

Donald Byrd and the Blackbyrds

Donald Byrd's jazz credentials are unchallenged and his academic credits are likewise impressive, so it comes as no surprise that he teaches music. But the way he does his teaching and the way his students do their learning have resulted not in educational theses, but in three hit albums, sell-out concerts, top singles, and awards ranging from "Top R&B Group" to "Top Instrumental Group."

Byrd's remarkable educational enterprise is the outstanding pop music group—the Blackbyrds. The same Blackbyrds whose *City Life*, *Flying High*, and *The Blackbyrds* have recruited fans from jazz, R&B, and pop lovers.

After receiving music degrees from the Manhattan School of Music, Donald played his trumpet with such jazz figures as Art Blakey, Max Roach, Thelonus Monk, and Oscar Pettiford. In the Sixties, he toured Europe, and returned to New York to complete his doctorate at Columbia Teacher's College. As a working musician of outstanding reputation and an accredited educational administrator, Donald took on musical academia.

Having taught at economically disadvantaged New York schools, as well as at the prestigious High School of Music and Art and Performing Arts, and having been guest lecturer in many colleges, he set out to found a music department that would be on par with other university departments—psychology, art, engineering, etc. He founded the School of Jazz Studies at Howard University, and last year moved to North Carolina Central State University in Durham.

Donald believes very passionately that music should be taught by musicians who can teach, instead of by educators whose subject happens to be music. And his Blackbyrds—all five of them—couldn't agree more wholeheartedly. Each one is a serious and gifted musician who came to Donald's attention while in one of his classes.

Detroit-born keyboardist Kevin Toney wanted to matriculate at a college where he could study black music

and he wanted to study with a real musician, not just a teacher. Howard was the place and Donald Byrd was his man. He started playing at East Coast jazz clubs with Donald. Their group was augmented by many well-known musicians.

As other students came to Donald's attention, he wanted to give them a chance to perform, write, record, travel, and get to know all aspects of the music business.

Kevin is now a senior at Howard, soon to earn his Bachelor of Music Degree in Jazz Studies and Composition. He hopes to go on studying and to teach in much the same way that Donald is instructing him.

Three other young musicians who grew up in Washington, D.C., and played together in high school came separately into Donald's music department at Howard. Guitarist Orville Saunders went to Howard to study with Donald directly from high school. A senior now, he plans to get his Master's in Education. The learning experiences that Orville has had with the Blackbyrds have been so rich and varied that he feels there is a book in it. All the members of the group write and sing. They have traveled to Hawaii, the Caribbean, and England, and have learned to relate to tens of thousands of people.

Sharing this musical and personal growth is Keith Killgo. Keith was with Orville in the same group during their high school years. While an eleventh grader, Keith met with Donald Byrd and the teacher offered him a scholarship to Howard University. But Keith wanted to go out of town and chose Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois.

Though he had been playing since he was nine years old and had been given lessons by his musician father [Harry], this was Keith's first formal training. He learned harmony and to read and write music. Then he transferred to Howard. Playing with the Blackbyrds has opened new vistas for the young drummer. He had learned about elec-

tronics and record production and grown musically as well as technically. He feels that his "group musically has new and fresh ideas, and taste. The music can do a lot of things. If it is done cleverly, with taste, it has distinction."

Bassist Joe Hall was a third member of that high school group. Joe wanted to go away to school too, so he put in his freshman year at Maryland University studying biochemistry. But now at Howard, his program is all music except for a few liberal arts courses. He finds that playing with his high school friends "makes for a warm atmosphere because we've overcome most of the difficulties of getting to know one another. The whole experience of playing with Donald is unique because he offers a cross-section of taste and knowledge."

The one graduate student of the group is Wesley Jackson, Jr., who just received his B.A. in Music. He just started work on his Master's. A native of Atlanta, Wesley found that Howard was the perfect school for him. It was away from home, and provided the musical scholarship he needed. Studious, intense, and eager to communicate, Wesley praises Donald as a good teacher because "he is well-rounded and involves

himself with everything he comes in contact with. Then he extends himself so far, it's remarkable."

