A Day In The Key Of Life

By Vashti McKenzie

BROOKFIELD, MASS. It's been two years since any new sounds have come out of Stevie Wonder.

The wait is over and the wait has been worth while. "Song In The Key Of Life" is hot wax.

For the past 18 months, Wonder has been recording this sizzling double album.

This past Tuesday, Wonder invited members of the countryside recording studio in Brookfield, Mass. for "A Day in the Key of Life."

A chartered jet took press representatives from Ebony, Essence Cash Box and AFRO-AMERICAN and more from New York City into the New England countryside.

The flight attendants noting the assembled travel experien group, decided to skip the detailed flight information speech.

Since we were not going higher than 17,000 feet, we didn't have to worry about oxygen masks dropping into our champagne.

The young hostess did tell us where the emergency exists were. (Whew!)

Just as the plane was landing, a sharp jolt greeted our return to earth.

"" apologize right away, ladies and gentlemen, for that one," said the plane's captain.

"We just wanted to come down as soon as possible just to be sure we had enough runway to stop."

The press began to murmur. . . .

"If he doesn't think we have enough runaway to land, do we have enough to take-off?"

The jet must have been the largest to land at the quaint white wood Worcester Airport. We were greeted by lots of starving people snapping photos and gwaking at the "city dudes."

The Long View Farm . . . with red barn, duck pond, horses, cows and chickens . . . is a brilliant stimulation to those who are "city-fatigued."

The farm looks over a gorgeous tree-lined valley. Bright pumpkins and cords in various hues blended with the golds, reds and oranges of the falling leaves.

There was even a swing under the old oak tree and a hay wagon to ride. A helicopter gave guests an even greater panoramic view of Brookfield.

The typical farm dogs romped and played among the guests under a green and white tent. Everyone gathered there to be impressed by the view of the fall setting and taste various culinary delights and libations.

The white farm house was a warm blend of wood, glass and antiques. Lush, lus green plants soften the masculine look and a fireplace added just the right glow and fragrance.

Wonder joined the press dressed in a creme colored cowboy suit with matching studded boots. He had a genuine leather gun belt strapped around his waist with double albums for six shooters.

His mellon colored glassed were adorned with his astrological sign. . .Taurus the Bull.

In introducing the "Songs In the Key of Life" Wonder said the album, was his "experiences of life."

"These are the many loves and realities of my life, put in a special way, to all of you, he said.

"I hope you enjoy it. I know I gave my all and it's the best that I could do," he said.

Wonder sat at the studio's sound board and began to play the first tape.

The album was a winner from the first note of "Love's In Need of Love Today," to the last note of "Another Star."

The first verse in "Love's In Need of Love Today" seems to sum-up what Wonder is trying to tell the world. He's says what he's about to say "Could mean the world's disaster. Could change your joy and laughter to tears and pain."

He talks of love as a thing that lasts forever.

Wonder's word are just as important as his beat. He's has a lot to say and if you don't listen to his words, you'll miss an important lesson in life.

Wonder has an amazing sense of black history and the black experience. It comes shining through on "Village Ghetto Land," "Black Man" "Sir Duke" (a tribute to Duke Ellington) and "Nigiculela Es Uno Historia."

In "Black Man" co-authored by Gary Byrd, and with a lot of research done by Sethema Byrd, "Black Man talks about the achievements of all races.

"We pledge allegiance
All our lives
To The magic colors
Red, blue and white
But we all must be given
The Liberty to defend
For with justice not for all men
History will repeat again
It's time we learned
This world was made for all men."

1976 Jobete Music Co., Inc. and Black Bull Music Inc.

Wonder shows great versatility in this set of albums. He's written songs with gothic flavors, spanish tones, themes with lots of violins followed by lots of beat and syntnesizers.

There are also two instrumentals but it's Wonder's poetic words that hit home.

By the time Wonder turned on the third track, the media were dancing from the barn yard, the kitchen, to the studio. It seemed the third and fourth tapes were building to a crescendo peaking at "As". It was one of the album's most moving sensations, the last cut "Another Star" had superstar Wonder and assembled guest singing the chorus.

