

Focus

A SUPPLEMENT OF

The
Portland
ObserverEditor in Chief,
Publisher

Charles H. Washington

Editor

Larry J. Jackson, Sr.

Copy Editor

Joy Ramos

Business Manager

Gary Ann Taylor

Creative Director

Shawn Strahan

4747 NE Martin Luther
King, Jr., Blvd.
Portland, OR 97211503-288-0033
Fax 503-288-0015

e-mail:

thefocus@portlandobserver.com
subscription@portlandobserver.comDeadlines for
submitted material:Articles: Friday by 5 P.M.
Ads: Monday by NoonFocus welcomes freelance
submissions. Manuscripts and
photographs can be returned
if accompanied by a self-
addressed stamped envelope.All created display ads
become the sole property of
the newspaper and cannot be
used in other publications or
personal usage without the
written consent of the general
manager, unless the client has
purchased the composition of
the ad.

1999 The Portland Observer

Music

CONTRIBUTED STORY
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

"Do you remember" the first time you ever heard Earth, Wind & Fire? Do you remember smiling, singing along, shaking your rump or cuddling with your loved on while listening to their albums? Do you remember the energetic rhythms, sultry love songs, feel-good vibes and lyrics that were intelligent, positive and uplifting?

Maurice White knew exactly what he wanted to accomplish when the Memphis-born, Chicago-reared drummer left his gig as a member of renowned jazz pianist Ramsey Lewis' quartet and session drummer for the famed Chess Records. Simply put, he wanted to form a band that abolished the lines between musical genres. He wanted to be able to freely borrow from all styles of music without regard to convention.

After heading west to Los Angeles, Maurice coaxed his younger brother Verdine, then nineteen, to join him. Verdine was a classically trained bassist who previously had never been outside of Chicago. The first grouping initially took the name "The Salty Peppers." Maurice renamed the band Earth, Wind & Fire, which he took from his astrological chart (he's a Sagittarian - no water). At first, EW&F was loose and somewhat unfocused. They even tried unsuccessfully using female singer in the mix. After his vision wasn't quite realized on two 1971 albums for Warner Brothers Records, Maurice demolished the band to its foundation and rebuilt the unit, adding a four-octave singer-percussionist from Denver named Philip Bailey and a drummer-percussionist-vocalist from Los Angeles named Ralph Johnson. Verdine stuck around. Good thing. Maurice's charismatic tenor and Philip's stratospheric falsetto helped chisel the band's vocal identity. The two fit together and complimented one another remarkably well. In the studio, Maurice floated a thicket of elaborate vocal arrangements over a stream of musical rivers. Philip brought an innate sense of melody to their songwriting efforts.

Earth, Wind & Fire created the soundtrack to a pioneering black film, "Sweet Sweetback's Badasssss Song," then promptly switched to Columbia Records, which became the home for so many Earth, Wind & Fire's classics. The albums "Last Days and Time," "Head To The

Earth, Wind & Fire



Sky" and "Open Our Eyes" propelled the group onto the radi and were backed with concert dates wherever they could play including clubs, colleges and theatres. An underground following began to amass. It was a soundtrack to an ill-fated film that busted them wide open. "That's The Way Of The World," was a total stiff at the box office (twice), but it did huge business at record stores. Earth, Wind & Fire got their first #1 single ("Shining Star"), first Grammy Award and first double platinum sales award. They were just getting started.

The huge group - fourteen or more on stage at-a-time was outfitted in outlandish costumes. In the early days, they wore tights (seriously folks), which were replaced by magnificently colored African-influenced attire. Flashy sequined, metallic and futuristic spacesuit numbers also were the regular. Earth, Wind & Fire was the first to bring the African culture into prominence and into pop culture. One of Maurice's and EW&F's trademark was a handheld African thumb piano called a kalimba, which seasoned so many of their recordings. Philip explained, "It was important to us to make a connection to our heritage and to introduce our culture to a wide audience."

Then and now, Earth, Wind & Fire put on unforgettable shows. These days however, it is done with less pomposity and greater focus on the actual

music. "Times are different," Verdine said. "Most of that stuff was of its time. We found that we can still put on fabulous concerts without all the hoopla. Look, even Elton gave up his wild glasses and outfits. KISS took of their make-up. Wait a second, check that."

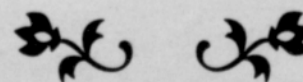
Year after year, tour after tour, concert venues worldwide are packed with fans who converge upon Earth, Wind & Fire shows. The warm feelings of love that permeate the celebratory concert extravaganzas exude from both the band and the audience and have forged a lasting bond. VH1 and HBO have both aired a pair of concert performances over the last

(Please see Earth Wind & Fire' page 5)

KENNEDY SCHOOL
McMenamins
THEATERMOVIES
NIGHTLY
WITH
WEEKEND MATINEES

For schedule & information call:

288-2180



McMenamins

Kennedy School

5736 NE 33rd · Portland, Oregon

(503) 249-3983

www.mcmenamins.com