Wesley, as all the other Blackbyrds, is a full-time student. All of the boys budget their time carefully. Studies must not suffer and practicing is seldom neglected. During the school semesters, the traveling, concerts, and performances are generally limited to weekends and school holidays. During the summer vacation, more extended tours are planned. By insisting that the Blackbyrds learn the business aspects of their profession and the fine points of record production, Donald is once again illustrating his creative and innovative teaching technique.

There's no doubt that the Blackbyrds are learning and growing. And Donald? As he sees his Blackbyrds' album, *City Life*, certified a gold record and Grammy nominee, does he feel that his unconventional teaching methods show successful results? Of course! It is satisfying to him to play with the group as a musician and rewarding to watch the band develop. But the Blackbyrds are not an end—they're a beginning. Each of the five is committed to go on to higher academic degrees and plans to become a musician/educator in Donald's style.



THE BROTHERS JOHNSON

Brothers Johnson Set To Release New Album

Following the success of their debut album "Look Out for No. 1," A&M recording artists The Brothers Johnson have recently completed the recording of their new album, "Right On Time." The album was produced and arranged by the Brothers' mentor Quincy Jones.

The Brothers Johnson skyrocketed on to the music scene

in 1976 as they appeared from virtual obscurity to stardom in record time. Their debut album

achieved gold status in a mere seven weeks, and attained platinum for sales over one million copies, five weeks later. Spurred by the success of their two gold singles (for sales of over one million copies each) "I'll Be Good To You" and "Get The Funk Out Ma' Face"

the Brothers Johnson became overnight sensations in the true sense of the word.

Their upcoming release "Right On Time" follows in the pattern that they established with their premiere album in that they have blended their variations influences into a sound that is uniquely their own. With studio assistance from drummer Harvey

Mason, percussionist Ralph MacDonald, The Tower of Power Horns, and Dave Grusin on keyboards, "Right On Time" promises to be an enormous success.

The Brothers Johnson (George and Louis) composed eight of the album's nine songs, as well as playing all of the guitars and basses, and handling all of the vocal chores. The

songs range from the funk of "Brother Man," "Feel So Good Make Me Wanna Wiggle," the lilting beauty of "Q" which they composed as a musical dedication to Quincy Jones, the ode to love of "Love Is," to the all out party flavor of "Show Us You Know How to Party Too." "Right On Time" is scheduled for a mid April release and will be available on A&M Records and Tapes.



THE IMPRESSIONS

Twenty years ago a fledgling group in Chicago decided to update its image and choose a new name. Each group member had his special favorite, so their manager suggested they put all the proposed names in a fedora and let the luck of the draw decide their new moniker. Sam Gooden reached in and fished out a slip with "The Impressions" written on it. A new group was born, and the history of popular music was never going to be the same.

Sam Gooden and Fred Cash, two kids who were next-door neighbors in Chattanooga, can look back over the last score of years and reflect on a string of hits any artist would claim with pride. From the Impressions came

such standars as "For Your Precious Love," "Gypsy Woman," "It's All Right" and more. From the ranks of the Impressions have emerged such musical geniuses as Jerry Butler, Curtis Mayfield, (who stayed on as their producer and mentor years after his departure in 1970) Leroy Hutson (now on his own as a singer-writer-producer), and Ralph Johnson (who has a bright solo career). "Our background is basically gospel with the influences of soul and pop," Reggie Torian feels, adding that the key to the Impressions' success is that "we've moved with the times."

