

Booking Agency on a Hot Streak

WALTERS: IT'S A GREAT CONCERT YEAR

BY NELSON GEORGE

NEW YORK The **Norby Walters** Agency, the industry's biggest black-oriented booking agency, is on a hot streak. Black concert attendance has been strong since last summer, says agency president **Norby Walters**—who, with the summer touring season upcoming, sees 1985 as a "spectacular year for black music." As proof, he cites the number of major new tours hitting the road and the durability of ongoing tours.

New Edition, Rick James, Teena Marie, Luther Vandross, Midnight Star, the Whispers, the Commodores and the Fresh Fest, featuring a package of top rap acts, are headlining tours that either are now on the road or will go out within the next two months. In addition, Shalamar, Klymaxx, Process & the Doo Rags, the Mary Jane Girls, the Bar-Kays, Zapp/Roger, Con Funk Shun and the Commodores will appear as part of larger tours. The Budweiser, Michelob and Kool Jazz festivals will be joined by a Soft Sheen concert series aimed at black consumers.

"Pop radio is playing more black music," Walters notes. "There is no Michael Jackson tour around to pull those big dollars out of the marketplace. A lot of motion pictures are putting black music into their soundtracks, and the perception of crime at black concerts, something that was a problem a few years ago, has lessened."

All these factors have added to white attendance at black concerts, along with a resurgence in black attendance. The economy is still hurting blacks, but they seem to have now been able to find the money to attend concerts again."

The corporate-sponsored tour season begins in San Diego June 7-8 with the Kool Jazz Festival. Appearing there will be Earl Klugh, Klymaxx, the Dazz Band, Shalamar, the Commodores, Midnight Star, Jeffrey Osborne, Patti LaBelle, the Gap Band and Luther Vandross. There will be seven Kool dates in July, with concerts to be held in Orlando, Atlanta, Memphis and Cin-

cinnati.

Promoter Al Haymon, who is handling the Budweiser, Michelob and Soft Sheen tours, is mixing acts among these arena shows. A core roster of Teena Marie, Maze featuring Frankie Beverly, the Commodores, Kool & the Gang, Midnight Star, the Whispers, Luther Vandross, Shalamar, the Gap Band and Patti LaBelle will share time on the 12 Michelob, 15 Soft Sheen and 15 Budweiser dates. In August and September there will be a special funk-oriented Budweiser package that will include the Bar-Kays, Zapp/Roger and Con Funk Shun.

"So far this year the biggest tour has been New Edition," says Walters' partner Jerry Ade. In 50 dates at 5,000- to 10,000-seat venues, the group has played to more than 350,000 patrons. Rappers the Fat Boys and Whodini opened the tour's first six weeks. "This summer we're taking them to middle America," says Ade, noting that New Edition will play state fairs and parks. In total, Ade estimates, New Edition will perform 150 dates in 1985.

Midnight Star's "Interplanetary Invasion" tour has just been extended 10 weeks and "would go on longer if the band didn't have production commitments," Ade says. Opening dates on this Solar label package are Shalamar and Klymaxx, each of whom have been touring outside this package.

Luther Vandross is doing 60 cities and 150 dates this year. He hits the road June 1 and should continue there until December. Significantly, in most markets, Vandross is moving up from the 5,000-seaters of his previous tour to arenas.

Rick James goes out with the Mary Jane Girls, Process & the Doo Rags and a new James-produced opening act, Val Young. James and company will work for five months, beginning July 1.

The Commodores, just off a European tour, have been playing colleges and smaller halls in the U.S. They may be the opening act on Vandross' tour.

The Fresh Fest starts in June and will be on tour for 12 weeks with rappers Run-D.M.C., Whodini, Kur-

tis Blow, the Fat Boys and U.T.F.O., among the acts scheduled. Walters raves that this was "a tremendously lucrative tour all around the country" last summer. The appearance of two rap films this summer should further enhance the music's appeal.

The Four Tops-Temptations tour, on the road for two years, was "a great surprise," says Walters. "Ever since the 'Motown 25' special, this package's appeal hasn't waned. The success of the current Temptations album has had no real effect on ticket sales. An older audience that loved the old hits has supported that tour."



Hometown Girls. After a recent appearance at the Universal Amphitheatre in Los Angeles, Klymaxx was given a proclamation honoring them, signed by Mayor Tom Bradley. Seen backstage with the proclamation are, from left, MCA's senior vice president of black music Cheryl Busby; Klymaxx members Fenderella, Bernadette Cooper, Robin Ginder, Cheryl Cooley, Lynn Malstby and Lorena Porter; and MCA's director of black a&R Louil Silas.

