

AWB gives soul a choice of colors

by Greg Porter and Newell Highsmith
Staff Writers

Average White Band, Atlantic Records, \$4.78

If you had a choice of colors
Which one would you choose, my brothers
If there was no day or night
Which would you prefer to be right

-Curtis Mayfield

When Curtis Mayfield wrote "Choice of Colors" in 1968, he reflected not only the distinct racial line drawn in society but the concomitant line that divided the musical styles of the day. Since those days of a popular music dichotomy — days that separated rock from soul like Iron Butterfly from Diana Ross — black stars such as Sly, Jimi Hendrix and Curtis Mayfield have changed soul and rock music, blurring the color line to an extent that even Curtis Mayfield could never have imagined when he wrote "Choice of Colors."

The change in pop music can be seen particularly in the long career of the Temptations, who started out as the premier sweet soul group with solid roots in gospel. After producer Smokey Robinson left the Temps, their new producer, Norman Whitfield, shocked the world with electric sounds like "Cloud Nine," "Ball of Confusion," and "Papa Was a Rolling Stone," the birth of what *Creem's* Vince Aletti called "nouveau soul."

The color line in pop music may have been crossed from the other side in 1975 with the success of six musicians from Scotland who play soul music and call themselves the Average White Band. White groups seldom, if ever, have scored in soul circles. The AWB has currently moved to second on *Billboard's* Soul Singles chart with "Pick up the Pieces," an instrumental *Billboard* also ranks as America's number one single. The *Average White Band* album itself is number one on *Billboard's* Top LP's and a surprising fifth on the Soul LP's chart. The AWB's unprecedented success on both charts proves

they have gone past the "choice of colors" that has divided pop music for so long.

AWB sound is soul but with such a mixture of different styles — jazz, blues, soul, electric funk — that the AWB product defies classification. The mixture is probably the most unique of the year, appealing to hard rock and hard-core soul freaks alike. The vocals are predominantly soul or blues, but the style of instrumentation is one of the most eclectic in pop music history. Though the band is only two years old, there has already been a heavy blues influence in its tours with Eric Clapton and B. B. King.

The *Average White Band* album is topping the charts because it displays an impressive versatility in ranging from the tough, dense sound of "Pick up the Pieces" to mellow love songs in the sweet-soul tradition like "Just Wanna Love You Tonight." AWB's bass player Alan Gorrie says the first side of the album, featuring "Pick up the Pieces," was "tailored for the discos."

A production gem, "Pick up the Pieces" is, like the rest of the album, well-mixed. The different melodies and rhythms contrast and compliment one another to produce an exceptionally innovative sound; and the transitions have a smoothness and fluidity that lend continuity to the songs. One such transition occurs about two minutes into "Pick up the Pieces" as the sax breaks from jazz into a wailing soul melody, changing the complexion of the song entirely. While the distinctive soul rhythm is quite evident it is mellowed and smoothed over by the guitar counter-melody. Yet the resulting effect is not watered-down funk, but instead a rhythm that is pulsating rather than jerky or disjointed.

"Work to do," a rich Isley Brothers tune revamped successfully in the AWB style, is the album's second best cut. "Work to Do" features a well-balanced interplay between the lead vocalists — Hamish Stuart and Alan Gorrie — and the guitar work of Onnie McIntyre. McIntyre's guitar solo is solidly rock and roll, accompanied by a fine baritone sax bass line. "Work to Do" is the most upbeat cut on the album, distinguished



