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I - Z A Y A Youthful Ambassadors For The Lord!

by Mattie Ann Callier-Spears
While they were busily setting up equipment and getting ready for another one of their many performances, the group "I-ZAYA" paused for a very informative interview.

After looking at the spelling of the group's name, I wondered "Who or what is an I-Zaya?" I discovered that in January of 1988, at James Madison High School, the angelic harmonies of three (of the current seven) young men were overheard by one of the schools' staff members. Although the young men had only sung together in the halls at the school or while riding in a car for fun, the staff member immediately recognized the God-given talent of these three friends and their potential for success as a contemporary gospel group. The three young men were asked to share their harmonious abilities in tribute to the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during a school's assembly. After agreeing, the group gave a performance that will forever live in the hearts and minds of everyone assembled for the occasion.

Following their debut performance, invitations began pouring in. Tim Harper, Craig Warren and Rueben Warren (who has now embarked upon a career of his own as a well-known comedian) were overwhelmed by the outpouring of opportunities in other states and invitations in and around the state of Oregon. They had answered the call to minister in song. They gave heed to the call and formed "ISAIAH." Approximately three months later, Marlon Irving became a viable part of this ministry. Their vision was expanding.

It is now 1992. The group has grown to seven: Tim Harper, Craig Warren, Brian Sims, Alonzo Lincoln, Jerry Harris, Solomon David, and Marlon Irving. The group's name has now become "I-ZAYA" which signifies that they are the pioneers of Ghetto Gospel Music in the state of Oregon. The term "Ghetto Gospel" refers to a method of sending an uncompromised



Back row: Stan Edwards, Asst. Manager; Brian Sims; Alonzo Lincoln; Bonda McCuller, Manager; Jerry Harris
Front row: Tim Harper; Marlon Irving; Craig Warren (not pictured, Solomon David).

message that Jesus can and will save young boys, young girls, men and women on the streets. In essence, Ghetto Gospel is gospel from and for the streets.

I-ZAYA claims that they are "Prophets called by God."

Vonda McCuller, the group's manager for nine months and also the group's "Spiritual Mom," stated that she has watched the group grow in size and spirituality.

"God has truly blessed these young men and I have been blessed simply by associating with them."

Another young man, Stan Edwards, has been a real source of strength to Mrs. McCuller. While she is at work, he takes care of all the business arrangements and appointments.

I-ZAYA's music attracts the youth of today with a healing and uplifting message. The group's members write and produce their own unique sound.

TIM HARPER--(soprano) born in Portland and graduated from Madison High School in 1988. He majored in music and communication at Mt. Hood and PCC Cascade. He is presently at Cascade with two years remaining before he obtains his BA degree in Music. He is one of two children born to Cheryl Harper. Tim states that he would like to give back to the community, in some way, and continue to work with the youth. He is presently working as the choir director and teaching Sunday School at the Highland United Church of God.

MARLON IRVING--(tenor) born in Portland and graduated from Jefferson. Currently enrolled in Portland State University as a Business Administration major. He plans to begin his own record company. He is one of five children born to Rev. Samuel and Ella Irving. Rev. Irving is the senior pastor of Albina Church of God. Marlon

is one of the original group members. He states that he is involved with the group because of the impact the group has on the youth of the community. "Without the music, I-ZAYA's ministry is not that effective. We're attempting to be accepted as a pure gospel group like: Albertina Walker, Thomas Dorsey and such. Just as direct and straight forward as they were."

CRAIG WARREN--(alto) graduate of Madison High School and now a student majoring in Business Administration and Computer Data at Portland Community College/Cascade. He was inspired by such groups as Commissioned, the Winans, Deliverance and others. He is one of three children. His family members attend Maranatha Church where he has served as a teacher in Children's Church. He sees I-ZAYA as a successful business venture as well as a very powerful ministry. He says that, within the group, there are those who want to produce and one day we may have our own record company. I-ZAYA is geared toward youth using drugs, having babies and living on the streets. They need to hear the gospel. It concerns him very much. The one message he would like to send out to the community of youth is "If you are going through something hard, try Jesus."

