

# ENTERTAINMENT

## Take 6 Expands Range With New LP

SPECIAL TO THE POST

It is one of the most unlikely sagas in the history of popular music. An a capella Gospel group from a small college in Huntsville, Alabama turns the musical world on its ear, as its first album earns unprecedented praise from the industry's biggest stars, achieves gold status, and takes a number of major awards capped by three Grammys.

The Take 6 story, though, happily continues to defy expectation, for just as fans and critics alike are running out of superlatives, the group has released a second album that is even more astounding than the first. It's still what member Mervyn Warren calls "contemporary Christian a capella pop jazz," but this time around the textures have deepened, the musical influences are more varied, and the added complexity makes the crystal-clear harmonies even more dazzling.

**So Much 2 Say**, well over a year in the making, also adds an occasional splash of humor and offers a more complete look at the incredible range of talents of the group's six members. Eight of the LP's songs are, in fact, are originals.

"Working on this new material was quite a challenge," says Warren. "Not only are we trying to improve upon what we've done in the past, we are making this project more our own by doing the majority of writing, all of the arranging and the entire production. We cover all the bases that a band would, only with our voices. It gets a little tricky. I believe the first album says, 'This is who we are.' **So Much 2 Say** says, 'This is what we can do.'"

It is an impressive display. From the opening bars of the title track, it is apparent that we are in breathtakingly fresh territory, where the human voice becomes the ultimate instrument, providing lead, rhythm and percussion, with rapid-fire staccato delivery alternating with richly textured, soaring chords.

As the LP unfolds, there are touches of doo-wop, the Caribbean, the classics, traditional gospel and scatting jazz, blending into one another an often taking unexpected twists and turns, and all delivered with an extraordinary dynamic range.

"With **So Much 2 Say**, I feel that Take 6 has grown up musically and stylistically," says member Claude McKnight.

Much of the credit for that can be attributed to plain, old-fashioned hard work. **So Much 2 Say** was painstakingly assembled over the course of a year that saw group members set aside studio time when they could. They are, as may be expected, some of the busiest young men on the planet, as they juggle a phenomenally successful career with family life and, in several cases, continuing education.

It was during the course of the education that Take 6 first took



root. The group had its beginnings in the Gentlemen's Estate Quartet at the 1200-student Oakwood College, a Seventh-day Adventist institution in Huntsville, Alabama. In a now-famous episode, the group's four members were taking advantage of the acoustics in a campus bathroom when Mark Kibble walked in, listened for a moment, and began adding a fifth

part. He, in turn, introduced the group to Warren, and, with a name change to Alliance-the group settled on its current lineup, which consists of Kibble, Warren, Claude V. McKnight III, Cedric Dent, Alvin "Vinnie" Chea and David Thomas.

In June of 1987, Alliance headed to Nashville to do a showcase. They invited executives from all the major gospel labels, with an

eye to landing a recording deal. The interest they were looking for, though, came from an unexpected source—Warner Bros./Reprise Records Nashville president Jim Ed Norman, who had heard the group's tape a year earlier and came to check them out for himself. Within two days of the showcase, Reprise Records and Alliance soon to change its name to Take 6—an inked a deal.

By the following winter, with the group's first album nearing completion, the phenomenal nature of the reaction they would be getting from all quarters was beginning to make itself known. Singer Andy Williams caught their first national TV appearance, on NBC's Today show, and invited them to accompany him on an eight-city tour. In April, they were featured

on the Sports Emmys program, and in May performed with Sandi Patti at New York's Radio City Music Hall.

At around this time, Stevie Wonder heard the LP and called Take 6 manager Gail Hamilton at 3 a.m. to ask that the group join him for his pending Radio City Music Hall dates. Hamilton says she asked him to call back in the morning, "to make sure I wasn't dreaming." Wonder also scoured record stores, buying up more than 200 copies of the CD to give to friends.

That fall, Take 6 recorded Grammy-nominated original music for the Murphy Brown TV show, and sang the national anthem at the World Series, activities not usually within the grasp of Gospel groups with just one album under their belts.

In the two years since that time, the collection of awards, collaborations and appearances amassed by Take 6 would make impressive career highlights for the most seasoned entertainers, let alone relative newcomers.

The awards include three Grammys, four Dove awards, two Stellar awards, and nods from *Black Radio Exclusive* and *Soul Train*, as well as a nomination for the NAACP Image award. The group has already recorded ad /or performed with a stunning array of stars from a variety of musical arenas, including Quincy Jones, Johnny Mathis, Ella Fitzgerald, Al Jarreau, Melba Moore, James Taylor, Patti Austin, Phoebe Snow, Branford Marsalis, BeBe & CeCe Winans, Joe Sample and k.d. lang.

In addition to being featured on every major television talk show, Take 6 sang and appeared in the theme of *Brewster Place* (which was, incidentally, arranged by Warren), had songs featured on the soundtrack to Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* and Warren Beatty's *Dick Tracy*, and did commercials for Burger King, Domino's Pizza, and Mitsubishi Electric Corporation. Their considerable influence has also been a rallying point for charities, as they have helped to raise money with appearance at benefits for Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the National Association for Retarded Citizens, and Special Olympics, among others.

