

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

THE O'JAYS

With thirty years as hitmakers, The O'Jays have the special distinction of being one of the select few groups still making albums that consistently become best-sellers. Their 1991 EMI set *Emotionally Yours*, set the pace for The O'Jays' latest decade of hit records by achieving gold status and with the 1993 release of *Heartbreaker*, the group is destined to achieve new heights.

With new member Nathaniel Best (former musical director for Miki Howard and an accomplished musician and vocalist in his own right) replacing Sammy Strain (who went back to his original group Anthony and the Imperials), original members Eddie Levert and Walter Williams are excited about the prospects for their latest work. "We wanted the new album to be a little more well-rounded. It's not about taking the R&B edge off but making the music a little broader in its appeal," says Levert, whose distinctive vocal style has graced over fifty hit singles since the group began racking up chart singles in 1963.

The father of Gerald and Sean Levert (two-thirds of the hitmaking group Levert) knows a thing or two about staying current. "The one thing we've found is that good lyrics and good melodies are always the key. It's only the drum and bass sounds that really change with each decade. We're keeping our natural vocal sound -- just adapting to those musical change. That way, we stay in the game."

Heartbreaker presents The O'Jays in a variety of musical settings, from the edgy "Cryin' The Blues" to the gospel-laden "He Loves You" (featuring Sherena Wynn). The pop/R&B feel of "One Wonderful Girl" contrasts with the urgent, funky sound of "Trouble"; while upbeat cuts like "Can't Let Go" and the infectious "Decisions" have an immediate, instant appeal.

No O'Jays album would be complete without its requisite share of soulful ballads: "Somebody Else Will," "Show Me The Right Way," "No Can Do" and the album's title track more than fit the bill. Balancing different sides of The O'Jays' musi-

cality, *Heartbreaker* is a showcase for the virtuosity of this legendary outfit.

Heartbreaker features the production talents of Levert, Williams and longtime musical associate Dwain Mitchell (collectively known as W.E.D. Productions); and Gerald Levert and Edwin Nicholas who contributed two of the album's ten cuts. Eddie Levert articulates The O'Jays their latest work: "For us, it's all about reaching everybody, young, old, the R&B audiences, the pop record buyers while still keeping our identity. We like to be adventurous with out music and at the same time, keep that earthy feel that's always been a part of The O'Jays' sound."

The 'earthy feel' that Eddie Levert refers to has been the earmark of The O'Jays work since the group came into existence in the 1950 in Canton, Ohio when Levert and Walter Williams began singing gospel tunes on a local radio station. The following year, the duo became The Mascots, a quintet with the addition of William Powell, Bobby Massey and Bill Isles. A popular "live" act in Ohio, the group signed with King Records of Cincinnati and in 1961, The Mascots released their first single, "Miracles." Shortly afterwards, the team adopted the name of their manager local radio personality Eddie O'Jay, in 1963, The O'Jays enjoyed their first national hit with the Levert-Williams composition "Lonely Drifter" (initially released on Little Star Records, later picked up by Imperial Records.)

A series of hit singles for several labels, Bell, Neptune, and Saru Records allowed the group national attention. After a one-shot single ("Peace") with the Ohio-based Saru label, the O'Jays signed with Gamble & Huff's CBS-distributed Philadelphia International Records. With the departure of Bill Isles, who left before the Bell Recordings, and later Bobby Massey, the group became a trio and in 1972, the release of the Back Stabbers album began a seven-year period of gold and platinum albums and a non-stop run of hit singles.

Aside from being the title of their first gold album, Back Stabbers was also the first of seven No. 1 R&B hits



The O'Jays: Eddie Levert, Walter Williams and Nathaniel Best

The O'Jays enjoyed during their Philadelphia International years. Following the 1973 release of *The O'Jays In Philadelphia* (a collection of their Neptune Recordings), the platinum Ship Ahoy album yielded the No. 1 pop and R&B smash in "Love Train," and the classics "Put Your Hands

Together" and "for The Love of Money" (a Top 3 R&B, Top 10 pop million-selling single).

