

# Duo Makes Music In Famous Studio

**BY HILLEL ITALIE**  
**ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER**  
 NEW YORK (AP) --- At the Science Lab in midtown Manhattan, the same studio where Irving Berlin composed standards, keyboardist David Frank and singer Mic Murphy churn out funk.

"Don't Disturb This Groove" and "You're In My System" won't make anyone forget "Blue Skies" or "White Christmas," but Frank and Murphy, whose songs have climbed the charts, aren't complaining.

Neither are Phil Collins, Phillip Bailey, Stevie Winwood, Chaka Khan and Nona Hendryx, some of the artists who have received help songwriting or production from the two-man funk band appropriately called The System.

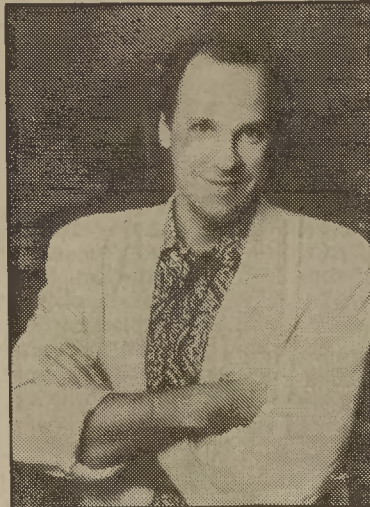
"One day, the phone rang and I woke up and picked it up," Frank recalled. "Mic said, 'I know what the name of the group should be.' He said 'The System.' I said I don't like that. I thought it should be more colorful. The next morning, I called him and woke him up and said I liked the name."

That was in 1982. Frank and Murphy had just met, written a song, "In Times of Passion," and persuaded Atlantic Records to release it. One problem: What should they call themselves? The "Frank-Murphy Project" was definitely out, it sounded too much like an album-rock band. Murphy considered Fiber-glass and This Record Itches before thinking of The System and phoning Frank.

"It has so many meanings. It's political, the body, a manner of the way things work together. We can go on. I was thinking, 'Dave is from Boston and I'm from Jamaica, Queens.' I used to say, 'We are America.' We have the whole spectrum on the East Coast," Murphy said.



Murphy



Frank

Names matter. Frank and Murphy insist. When they start writing a song, the title often comes first; music and lyrics are filled in. That's why ballads are rare for The System. Working titles such as "Groove" and "You're In My System" just don't seem right for slow songs. Neither do "Midnight Special" nor "Wicked," tracks off their new album "Rhythm & Romance."

"A lot of times we'll fit things together," Frank said. "The Beatles used to do exactly the same thing: Let's just take this bridge and inject it into this song."

Their childhoods had little in common, except a love for music. Frank grew up in the Roxbury section of Boston, literally on the wrong side of the tracks.

"I lived at the edge of town," Frank said, "and WLIR was the only R&B station in the Boston area and only during daylight hours. Right when we crossed into our town, I'd be listening to my mother's car radio and it would fade out and we'd get a Top 40 station from Baltimore."

While Frank had to fumble with the radio dial to hear the music he loved, rhythm and blues was practically in Murphy's backyard. The local barbershop was owned by the father of future Funkadelic guitarist Eddie Hazel and several other aspiring funk stars. Eddie Martinez, Marcus Miller and Ronnie Drayton were in the neighborhood.

"I was in bands when I was 10 or 11," Murphy recalled. "Little Mic and the Soulshakers." We played a lot of social clubs and dances at the time. My parents and their friends went to these clubs and because we were the only young kids who had a band, we got to play every weekend.

"People would say, 'They're so cute.' We were getting paid 50 bucks a night. We'd be the midnight floor show. We'd play all the new songs and the audiences loved it. We were like the local Jackson 5."

Frank, meanwhile, was being groomed for a more highbrow career, studying classical piano at the New England Conservatory

and Berkeley College of Music. Rock 'n' roll won out, but he did not forget his early training. "It affects the way I think of music," Frank said. "I'll refer to a song as a concerto, a vocal concerto."

"That's what happened with 'Don't Disturb This Groove,'" Murphy added. "That's the first movement. 'Soul to Soul' on this album is the second movement."

The System has other influences, including the Rolling Stones, Sly and the Family Stone, Parliament-Funkadelic and Led Zeppelin. Frank and Murphy's musical tastes ranged so wide, they at first had no idea into which radio format or formats their songs would fit.

"We'd never been on a chart," Frank said. "I looked at the label and saw our names as producers and thought, 'So that's what producers do. We didn't have any plan in mind. We just did it were getting paid more money than we had ever gotten before.'"

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