THE RHYTHM & THE BLUES

by Nelson George



WHAT EVER HAPPENED to Jeffrey Daniels? That has been a popular question ever since the ex-"Soul Train" dancer left Shalamar, relocating to England, where he was always very popular. The singer has reportedly made some records, none of which have made it to these shores. He has received some notice in the British press for his role in Andrew Lloyd Webber's English musical hit "Starlight Express," portraying an electric train in the show's elaborate production numbers.

Now, in a remarkable coincidence, Daniels has landed a position that could make him a major figure on the British music scene and give him visibility in the U.S. as well. He has been chosen by the staff of Channel 4 in England to host the British version of "Soul Train," known there as "620 Soul Train" due to the time of the day it airs. Daniels' selection was done without the knowledge of Don Cornelius, the man behind the original "Soul Train."

Jeffrey Daniels hops on the U.K. 'Soul Train'

According to his assistant Trish Steed, Cornelius, who founded "Soul Train" and co-produces the British version, found out about it when Daniels called collect from England. "620 Soul Train" began broadcasting April 12. Thirteen shows have been ordered, with such popular black British acts as Loose Ends and Cashmere having already appeared. Aside from showcasing current artists, the British version will integrate vintage "Soul Train" material into the broadcast.

Clips from both countries will be traded between the shows, and Daniels, last seen in the U.S. bopping through Shalamar's "Dead Giveaway" video, will be featured in much of the footage from overseas. So Daniels is now set to become something of an international video star. It will be interesting to see what Daniels looks like, since he has always been a flamboyant dresser, and this show will certainly be a powerful vehicle for influencing style on both sides of the Atlantic.

WORD ON THE STREET has been that Prince's "Around the World In A Day" was uncommercial and more than a little strange. Well, it contains nothing as obviously hit-bound as "When Doves Cry" or "Let's Go Crazy," but it just might be a better album than the "Purple Rain" soundtrack. The range and sophistication of the music is great. Some songs sound like the Beatles (the title cut, "Paisley Park"), some like

Sly ("America," "Tambourine"), and some just wonderfully weird ("Temptation," "A Condition Of The Heart," "The Ladder"). To these ears, all the music sounds mighty fine, something that could not be said of "Purple Rain."

Those looking for singles should try the pop-funk of "Pop Life," highlighted by some beautifully in-the-pocket trap drumming by Shelia E., and the sweetly melodic "Raspberry Beret." Though Prince makes a rather big deal of his confusion between lust and love (which God, finally, sets him straight about in a humorous conversation), the socially conscious lyrics of "America" and "Pop Life" show that Prince Rogers Nelson is more aware of the world than might be suspected.

SHORT STUFF: Los Angeles session keyboardist **Denzil Miller** co-produced and arranged saxophonist **George Howard**'s current TBA album, "Dancing In The Sun" . . . Mango artist **Ini Kamaze** is touring the West Coast, with dates in San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego . . . **J. Blackfoot**'s new Sound Town album "Physical Attraction" has just been released . . . **Deodato** has produced an artist with the rather familiar handle **ET** for Posse Records. The single is called "Hurt Me With Your Love." The lyric is self-explanatory . . . MCA, which has been quite successful with young signings (**New Edition**, **Ready For The World**), has a most intriguing female act in **Cheyne**. The lady is sort of a black, punky **Madonna**, and her single, "Call Me 'Mr. Telephone,'" was produced by **Mark Kamins**, Madonna's first sponsor . . . For a listing to be included in Billboard's June black music special, black video outlets should send their address, telephone number and a sample playlist to Nelson George at Billboard's New York office.

LeVert, the young band fronted by O'Jay **Eddie LeVert**'s son **Gerald**, has just had its debut album, "I Get Hot," issued on **Harry Coombs**'s Temple label. Father Eddie and another O'Jay, **Walter Williams**, contributed to the production, along with Coombs, **Gerald LeVert** and **Dexter Wansel** . . . Though Capitol has been putting the big push behind "Read My Lips," from **Melba Moore**'s album of the same name, the better record might be "When You Love Me Like This," a smoothly danceable duet between Moore and labelmate **Lillo Thomas**. Both cuts are produced by **Keith Diamond**. Also worth noting is the **Paul Lawrence Jones**-produced "Winner" . . . **Grace Jones**' new single will be called "Slave To The Rhythm." Talk about a lady with a good sense of her image . . . **The Deele**, who made such a powerful impact with their first album, are generating strong sales and radio play with "Material Thanga."



Atlantic City Lady. Rochelle, whose debut single "Love Me Tonight" has just been released by Warner Bros., is a regular performer at Atlantic City's Sands Hotel. Celebrating her signing are, back row, from left: Al Saucara of Brothers Management, Rochelle's personal manager Jonathan Goldman, Nick Grant of Brothers Management, front row, from left: Warner Bros. promotion manager **Jack**, Rochelle, and Sands entertainment director **Hans Kennon**.