

ENTERTAINMENT



MARILYN MCCOO

5th Dimension Meets For 25th Anniversary

After 15 years apart, the original members of the 5th Dimension reunited last weekend for performances at Trump Plaza Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City that will also mark the group's 25th anniversary. "It seems like it's only been a couple of weeks away from each other," said group member Florence LaRue. "It feels wonderful and we sound better than ever."

LaRue, Ron Townson, Lamonte McLemore, Marilyn McCoo and Billy Davis, Jr. teamed up in 1965 under the eye of former Motown record producer Marc Gordon. Two years later, they topped the charts with the song "Up, Up and Away," which won five Grammy Awards, including Song of the Year, Record of the Year and Best Performance by a Vocal Group.

"We didn't think 'Up, Up and Away' would be a hit because the music was so psychedelic and loud," LaRue said. "But it was different, and that's what the public wanted, something different. And it was much more musical and pretty than most of the music around that time."

The Los Angeles-based group's "Champagne Soul" was also out of sync with what most other black groups were offering at the time—the blaring, gritty Southern soul of Stax Records and the polished pop sound of Motown's Detroit brand of soul.

"We weren't into any sound but we got criticized for sounding 'white,'" LaRue said. "We weren't a black group that sounded black, and a lot of people didn't know we were black until they saw us."

Criticism aside, the 5th Dimension garnered fans and three more Grammy Awards during a career that also

included songs such as "One Less Bell to Answer," "Aquarius—Let the Sun Shine In," "Stone Soul Picnic," and "Wedding Bell Blues."

With the advent of disco and album-oriented rock in the 1970s, the band had stopped recording by 1975, when McCoo and Davis—now married—left the group. The husband-and-wife team went on to earn a Grammy in 1976 for "You Don't Have to Be a Star" and starred in their own variety show on CBS-TV.

McCoo hosted the syndicated television show "Solid Gold" and is now a correspondent for the NBC-TV show "Personalities." Davis is a businessman.

LaRue, McLemore and Townson continued to tour with a new 5th Dimension that has recruited other singers for the two open spots. The newly configured group has played Las Vegas, performed with symphony orchestras and starred in the Broadway musical "Ain't Misbehavin'."

LaRue said the original three have been rehearsing in Los Angeles with McCoo and Davis while honoring commitments with the new group.

"I don't consider it hard work," she said. "It's really fun, like getting back with two members of the family we haven't seen in quite a while."

The group is waiting to see how the weekend shows go before deciding whether to undertake more reunion performances. Meanwhile, the new 5th Dimension is working on getting a recording contract, she said.

"We would like to begin a recording life and make a video, because of the fan pressure and our own desire to do so," LaRue said.

Soldiers Cheered By James Brown Concert

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP)—Thousands of Fort Jackson soldiers whose Christmas leaves were canceled because of the Middle East crisis were treated to two concerts by the "Godfather of Soul."

It was James Brown's first public performance since he was jailed two years ago.

Brown, on a 72-hour Christmas furlough until last Wednesday, headed a two-show Christmas Day ticket that also featured the rock group Wet Willie and rhythm and blues musicians Point of View. Base officials limited each performance to about 2,000 soldiers.

Brown, jailed in December 1988 for assault, sang four songs at the end of the concerts with the two other groups. Trainees in crew cuts jumped to their feet as he came out singing "I Feel Good." They clapped, cheered and swayed to his four songs, which ended with "God Bless America."

He got special permission to perform for the soldiers by the Corrections Department following an intervention by Gov. Carroll Campbell. Brown's manager said Brown would not talk to reporters after the first performance.

But all the good cheer did not make up for the homesickness, though many soldiers said the concerts helped get their minds off missing home on Christmas Day. For many of the young soldiers, it was the first Christmas away from home.

"I'm not the saddest person in the world, but I'm not the happiest, either," said Brent France, 19. "The concert makes it a little easier on us, because we're basically down and depressed."

Community leaders organized the variety show to entertain soldiers in basic training whose regular holiday leaves were canceled because of the troop buildup in Saudi Arabia.

Their campaign has included visits to the base and holiday cards by school children and the placing of soldiers with local families for Christmas.

Organizers achieved a coup with the addition of Brown, a two-time Grammy Award winner.

A disappointing Christmas wasn't the only thing worrying Delila Carson last Tuesday. The 18-year-old from Union, Calif. said she is also thinking about being shipped out to Saudi Arabia when she completes basic training on Jan. 31.

She said the trainees will find out on Jan. 15 if they'll have to head to the Middle East.

"It's scary," Ms. Carson said. "What's really basically on my mind is worrying about what's happening over there, because we could be sent there."

The soldiers were hugged by Santa Claus, who is the command chief of the Navy and Marine Corps Reserve Center in Columbia when he unglues his white beard. John Isakson said one soldier tugged on his beard, but it didn't come off.

Brown is serving a six-year sentence for aggravated assault, failure to stop for police and weapons violations. He was imprisoned in December 1988 on a concurrent sentence in South Carolina and Georgia.

The charges stemmed from a two-state, high-speed chase. The incident began when a gun-toting Brown stormed an insurance agency next to his Aiken office and claimed strangers had used his bathroom. Tests showed Brown had used the illegal drug PCP. He had several previous drug arrests.

In April, after serving 15 months in a prison outside Columbia, Brown transferred to a prison work-release program in Aiken where he counsels youths on drug abuse. He spends his nights at a Corrections Department minimum-security facility near Aiken.

Brown, who is eligible for parole in South Carolina on March 8, is scheduled to meet with the parole board on Feb. 27.



SARAFINA!