ALONZO LINCOLN--(drummer/back-up vocal) graduate of Madison High School and one of two children born to Brenda and Donald Lincoln. He states that he first wanted to play a positive part in a male bonding group and develop his talent on the drums. He has performed in several groups, such as: Disciples II Choir, Zack & Tracy Clay-Harris and different church music workshops around the community. He says that the group has been ordained by God. "He will never forget the group's performance at the Apollo. They sang "Children of the Light" and won in two categories--performance and stage appearance. His message to the youth is: "Strive for something positive in your life and give

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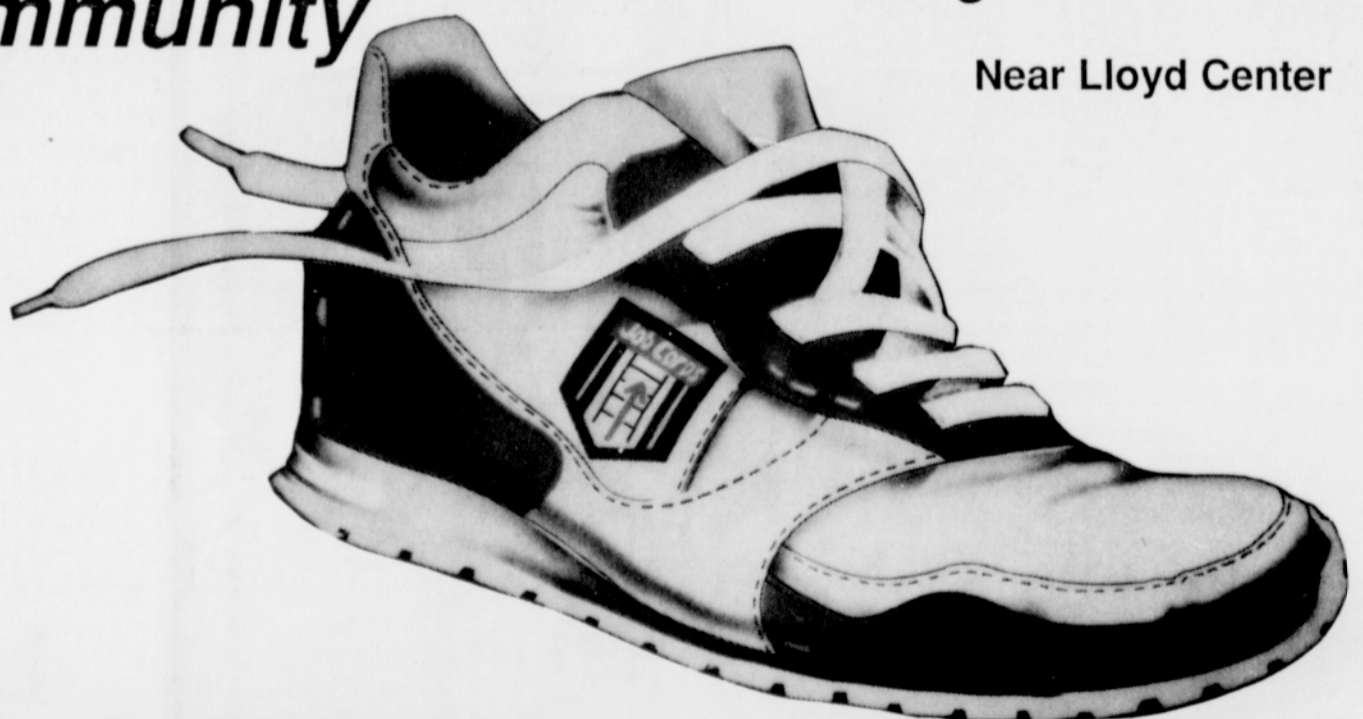
Pictured from left to right are Job Corp staff members Marco Navarrete, Vincenti Shorte, Poncho Gonzalez, Lana Barr, Kimberly Bridwell, Ollie Smith and Rafael Arellano.

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