

4B ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Cleveland tribute OK, needs fire



By Winfred B. Cross
THE CHARLOTTE POST

**Various Artists
James Cleveland: We Remember Him
Various Producers
Intersound Records**

☆☆☆

James Cleveland's death has done little to keep him from being one of the most popular gospel singers of all time. There's not a Sunday morning that passes without a radio announcer playing a song he sang, wrote or produced.

It's been years, but the tributes keep on coming. The latest is an all-star cast ranging from pop to stomp-down gospel. It's an eclectic mix, but, for the most part, it works.

Howard Hewitt is the lone pop artist participant. He teams with Kim McFarland on "It's In My Heart." It's a good pairing, but I expected a bit more fireworks from such superb vocalists. It's almost too understated.

That is the basic problem with this set. It's good when it could have been spectacular. Even if you didn't like Cleveland much as a vocalist, you had to give him credit for being able to get you out of your seat. This set borders on being tedious.

It's not because of the lineup. Walter Hawkins is close to being spectacular on "Please Be Patient With Me." The Clark Sisters are almost there on "Jesus Lifted Me," a number that bubbles with understated fire.

The rest of the CD is, well, good. Spencer Taylor & the Highway Q.C.s give a rousing version of "Everything Will Be Alright." And Mitty Collier's version of "I Had A Talk With God" is special.

I think this set would have been better if it was a live recording. Gospel singers tend to work better that way. As it is, the set is good. I just wish it was spectacular.

**Various Artists
Muggs Presents the Soul Assassins
Chapter One
Produced by Muggs
Columbia**

☆☆ 1/2

I don't know who Muggs is, but I have to give him credit for pulling together some of the best talent in the rap world to make this CD. He either wrote or co-wrote all of the material, a feat within itself.

The theme of this CD must be depression. There's not an uplifting song to be found. But that's not bad because most of the stuff has powerful messages. I wish rap folks could make these points without using such foul language.

Members of the Wu-Tang Clan, Cypress Hill, The Fugees, Call O' Da Wild, Infamous Mobb, Goodie Mob

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Isleys still love their work, music

By Winfred B. Cross
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Let's clear up a rumor. Jimi Hendrix did not teach Ernie Isley of the Isley Brothers how to play the guitar. Isley didn't get his first guitar until he was 10 years old. Hendrix had already left the Isley's band by then.

"First of all, whatever (Hendrix) was doing couldn't be taught," Isley said in a Tuesday phone interview. "If he could have, he would have taught it to my brother Marvin. He was more than a year younger, but wasn't afraid to ask him anything. Me, I was always standing off."

That was years ago. Isley has certainly gotten over his shyness. He proves that every night he gets on stage and peels off Hendrix-like guitar solos that's infused seamlessly into a funky dance song like "Midnight Sky" or a lilting ballad like "Summer Breeze."

Lately, Ernie and brothers Marvin and Ronald (aka "Mr. Big") have been playing those songs frequently. The Isley's "Mission To Please" tour, named after its latest platinum-plus CD, is swinging across the country with a vengeance. Isley fans are once again packing auditoriums to see the group.

The Isleys play Charlotte's Ovens Auditorium March 14.

"Everybody is starting to become aware of the Isley Brothers again," Ernie said. "A lot of people who haven't been to a live concert in a long time are coming out to see us. They'll get the whole nine yards, from "Shout" to

"Mission To Please." We know we're pushing a lot of different buttons."

That's a lot of songs and a lot of history. The Isleys first hit was "Shout," which had a second life in the '70s through "National Lampoons Animal House." Then came a number of hits with Motown like "This Old Heart of Mine." The group did several other songs for Motown - "I Heard It Through The Grapevine," and "Reach Out, I'll Be There" to name two - which were never released.

"Other groups were like, 'look, you're giving these new guys all the good songs. It was very competitive," Ernie said.

The Isley Brothers - then Ronald, Rudolph (now a minister) and O'Kelly (who died in 1986) - were allowed to leave Motown after a two-and-a-half year stay. They made history by becoming the first group to leave the label and immediately have a hit record, "It's Your Thing." Ernie did his first guitar solo on "Layaway." He became an official member of the group along with brother Marvin and brother-in-law Chris Jasper on 3+3, the album that made them one of many '70s black super groups.

"Three plus three was a break from everything we had done," he said. "It's Your Thing" had horns. This one was guitar and keyboard driven. (His guitar solos were one more weapon in the arsenal.)

And a potent weapon it was. From 1973 until 1984 the group rolled 10 platinum (1 million copies) in a row. "With catalog sales, each is double



Ernie (left, with guitar), Ronald and Marvin Isley will appear at Ovens Auditorium 8 p.m. March 14. Says Ernie, "everybody is starting to become aware of the Isley Brothers again."

platinum," Ernie said.

"There's not a lot of groups that started in 1959 that are still around in the '90s....For a group to go all through that is really remarkable."

Isley credits the group's resurgence to its ability to read the market and fate.

