

THE ENTERTAINMENT SEEN

Sweet Honey in the Rock To Appear in Portland

Sweet Honey in the Rock, the award-winning five woman a capella gospel group, will be appearing for one show only, Sunday, September 21, at the Benson High School, 546 N.E. 12th Avenue, Portland. The concert is presented in conjunction with the Women in the Year 2000 Conference and is open to the public. Showtime is 4:00 p.m.

A Sweet Honey in the Rock concert is not for the passive listener—Sweet Honey's mission is to get each individual in the audience to move and be moved. Sweet Honey is known for their constantly challenging and surprising performances. Using only their voices, handclaps and an occasional gourd or tamborine, Sweet Honey produces a seemingly endless variety of sound, drawn from an eclectic range of styles and traditions; gospel, folk, pop, reggae, blues, rap, soul and the experimental. An important facet of Sweet Honey's story is their commitment to the struggle of all people—black, white, women, and men. This commitment is expressed through their often hard-edged political statements on topics ranging from anti-racism, feminism and anti-nuclear.

This music moves the heart and provokes the mind, as stated in a recent Billboard review. "In the world of ear candy, this is music with meat on its bones. Sweet Honey in the Rock offers soul food."

Based in Washington, D.C., Sweet Honey first began performing together in November 1973. Originally part of the D.C. Black Repertory Theatre Company, the group's strength lay within its stirring sounds and songs rooted in the tradition of Black American unaccompanied choral singing.

For the last 13 years, the group has looked to its leader Bernice Johnson Reagon, for its inspiration and direction. Reagon, a civil rights and social activist since the sixties, is employed full time at the Smithsonian Performing Arts Center as the director for the Program in Black American Culture. Currently the four other voices in Sweet Honey are: Evelyn Harris, a solo artist in her own right; Ysaye Marie Barnwell, a speech pathologist and she provides the full bodied bass lines; Aisha Kahil, a performing artist, teacher and choreographer; and Nitangu Bolade is a professional researcher of African-rooted folklore. Shirley Childress Johnson, a sign language interpreter, is currently touring as a full-fledged band member.

Reagon states that Sweet Honey's performances are not just good entertainment, "Our singing is an act of daring—a commitment to step into new territory and to effect change. But we also want to emphasize that no obstacle is too big and that's why we also like to sing love songs."


On the Silver Screen

"She's Gotta Have It" — rated R

They call it a sex comedy. I call it a masterpiece. "She's Gotta Have It" is today's modern woman versus the yuppie (or, in this case, buppie), the street and the traditional attitudes found in males of the 80's. Done in black-and-white, the film seems more real than the slick high-budget Hollywood hokey seen in theatres across the nation today. Jazzy is the soundtrack and jazzy is the film. Spike Lee is on his way to making history in the film industry. If you miss this one, you'll be missing out, so check it out!!!

Act One

By Ken Covington



Billy Larkin/From the Heart of Soul

Before I begin, let me make a couple of statements. I, like any other human being, have the aspirations and dreams that are like everyone else's, and being an entertainment editor and columnist, naturally I dreamt of meeting and interviewing artists that I have listened to and idolized all of my life along with the new breed of superstars like Stevie Wonder, Alexander O'Neil, Force M.D.s, Wynton Marsalis, Confunkshun and scores and scores of artists and actors and the like. Since working at this paper, I've had a chance to fulfill some of my fantasies, even though these interviews never come to print. My boss (God bless him) gets a little tense even when I write articles like last week's Expo article. He tells me again and again that the talent is here in town. He says that this is the PORTLAND Observer, not the National Entertainment Magazine, and, besides, all the people I want to interview have already been interviewed by the large mags and they will probably tell me the same thing that they told them. In essence, nothing new.



When he makes these painfully valid statements, I get a little ticked, and I always know, just like Ford, I've got a better idea, but, since he is my boss, I sometimes (always) do what he says, and when he told me to interview Billy Larkin, my mouth dropped lower than last week's Dow Jones average. I'd never heard of him, but I assumed that he was old and played old folk's music. It turned out to be one of the unforgettable moments in my career.

When I walked into Bee G's to interview him, Billy was sitting with his back to me, but even then, I could feel the glow, the magic, the warmth, that intensely calm feeling that comes only from real people. I really mean "from real P-E-O-P-L-E". As we talked, I began to realize two things: 1) My boss was right (chalk one up for the old folks) and 2) that I was sitting across from one of the greats responsible for Portland's rich jazz history; a real legend, keeping and playing music the way that it's supposed to be played—from the heart of soul.