"Songs In The Key of Life" is undoubtedly being shiped "gold" by Motown just on the Wonder name alone. It will undoubtedly go platinum within weeks of its Sept. 30 release date on the sheer power of the Wonder genius. The man is talented and that's that.

The album was a long time in coming but oh, what good things comes to those who wait.

Stevie Wonder introduces his new double album "Songs In The Key of Life" to the press in Brookfield, Mass. this week.

On Stage

By Harriette Lane

Theatre-goers enjoyed a delightful alternative to the hussle and bustle of the City Fair last weekend in the little auditorium at the Community College of Baltimore.

The production was "Sty of the Blind Pig," a comedy-drama in three acts, by Phillips Hays Dean. It's the result of intense preparation from a group of creative artists who call themselves, A New Experience.

Besides the promise of good theatre entertainment for Baltimore, A New Experience in an attempt at providing valuable experience and employment opportunities for black actors and actresses in the city.

Benjamin Prestbu, directed the play, and is also a member of the cast, along with Verna Day, Claudette Allen, and Calvin Parker.

When the curtain rises, the period of time is the 50's in an apartment on the southside of Chicago. With Verna Day, as Weedy Warren and Claudette Allen as daughter, Alberta, they have brought us into a world we all recognize and understand. It was the calm before the storm of radicalism and civil rights movements; when black people were caught between their hopes for a better life and fear of losing the stability of their present one.

"Sty of the Blind Pig," is the tragic story of Alberta's fears and subsequent loss of her emotional stability. However the plays foundation is human comedy that makes us laugh at the realistic bickering between Weedy, her brother, Doc, played by Ben Prestbury, and Alberta.

A seemingly harmless blind man who travels with a guitar enters Alberta's life ans brings with him all the filth her churchwoman bringing rejects as sinful. Weedy Warren knows her daughter is acting strange by, but even she doesn't perceive the source of attachment to the stranger, Calvin Parker plays the Blind Man, Jordan. He eventually moves into the apartment to satisfy Alberta's desperate need for someone, while her mother is silenced by anger and a sense of doom.

* * *

When I attended the opening of "Sty of the Blind Pig," last Friday night, the audience's reaction to Alberta's emotional experience got lost in the exceptional performance by Verna Day. It is clear from the script and Prestbury's direction that Alberta is sufferin. But it did not come across strongly enough in Ms. Allen's interpretation. Many were laughing at the wrong moments.

Collectively, the cast worked well together, and the tremendous talent of Verna Day seems to feed energy to the actors around her. Ben Prestbury is a great actor who didn't suffer in his dual role as director. The direction is excellent.

"Sty of the Blind Pig" will run through this Sunday, September 26th in the Little Theatre of the Community College of Baltimore. Curtain time for all performances is 8 p.m. Take the whole family, and welcome "The New Experience to Baltimore.

Arts and Music

JAZZ

Morgan State University's Student Government Association brings to a close its Black Music Week honoring John Coltrane, Saturday, Sept. 25 with a concert featuring Dizzy Gilespie, Charles Earland, and Nation Don L. Leo (Eaki).

* * *

WALTERS

The Walters Art Gallery begins its 1976 fall season when it opens a major exhibition, "The Animal Fair," Monday (September 27) evening with a preview for gallery members. The exhibition, which opens to the public the following day (September 28), celebrates the centennial of the Baltimore Zoo and will remain on view through November 7 in the special exhibition galleries on the entrance level of the Centre Street building.

ART

The photography of Lawrence F. Sykes will be on exhibition at the Morgan State University Gallery of Art through October 8.

Born in Decatur, Alabama, Mr. Sykes received the B.S. degree in art education from Morgan in 1955, and the M.S. degree from Pratt Institute in 1967. A former director of the Murphy Fine Arts Center at the University, Mr. Sykes was selected as a participant in the advanced Studies Workshop at George Eastman House in 1967.

Since 1970 he has focused more closely on Afro New World Themes as a result of his travels to the South, the Caribbean, South America and Africa. During a recent sabbatical leave, he served as visiting lecturer in graphic design at the College of Art, University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.

