

# 5B ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

## 'Vulnerable' is classic Gaye CD



By Winfred B. Cross  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

**Zhane**  
*Saturday Night*  
Zhane, Andre Harrell,  
Eddie F. Kaygee,  
Charm Warren  
Celestine, executive  
producers  
Motown

☆☆☆

It would have seemed easy to dismiss Zhane as the latest dance duo, but these sisters have way too much talent for that. Jam? Yes they can. But even a casual listen to the group's first CD should have told everyone there was something special going on.

Rene Neufville and Jean Norris are back with a sophomore effort called *Saturday Night*. Yea, the title is right. This is a party, especially with songs like the debut single "Request Line" and the head noddin' remake of Chic's classic "Good Times." And you have to throw the title song in the mix as well. But there's a lot more here than booty shakin' music.

Just listen to the duo's treatment of Billy Joel's "The Longest Time." It discards the song's original doo-woop flavor for a breezy '90s beat. "This Song Is For You" features a thick bass line and drum beat and some amazingly tight harmony.

When the mood changes, Zhane is just as brilliant. "Rendez-Vous" is a jazzy-sounding ballad that features slinky music and a silky vocal delivery. Mark Leadfoot's trumpet solo is added elegance. "Piece It Together," features background vocals by the always stunning Will Downing. The combination is a good one.

Zhane has released a savvy CD that should please its hip-hop base and even draw in some older folks. This shouldn't be missed.

**Marvin Gaye**  
*Vulnerable*  
Amy Herot and Art  
Stewart, producers  
Motown

☆☆☆☆ 1/2

Marvin Gaye fought with Berry Gordy over his image for years. Gaye saw himself as a balladeer - a Frank Sinatra for the Motown set. Gordy saw him as nearly everyone else did, a pop and r&b superstar.

Gaye became just that, but he flirted with the idea of doing an album of standards for decades. He wanted to call it "The ballads." Years later writer David Ritz suggested *Vulnerable*, like Gaye really was. He toiled for years, laying down tracks, changing the arrangement constantly, until he felt he had them all right. He wanted to convey the agony and loneliness of the songs he'd chosen.

Finally, the world can hear the finished product. Motown has released *Vulnerable* and it's spectacular. Gaye's voice floats over Bobby Scott's arrangements like a feather

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## Badu not surprised by her quick rise to fame

By Nekesa Mumbi Moody  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ALBANY, N.Y. - Talking with Erykah Badu about the smash success of her debut album, *Baduizm*, she seems so mellow and unfazed by the attention that you wonder if she ever gets excited at all.

So it's somewhat surprising to hear a simple phone call can make her all aflutter - until you find out who the phone call was from.

"Let me tell you this. Stevie Wonder called me. ... Y'all could tell me I'm the worst thing that happened ever, and it doesn't matter," she says, laughing. "Stevie loves me."

Of course, Stevie's not the only person who loves her. Badu has become the darling of critics since she burst on the scene this year with *Baduizm*, a mixture of r&b, funk and jazz that has breathed new life into a sometimes stagnant and repetitive urban music scene.

But unlike other artists who are hailed by critics and ignored by fans, music buyers have been snatching up her album, and the first single,

"On & On."

*Baduizm*, which debuted in February, was shipped to record stores platinum, an unusual feat for a new artist.

While Badu says she's pleased by all the success, she's not surprised, because she says she planned it - with a little help from above.

"I'm one of the first ones in a while to come with something from the deepness of the soul, and when you come with something true, people feel the truth," she said.

"We came to the label (Kedar Records) like we were doing them a favor. You have to really believe in it, and if more than one person believes in it at the same time, it's bound to happen. There's no stopping what the creator has planned."

Just over a year ago Badu, a 26-year-old graduate of Grambling State University in Louisiana, worked three jobs in her hometown of Dallas - a teacher during the day, a nightclub performer during the evening hours, and a waitress during the nightshift to help pay the bills.

She landed opening performances with hip-hop acts like



BADU

Naughty by Nature and Method Man before the manager of the group Mobb Deep sent her demo tape to an industry insider, Kedar Massenburg, who was just about to start his own label at

Universal Records.

Once he saw her perform live, he says Badu "just blew me away."

"The fact that she sounds so different, her voice, it just cut through the rest. It wasn't like

she was trying to be what was going on today. ... She had this whole jazzy flow," Massenburg said.

In fact, her voice has often been compared to Billie Holiday - though Badu says her strongest musical influence was actually hip-hop.