"Man, I've played every dive, every nightclub, every after-hours—even six in the morning) jam session—every and anything you can think of, I've played it. I've been up and I've been down, but the one thing I'll tell you is I wouldn't trade them for nothin'. Ain't nothin' like bein' a musician. It's the highest high in the world! The music we play, you just can't play at. You gotta be on full. People don't come to hear you play light and flowery; people come to hear you get down!"

"I grew up in southern California. My mother sang in holiness churches and my uncle played drums. The soul was just shot on me. God made sure I got my portion."

"When I was real young, I found out I had a little gift on the piano, but when I heard the organ sound, I knew that was me, and I haven't done anything since. I started out listening to Duke and The Count, you dig, but at the close of World War II people started coming west for those jobs. They brought B.B. King, Muddy Waters, Lightnin' Hopkins and others with them. That stuff kinda blew my mind."

"When I would play, people would listen, and before you know it, I was playing some of everywhere. I had a two-week gig in Portland and stayed 8 years. It was home then, and it is home now. I used to play over at the Cotton Club when it was the number-one club in Oregon. I played behind some names you wouldn't believe."

"Paul Knauls is the one responsible for me going so far in this business, and I'd like to take this time to thank him. Paul helped me and the group more than I can say. Me, Hank Swan and Mel Brown got together and made some beautiful, beautiful music together. When Ralph Black used to come in, we'd blow down the house."

"We were fortunate enough to be invited down by World Pacific to cut some sides, and I believed then I kinda realized what I was in to. When we were recording, the who's who of jazz would be sitting around watching the sessions: The Jazz Crusaders, McCoy Tyner, Less McCann, to name a few. If we needed someone to play something, they'd be right there. Matter of fact, our albums are collectors' items now. We just never seemed to be in the right position to promote them with those fancy one-night stands and the like, but, like I said before, I have no regrets—none. I love being a musician. I love it the most when I see some of the little cats we schooled out doin' it now. Two local cats you might know are Frankie Redding and Ronnie Steen. That's the real reward. Right now I'm playing with two beautiful cats: Gene Smith on tenor, who I've known most my life; and the newcomer, Smith (Smitty) Houston White, the ladies' man in the group. We have fun playing a lot of the stuff from the old days, and people seem to still love it. The music seems to transcend time."

I asked Billy what advice he would give to young musicians today. He replied, "Don't give up; keep on pushin', and even though right now you might not have a job, keep woodshedding; keep stretching; keep working out on that axe; a job will come."

As you see, I didn't ask many questions. I just sat and listened, like I did when I heard him play. I just sat and listened. You should do the same. Go and see one of the pioneers of Portland's jazz scene playing, excuse me, gettin' down from the heart of soul.

ABOUT TOWN

- Bee G's 5700 N.E. Union, 281-1176
Fri.-Sat., Billy Larkin & Co.; Sun., Jam Session
- Brasserie Montmartre 626 S.W. Park, 224-5552
Fri.-Sat., Dennis Springer Quartet
- Cisco & Pancho's 511 N.W. Couch, 223-5048
Fri.-Sat., Norman Sylvester Blues Band
- Eldorado Club 5016 N.E. Union, 284-8654
- Eli's 424 S.W. 4th Ave., 223-4241
Thurs.-Sat., Calvin Walker & The Conquerors
- Hobbit S.E. 39th & Holgate, 771-0742
Fri.-Sat., Mel Brown Quintet
- Key Largo 31 N.W. 1st, 223-9919
Fri.-Sat., Paul DeLay; Sun., Palante
- Last Hurrah 555 S.W. Alder St., 224-1336
Fri.-Sat., Cool 'R
- Remo's 1424 N.W. Glisan, 221-1150
Sun., Jam Session W/ Ron Steen
- Salty's Foot of S.E. Marion, 239-8900
Thurs., Cool 'R; Fri.-Sat., Phil Baker Band
- Shanghai Lounge 0309 S.W. Montgomery, 220-1865
Sun., Calvin Walker & The Conquerors
- Top of the Cosmo 1030 N.E. Union, 235-8433
Mon.-Sat., Gene Diamond & Aires
- Whaler's 120 N. State Street, Lake Oswego, 636-8880
Fri.-Sat., Shirley Nanette Band
- Pioneer Square Downtown Portland
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3. Word Up Cameo/Polygram
4. Back in Black Who'dini/Jive
5. I Commit to Love Howard Hewitt/Elektra
6. Rapture Anita Baker/Elektra
7. Control Janet Jackson/A&M
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10. Headlines Midnite Starr/Solar

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