

ENTERTAINMENT



The Carolina Times

The North Carolina Edition

March 15 - 21, 1981



L-R: Denise Dunning-Crawford, Dolores Dunning-Milligan & Bonnie Dunning



Skyy, the million-selling group whose new *Skyyport* LP is hot on the charts, has a secret weapon. . . . a trio of singing sisters who help form the core of Skyy's smooth vocal style. But while some singers spend their whole lives trying to get discovered, the three lovely Dunning sisters got their first big break by accident. Skyy's Denise L. Dunning-Crawford, Delores Dunning and Benita Rae (Bonnie) Dunning have sung "for fun" since childhood. At Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn, they won numerous talent shows and wowed their Brooklyn friends and neighbors as a singing group that became known as Di La Rae.

"We never even thought about doing it for a living," says Skyy's Denise, the oldest. But one friend and neighbor in the Lafayette Gardens project in Bedford-Stuyvesant where they grew up knew that the girls had talent.

"Our girlfriend who lived in the project also used to sing with us for fun when we'd visit," explains Skyy's Delores. "Her husband was involved at the time in the New York State Finals for the Miss Black America Pageant. He had the franchise that year to direct it.

"So he knew that we sang, and he just said, you know, why don't you come sing for me at the show. And we said okay, we'll do it. We just thought it was another chance to sing."

Also hired to perform at the pageant was another group of struggling Brooklyn musicians — a band known as **Brass Construction**. Although **Brass** was two years away from its first record (a million seller), they already played like pros, and cast a wary eye when the future Skyy girls showed up.

"They assumed we couldn't sing. . . ." says Bonnie.

"Of course," adds Delores.

"They were just looking at these girls," says Bonnie, "sayin' to themselves, 'Okay. . . sure, the same old, same old. . . .'"

When **Brass** had to back the girls on a song, "it was like, 'Oh God, here they go — another girl group,'" Denise recalls.

"But when we started singing, they said that they had to look up and take notice, because they couldn't believe it," says Bonnie. After that night, **Brass** leader and producer Randy Muller recruited the girls to sing with **Brass**, which led to their association with Randy's friend and musical cohort Solomon Roberts, Jr., who is the leader of Skyy.

Seeing their names now in lights and on Skyy album covers is a pleasure the girls of Skyy never thought about until that night in 1973. "That night everything materialized in front of our faces," Delores says. "Before that it was fun, after that, it was an obsession."