

# Painting Pictures With A Meaning

## Local Artist Hopes To Capture The People's Republic Of China On Film

By Winfred B. Cross  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

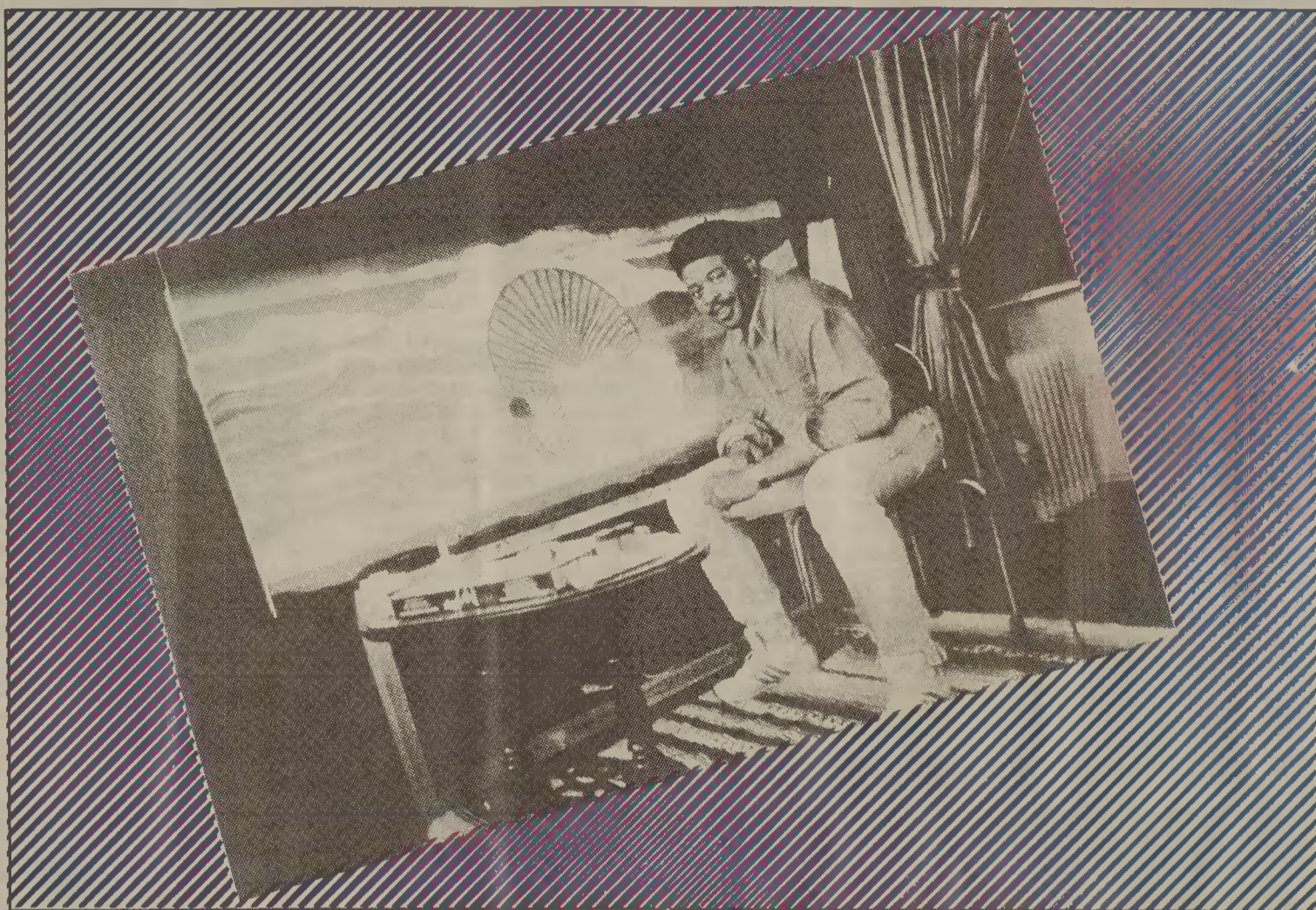
Lee Stewart's been a member of the Light Factory since 1985. He has participated in the Factory's annual member's show a couple of times before.

This year's show is going to be very special, however. On Friday, Stewart will be selling a special T-shirt and print package that, he hopes, will help him get to the People's Republic of China.

Stewart will be going to China with the Total Dance Theatre, an Atlanta-based troupe that has been chosen as Goodwill Ambassadors to China for the 1993 China/USA Summer Festival. The group was picked by New Olympians International (NOI) Show Teams committee in Grand Rapids, Mich.

"I've been involved with TDT since I was back in Macon, Ga., where I got my first job in television. That's been every bit of 15 years," said the 41-year-old Stewart. "TDT is allowing me to go over as a visual artist and multi-media specialist. I'll be projecting my artwork -- 16 millimeter film and slides onto screens as the dancers perform in front of it."

Chinese festival officials are paying for the lodging, food and transportation between the four cities hosting the festival -- Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai and Suahou. Each member of the dance troupe is responsible for round trip transportation and other incidentals.