The times have changed tremendously since the early 1950's when Sam was singing

in the church choir where his father was minister. It seemed only natural that he join his buddy from his marbles and baseball days, Fred, and tour the area's gospel circuit for a share of the "singers' offering." The share usually was about five dollars for each. After high school the Cubs offered Sam a contract to play shortstop, and he moved to Chicago to pursue dual careers in sports and music. It wasn't long before he was singing with Richard and Arthur Brooks, Curtis Mayfield, and Jerry Butler. After they took to the road in a station wagon, as "The Impressions," and their first record, "For Your Precious Love" sailed up the charts, Butler and the Brooks brothers left the group for separate careers. Sam and Curtis went looking for Fred, who had remained in Chattanooga. This re-organization of the Impressions would be the first of several. "We were always starting over," confided Sam, who remains philosophical about the rough times in his career. Yet perhaps the fresh infusions of new blood into the group have been one of the hidden strengths of the Impressions. The newest members of the foursome are about ten years younger than Fred and Sam. For both Reggie and Nate Evans joining the Impressions was a dream come true. A friend asked Reggie, who had been singing with the Enchanters in Chicago, if he'd like to sing with the Impressions. Taking the question lightly, he replied, "Sure, when do I start?" Ironically Reggie was prepared to start; he had the songs down cold. Years be-

fore he would run home from track practice and practice some more with a friend's tape recorder, recording his voice on one track and the Impressions on the other. For him Curtis Mayfield was "one of the finest tenors that ever hit a note."

Later Ralph Johnson followed the footsteps of the others who had moved away from the Impressions on solo careers. His absence was the dilemma which confronted the group when, in the summer of '76, Nate asked the Impressions to perform at Jackie Wilson's Latin Casino Benefit Concert—a concert which Nate was promoting. Nate, like Reggie, had practiced the great Impressions'

standards for years on his own. He asked if he might audition as the replacement. Although it was too late to get their act together for the benefit, the Impressions sound was restored better than ever. They signed on with the newly reactivated Cotillion Records label under Henry Allen and began touring the world pleasing fans who had missed them too long. Their first album with Nate and Cotillion is entitled, "It's About Time." In many ways that title sums up the story of a group which, like few others, has not only endured 20 years of ups and downs, but also continues to exert a lasting influence on popular music by moving with and often ahead, of the times.

ENTERTAINMENT

The Central Harlem Tennis Club is sponsoring the Yago San'Gria, "Black Tennis Classic" April 14-17 at the Myrtle Beach Tennis Club, Myrtle Beach, S. C., and featuring the top black professionals in the USA plus an open tournament for all guests.

Because he reportedly turned down an offer of \$25,000 a show, Demond Wilson, will not be on "Sanford and Son" when it returns to NBC-TV next season. Producers are now turning to an alternate plan on a new format not requiring the character played by Wilson. Redd Foxx also isn't returning since he's signed an exclusive deal with ABC-TV for next season.

By winning the Houston Open last May, Lee Elder has been invited back to the Masters. The Golf Writers Association has also named Elder winner of the Charles Barlett award for contributions to the betterment of society and he'll be presented with the award at the writers' annual meeting at the U. S. Open. It's reported that 90 per cent of the baseballs used in the All-American game are made in Haiti because of the cheap labor there.

Sports caster Art Rust, now heard on WMCA, says he's sold his story on Joe Louis to Columbia Pictures.

Shaw Players Present "The Sistuhs"

RALEIGH — The Shaw Players and Company presented their spring production in Raleigh Memorial Auditorium, Sandra Sharpe's "The Sistuhs", under the direction of Mrs. Patricia C. Caple.

The production featured the members of the Shaw Players and Company, as well

as the combined members of the Shaw Marching Band, with music under the direction of Curtis Moore.

The featured players in the production were Michael Howell, Valerie Tekosky (both winners of the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts Award), Miss Deborah Tekosky, Theatre Arts Teacher

at Broughton High School, and Miss Susan Hairston.

The play, a two act musical with vignettes of song, dance, and music, captured comedy at their best, and portrayed moments also of tragedy and frustration that surrounds the various moods and life styles of today's black women.



SHAW PLAYERS & COMPANY — Left to Right: Valerie Tekosky, Michael Howell and Susan Hairston.

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