

CITY

# This Wednesday: Watch TV-One's *Unsung* Documentary on Chuck Brown

STEVE KIVIAT — JUN 22, 2015 1 PM





Since 2008, *TV One*'s music documentary series *Unsung* has chronicled the lives and careers on R&B, soul, and hip-hop acts from the '60s through the '90s, including **Otis Redding**, **Martha Wash**, **the Chi-lites**, **DJ Quik**, **Ike Turner**, and **Rick James**. This Wednesday at 8 p.m., the network will spend an hour on the late D.C. go-go pioneer **Chuck Brown**.

While much of the network's history of Brown and go-go will be old news for longtime fans, the program includes enough wistful anecdotes, interviews, fun video clips, and obscure photos to keep the already-clued-in tuned in. Over email, the senior producer for this episode—Silver Spring raised, L.A.-based **Sade Oyinade**—told me that the idea for the episode came from **Cathy Hughes**, the founder of TV One, who used to work at Howard University and WHUR-FM radio. Production started in August 2014 and lasted about seven months.

*Unsung* biographies feature the voiceover of actor **Gary Anthony Williams**, and on this episode, he doesn't just tell the story of Brown—his narration takes a deep look at the rise of the local brand of funk Brown championed. The episode covers **Trouble Funk**'s signing with Sugarhill Records, **Rare Essence** playing a packed Capital Centre arena show, the failed *Good to Go* film, **E.U.**'s success via **Spike Lee** with "**Da Butt**," the popularity of the hip-hop-inflected approach of **Backyard Band**, and the genre's struggles once problems with crack and street violence shut down go-go clubs.

Through faded snapshots and interviews with Brown's family, including some emotional observations and admissions from his son **Nekos**, viewers will learn about the Godfather of Go-Go's upbringing in rural poverty in North Carolina, brushes with crime (including the shooting that led him to a stint in Lorton Penitentiary, where he developed his guitar skills), struggles with the bottle, marriages, success in Japan, and satisfaction with his life after successes like his first Grammy nomination at age 74. While some major chunks of Brown's life are not included (like his acclaimed jazz and blues duets with **Eva Cassidy** and his gig with the **National Symphony Orchestra**), the program hits the highlights nicely with *Soul Train* footage and shots of D.C. crowds shouting, as they always did, "wind me up Chuck!" The program also unearths some fascinating lesser-known gems: Brown's signature look was inspired in part by country-music icon **Hank Williams'** boots and cowboy hat, and Brown was the first black waiter at Duke Zeibert's, a famous downtown D.C. restaurant frequented by many U.S. presidents.

The *Unsung* episode includes interviews with the likes of singer **Jill Scott**; former D.C. mayors **Marion Barry** and **Vince Gray**; Brown's 1970s bandmates **John "JB" Buchanan** and **Donald Tillery**; Rare Essence's **Andre "White Boy" Johnson**; E.U.'s **Sugar Bear**, and **Ju Ju House**; TMOTTGoGo's Kato Hammond; and *The Beat* authors **Charles C. Stephenson Jr.** and **Kip Lornell**. A number of the interviews were recorded specifically for the episode, while others were archival videos found by TV One production staff. Associate Producer **Shekila Ferguson** tracked down much of the latter through various collectors, vendors, go-go artists, and filmmakers who've made videos on D.C. go-go. Oyinade interviewed Barry just a couple of weeks before he passed away.

Oyinade says that for her, the episode was not just about Brown's story, but was "even more about representing for D.C., a city that had its own rhythm and flavor that too often, at least in the U.S., rarely gets enough love."

*Photo by Darrow Montgomery*

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Posted by noodlez  
DAMN I MISS CHUCK BROWN!

Jun 22 2015 19:12

HAPPY TO HEAR NATS PARK PLAYING BUSTING LOOSE FOR HOME RUNS AGAIN.



Posted by Jay Maestro

Jun 23 2015 12:55

I can't wait to see this episode I am a musician born and raised from the go-go scene and Chuck Brown laid the foundation for a lot of musicians in the dc area

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