Local artist Lee Stewart sits in front of one of his "Over The Rainbow" paintings in his studio.

Stewart hopes to bring back more than memories from the trip.

"I'll be bringing back images for Charlotte -- a cultural exchange through pictures," he said. "I want to show how their performing artists react to us as well as how we

react to them. I've never been abroad before in my life, but I think it's going to be a beautiful exchange.

"China's been closed off to the rest of the world except for the exchange through Hong Kong and that's about to be closed off in a few years

when that becomes a part of mainland China. These people are hungry for Western culture and we want to know about them. We hear about the student uprisings and the unrest. What are they doing culturally?"

Stewart is selling a special

print called Jade, from his "Over The Rainbow" series of work. The signed print is an 11-inch-by-17-inch reproduction of an original oil and photograph work. The five-color T-shirt incorporates the print bordered by American and Chinese flags

and the date of the festival. The shirt is \$15 while the print is \$30.

Stewart paints to get away from the sometimes depressing aspects of his job. He sees a lot of destruction as a news photographer with WBTV-Channel 3.

"It's not only in the black community, but in the white as well," said Stewart. "It's babies killing babies."

To get away from the depression Stewart paints images of other places, places of peace.

"I'm basically a surrealist type of painter. I like combining photographs and paint," Stewart said. "Romare Bearden is one of my favorites. He did a lot of photograph and collage painting together. He was amazing. And they were black images. You could actually feel what he was putting on canvass. That's what I want people to get out of my work. I want them to get a message."

The Light Factory Photographic Arts Center's annual members show and party will be held 7 p.m. Friday until its over. The Light Factory is located in the Park Elevator building at the intersection of South Boulevard and Arlington.

To purchase the T-shirt or print, call the Light Factory at 704/333-9755 or write Lee Stewart c/o T-Shirt or Print, 1514 Camden Road, Charlotte, N.C., 28203.

# Hard Work, Talent Help Shai Top Charts

By Winfred B. Cross  
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Members of the soul/pop group Shai don't mind people calling them overnight successes, but they want to be recognized as much for their talent as their luck.

Yes, the group did get lucky and got its first demo played on Washington, D.C.'s WPGC radio. But it was its determination and talent that got it to that point.

"In our case it was one of those things where we said try it and see if it works. No one really was interested in singing when we first started," says Marc Gay, 24, during a phone interview from Sacramento, Calif. "Once we started we got serious. I don't think a lot of people know that about Shai. At first we had no (record) deal and we used to practice for six hours a day. Then each individual would go home and practice what they do best -- sing, write, produce, play piano or write some more. We'd do that an extra four to six hours and then go to school. I don't think people realize how much time we put in before we got signed. They just think it's something that happened overnight. It may have been overnight, but not without talent."

And not without a little luck. The foursome -- Carl "Groove" Martin, Gay, Darnell Van Rensalier and Garfield Bright Jr. -- were students at Howard University in Washington when they decided to record a demo. They scraped up \$400 to record "If I Ever Fall In Love," a haunting capella ballad which features exquisite harmonies written by Martin.

"He had given Darnell a copy of the song first and he had a pretty good inclination of what the song was like. The first time we sang it in front of an audience we only did the first verse and people really reacted to it," Gay said. "We decided to finish and produce it for a demo. It was the first time I had been in a studio. It's almost the same as the demo except for four changes. Those were really like the solo lines, nothing to do with the harmony or anything."

Record companies weren't exactly thrilled, but radio patrons were. After per-



photo by Mario Castellanos

From left to right: Darnell Van Rensalier, Carl "Groove" Martin, Garfield Bright Jr. and Marc Gay.

suading WPGC's programming director to air the song, the station's switchboard was swamped with requests for the song. The song spread to the stations other affiliates in Houston and Phoenix, becoming the most-requested song.

"I was very surprised how it spread to other stations and how well it did. We didn't even have a record deal. This was before we had anything signed," Gay said.

"If I Ever Fall In Love," has been certified platinum, close to double platinum. The song was followed by "Comforter," the second single from "If I Ever Fall In Love." The third single "Baby I'm Yours," done in a "Marvin Gaye" style, is already a Top 40 pop and soul hit.

Gay said the group's sound was immediately compared to Jodeci, Silk, and Boyz II Men.

"Actually it's stopped. I don't know what's happened, but as every song comes out they're finding out we not like the other groups," Gay said.

That's due in part to Shai's ability to concentrate more on the mind than the body. Yes, the songs are sensual, but not in the beat-you-over-the-head-with-my-sexuality manner by which most groups deliver songs. Instead of singing "let me lick you up and down" or "knockin' da boots," Shai asks women to "tell me what's on your mind."

"There you go," Gay says. "That's exactly what Shai is all about."

The name Shai (pronounced shy) comes from "The Egyptian Book Of The Dead." Gay found the name while looking for a pledgee joining Alpha Phi Alpha's Beta chapter at Howard, of which Gay, Van Rensalier, and Martin are members.

"That's just how the three of us met. Garfield and Darnell had known each other since freshmen year because they were roommates and they had known each other all along. The rest

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