In July, 1976, Mr. Sykes was photographic consultant for the Baltimore Urban Services Cultural Arts Project. He currently teaches film-making and photography at Rhode Island College, Providence.

Admission to the exhibition is free-of-charge and the public is cordially invited to attend.

"Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" is now playing each weekend through October 3 at The Spotlighters Theatre on St. Paul St. Performances begin at 8:30 P.M.

Two evenings with superstars of basketball enliven the Pro Basketball Tournament, Sept. 8, 9 at Madison Square Garden. A team featuring Julius "Dr. J" Erving, Tiny Archibald, Bob Lanier, Spencer Haywood, Charlie Scott, and Bill Bradley, will meet one featuring Kareem Jabbar, Jo Jo White, Artis Gilmore, Randy Smith, Kevin Porter and Marvin Barnes.

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AUDITIONS FOR RHODA IN THE BAD SEED

The Arena Players, Inc. will be holding auditions for the part of Rhoda, star of the Bad Seed by Maxwell Anderson, on Saturday and Sunday September 25 and 26 from 10 a.m. until 8 p.m.

The auditions will be held at 1229 Druid Hill Avenue. All girls who wish to audition should be 10 years old or appear to be around that age, attractive, and black.

No previous acting experience is necessary and any girl who fits the description is welcome to audition.

The man who turned leaves to gold.

Look at the different colors of tobacco in your cigarette. The tobacco with the golden brown color is there because of a black man.

The year is 1839. Tobacco is being cured in open barns on a farm in North Carolina near the Virginia border. Stephen Slade takes charcoal logs from his blacksmith pit to rekindle the smoldering embers on one of the curing fires. The result is amazing. The heat from the fire turns the drying leaves to a bright golden yellow never before seen in tobacco history.

Stephen Slade had truly "struck gold." His discovery gave way to the flue-curing process, and the entire industry was revolutionized. Flue-cured tobaccos are now used in most cigarette blends to give flavor and mildness to the smoke.

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Black Caucus weekend

The nation's capital is preparing to receive hundreds of visitors from all over the United States for the events in the 1976 Congressional Black Caucus dinner weekend.

There will be workshops held all day today, Fri., Sept. 24.

The highlight of the evening is the benefit concert at the Capitol Centre. Headling the show is Epic recording artists The Jacksons (formerly the Jackson Five) Jackie, Tito Marlon, Michael and Randy.

They are joined by Johnny Taylor, B. T. Express and Bill Withers.

Tickets for the conert are still available and there is no better way you can support Caucus projects.

The Congressional Tennis Classic is on Saturday, Sept. 25 in the morning. Washington AFRO-AMERICAN circulation manager Stan McKenzie is playing in the celebrity tournament.

Alma Rangles, the beautiful and gracious wife of Congressman Charles Rangles of New York, is sponsoring the caucus fashion show, 12 noon at the Washington Hilton Hotel, also on Saturday.

The Sixth Annual Congressional Black Caucus Dinner will be held that evening at the Washington Hilton.

Dee Dee Bridgewater, Tony Award winner for her best supporting role in the Broadway musical "The Wiz" will perform.

Bill Withers, Johnny Taylor and The Jacksons headline a benefit concert for the Congressional Black Caucus Fri. Sept. 24 at the Capitol Centre.

'Trackdown' a new thriller

"Trackdown" starring Jim Mitchum, Karen Lamm, Anne Archer and Erik Estrada deal candidly with a gigantic social problem faced daily by thousands of parents . . . that of the teenage runaway. The film, told through the eyes and emotions of a sixteen year old and her older brother who tries to find her, is vividly presented by producer Bernard Schwartz and director Richard T. Heffron from a screenplay by Paul Edwards and a story by Ivan Nagy.

The film is a tale of frustration, anger and ofteuvlolence, that begins when 16-year-old Betsy Calhoun (Karen Lamm), feels the need to find herself and her own lifestyle and decides to abandon the Montana ranch home to go to Los Angeles where she is certain there is more to life than pawing cowhands and the ever-watchful eyes of her older brother Jim (Jim Mitchum).

