

ON STAGE

Vernon's "Reid"ing colorful words of wisdom

When asked why his rock band went against the musical norm of blacks playing jazz and soul, Vernon Reid of Living Colour will almost always scream back: "You crazy? Blacks created rock music!"

Reid, the lead guitarist and founder of Living Colour, is now gaining huge critically-acclaimed and commercial success from the group's second album, *Time's Up*. Blacks playing rock'n'roll are indeed rare, but sentences about today's music that contain both "critically-acclaimed" and "commercial" in the same breath are almost obsolete.

The group, which consists of Reid, lead singer Corey Glover, bassist Muzz Skillings and Will Calhoun on drums, is supposedly the symbol of a new age in music. Along with black groups such as Public Enemy and De La Soul, Living Colour is supposedly the arrival of prophets of pride, rage and talent.

How did they get into this situation?

"Man, I don't know," Reid said in a recent teleconference interview. "It was like that old saying — we were in the right place at the right time, you know?"

"We came up with a lot of bands

TIM LITTLE PROFILE

that were doing the same things we were. A lot of them didn't get a break, although they were very good ... or at least I think so," he said.

Reid doesn't refrain from being vocal about the music business. Although it has been his life, he has also seen the music destroy a lot of talented people across the country.

"I really don't like the way the industry grinds people up and uses them," he said. "Look at Curtis Mayfield and James Brown. These guys are important cultural figures. I mean they are important everywhere."

"Trust me when I say something like *Kick* from INXS would not sound the same without these guys. And these are the big guys. Little-known acts get crunched up, and it is really devastating to them."

Reid also said he gets unfair criticism when people talk about his role involving other black rock groups. A lot of people have said his success has made him forget and dismiss other black groups.

"It's wild because when Living

Colour first started out we were the opening act for Fishbone. Hell, we looked up to those guys. There's no way we could think about not regarding them as a good rock group."

"Lately, I've been trying on the Black Rock Coalition, which is trying to pull the few black rock groups out there together. It's something that will try to build these guys up before the industry tries to kill 'em."

He explained that the Coalition will try to put together a concept album combining works by several black rock bands (Much like the *frequeNCy* album put together by North Carolina bands.). The album will try to include some educational themes as well as just plain old rock'n'roll.

Reid added that when Living Colour rolls through the States on its world tour, the group will try to get local black groups as opening acts to help the local bands garner more publicity. He acknowledged North Carolina's The Veldt as one of the best bands he's heard.

"Oh yeah, The Veldt is a hyped band. We heard them a few times and I'm trying to get them in on the Coalition. They're another example of a great band that a lot of the rock nation hasn't heard yet. North Caro-

linians should feel privileged."

When speaking about North Carolina, one might expect Reid to be reluctant to play in a state frequently stereotyped as uncultured and redneck. But he completely disagreed with this attitude.

"I'm pretty sure we're coming through North Carolina on the tour. We loved North Carolina the few times we've played there. I was surprised that we had so many fans down there."

Playing throughout the world can be stressful, though. When the Rolling Stones tapped Reid and the band to open for them on their Steel Wheels tour, Reid almost said no.

"We were concerned that on such a huge tour we wouldn't be able to devote enough time to the new album. We were also concerned that we'd get burned out somewhere along the way. But when the opportunity comes to play on one of the largest concert tours ever, I guess you don't say no."

The group's travels apparently didn't hamper the quality of the new album, as critics have raved about the record all across the country. Fortunately, the results for Living Colour weren't all that bad.

"After the tour, we went to a concert at the Omni in Atlanta. After we

went in, we were all like, 'Man, what a small room.' It was wild because we had played in all these huge stadiums across the world, and even a 20,000-seat center seemed small. It was a weird adjustment, but luckily not a hard one."

The group also had to adjust to dealing with the success of the album.

"One thing I've most appreciated while I've been with Living Colour is getting that first gold record. Going platinum was shocking, getting a Grammy was great, but gold really meant a lot. Back in the day, the gold record was it! I couldn't believe it when we got it."

After achieving so much, what could be next for the group? A new record deal might be in the works, along with collaborations with other big artists, but what about the next album?

"The next album is going to be a bit of an experiment," Reid said. "The type of jazz style we had in songs like 'Ology' and 'Undercover Of Darkness' might be the main theme. But hardcore stuff like in the beginning of 'Time's Up' might be in there, too. Then again Will was talking about involving more rap in the music. And ... well, I guess the truth is I don't know."

Hip popsters return as older kids on the block

The Popes

Saturday, November 3, 10 p.m.

