

Decided to Write Own Hits

By Wayne Edwards
Special to the Chronicle

NEW YORK - The names of Gene McFadden and John Whitehead should not be new to anybody who has been even remotely connected with the music industry during the '70s because they have written and produced some of the most powerful R&B hits of this decade.

Although known primarily for their producing and composing abilities, McFadden and Whitehead have finally fulfilled a life-long dream: they have now stepped out front as performing artists on their debut LP, **McFadden & Whitehead**, on Philadelphia International Records.

Featuring eight brand new tunes written by this dynamic duo (along with Jerry Cohen), **McFadden & Whitehead** is a pulsating album that ranges from funk to disco to romantic ballads - while maintaining cohesiveness.

Ironically enough, they were first signed to Philly International as recording artists way back in 1969. It's taken ten long, but fruitful years for the two men who are often affectionately referred to as "the comedians of Philly" to reach this stage of their career.

"Actually," says John, "it's taken a long longer than that because we've been anxious to record since we first teamed up years ago as kids in the streets of Philly. You can trace our beginnings all the way back to the tenth grade when we formed a group called The Epsilons."

The Epsilons found moderate success when, after approaching the late great Otis Redding with a proposition that he manage them, the group became

part of the famed Otis Redding Revue. "Working with a man of that stature," Gene continues, "gave us a lot of confidence. While with the Revue we were supposed to record the song 'Sweet Soul Music' which later became a big, big hit for Arthur Connelly with us singing background."

Despite being with Otis, however, the two young men eventually tired of the constant road travel and returned to the familiar setting of Philadelphia.

Upon returning to Philly, McFadden & Whitehead signed as recording artists with Philly International but, because of their inexperience and lack of a track record, the venture was not as fruitful as anticipated. In fact, John ended up taking on assorted odd-jobs within the company.

"That was somewhat of a drag," he relates. "But it was good for both of us because while I was there I checked out how these cats were writing songs and I realized that Gene and I had been writing songs all along but didn't know it."

One night they finally sat down in John's kitchen determined to create their first "official" song and the results were phenomenal. "Backstabbers" McFadden & Whitehead's first song - became a number one across-the-board smash for the O'Jays just weeks after its release.

"It was hard getting Mr. Huff to listen to our lyrics," John laughs, "because we were literally following him down the hallway reading the words to him. But we finally got to him because before we even finished he stopped by his office, turned to us and said, 'come in here.'" That was the start of one of the most successful songwriting

duos to emerge since Lennon & McCartney.

McFadden & Whitehead's credits now include having written and/or produced "Easy, Easy (Got to Take it Easy)", "Cold Cold World", "The More I Get, The More I Want" for Teddy Pendergrass; "I'll Always Love My Mama" for the intruders; "Standing Right Here" and "Pick Me Up I'll Dance" for Melba Moore; and "Bad Luck", "Where Are All My Friends" and "Wake Up Everybody" for Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes.

In addition they've written and/or produced albums for Archie Bell & The Drells, the Jacksons and Lou Rawls, as well as perform with such headliners as the O'Jays, Gladys Knight & the Pips, Sammy Davis, James Brown and

Stevie Wonder.

"That's why this album, **McFadden & Whitehead**, is an important move for us," says John. "For years we've poured our all into making things happen for other artists while all the time saying to ourselves, 'hey, that could be us doing our tunes.'" If Gamble & Huff (mentors of the Philly International label) hadn't given us this opportunity I think it would have hurt our morale. It would have taken something away from us because, in all honesty, despite the enormous success we've had as composers and producers, our hearts were really into being - or at least attempting to be - performers."

They are undoubtedly off to a flying start with a debut album featuring strong tunes like "Got To Change", "Mr. Music" and the infectious up-tempo smash gold single "Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now" which states to the utmost the philosophy that makes these two men click. The lyrics, in fact, are so poignant that the New York's WBLS-FM, the top rated black-oriented station in the country, has dubbed it "the national anthem."

"Our album is very versatile," concludes Gene. "You might hear Otis Redding, Bobby Womack, Earth, Wind & Fire, Graham Central Station or anybody, if you dig what I mean. We can do it all."

Although said jokingly, you somehow get the feeling that underneath it there is a serious message and, perhaps, maybe all of these groups should keep an eye on McFadden & Whitehead.



McFadden and Whitehead

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Black Broadway

A virtuoso performance by 96-year old pianist/composer, Eubie Blake, marks a classic note as National Public Radio broadcasts live from the 1979 Newport Jazz Festival. Blake is one of many stars in the festival's production of "Black Broadway" to be broadcast by BPR member station WFDD.

Disco Down with TV

Discomania has hustled its way right off the dance floor and boogie-oogie-oogied its way into America's heart. The fashions, the flash, the dancing and the beat are reverberating throughout the contemporary culture - and their appeal is irresistible. Whether or not you've caught the fever yet, you're invited to "get down and boogie" Monday, July 2 at 9:00 pm on UNC-TV Channels 4 & 26, with **Dancing Disco**. The eight-part series will feature dance lessons from teacher Randy Deats, who can untangle the complex moves of a Triple Hustle so that even non-dancers will soon find themselves fast-stepping to the beat of

"Keep on Dancin'." The series will explore the entire range of the disco phenomenon, including interviews with deejays, top dancers, disco owners, fashion designers, special effects experts, musicians, record industry execs, and even a foot doctor - because you can't hustle when your feet hurt!

Dancing Disco will be recorded live on location at Club Max, one of Boston's hottest nightspots. In addition to lessons, each program in the series will spotlight a top dancing couple; so once you've mastered the basic steps, you'll be able to pick up some fancy flourishes from advanced dancers.

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