

arts & leisure

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Spotlight

Precocious DeBarges growing with their music

Young groups who attempt to ply their musical trade with Motown have some tough acts to follow.

After all, it must be pretty hard to impress the folks at the label that discovered and nurtured the Jackson Five (featuring a large-Afroed, pint-sized lead singer named Michael), "Little" Stevie Wonder and a bony group of teens who called themselves the Primettes and later became the Supremes.

But DeBarge has managed alright, making its debut last year and promptly striking gold with its second Motown album, "All This Love."

With a third successful LP, "In A Special Way," moving up the charts El, Randy, Mark, James and Bunny DeBarge, Grand Rapids, Mich., siblings who could dance and sing before they could barely talk, appear to be much more than a one-shot hit.

If anything, DeBarge's success has grown with DeBarge.

The new album, for instance, was written solely by the group and produced by 22-year-old El DeBarge, who readily admits it wasn't easy. "It was a lot harder than I thought it would be," says El, who occasionally got a little help from brother Bobby, who is not a member of the group.

"I had to learn to be strict and stern. The family had to learn to look at me as El the producer, not El the brother. If I made a decision, it was made on the basis of what was best for the album and my brothers and sister had to learn not to take it personally. But if I had to do it all over again, I would. We all pulled together and it was a labor of love."

Pull together they did. El literally challenged his family to write the best music possible and each member rose to the occasion.

But that hardly surprised fans and critics who have watched the rise of this talented family. Music is in their blood. As Bunny once said, "If your last name was DeBarge in Grand Rapids, you had to be into some type of music."

Ten youngsters under one roof means a house is never quiet. But 10 youngsters singing as soon as they could talk, playing any instrument they could put their hands on, and making up little songs to see who could outdo whom could mean only one thing: constant noise.

But the noise was channeled into a creative vein by loving parents and relatives who gave the young DeBarges a sense of direction in their music.

"So many people have believed in us and helped us reach our goals that we have to do our best at all times," explains Mark, who wrote "Stay With Me." "We can't let anyone down -- not our friends, family or fans. When our brothers Bobby and Tommy arrived at Motown with a band called Switch, they told us they wouldn't forget the rest of the family back home. And they didn't. Motown believed in us and supported us and now our fans are doing the same thing."

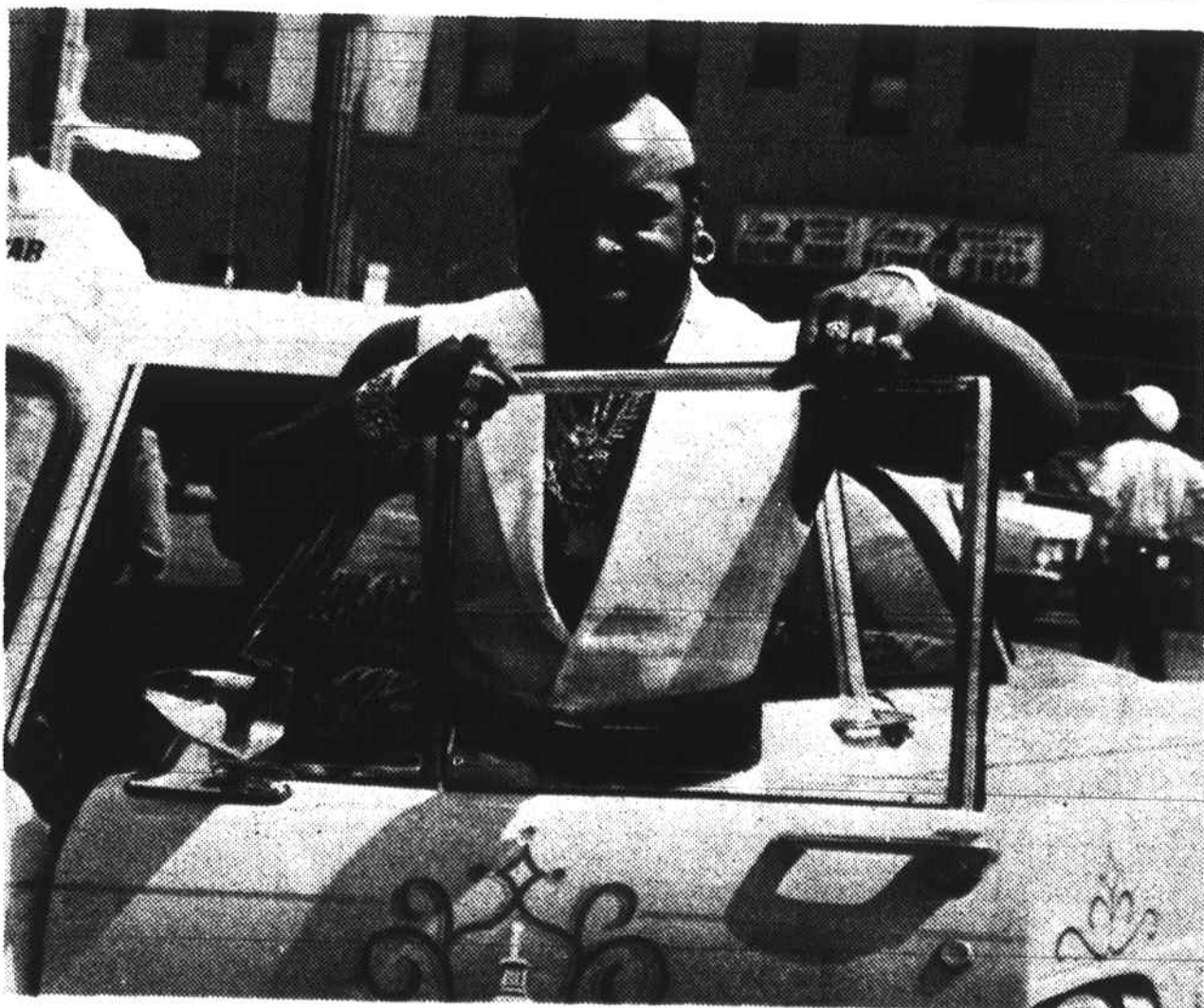
"How can you let people like that down? The answer is you can't, so we go out and do the best we can every time whether it's writing or singing or performing."