The momentum kept going with *Live In London* (1974) and *Survival* (1975), both gold albums and hit singles "Let Me Make Love To You," and "Give The People What They

Want": 1975's platinum *Family Reunion* set, featuring the million-seller "I Love Music" (No. 1 R&B, No. 5 pop) and "Livin' For The Weekend."

In 1975, William Powell left the group, due to illness, passing away two years later. He was later replaced by Sammy Strain. The mid-to late-

seventies produces two gold albums, *Message In The Music* (1976), *Travelin' At The Speed Of Thought* (1977) and two more platinum sets, *So Full Of Love* (1978) and *Identify Yourself* (1979), spurred by a slew of hit singles that included "Darlin' Darlin' Baby," "Use Ta Be My Girl" (an R&B chart-topper and Top 5 smash in 1978), "Brandy," "Sing A Happy Song," and "Forever Mine."

The O'Jays continued their association with Philadelphia International through the albums *They Year 2000* (1980), *My Favorite Person* (1982), *Will I See You Again* (1983) and *Love And More* (1984) and in 1985, Gamble & Huff initiated a deal with EMI Records, the group recorded the *Love Fever* album.

1987's *Let Me Touch You* set featured production by Gamble & Huff and Thom Bell and yielded "Lovin' You," an R&B smash that knocked Michael Jackson off the top of Billboard's Hot Black Singles chart at the end of '87.

With the 1991 release of the gold album *Emotionally Yours*, The O'Jays reached a new pinnacle of success. The title track, with an all-star choir providing soulful support, was a major hit for the group as was "Keep On Lovin' Me."

Now comes *Heartbreaker*, another hit-filled album from the legendary team destined to expand The O'Jays' universal appeal. "There's no doubt that the success of the group Levert has helped us," says Eddie. "It's made young people aware of us. They want to see these 'old guys' and they find that we're actually not that old and that we've got some great music for them. It's great because now we've got three generations of people coming to see our shows: our fans, their children and their children's children!"

Finally gaining the industry-wide and public recognition that is clearly their due after three decades of providing hit-making music, The O'Jays are ready to take it to the next phase. *Heartbreaker* should help make the achievement of the group's goal of across-the-board and international acceptance a reality.

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Renewal Of Gabi's Liquor License Postponed

Consideration of a hearings examiner's recommendation to renew the liquor license for Gabi's Restaurant and Lounge, 4700 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Portland, by the five members of the Oregon Liquor Control Commission has been postponed, according to OLCC Hearing Director Lee Moore.

When OLCC hearings examiner David Slansky issued his 79-page recommendation and proposed order last month, the Aug. 16 commission meeting was the first possible time for action by the liquor board members, Moore said.

"However, when the Attorney General's office raised legal issues concerning the proposed order, it became clear there just wasn't enough time to work through the issues before the August meeting," he said. Moore also explained that exceptions to a proposed order were filed, and they must be considered by the hearings examiner before the commissioners review the order and make their final decision.

The Liquor Commission members meet for two days each month. The next two scheduled meetings are Sept. 27-28 and Oct. 25-26.

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CARNIVAL THRILLS

The carnival rides at the 1993 Oregon State Fair, August 26-September 6, will be provided by Funtastic Shows Inc. of Portland. Some of the rides scheduled for the Fair were made abroad in Italy, Germany and England, which adds a touch of international flavor as well as thrills.

The scheduled rides will include traditional, proven favorites as well as several new and thrilling additions. The hottest ride, of course will be the Fair Chairlift, which is a ski-lift style ride running from one end of the fairgrounds to the other. The Chairlift offers a magnificent view of the entire Fair from 20 feet above. Fairgoers can purchase either a single trip or round trip ticket. Also new, The Ballon Race which is made in Italy, is an intermediate ride and mild enough for parents and children. The ride consists of eight balloons in a circle that lifts seven to eight feet in the air and then swings back and forth.

Traditional rides scheduled include: The Grand Wheel, The Matterhorn (made in Germany), The Wave Swinger (made in Germany), The Enterprise (made in Germany), The Orbiter (made in England), The Monster (made right here in Salem, OR), The Kamikaze (made in Italy), The Sea Dragon (made in Kansas), Super Loops (made in Texas), Tilt-A-Wheel and more.