

'Analyzing a song is like analyzing the person you love.'

Mr. Butler - The Iceman speaketh

by Greg Porter
Staff Writer



They call him the Iceman. He doesn't strut like James Brown. His act isn't choreographed like the Spinners'. He doesn't perform in the peacock's plumage of an Elton John, the "bad" chains of an Isaac Hayes or even the garish threads of a Marvin Gaye.

Jerry Butler has sold over 11 million singles, 500,000 albums and has played all the name nightclubs including the Copa. But he has risen to success in the recording industry not by packaging himself as a nightclub act, as a showman, but as a pure singer and writer. Jerry Butler stands alone among established performers for his ice-clean style on stage.

He sings with little wasted motion, clad in a simple grey suit, eyes often closed, the microphone in his right hand, the energy of his performance clenched in his left fist. He is the same man off and on stage, an entertainer with no stage persona, just a talent and a magic pristine as ice. In an age of showmen, Jerry Butler is an artist.

"George Woods, a disk jockey in Philadelphia started calling me 'the Iceman' early in my career as a kind of joke," Jerry said.

"At that time, most of the guys in the business—like the Isley Brothers and Joe Tex—were turning flips and sliding across

stage...and I wasn't. George said, 'This guy is so cool that he's got to be the Iceman.'"

"I grew up in a neighborhood where almost every cat either wanted to be one of the Globetrotters, or make a record, or be Jackie Robinson or Joe Louis," Jerry recalled, sipping a beer backstage at Raleigh's Embers Club. "In that

down and write this song and blow everybody's mind—I think that's being rather facetious. I think that in anything a person does he must start with Number 1. Usually when I do something that knocks me out, it's a hit. I know when I'm doing something mediocre and when I'm doing something that's great. A lot of times,

'The black entertainer is better educated, has more tools to deal with his particular problems now than ever.'

neighborhood there were about 10,000 people and we knew that less than 1% of 1% would ever make it. I was 18 years old when I made it and it still blows my mind that I can be so blessed."

Indeed, Jerry was blessed. In nine years he rose to the top of the industry, netting in 1968 and 1969 alone, over \$600,000. Now he owns his own publishing firm and a beer distributing company in Chicago, where he makes his home with his wife and two sons.

"I write about true-life situations," Jerry claimed. Music, he said, comes from the soul.

"I don't analyze my songs. Analyzing a song is like analyzing the person you love. You get so far into the analytical part that you start missing the things you really enjoy."

Jerry also makes music to please himself. "As far as me saying, 'Hey, I'm gonna sit

because of contractual commitments and other pressures you have to deal with things that are mediocre just based on the fact that the contract says you must record 'x' amount of sides per year."

Jerry's individualistic viewpoint carries over into his comments on music in general. Music, Jerry claims, is not part of a professional trend but "what people like, what they feel for, what they want to hear," not what the companies want to sell.

"I hate to say there's ever a trend happening in music," Jerry added. "I was coming over here on the plane with Ramsey Lewis and we talked about his new album *Sun Goddess*. Now *"Sun Goddess"* is a song that Ramsey felt was a strict jazz tune and didn't expect it to be a big single. So now *"Sun Goddess"* is a big hit and all the things they cut trying to stay within the trend are sitting in the album getting passed over because nobody's into the 'trend.'"

"Groups like the Ohio Players and Kool and the Gang are playing self-contained kinds of things," he continued. "They aren't doing the big string arrangements. A girl like



No James Brown strut

Staff photo by Peter Ray

Minnie Ripperton comes along and makes a smash (*"Loving You"*) without even a drum in it."

Jerry's disdain of pure promotion reflects the quality that won him the name "Iceman". "Sometimes people have promoted a thing into popularity—like Tiny Tim and the Monkees. They take it to TV and shove it down your throat. People will buy it for a little while but after the fad of it is worn out, they're through with it. When you're talking about genuine artistry, it's hard to say 'we are going to take this and promote it into greatness.' There has to be something to sell."

Jerry Butler really believes that "only the strong survive," and that same ethic of personal responsibility applies to all facets of his life, including his contribution to improving the lot of the black man in America.

"If a guy represents his race well, which is what I've always tried to do, whether it be in music, personal appearance, public life, then he's doing his job. I've always tried to be the best of all the things my race is about because that's what I wanted to be as a person. If that means standing up for what I believe is right,

then so be it—whether that's going into a restaurant to eat, or getting the proper deal with a record company."

Jerry sees some racial progress in the recording industry.

"I think that the black entertainer, the black athlete, the black politician, etc. is better educated, has more tools to deal with his particular problems now than ever. There's no comparison in, say, a Joe Louis and a Muhammed Ali as far as the amount of knowledge at the same age level. Take Jerry Butler and Nat Cole. At the same age level there's no comparison between what he knew about the business and what I know about the business."

For the moment, Jerry Butler is finishing up a nightclub tour that will take him across the country. After the tour Jerry plans to sign with a new record company (his contract with Mercury terminated in February), the name of which he won't reveal because negotiations are not yet complete. A new album should hit the market in about a year. The Iceman hasn't had a big hit in five years and is looking forward to a fresh start because, as he says, "I'm still not the best Jerry Butler I can be...yet."

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"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

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Crossword Puzzler

Answer to Yesterday's Puzzle

ACROSS

- Stitch
- Call
- Flap
- Macaw
- River in France
- Turkish commander
- Waterways
- Baker's product
- Proceed
- Attempt
- Fondle
- Torrid
- Dillseed
- Weight of India
- Humorists
- Article of furniture
- Ventilate
- Dance step
- Latin conjunction
- Long steps
- River in Italy
- Southwestern Indian
- Grain
- Uncouth person
- Endorsement on a passport
- Sum up
- Peel
- Peer
- Gynt's mother
- Cyprinoid fish (pl.)
- Ethiopian title
- Saint (abbr.)
- Brick-carrying device
- Nimrod
- Lamb's pen name
- Ireland
- Falsehood
- Goal
- Soaks
- Bitter vetch

DOWN

- Algonquian Indian
- Period of time
- Needed
- Consecrated
- Three-toed sloth
- Exists
- Sufferer from Hansen's disease
- Golf mound
- Part of "to be"
- One obstinately devoted to his own opinion
- Decays
- Skill
- Pronoun
- Portions of time
- Pronoun
- Man's nickname
- Openwork fabric
- Title of respect
- Existed
- Devoured
- Carling
- Music: as written
- Parent (colloq.)
- Equality
- Poem
- Employ
- Pretextuous home
- Um
- Fiber plant
- Snake
- Shallow vessel
- Maiden loved by Zeus
- Hurries
- Possessed
- Strike
- Goddess of healing
- Things in law
- Preposition
- Note of scale

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