Cal's Cradle
tickets: \$4

Hey, Big Saturday is only a week away!

Actually, Big Saturday is only three days away for the soon-to-be-world-famous Popes. Saturday, Nov. 3, the Popes play the Cal's Cradle, and local partisan crowds, no doubt, will be ready to welcome them back.

Many of the Popes' fans have been wondering where these hip popsters have been lately. I found them banging away Monday afternoon in residential Chapel Hill, in a house aptly called "the Vatican" on their answering machine.

"We've really been in a terrible state of disorganization," said John Elderkin, one of the group's pioneers. "We didn't have much of a plan after we put out that first record."

After losing bassist Henry Pharr to law school this fall, the newer members, Jim Rumley and Mark Whelan, along with original member Steve Ruppenthal, are supplying new fuel to keep the wheels churning. They have an album in the works, produced by John Plymale of the Sex Police, that they hope to release this winter.

In 1988, The Popes graced the North Carolina music scene as one of the most promising young bands to

CHARLES MARSHALL Concert

emerge since the Connells. Their 6-song EP, *Hi, We're the Popes!*, not only landed them steady gigs along the I-85 corridor, but brought fantastic reviews floating in from all across the country — *Billboard* and *CMJ* are just a couple of the bigger publications that lent an appreciative ear.

Looking back, Elderkin said he wished they could have put out a follow-up last year. But the Popes were hoping their glowing reviews and regional successes would help them land a contract. Unfortunately, the band soon learned about the frustrations and politics inherent in the record industry, and most of their high hopes gradually fell through.

"We've got a Wall of Shame over there," the members of the band said, pointing to a display of coming-up-short and apologetic rejections from hosts of record companies.

Ironically, the Wall of Shame represents the band's most positive musical elements — their off-beat honesty and their ability to poke fun at themselves.

Critics have raved about the band's catchy, hook-laden, pop-tinged style but have sought to distinguish it from traditional college pop. Some refer to it as "rougher along the edges, with a bit more grinding guitar." Others cite the band's knack for lyrical wit and its hip-happening everydayness. In fact,

many of its lyrics seem as though they come from late-night bull sessions that relive male glories and frustrations with unbelievable vividness — portraying everything from hopeless crushes to family life to '70s stoners — all with honest-to-God logic and storytelling genius.

And finally, some like it just for being the purest, truest form of college pop. Though at times the Popes' sound teases audiences with flashes of influences (Let's Active, dB's and even They Might Be Giants), it isn't enough to pinhole it into a specific pop genre.

But what separates the Popes from mainstream cliché pop is undoubtedly the personal humor and candor in the songs. Not only are the songs more personal, they are more real, and they come from the heart, no matter how masked, warped or comically they are delivered. The New Kids can sing "I'll Be Lovin' You Forever" with as much sappy mechanical harmony and melody as they can fit into it, but it'll never come close to reaching the more mature personal pop that the Popes play. And that's why the record industry sucks.

Though Elderkin said they have become more serious and direction-oriented about their songwriting, it probably won't lose that personal touch that he described as the "bare-bones" type. And even when the band breaks into a brasher element, both the musical and lyrical deliveries are still so playfully joyous and expressed in such a feel-good fashion that you can't help but laugh along with them.

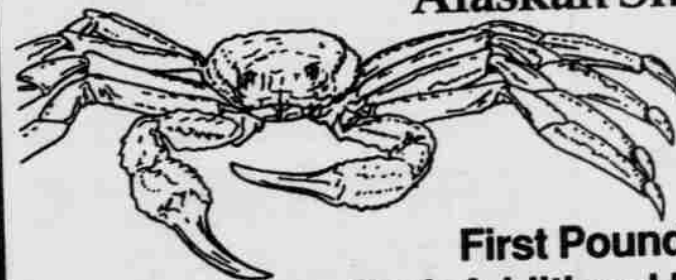
Recently, the Popes have thrust themselves successfully back into the local limelight, now packed full of promising bands. "She's You" appears on WXYC's *DemoListen* and "Cornerhouse" appears on Mammoth Records' *frequeNCy* sampler. On "Cornerhouse", the band creatively relives the younger memories of the hippie-ridden '70s with satirical savvy

and a stunning literal wit. Though an old song, it's become a sort of centerpiece for the public since the EP.

At any rate, The Popes are back with their guitars, sunny harmonies and popsmarts. Don't miss this band, and astutely encourage the record companies not to miss it either. They need to be awakened to the real world every once in a while.

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