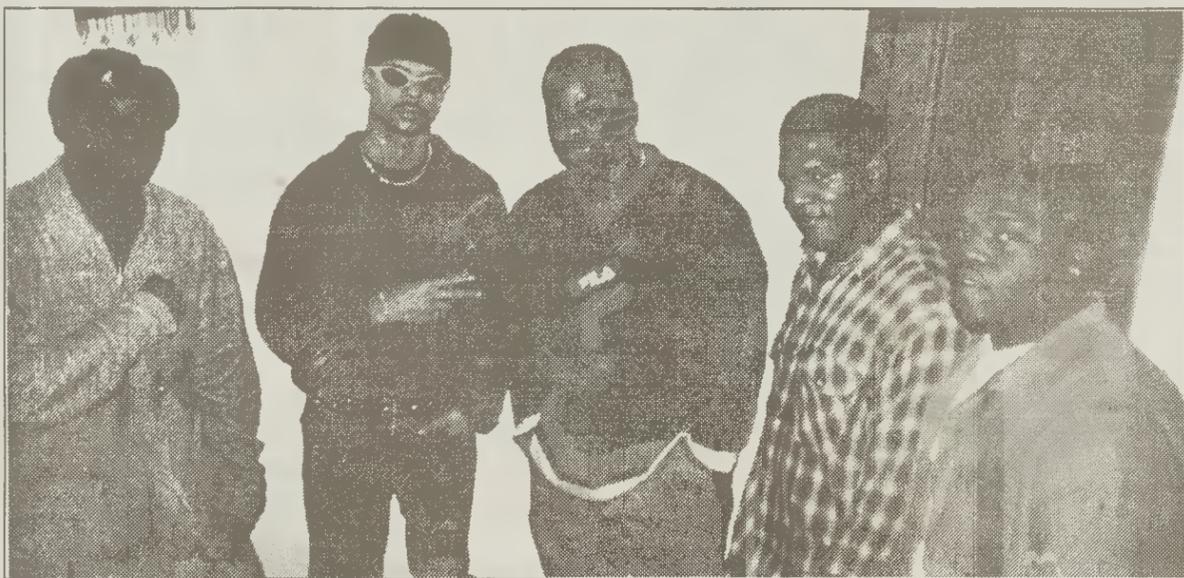


ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Perfect blend of vocals merit a contract



PERFECT BLEND (left to right): Hobbs, Reid, Dave "Jam" Hall, Dube and Camp PHOTO/James Brown.

By Winfred B. Cross
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Two years ago Perfect Blend was a fledgling vocal group hoping to make it big. It's on its way. The quartet — Reggie Dube, Carey Reid, Robert Camp and Dana Hobbs — have signed a deal with gifted producer Dave "Jam" Hall and Epic records. "It's hard to believe," Dube said. "I still have to dig out the paperwork and make sure it's real." The group signed the contract

Jan. 26. Michael Pantaleoni, a New York entertainment attorney representing the group, couldn't give specifics, but said "it's a very good contract for a new (group)." "It's the standard Sony (parent company to Epic) contract — one album with the option to pick up seven more," Pantaleoni said. They've not only signed to a major label, but to a producer that has had extraordinary success in the last few years. Hall has worked with such double-platinum selling artists as Brownstone, hip-hop queen Mary J. Blige and pop princess Mariah Carey.

"His staff has most of the say-so," Dube said. "We've got freedom to write and submit stuff. But I think he's going to do a good bit of it." Perfect Blend caught Hall's attention at a birthday party in his honor. "We did a special a capella version of 'Happy Birthday' and a few other songs," Dube said. "The crowd loved it and that really got his attention. We'd talked to him a couple of times before." The group formed in 1990 while all the members were still in high school. The members have performed at dozens of local events, honing their

immense vocal skills. All are original members, but the group has had a few other members. For a time only Dube and Camp remained members. "Everyone had gone their separate ways," Dube said. "We got everybody back together and went into the studio." Dube promises the group will be more than a clone of its contemporaries. "Our live show will set us apart. We will try to perfect our singing live. We have tight harmony like Boyz II Men, but we can get funky like Jodeci." The group will shuttle

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Dube

between New York and Charlotte for the next few weeks, eventually staying in New York to record an album. A single is planned for March with the album following in May. "Right now we're going to feel it. Whatever happens, happens," Dube said. "We're going to keep our faith in God and know that he's going to do it for us."

Perfect Blend

SOUNDS

By Winfred B. Cross

Speech
Speech
Produced by Speech
EMI/Chrysalis
Records

☆☆☆

Speech proved himself as a fine writer and producer as head of the avant garde ensemble Arrested Development. That is no

Speech is deep, but will buyers hear?

more, so Speech has decided to continue as a solo act. He makes a fine debut. Those looking for something completely different from his work with AD will be disappointed. Speech continues on as a messenger for positive vibes — a hippie for the '90s if you will. There's plenty to like on this debut. Speech knows how to craft a groove as well as a thoughtful message. "Can You Hear Me" and "Why U Gotta Be Feelin' Like Dat" are little more than excuses to party. That's OK, because they do lighten the somewhat somber mood. They are both good for head bobbing. But Speech is at his best when he's tackling social issues. "Ask Someone Who Ain't (If U Think The System Is Working)" and "Like Marvin Said, (What's Going On)" fill the social consciousness bill. But Speech's efforts will probably go largely unnoticed. As good as this work is, it has problems. His sound was once viewed as fresh, but now many rap buyers find it stale. Speech's biggest problem is he concentrates more on profound thought than profane language. Gangsta rap is what's selling and this ain't it. I commend Speech for sticking to the positive tip. I just hope someone out there is listening.

work from this trio ever since. They may be disappointed. Yes, there are other catchy beats — most notably "No One Else" with Da Brat (who actually isn't bad when she bridles her foul tongue). And Raphael Saadiq's "Kissin' You" is pleasant enough. But the

group's self-titled CD points out some glaring limitations, namely the group's vocal ability. To compensate for lack of talent, the project turns kinky as group member Keisha Spivey and producer Sean "Puffy" Combs pretend to engage in kinky sex while the other members — JaKima and Pam Long — watch. Desperate times

call for desperate measures. Even Combs' generally brilliant production ability can't salvage this product. There's nothing here to separate Total from dozens of other female trios. Well, maybe there is one thing: Some of those other trios can sing.

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Total
Total
Sean "Puffy" Combs,
executive producer
Bad Boy/Arista
Records

☆ 1/2

Total caused quite a stir last year with The Notorious B.I.G. on "Can't You See," a No.1 hit from the "New Jersey Drive" soundtrack. Hip-hop lovers have been clamoring for a complete



SPEECH



TOTAL