So far, all of the right ingredients appear to be there: hot music, charming good looks and a sincerity that reaches out from the music and touches the soul of the listener.

"We like to sing about love and spread a little bit of it around," says El. "If we touch just one person's life with our music, well, that's what it's all about."



DeBarge: Hot music, good looks and sincerity.



Mr. T: Getting a bit prosperous around his waistline.

Broadway Is My Beat

Diana's romance with Nastase's back on

By JOEY SASSO
Syndicated Columnist

The latest casualty in the battle of the bulge is none other than "A-Team" star Mr. T. The muscleman packed on a whopping 15 pounds during summer break.

And now -- as any "fool" should know -- he's dieting and exercising like crazy to shed the flab for the new season. He's also trying to change his intellectual image. T told a cluster of fans recently that he's willing and able to expound on any topic, including the ins and outs of geopolitics, if somebody would only ask.

Meanwhile, it's not so bad to be a fad. Mr. T's popularity might be a passing public fancy, but, with the money he's raking in, he doesn't have to worry about long-range success. He has reportedly grossed \$3 million this year.

Observations in covering the night beat:

Dusky singing siren Diana Ross has launched into a new romance with controversial Rumanian tennis ace Illie Nastase. The couple spend most of their time smooching in the privacy of Diana's New York apartment and are seldom seen in public together.

Not that they are ashamed of each other. Says one friend of the couple: "Diana finds Illie very sweet and charming. Another New York insider revealed: 'He's nuts about her.'"

Looks like Miss America is headed for Broadway and Hollywood. Vanessa Williams, the first black Miss America, says she's been offered a role in David Merrick's "42nd Street" Broadway musical next season. Plus, "Pink Panther" director Blake Edwards has indicated he wants Vanessa for the title role in a film about the legendary performer Josephine Baker.

Vanessa hasn't said OK to either project, but she sure seems interested in the movie

which Edwards plans to shoot in two years.

About Baker, Miss America says: "She went through a lot in her life and I think it would be a great challenge to me, as an actress and singer, to play her life in the movies." Williams, 20, says she's also received other movie and stage offers as well....

While Diana Ross is waiting for her own long-planned Josephine Baker project to go into action, she's making plans to star in "Tough Customer" as a numbers doll who gets involved with gangster Dutch Schultz. Shultz is also being brought back to life in the beleaguered "The Cotton Club," which will be released next year -- as will at least six other shoot-'em-up ganster movies.

Singer-songwriter-producer Lionel Richie, 34, still calls music a hobby, even though his achievements have earned him amounts akin to the gross national products of some small nations.

Ask Yolonda

Her boyfriend doesn't realize she's entitled to her privacy

By YOLONDA GAYLES
Chronicle Columnist

Dear Yolonda: I'm 31, and I've been dating a guy, 40, for four years. He has let his daughter, her husband and their two children move into his house.

Since then, we've been arguing because I refuse to spend the night with him while they're in the house. To me it's embarrassing, particularly because of the kids.

My boyfriend thinks I'm acting childish, and tells me I don't love him. To top it off, he's told me that if we marry, he'll have a room added onto his house for his daughter and her family. I haven't told him, but I won't marry him under those circumstances.

I really don't enjoy going to his house now. His daughter has brought her furniture in, and thrown all of his out. I mean, the house now looks more like her's than his. Her dining room set is there, and the

kitchen is filled with her appliances. Her things are everywhere.

Please help me with some answers. I really enjoy my friend's company, but the arguments are going to break us up. I have told him how I feel, and also that I refuse to go to a hotel every week. His daughter's a slob, and she won't give him room and board, just problems. What should I do?

Dear G.A.: Let's look at this from another angle. Most parents would step in and aid their children in a



Yolonda

G.A.

time of need. You can't blame your friend for being a good parent.

What you need to do, though, is make sure that he understands your side. Tell him that, once you become his bride, you want your own place, independent of his daughter and her family. That means he'll either have to put a time limit on the period that they live with him, or, once married, you and he will have to find a new place.

Meanwhile, be willing to spend time with him elsewhere. Your point is valid: no need to parade your business around other people.

Three-Way Affair

Dear Yolonda: I fell in love about three years ago with this very special girl, but she decided to end our relationship because of personal reasons.

When I entered college two years ago, I was lonely and broken-hearted. Then I fell in love with a dif-

ferent girl.

I know the woman I date here at college loves me, but I don't know if I love her the same. You see, I'm still in love with the past girl.

About six months ago, I received a letter from the girl back home saying she wants me back, so, without a doubt, I called her and got things back together.

What I want to know is how can I break the news to the college girl? I'm the type who hates to hurt anyone. I'm stuck with two girls, and don't know how to end it with one.

C.P.

Dear C.P.: You harm someone far more by dragging out the situation, or worse, saying nothing. The answer is to sit down with your college girlfriend and tell her your true feelings.

If the shoe were on your foot, that's exactly how you'd want it. Right?

Got a problem or gripe? Write Yolonda Gayles, P.O. Box 19112, Chicago, Ill. 60619.