

ENTERTAINMENT

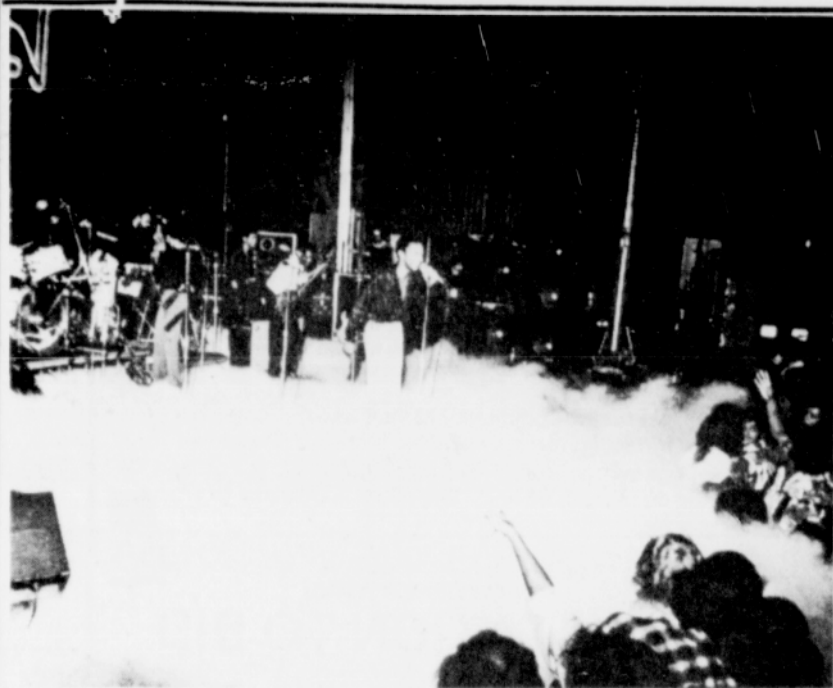
HAPPENINGS

ENTERTAINMENT



A holiday interview with Kool & The Gang

Exclusive - By Lanita Duke



Kool & The Gang "Celebrate" the success of their latest hit of the same name, in concert, with delighted fans, at the Paramount Theatre.

(Photo: Richard Brown)



Members of Kool & The Gang sign autographs at the House of Sound. This appearance at the House of Sound, marks the second time this highly acclaimed group has visited the Northeast community before performing in concert.

Grassroots News, N.W. - With the onset of the end of this decade's first year, one must look around for survivors. The musical industry is no exception and one of its survivors is *Kool & The Gang*. Grassroot news reporter Lanita Duke interviewed the Gang's leader during their recent concert in Portland.

Duke: Since the group's conception in 1964, *Kool & The Gang* was in the forefront of soul groups using social themes in their lyrics. What brought that about in your music?

Kool: We believe that music reflects the thoughts of the people, the environment from which they come, and at the time that was the air that was going on. Our music deals with a social level as well as the spiritual.

Duke: From *Ladies Nite* to *Celebrate*, the social theme isn't reflected that readily in your lyrics, why is that?

Kool: The 45 *Celebration* is really related to the group and to the people as well. Recording wise, *Celebration* is our first album in our second decade. To us, it's a time for celebration because we are finally



ROBERT "KOOL" BELL

(Photo: Richard Brown)

being recognized, accepted and respected. After the manifestation of our work, years we put into it, we feel it is a time for rejoice. There are other songs on the album like *Jones vs. Jones* which has a social message due to the high rate of divorce in this country. So we are still coming from the social level. It's a bit more commercial, but what can I say?

Duke: In terms of musical and technological evolution, what innovation catapulted *Kool & The Gang* to where you are today?

Kool: It has to be the wider spread of demographic in terms of merchandising. The marketing powers touched upon *Kool & The Gang* and the public bought it.

Duke: How do you feel about the group's commercial success being attributed to the labeling of your music as disco?

Kool: When our first record came out in 1969, there was no such thing as disco. In 1977-78, when the European sound of the basic bass drum beat and the background vocal and violins came out, that's the more defined disco sound. We are not a part of that, per se, because our music transcends more than just disco. You take *Summer Madness* or *I Remember John Coltrane*; those songs are more than just disco.

Duke: What advice would you give our readers as we approach this new year?

Kool: For the music business, try to be unique in what you're doing in a business where everything is competitive and sounds alike. You need to have that I.D. Also, to know about the business. Learn about writing and publishing, distributing and merchandising, so that you'll know what's suppose to happen with your product. Get an attorney and a good accountant; mix confidence and will power with this and nothing will ever dare to stop you.

Look out Peaches & Herb!!

He studied to be a court reporter, she a school teacher. He says she has "the phrasing and rhythm of Ella Fitzgerald and the sensitivity and power of Janis Joplin." She says he has a "velvet sound along with a lot of soul and a smooth touch of pop." They're Rene Moore and Angela Winbush and together they're making their Capitol debut with *Rene & Angela*.

Rene and Angela met in fall '77, introduced by a mutual friend, singer Carolyn Dennis. By February '78 they'd decided to form a duo, made a tape the following month then began their search for a label. Within a year, they'd signed to Capitol Records.

But in spite of their newcomer status, both had amassed outstanding credits before they'd even met.

A native of Los Angeles, Rene was to the manner of music born. One of his brothers is Rusus' bassist Bobby Watson and while still in high school Rene performed in various rock and R&B bands with his friends Louis and George, now the Brothers Johnson.

In '76, while studying court reporting and music at Cerritos College and performing in a group for the SCLU's Operation Breadbasket, Rene was invited to join the Los Angeles Philharmonic's minority training program. To date, he has written several pieces orchestrated and performed by the Philharmonic and, through the program, has performed with such artists as Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Billy Eckstine and John Denver. And he's also collected quite a few credits as a session performer on his own.

Growing up half a continent away, Angela too was raised in a family whose avocation was music - in this case, gospel music. At 17 she left St. Louis to earn a teaching credential at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Between classes, she and two other students formed a trio which, during its brief year of existence, proved professional enough to open for Al Jarreau and Van McCoy and play a few dates in New York city.

Graduating Howard, Angela spent a few months singing backup for Jean Carne, then on tour with Red Foxx, then moved to California. Once in L.A., she began to work the session circuit, performing with such artists as Dolly Parton and Lenny Williams. (At one point, she turned down Bob Dylan's offer to sing and play keyboards with his group on *Slow Train Comin'*.)

Discussing their present and future, Rene enthuses: "We want to be a duo that can sing aggressive, funky songs as well as ballads and exercise both our abilities as keyboardists as well. Most of the songs on *Rene & Angela* are originals. But we also wanted to show how well we can do performing outside material, as on *'Hotel California.'*"

In fact, the Eagles' song is the only tune on the album that wasn't written by the duo. A fresh blend of pop and soul, the material on the LP includes both powerful ballads and vivid, uptempo funk. Bobby Watson and Skp Drinkwater produced and musicians who contributed to the album include Louis Johnson and Rusus' Tony Maiden, John Robinson, Kevin Murphy and Watson himself.

With the release of *Rene & Angela*, the world may be short one court reporter and one school teacher, but it's a whole lot longer on good music.



ANGELA



RENE

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