Jason Aldean and the internationally acclaimed classical violinist Robert McDulhe.

Although nobody can put a firm figure on the dollar value of music tourism, it is a big contributor to the local economy, according to the cities' CVB directors.

In Macon-Bibb County, tourism generated \$328 million in direct spending and accounted for 3,309 jobs, as well as \$8.94 million in local tax revenue. The county ranks 10th in the state for tourism expenditure.

"We're not able to break that down as far as music, but I will say music is a

very large component of that story and what people want to see when they visit Macon," said **Valerie Bradley**, director **Macon-Bibb County Convention & Visitors Bureau**.

With the growing realization that the city's musical heritage is worth preserving, the city has scored some major victories in preservation. The Big House is now a popular museum and tribute to the Allman Brothers. The old Capricorn Studios building was saved from deterioration and the wrecking ball and will find new life as a music incubator and performance space.

These cities not only preserve the past, but locals are more than willing to support up and coming talent.

"Here in Athens we not only have the heritage product where people can still trace the steps of bands like R.E.M. and the B-52s, but we have the current thriving music scene of today," said **Hannah Smith**, executive director of the **Athens Convention & Visitors Bureau**.

The CVB offers a music heritage walking tour that allows visitors to see the famous sites that gave rise to the "Athens sound" and hear stories about how the music was made. Here too familiar landmarks are still standing — despite some precarious moments. The kudzu-choked Georgia Railroad trestle that appeared on the cover of R.E.M.'s 1983 debut album "Murmur" is still standing. Another R.E.M. landmark, the church steeple where they first performed, is still standing although the church to which it was attached to is now gone.

Other landmarks like the **40 Watt Club** and even the **Georgia Theatre**, which was burned and rebuilt, are still standing and providing stages for artists. Other clubs and performance space have sprung up such as **The Foundry**, a circa 1850 mill where making music has replaced making iron.

"So there is definitely that music heritage you can see and then in the evenings we have hundreds of bands that still call Athens home and are performing in clubs

every night of the week," said Smith.

Athens has also developed a support structure for musicians. There are now several recording studios where artists can lay down tracks. The **University of Georgia** now has a music incubator program to help aspiring artists develop their careers.

When you say Augusta, thoughts usually turn to the legendary Godfather of Soul, James Brown. He lived, performed and died here and the **Augusta Museum of History** has the country's largest exhibition of Brown-related artifacts and memorabilia.

The CVB offers a self-guided tour of important Brown landmarks. There's also a guided sightseeing excursion by motor coach known as **The James Brown Family Historical Tour**. It covers a number of Brown locations including the downtown statue and drives by his former home,

which is now privately owned.

"He grew up in downtown Augusta," said **Staci Cooper**, director of the **Augusta Convention & Visitors Bureau**. "So a lot of historical spots are there. He also owned a radio station in West Augusta and had airplanes at Daniel's Field, which is more east."

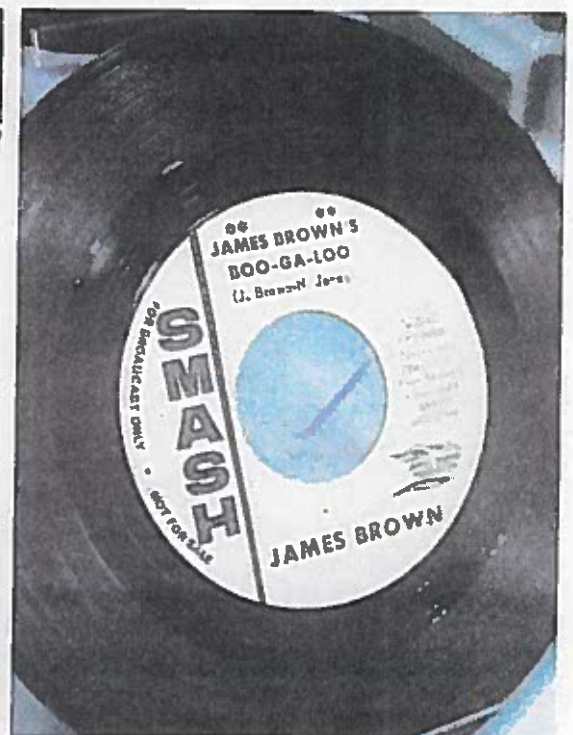
Renowned opera singer **Jessye Norman** is also from the Augusta area and now has a local school of arts named in her honor. The institution not only stages shows, but also works with local schools to help grow the arts in the community. Then there's the **Jessye Norman Amphitheatre** on the **Augusta Riverwalk**, which offers outdoor concerns throughout the year.

Along with its musical heritage, Augusta has fostered a thriving contemporary music scene. The Augusta area is also home to country music group **Lady Antebellum** along with a host of other, lesser known groups and musicians in a wide variety of genres. The **James Brown Arena** can accommodate up to 8,500 people and has hosted shows by the likes of county stars **Carrie Underwood**, **Rascal Flatts**, and **Merle Haggard**, as well as **Kid Rock**.

There are also smaller venues like **Soul Bar**, named in honor of the music James Brown made popular. It hosts smaller regional acts throughout the week. Its walls are also adorned with James Brown memorabilia. Another club called **Sky City** can also host up to 500 patrons for shows.

Small venues like coffee houses have also stepped up to offer opportunities for performers in genres such as folk, country and Americana, as well as rock.

"There are so many great venues here and the music scene here is really popping," said **George Claussen**, who owns the production and promotion company that brings shows such as **The Major Rager** to Augusta during **Masters Week** and the **Riverwalk Revival Series** to the **Jessye Norman Amphitheater**.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF AUGUSTA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

The **Augusta Museum of History** has a large collection of **James Brown** artifacts and memorabilia, including performance costumes and vinyl records.