"Certain things happen when it's time to happen. It was time, for whatever reason

by the grace of God. We've even rejuvenated T-Neck (the group's own record label). We're on T-Neck, distributed by Island. We were also

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Does being black in Hollywood count?

Non-whites still scarce on screen



By Lynn Elber
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES - One year ago, the Rev. Jesse Jackson used the Academy Awards as a vehicle to protest the film industry's exclusion of blacks and other minorities.

This year, he could recycle his script with virtually no rewrites.

Although some Hollywood observers find cause for limited optimism, many agree that nonwhites continue to face enormous challenges in launching and sustaining an acting, writing or directing career.

And while a few new films such as "Rosewood" and "Set It

Off" honestly explore black life, they are rarities in an industry and a society - with a new and troubling awareness of deep racial divisions.

"Change has been minimal at best. Very, very minimal," said Frank Berry, an official of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. "There is so much room for improvement, for growth, we don't want to focus on Band-Aid cover-ups."

It is true that A-list actors such as Morgan Freeman and Denzel Washington consistently find work. It's true the historical drama



Washington

"Rosewood" got studio backing. And unconventional projects such as "Set It Off," a heist film with black women as the heroes, are nurtured by smaller companies.

All suggest change. But widespread, consequential progress is not supported by the statistics of groups such as the Writers Guild of America.

Blacks represent just 2.6 percent of the WGA membership, as they did a year ago. In the past five years, employment of black writers has increased just about 1 percent. Hispanics are about 1 percent of the WGA, with Asians about .5 percent.

By comparison, blacks make up 12 percent of the U.S. population, while Hispanics represent about 10 percent and Asians about 3.5 percent.

"I don't know what you could point to to say things are getting better," said Zara Buggs-Taylor, the guild's executive administrator for employment diversity.

Directors Guild of America statistics also show that minorities consistently are bypassed in hiring. According to the latest figures available, for 1995, less than 4 percent of directing work went to non-whites, including blacks, Hispanics and Asians.

Among actors, recent years have brought some improvement. Between 1991 and 1995, employment of black actors in the Screen Actors Guild increased from 11 percent to 13 percent of the guild total.

For black actresses, there was a 3 percent increase, to 13 percent.

Among minorities overall, employment for actors rose from 15 percent in 1991 to 19 percent in 1995; for actresses, the figure went from 14 percent to 18 percent.

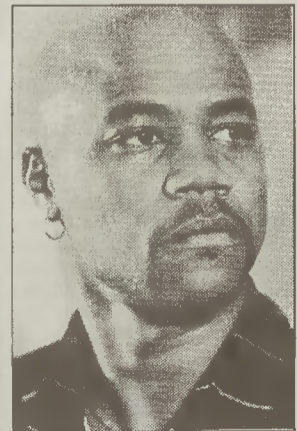
The number of minority Oscar nominees, which initial-

"There is so much room for improvement, for growth, we don't want to focus on Band Aid cover ups."

- Frank Berry

ly provoked Jackson's criticism, is little changed. Hollywood's famed golden symbol of excellence also is a dubious monument to the limited inroads made by non-whites.

Cuba Gooding Jr. of "Jerry Maguire" and Marianne Jean-



Cuba Gooding Jr.

Baptiste of "Secrets and Lies," both black, are the only minority actors nominated this year. A handful of non-white nominees are found in categories such as best documentary short.

Oscar's record is defended by Academy Executive Director Bruce Davis, who said worthy performances are recognized without regard to color.

"It seems to me the good news this year is not that there were two black perform-

ers nominated, but the two black performers deserve to be nominated," he said.

If they had been made out of a "sense of organizational obligation," he said, "we would have started down a very unfortunate path."

But there are subtle signs of Hollywood's awkward handling of race. "Ghosts of Mississippi," about the murder of black civil rights activist Medgar Evers, received an Oscar nod for James Woods' portrayal of Evers' killer, Byron De La Beckwith.

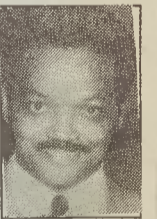
A nomination for the actor playing Evers was unlikely: The character received bare minutes of screen time as Hollywood chose to tell the story mostly through the eyes of the white participants.

"As we said last year, the Oscars are the end of the process, and the paucity of nominations is a reflection of the need to have more people of color involved at the beginning, middle and final stages of film work," Jackson's Rainbow-PUSH Coalition said in a recent statement.

"We said a year ago and we say it today: Hollywood must do a better job in reflecting the cultural diversity of society."

The coalition, which staged Oscar-night protests in 20 cities last year, said the impact of its plea has yet to be seen. The group is weighing possible action during the upcoming March 24 ceremony.

For its part, the NAACP plans a comprehensive examination of the "deep-rooted problem" of discrimination, Berry said. That might result in a future plan of attack including "picketing to lawsuits to anything in between,"



Jackson



Ving Rhames stars in "Rosewood," Warner Bros.' searing drama based on an actual story.

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