

My Time with James Jamerson.

Another night of home sequester, another memory. As I was eating dinner, I decided to watch the great documentary film on the music of Motown, "Standing in the Shadows of Motown". The first musician portrayed is the legendary bassist of Motown, James Jamerson, and it reminded me of the time I played with him, all day long.

It was March of 1975, and I was starting rehearsals of my second year of touring and recording with Ray Charles. I walked into Ray's studio at 2107 West Washington Boulevard in Los Angeles, knowing that Ray was auditioning bass players for the new year of touring. His original bass player, Edgar Willis, who had been in his first band and played on all of those fabulous recordings of the Fifties and early Sixties, and who I had had the huge privilege to play and record with, was retiring. He would become Ray's road manager that year.

And so I walked in, sat behind my drums, and took notice of a man with a bass whom I did not recognize. We said hello to each other, but I don't remember either of us introducing ourselves. It can be that way with auditions, the awkwardness of meeting someone, then they don't get the gig, and you never hear of them again. Better to not get too personal.

Ray came in, called some songs and we played for a while. The bass player didn't say a word about who he was or about the music, and neither did Ray. We took a break and Ernie Vantrese, Ray's organist and piano player when he played electric piano, whom Ray and the rest of us all addressed as, "the Deacon", came over to me.

He whispered in my ear, "Do you know who that is?", nodding towards the bass player. I shook my head. Then Ernie hit me with a sledge hammer.

"That's James Jamerson."

Well, you could have substituted a feather for the sledge hammer and knocked me over. One of the greatest, hit making bass players of all time there within a stick's distance, and I didn't even introduce myself to him. He hadn't said a word, and immediately I'm thinking I might get to actually do a tour with him, record with him - Hell, we might even become close friends!

When we went back, I DID introduce myself, as did he to me, and I proceeded to play with a bit more intent. Now this was a very special moment – the rhythm

section is Ray Charles on piano, James Jamerson on bass, and John Bryant on drums. Damn!

Come to find out, he was there because his service mistakenly told him it was a recording session, not an audition to go on the road. Maybe Ray couldn't find a bass player that day and just put out a call. I never found out.

He didn't go on tour with us, and I never saw him again. But I never forgot that day, and I took special notice after that to ALWAYS introduce myself to every new musician I ever play with, first thing. Be careful what you wish for, because you just might get it!