"I never really studied jazz, but I felt and desired the emotion of that time. I think my vocals were affected by that era, definitely."

Badu, who describes herself as a very "left brain" person, embodies the kind of free spirit, Afrocentric vibe that her record exudes. Typically adorned in African-inspired garb, she often lights candles and incense onstage; while performing, she manages to be both low-key and electrifying at the same time.

Badu was born Erica Wright, but when she reached her teen-age years, she decided to change what she called her "slave name" to become more in tune with Afrocentric culture.

However, her search for a new name hit a major obstacle - her mother.

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## 'Fifth Element' looks good, but what does it mean?



*The Fifth Element*  
Bruce Willis, Gary Oldman,  
Ian Holm, Milla Jovovich  
and Chris Tucker  
Luc Besson, director  
Columbia Pictures

☆ 1/2

It might be easier trying to decipher hieroglyphics than to explain the bizarre goings on in "The Fifth Element," the latest Bruce Willis disaster. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

That's not to say there are not likable moments. The special effects are dazzling - even spectacular from time to time - but the story, such as it is, is a confused mess.

## Movie Review

By Winfred B. Cross  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

As far as I could make out, there's this evil thing, a Mr. Shadow I believe, who's had a particularly bad day for the last 5,000 years. That's the only window of opportunity it has to devour all life as we know it.

The only way to stop Mr. Shadow is to combine the four elements - fire, water, wind and earth - with a fifth, which happens to be a woman named Leelo (Milla Jovovich). Then you can blow Mr. Shadow back to hell, or wherever he resides.

That sounds simple enough but there are lots of other things going on. Leelo literally drops in on Korben Dallas (Bruce Willis), a cab driver who was once in the Army. He takes her on a wild and bullet-riddled cab ride. Eventually

they go to a priest named Cornelius (Ian Holm) who knows something about this fifth element thing. He knows how it's suppose to work, but, since no one's done it for, well, 5,000 years, he's not sure it will work.

Thrown into the mix is Zorg (Gary Oldman), agent to all that is evil. That means he was working for Mr. Shadow, who needs to get his hands on some stones which represent the four elements. If Mr. Shadow gets the stones and mixes himself with them, he'll suck up all life.

Maybe if he'd have done so, this silly movie would have ended quickly. But nooooo. Dallas is reactivated by the Army and helps Cornelius and Leelo get these stones to stop mean 'ole nasty Mr. Shadow. Guns blaze, ships explode, bodies go reeling throughout the rest of this mess. How long? Two hours and seven minutes.

Does this review seem that long? Now you know how I felt sitting through this baffling story. If it seems I did understand it, thank you, but I read the press kit.

If director and writer Luc Besson ("The Big Blue," "The

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PHOTO:JACK ENGLISH

Chris Tucker, center, portrays futuristic world radio DJ Ruby Rhod.

## Soulful circus making rounds

By Verena Dobnik  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK - Ted McRae was a forklift driver in Baltimore when he got The Call: How would he like to be the lion-and-tiger tamer for his cousin's new circus?

The closest he'd ever been to a tiger was at the Baltimore Zoo.

"The first time I hugged a tigress, she sank her big tooth into me," says McRae. Blood gushed from a 2-inch (centimeter) gash on his shoulder as the 400-pound (180-kilogram) animal, named Zena, was yanked away.

The owner "wagged her finger at the cat and yelled, 'No, no, no,'" says McRae, remembering his month-long crash course, four years ago in Florida.

He went right back for another beastly embrace.

"This time, I did it right. I didn't shove my shoulder into her mouth," says the 40-year-old tamer, smiling as he gently strokes Rajah, another tiger playing in a trailer with five of her cubs and six lions.

Now, McRae and Rajah are conquering New York as part of the savvy and sassy UniverSOUL Big Top.

The one-tent spectacle, on

an island in the Harlem River off Manhattan, is the first circus in a century owned and operated by African-Americans.

The New York stop, which runs through May 25, is part of a 10-city UniverSOUL tour. It features performers from around the world with African roots and various "cultural infusions," says McRae's cousin, Cedric "Ricky" Walker.

He traveled far to hire the best talent for his \$2 million show.

In Iceland, Walker found a trapeze act in a European circus - two South African men

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## All Wet!



PHOTO:PAUL WILLIAMS III

Courtney Briggs, 6, cools himself off in Carowinds' new 12-acre Water Works attraction during a press preview last week. The attraction is open until September.