African Musical Set For UNC Campus Tour

CHAPEL HILL—"Sarafina!," a musical celebration of South African high school students' resistance to and rebellion against apartheid, comes to Memorial Hall on the UNC campus Jan. 22. Premiered in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1987, "Sarafina!" quickly became a smash hit on Broadway, and played to capacity audiences at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., before embarking on its current national tour.

The story of "Sarafina!" follows the activities of a class of the Morris Isaacson High School in Soweto, site of the now famous 1976 student uprisings. For an end-of-the-school-year concert, the students decide to put on a play about the day when Nelson Mandela, jailed leader of the African National Congress, will be released after more than 20 years and the Day of Liberation that is sure to follow.

The show features a cast of exuberant young men and women between the ages of 15 and 25, drawn from throughout South Africa. None of the actors were professional performers when they auditioned and they were put through eight months of extensive training to prepare for their stage debut.

The critics leave no doubt that such training paid off, as the show leaves a trail of rave reviews in its wake as the tour winds its way across the nation.

"Sarafina!" was conceived, written and directed by Mbongeni Ngema, the noted South African author and musician. The idea for the production came in 1984, when Winnie Mandela, wife of African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela, spoke with Mbongeni about doing a show to celebrate the children of South Africa's townships.

Ngema, who had achieved international fame as one of the co-creators and stars of the play "Woza Albert," began to develop the idea and saw it as a terrific opportunity to also celebrate the music of the townships, a driving dance music called Mbanga in Zulu.

Certain time for "Sarafina!" is 8 p.m. Tickets are \$25 for the general public, \$13.50 for UNC students, and are available from the Carolina Union Box Office. Call (919) 962-1448 weekdays from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. VISA and MasterCard accepted. Due to the popularity of the show, early ticket purchase is advised.

MY TUNE
by
Obataiye B. Akinwole

When Columbus, of "I discovered America" fame, arrived in the Caribbean in 1492 he "passed ships filled with merchandise and manned by Africans returning from the West Indies to their homeland." As early as 1310 Mansa Abubakari I believed it possible to "sail to the limits of the neighboring seas [the Atlantic Ocean]." The Indians were here when we got here. So much for being discovered.

Over the years many Africans came to this country. Many were explorers, some were craftsmen, some were servants and of course many were slaves. Of course with us came our art. It is both a blessing and a curse that many others consider our music, dance, and art to be our most significant cultural contribution to America. Take some time, as I often do, to research the many contributions we made to every facet of life in America.

Of the many song forms brought to America by Africans, the form that eventually became the blues is perhaps the most distinctive. My wife is a blues "fanatic." I mean that literally. I hear the blues almost every day. My weekends are filled with the sounds of the blues, even when I want to hear something else. Not surprisingly, we talk a lot about the blues. We come to some conclusions often. Sometimes we don't arrive at the same conclusion.

To me the blues has grown out of the confusion and violence of our times. African-Americans are literally caught between two worlds. On the one hand we are Africans with proud heritages. On the other we are Americans trying to accept a culture that is not and will never be ours. The blues is a unique song style. It is not only a musical expression. It is also a social statement. Again, our songs and song styles are evidence of our separateness from the larger society. We have been compelled to live separate from the larger culture. Even those of us who think we have arrived discover it difficult to find our niche. This kind of existence gave us the difficulties and pain that provided much of the materials for this music.

My wife says, "The blues is spiritual, akin to one's soul. It is derived from low self-esteem brought on by slavery." Of course my next question to her was, because the blues is so popular today, does that mean slavery still exists? She quickly responded, "We suppress our feelings for the blues today because of our newly found social status. In other words, we've arrived and can't relate to the blues. The only problem is that we are in reality no better off than our forefathers."

CAROLINA UNION PERFORMING ARTS SERIES presents



SARAFINA!
THE MUSIC OF LIBERATION

"THE ENTHUSIASM and extraordinary musicianship of the cast of young South Africans is irresistible." - Howard Kissell, Daily News

8 p.m. Tuesday, January 22
Memorial Hall - UNC

Tickets: \$25 General Public, \$13 UNC Students
Carolina Union Box Office 962-1449

(Box Office Open for Telephone Orders Only January 2 - 7)



TRY MY LOVE—The Wooten Brothers (Louis, 27; George, 25; and Gary, 24) have been making music together since they were kids in Dallas, Texas when they would entertain at family gatherings and sing in the church where their father was a minister. Their rich blend of Motown/rhythm & blues, gospel-soul-funk has finally surfaced in the form of their debut album entitled, "Try My Love."

"Blackbird Fly" Aims Drama At Sexual Abuse

LOS ANGELES, Calif. (AP)—Esther Rolle didn't mind taking time out of her already busy schedule to film a movie she isn't getting paid for.

Ms. Rolle donated her time to make "Blackbird Fly," a 28-minute drama about adolescent sexual abuse, and takes pride in the final product.

"It was my feeling that if I don't do it, who will?" said Ms. Rolle, who starred in "Driving Miss Daisy" and whose television credits include the situation comedy "Good Times."

To complete the film, Ms. Rolle had to work a regular five-day week during the filming of "Driving Miss Daisy," then put in two additional days on "Blackbird Fly."

"I enjoy doing anything I can that might help," Ms. Rolle said. "I hope it does the children some good."

The film is scheduled to be broadcast Feb. 27 on the Learning Channel and is being screened for Academy Award consideration in the short-film category.

In "Blackbird Fly," Ms. Rolle plays a counselor at a community center who encourages a sexually abused teenager to take control of her life. The teen abused by her father is played by Rain Pryor, who appears on ABC's "Head of the Class."

Ms. Pryor and Whoopi Goldberg, who plays a sympathetic piano teacher, also donated their performances to the project.