

Tony Coleman

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A short history of Tony Coleman

Music has always been a big part of Tony Coleman's life. As a young toddler, his grandmother discovered that the easiest way to soothe his cries was to place a transistor radio inside his crib, tuned to whatever music was on the airwaves. Growing up in Florida, he was raised on a steady diet of soul, jazz, gospel, and rhythm & blues. Drawn to the rhythm of the beat, Tony found that percussion came natural to him, and picked up on drums at an early age.

While blues music was all around the community, from the local radio stations to the ever-present juke joints, it was the music of James Brown that really got Tony excited about exploring music as a full-time passion. With a new breed of soul-funk music that pushed the drums as a dominant element, it was hard to ignore the underlying rhythm of the music by «Mr. Dynamite» When Tony heard James Brown perform a line in the song «Cold Sweat» that asked the band to «give the drummer some». a spark was ignited, and Tony knew, more than ever, that he would become a full-time drummer.

Of course, when your father happened to be Carlton «King» Coleman, a famous band leader, radio disc jockey, and MC, that would certainly encourage an interest in the world of music. In fact, when James Brown was having some problems with his record label over the recording of «Mashed Potatoes - part 1» it was King Coleman that provided lead vocals for the original 1959 recording on Dade Records. While his father may not be active in the industry anymore, choosing a life of ministry over music, there was a time when «King» Coleman was undoubtedly the biggest influence on Tony Coleman's musical career.

Drums were certainly an ongoing passion for a young Tony Coleman. His school notebooks were often filled with doodles illustrating his musical aspirations, creating little stick figures of different musicians. Until he purchased a real drum set, he would often carve old tree branches into the shape of drumsticks using kitchen pots and pans for the drums.

As a young junior in high school, Tony got his first professional gig backing up a local disc jockey that wanted a live drummer to accompany him at the regular teen dance parties. Playing alongside all the latest records, Tony developed his skills by playing with all sorts of popular music. Around town, word was getting out that the show to see was «Rudy A Go Go and Tony Coleman, the funky drummer».

A short time later, opportunity knocked when a regional soul/R&B band by the name of Bobby Williams and the Markings offered Tony an opportunity to join their assemblage. Bobby Williams and the Markings were a popular 14 piece band in the James Brown mold of music, mixing popular cover songs with some original compositions. With 4 horn players, 2 guitarists, a bassist, a keyboard player, a lead singer, back-up singers, dancers, and 2 drummers, it was a big change for Tony Coleman as he entered the big time, touring with the group in the Deep South in a converted double decker tour bus. While Tony was still considered a minor when he was a member of this group, he wasn't allowed inside the clubs he performed at, unless he was actually performing.

In 1973, Tony was ready to try something different when he enlisted in the US army. After 3 years of military service that took him to different parts of the world, Tony moved back to Florida. He enrolled in graphic design courses at night school. After realizing that he wasn't reaching any career goals in this particular situation, he decided to live out his real dreams, and move out to Chicago in 1977 with some old Army buddies to create a new music group. The group fell apart. As luck would have it, Cloridale Walton, was a singer with the Otis Clay band. Cloridale made a point of introducing Tony to Otis Clay, whose band had just dissolved, with only his guitar player, Leonard Gill, remaining. As bassist Russell Jackson was also looking to join a group. Now Otis Clay had a new rhythm section.

The years with Otis Clay were an exciting time for Tony Coleman, as he toured around the world, and recorded a live concert in Tokyo. Working with a world-renowned band, many new doors were opened to Tony. He had plenty of opportunity to meet and mingle with other great musicians, doing occasional back-up shows for Buddy Guy, O.V. Wright, and Tyrone Davis, to name but a few. After a jam session with BB King and the Otis Clay Band at a Chicago club, BB King decided he liked what he heard, and hired members of the Otis Clay Band to become his new touring band. Keeping only his drummer from his previous touring band, BB King performed with two drummers for a few months.

Tony returned to Chicago, and rejoined the Otis Clay Band for a tour of Japan. As one of the most sought-after drummers in the Chicago blues community, Tony was weighing different options when he received an offer from Johnnie Taylor to play in his band. So Tony moved to Dallas in 1980, where he worked full-time with Johnnie's band. After a few years with Johnnie, Bobby Bland offered Tony a position with his band, and Tony moved from Dallas to Memphis, where Bobby was headquartered. For years, Tony worked with Bobby Bland.

All this time, B.B. King kept in touch with Tony, letting him know in no uncertain terms, that if there was ever an opening for a drummer in his band, BB would like to work with Tony again. During the middle of a tour featuring both BB King and Bobby Bland, BB needed a drummer, and Tony wound up performing in both bands before rejoining B.B.'s band full-time.

Working with BB King has been one of the fulfilling moments in Tony's life. Reuniting with his old band mates Leonard Gill and Russell Jackson, Tony was honored to work with the man recognized all over the world as the world's greatest blues ambassador. For ten years, Tony worked with BB before deciding in 1999 that it was time for him to do his own thing. ”. In 1998, he was voted the «best R&B drummer» by his peers in the DRUM MAGAZINE. He has also been nominated best R&B drummer many times in MODERN DRUMMER MAGAZINE.

Things have certainly not slowed down for Mr. Tony Coleman, as he takes his great talents to new levels. He continues to record, tour, write for him and others, and play a bit of golf when he gets the chance. Expanding on his career options, he's appeared in a commercial for the Callaway Golf Company, showcasing his talents as an actor and songwriter. He's also written a few jingles for Northwest Airlines, and continues to explore new avenues in the entertainment industry. He went back with BB King for some more years until April 2010 and Co-produced in 2013 Ana Popovic album “Can You Stand The Heat”.

Now when he isn't touring with Jamey Johnson in USA and in Europe with his band, he is used to play with the B.B. King's Blues Club All-Star at BB's Club in Nashville for which he is also the Music Director Consultant as well as for the recently opened ones in Orlando, FL - Montgomery, AL - New Orleans, LA ...