Staff photo by Peter Ray

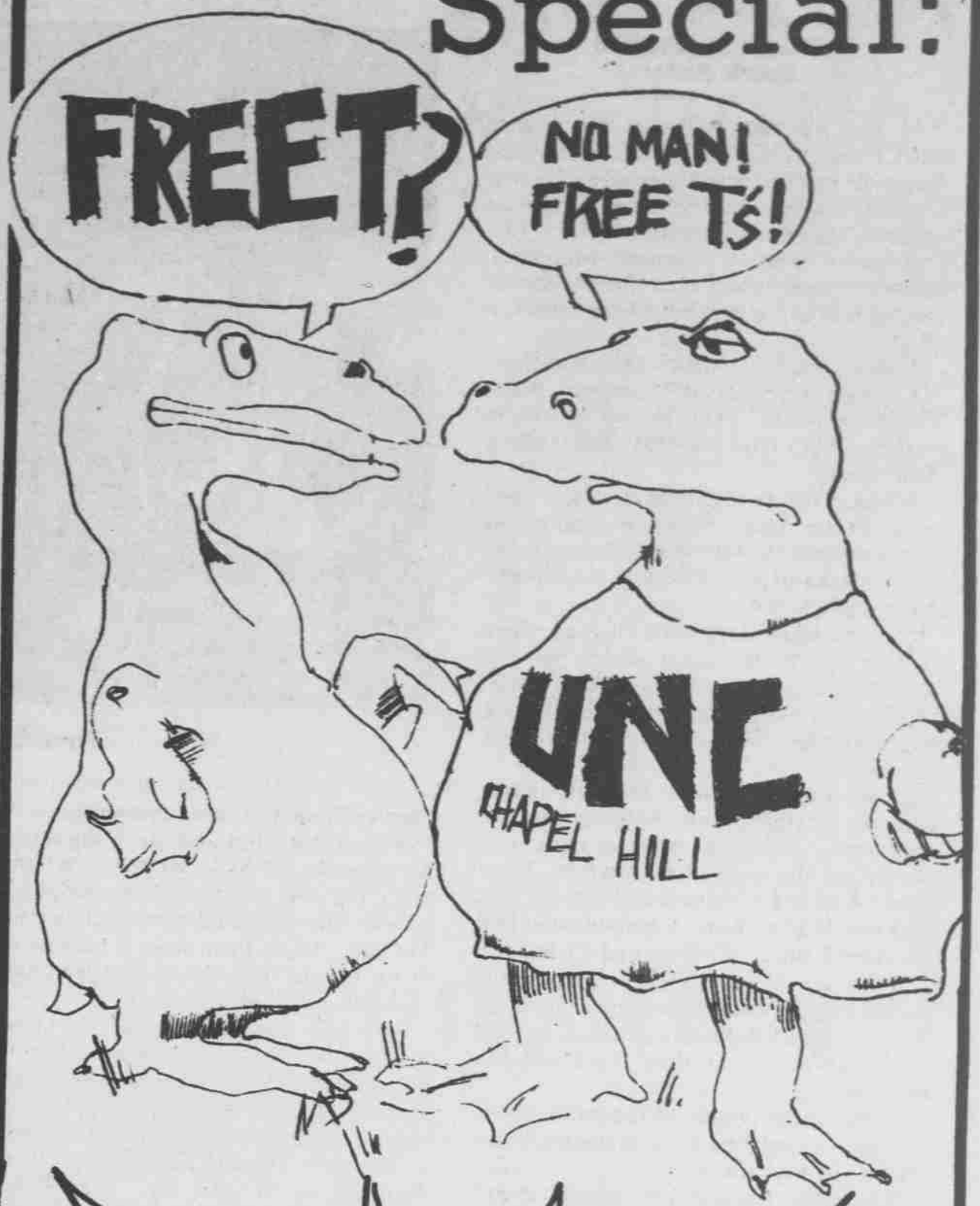
Maynard Ferguson and his orchestra brought the big band sound back to Memorial Hall last Thursday. Ferguson is a veteran of New York jazz, and has played with Jimmy Dorsey and Charlie Parker.

by powerful blues vocals and a strong refrain.

The *Average White Band* LP is a strong offering from a group of musicians all talented in their own right. AWB is similar to Tower of Power in the quality of its individual musicians. But the AWB has created for itself a unique, versatile style complimented by rich vocal harmonies.

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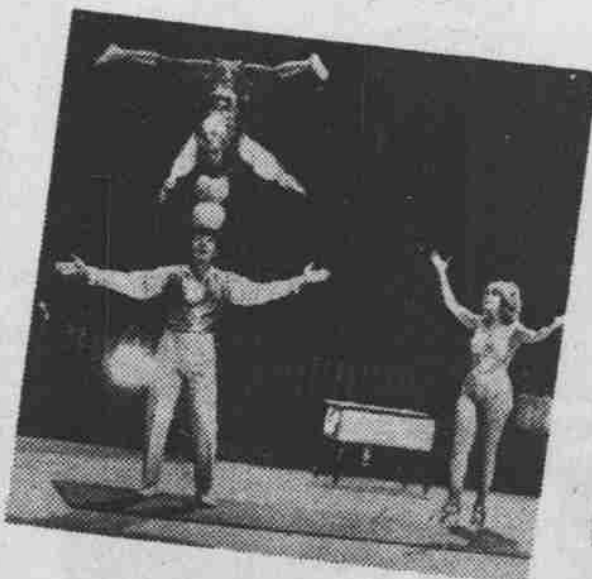
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