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s o u l m a n

GET ON UP
THIS MONTH, STAR CHADWICK BOSEMAN TRANSFORMS HIMSELF INTO THE HARDEST WORKING MAN IN SHOW BUSINESS—BUT FIRST HE MAKES THIS FALL'S FRESHEST STYLES WORK FOR HIM. BY TODD LONGWELL. PHOTOGRAPHED BY ADAM FEDDERLY. STYLED BY ASHLEY WESTON



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Nobody gawks at Chadwick Boseman when he walks into the open-air restaurant at the Sunset Marquis Hotel in West Hollywood on a slow Friday afternoon. The sparse crowd might simply be too engaged with their baby kale salads and grilled Spanish octopus to look up from their plates—or perhaps they don't recognize the newly minted star out of a Brooklyn Dodgers uniform.

Boseman has another idea: He thinks fans afford him a certain deference because he made his name playing the saintly Jackie Robinson, the man who broke the Major League Baseball color barrier, in 42. "The role sort of makes people do that, as opposed to if I was, like, some music star or comedian or something," says the 37-year-old, as the waiter pours him a glass of sparkling water. "There's this sort of silent respect people have."

If that logic holds true, Boseman's interaction with the public is about to change substantively. He next stars in *Get on Up*, playing the late soul legend James Brown—an utterly different sort of icon, a musical legend whose on-stage persona was as over-the-top as his towering pompadour. In fact, Boseman's chief challenge was to refrain from caricature—no easy task given the Godfather of Soul's propensity for shimmying across that line in real life. "It's like you're running through a minefield," says Boseman, who is, like Brown, a native of South Carolina. "There's the stereotype, the Eddie Murphy version, and then there's the headline version." That would be the shock-haired, PCP-smoking, woman-beating, leading-the-cops-on-an-interstate-chase Brown.

As a showman, however, Brown was a master of control, fining band members for missing notes, firing them for



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drinking or doing drugs, and keeping everyone on edge with his mercurial moods. For Boseman, that duality presented both the fun and the challenge of the role. "Whether he seems angry when he walks into a room or he's in the best of moods, relaxed, none of that matters, because he might not really feel that way," he says, laughing gleefully. "He might be playing at the idea of those things to achieve a goal, which is very complex. I went through the script, marking what his true feelings were and what was a game and what was manipulation." Boseman discovered that whatever the hazards, Brown's charm remained incredibly powerful. "Nobody wanted to talk to me," he says. "They wanted to talk to James Brown. They wanted James Brown to be mad at them because they didn't do something right."

One thing Boseman couldn't find in the script was Brown's authentic, country-fried voice. "It's not really on the page," he admits, haltingly. The script was very good, he emphasizes. "Structurally, it's amazing."

Were the writers black or...?

"White," he answers.

In other words, even if the scribes had the talent to portray Brown's uniquely profane and not always decipherable language on the page, it still would have been a dicey proposition.

"You can't write that," says Boseman flatly. "There's a certain way that it has to be



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presented so that everybody gets it. [Director] Tate [Taylor] knew it, and I knew it. Actors have these vocal tapes that tell you how to speak different dialects, and it's not there, either." To find that voice, Boseman sought out Brown's widow, Tomi Rae Hynie, and various bandmates. He traveled to South Carolina and Georgia, where the singer grew up, and talked to people of a similar age and background, including some of his own, old-school uncles. "They mean everything they say, and if you take it too seriously, you're gonna cry," he says with a laugh.

One thing that made Boseman cry: re-creating Brown's inimitable dance steps. "There was one day, I don't know how many splits I did," he recalls. "I know it was at least 50. At least."