They also saw their debut album hit the inspirational, spiritual and jazz charts—all at the same time—and have seen their message received enthusiastically in Europe and Japan.

The word "message" is not used lightly, for, above all, Take 6 has never considered watering down the straightforward Gospel lyrics it sets to such dazzling music.

"All of our gifts and talents are God-given," says Warren. "We have always done Christian music, and we will always do Christian music."

I feel that here is a lot of love on this album, as well as a lot of the same Christian message that we aspired to give on the first album, adds McKnight. "We take that part of who we are very seriously."



**Take 6 - So Much 2 Say.**  
Warner Bros./Reprise  
Produced by Mervyn Warren,  
Co-produced by Take 6

I don't like it quite as much as their sparkling debut effort, but I doubt that I'll ever like anything as much as that.

Still, I think this cassette is the most logical direction for the group to take. The lyrics are

still firmly rooted in the gospel. Spreading the love of Jesus Christ is the still the main point of these guys. But they are using different vehicles to do that.

The jazz influences are still intact ("So Much 2 Say") as well as the more traditional sounds ("The Savior Is Waiting"). But they've added some calypso (Check out the break in "Something Within Me"), pop and delicious funk ("I L-O-V-E-U"). And they handle all of the different styles with little trou-

ble. I would have liked a few more traditional numbers but that's a very minor criticism. What they've included here is exceptional. As always their harmonies are awe-inspiring. Nice follow-up guys. Very nice.

☆☆☆☆

☆☆☆ Excellent  
☆☆☆ Good  
☆☆ Fair  
☆ Why?

So, just how good is this new Take 6 cassette?



### BEHIND THE SCENES

with Lisa Collins

performer while he was part of a band called the LA City Rockers. Course, it was his flashy dance moves that caught her eye). In the meantime, Chuckil Booker has left the tour, and is being replaced by Rex Salas, as musical director. Johnny Gill becomes her new opening act.



Wayans

**Coming To The Aid Of Curtis:** A concert tribute to Curtis Mayfield, who is presently undergoing physical therapy (after an onstage accident left him paralyzed from the neck down) was being staged last week in Los Angeles at the Palace. Artists slated to be on hand include the Impressions, Ice-T, Tone-Loc, Easy-E, and Kid Frost. Proceeds will help defray the mounting medical costs of the 48-year old singer, now hospitalized at a spinal hospital in Georgia. Donations can be sent to the Curtis Mayfield Recovery Fund, c/o Jack Culbreth, 10 Piedmont Center-- Suite 350, 3495 Piedmont Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30305... **By The Way:** Kim Coles has definitely left Fox's "In Living Color", but denies tabloid reports that it's due to a bad romance with creator, Keenan Ivory Wayans. Instead, sources maintain Coles, who is married, is leaving to pursue other projects... **Congratulations to Emmy winners** Thomas Carter (Creator/director of "Equal Justice"), and Keenan Wayans who picked up the trophy in the category of "Best variety, music, or comedy series." **Next week:** The tables turn on R&B's Angela Winbush.

**J** am South Africa: Artists for A Free South Africa, recently held a festive benefit to raise funds in support of cause. Among those on hand were Jasmine Guy, Carl Anderson, Glynn Turman, Blair Underwood, Shari Belefonta, C.C.H. Pounder, Alfre Woodard and a host of others. Woodard, who spearheads many of groups activities, says "we've got to

continue to provide educational support and economic aid." Woodard says the most important thing to her is "seeing that African-American children are educated, you do that and you solve 101 problems. Meanwhile, Los Angeles theatre fans will receive quite a treat when she stars in a weeklong performance to the LA stage play "Love Letters", opposite Blair Underwood. Underwood, by the way, says we can look forward to some surprises in this season's "L.A. Law", but he won't say what they are. We do know, however, that Paul Winfield will join the cast temporarily for a stint as an Al Sharpton-type with some sort of tie to Blair.



Belefonta

**Is What You See, What You Get?** Perhaps the biggest talk on the entertainment news circuit is Whitney Houston's reply to rumors that she is gay in two highly-visible magazines-- Fame & Life,

marking the first time (I know of) the superstar has publicly addressed the longtime rumors. Houston that when she first heard about the rumors that she cried. Now she says the rumors crack her up. She added that the woman in question is a childhood friend, as well as executive assistant. Adding that she saw Eddie Murphy for a time, Houston implied that her career had preempted a romantic life, but that she was presently involved with a steady guy who was "very much a man"... Meanwhile, the October issue of Spin, featuring a candid conversation between Spike Lee and Eddie Murphy, is also generating a lot of talk. The most surprising news here is Murphy's falling out with childhood idol, Richard Pryor. "It's weird to find out that your idol hates you," Murphy says. Of course, the feature also covers the now overplayed Eddie Murphy-Spike Lee feud. This turns out to be little more than hot air, as the two actually find they have alot in common after talking. (Meanwhile, word is Murphy's next movie for Paramount is going to be none other than a western).

**S**tepping Out Of Janet's Camp: Anthony Thomas (who won an MTV Video award for his choreography of Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation) has left the Janet Jackson camp to pursue other projects. (Quiet as is kept, he also sings. In fact, Janet spotted the 25-year old choreographer-