

Entertainment

Mother's Finest comes home to heavy metal

Interview by Barbara Beebe

Heavy metal rock and roll emanating from an all-Black band is the last thing anyone would expect to hear and see on the stage of the Empire Mine, a large, mine-decorated C&W club in Wilmington, N.C. But, tonight, the conservatively-dressed, predominantly white crowd is in for a blast that will last. Mother's Finest is touring, promoting their latest Scotti Brothers' release, **BLACK RADIO WON'T PLAY THIS RECORD**. Unlike the infectious grooves of "Baby Love" and "Love Changes," Mother's Finest has progressed and found a home...in heavy metal. Mother's Finest have long-traveled the tumultuous road of rock and roll. Each leg of the journey defying the stereotypes and unwritten rules of race and musical expression. Their latest is not only a long-deserved kick to the frigidity of Black radio, but a kick to Classic Rock and AOR formats as well. As Joyce Kennedy, lead singer and 'range goddess of rock' quipped, "White radio won't necessarily play it either." I caught up with the members of Mother's Finest after the show to chat about their latest release, race, music and their past.

Q. Who thought of the title for this record?

Joyce: It came out of the air. When we heard the record, we said, "Well, Black radio won't play this record."

Q. Putting "Like A Negro" as the first tune was a very brave move. Whose idea was it?

Glenn: We thought it was kind of nice for someone to see **Black Radio Won't Play This Record** and turn it over and see "Like A Negro" and think 'I gotta hear this shit.'

Dion: Or be scared to death of it.

Joyce: When we sang the lyric "niggers can't sing rock and roll," the NAACP and a lot of people were yapping, because they didn't understand where we were coming from. Same concept with "Like A Negro."

Q. Wyzard, you wrote the song "Move (Get Outta My Way)." Who is that directed to?

Wyzard: That's just about getting past obstacles.

Q. You mean like record executives?

Joyce: Listen, when you finally wake up to the oppositions that you have in life - whether it's the music industry, whether it's film, whether it's being an author or a writer - there's always obstacles, there's always somebody that's always saying you can't do this because you're this way or you're that way. You can't do rock because you're female, you can't do it 'cause you're black - it's like when you finally commit to doing it you say 'well, move muthafucker, I'm coming through.'

Q. Joyce, what do you think it will take for the rock and roll industry to take female vocalists seriously?

Joyce: For us to be there all the time...to be relentless. To keep doing it..

Q. If you notice with Melissa Etheridge, they tried to feminize her by putting her topless on her record cover..

Joyce: It's just another obstacle. We had this meeting..when the title was up **Black Radio Won't Play This Record**...we had a real power-out with the President of the company. And what he told us was this: The way the industry is now you have to come out, and you have to say something. It has to be an event. With the band having been together so long and people knowing so much about the band, it had to be an event, because now we weren't the only ones. There were more bands, more black bands, doing heavy music. Second of all, this is the only band that has a female counterpart in heavy music. So, that's another obstacle to climb over. The next thing is - we weren't selling sex, we were selling talent. It wasn't like one band has either got talent and they don't look good, or either they're real cute and got no talent, or either the girl can't sing, but she looks good, she got big tits. We were selling music, we were selling ideas, we were selling social statements. The sexuality was there, but it wasn't blatant.

Wyzard: We've always done that. Like when we got together, we didn't put this group together from a contrived idea, by saying we need a girl or a boy, we need this or we need that. We've always gone for what works. And, when we started, this unit worked. After we started getting out in public, people started saying you've got this and you've got that.

Q. Joyce, you were quoted as saying "rock and roll was originally black music." It's been said before, but how do we hammer this home? In this country, we seem to have an Elvis complex.

Joyce: I don't think there's any one way to do it. I think us being there and being an example and having roots there without having to compromise one way or the other is a way.

Glenn: That's what "Like A Negro" is about.

Q. Dion, you have a quote on the CD that says, "What shall it avail our nation if we can send a man to the moon, but we cannot cure the sickness of our cities?" Why this quote?

Dion: I watched this movie called "Heatwave" about the Watts riots and it really hit home. It hit me hard and opened my eyes. That quote is just about racism which is the sickness of our cities. Black people don't have a strong leader like Martin Luther King or Malcolm X. But, I don't think anyone wants to stand up there, because every time someone does stand up, they kill them. There are a lot of people who could speak for the black community.

Q. Have you ever played in front of a predominantly black audience?

Wyzard: Back when we first met, we used to always play in front of a black audience. When we first started, we would do a tour with AC/DC, then we would do a tour with Parliament Funkadelic. Then we'd tour with Black Sabbath, then the Commodores. We used to always be right down the middle. Then our music went a little more rock. Now we're getting heavier and more brittle. But you know, I think the black audience is getting ready to go this way, too. We've always been ahead of our time. And we still are, even though we try to fall into what's happening. We always seem to be ahead.

Joyce: As far as black audiences are concerned, we used to get more opposition from black audiences than we did from white audiences playing the music that we were playing. We headlined the Capitol Center in D.C. That's when Mother Factor was out and we had "Love Changes" as a hit. We sold the place out. We went onstage and played 20 minutes into the set. Then we did "Love Changes." After we did "Love Changes," every nigger in there got up and left. I'm being real, because we've been in the middle of the road and we've had opposition from both. It ain't only

been from whites, but from blacks, too, because they weren't ready until Living Colour came out and said it's all right for you to do that. Our evolution has come about as well. So, as far as playing in front of all black audiences, no - there were not very many because we were not accepted by them. Because they figured we were playing all white music. I remember when we went to Columbia, S.C. We played a campus, then the word spread like wildfire. Then we went back to the same market and played this little place. This cat didn't even have a club, he made a club and brothers started coming. We used to have lines around that place. They called it "electrified funk." They didn't consider it rock and roll. It was electrified funk.

Glenn: It started out, we played there a week - they had a beer bash and it was mostly white. Then, when Monday came around, there was nothing but mostly brothers. They were very, very curious to see what was going on. We have pleasure playing - especially in the Carolinas, up in the D.C. area and in New York. You know, there's some hard brothers that come out there. When we see some of our own people in the audience, it makes us feel good that they're open enough to be able to come out and see if they dig it. If they don't dig it, fine, but at least give themselves a chance and not be as they have - in someone else's ass about what kind of music they should listen to.

Joyce: Our music has never been racial. When we played with P-Funk, the Commodores, AC/DC, Atlanta Rhythm Section, we played the same set. We didn't change it. The set stayed the same no matter who we were playing with, because that was us. And, it wasn't racial - we transcended racial lines. That's why audiences a lot of the time are 99% white - because we were accepted on that level of just the music standing on its own. Now we're having to fight the battle with radio. And that's what got frustrating when we split up in '83. That was so hard to break down, because we were standing alone. We were the only ones doing what we were doing. There was P-Funk, but our stuff was so electrified. They didn't have that hard edge. We have that hard edge. Plus, it was a mixed band at the time. It wasn't all black. So, in the '70s that was not the genre of music that everybody was playing. We were the only ones doing that kind of stuff.

Wyzard: If everybody had been playing it, then there wouldn't have been any problems.