"Trackdown" a suspense thriller is perhaps the first American motion picture to deal truthfully with the lifestyle in the Barrio, the Mexican-American section of a contemporary American city — Los Angeles.

Jim (James Mitchum), searching for his runaway sister in Los Angeles, tangles with an underworld type in "Trackdown" a new thriller opening this week at area theaters.

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Also starring Hal Holbrook and David Soul. First time on television. Designed for mature audiences. Parental discretion advised.

... and all that jazz

By Bob Matthews

Back from a short vacation where we had a chance to check out the jazz scene in Chicago and Detroit.

Discovered that the Baltimore-Washington area is far and away above the Mid-West when it comes to live presentations.

The Left Bank Jazz Society weekly concerts are truly unique and have no counterpart extant.

Jazz is healthy in the Mid-West, but mainly in a nightclub setting which costs an arm and a leg.

But . . . Chicago and Detroit have 24-hour long radio stations . . . an item totally lacking in Bgltimore-Washington.

LBJS had one of its rare night sessions last week. It was all because of the City Fair. On tap, the Nat Adderly Quintet.

Nat did a bit of a cop out at the beginning announcing that it was the first appearance of the group in over a month . . . so . . . they might be a bit rusty in their arrangements.

Ha! You'd never know. Turned out to be the most romping, stomping, wailing swinging concert heard in these parts in quite a spell. Every member was a thorough professional and a performer as well as song-writer arranger. In fact most of the tunes played were composed by the members of the quintet. For example, there was "Love Dreamer", composed and arranged by John Stubblefield, the reed man, whose tone on alto sax was surprisingly like Cannonball.

Then there was "Listen to the Rain," by pianist Onaje Gumos who has switched to the electric piano for this particular composition.

Fernando Gumbs switched to electric bass at this point all of which made this particular ditty simply soar.

Nat's contribution was a little tune dedicated to his childhood in Florida and named for a neighbor "Miss Sally."

The standards were not overlooked in the concert. There was a rousing arrangement of "Work Song" and a swinging rendition of the "The Theme from M.A.S.H."

Nat calls the group the "Basic Black Band" which denizens of the corner could not help but feel for the sideways slap at the group known as the "Average White Band."

Nat sticks with the cornet. On rare occasions, he blows the flugel horn but distains the trumpet. And, Odds Bodkins, the coronet, he says is black.

That's right, black, not brass colored or silver . . . black Thought it might be some sort of plastic but it was medal and blackened in much the same way that pistols are blued.

*** next week, LBJS presents the Charlie Rouse Quintet with Waymon Reid trumpet; Hugh Lawson, piano; Cecil McBee, bass, and Ben Riley, drum.

What's Happening

By Ida Peters

Editor's Notes: Mrs. Ida Peters is on vacation. The entertainment pages are being managed by Mrs. Vashti McKenzie until her return next month.

****

Morgan State University will present "A Streetcar Named Desire," a play in three acts by Tennessee Williams, on September 29-October 2 at 8:00 p.m. and October 3 at 3:30 p.m. in the Little Theatre, located in the Murphy Fine Arts Center.

The play will be directed by Dianne Jemison, a member of the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts.

Flip Wilson, comedian, has announced that his production company will produce "Nadia: From Romania With Love," a television special starring Olympic gymnastic Nadia Commaneci.

Flip will star and the 14-year-old gold medal winner will co-star.

Before Ray Charles goes to Europe, he and singer Cleo Laine will team on a new "Porgy and Bess" album. Laine came all the way from Britain for the task of recording George Gershwin's celebrated folk opera.

This is the first time the two have collaborated.

Laine, who's been called "the world's greatest singer" shows her versatility by singing parts that composer Gershwin originally wrote for male singers and also performed song intended for other females in the opera. Sounds like a unique presentation due for a late September release.

* * *

Final auditions will be held Saturday and Sunday, September 25 and 26, from 1 to 6 p.m. at Joel's Place, 1 West Lafayette, for Richard Ronan's "Antigone." Eight parts are open, for men and women, and one part for a mature woman is not cast. Actors should prepare a two-minute piece, and be dressed for physical improvisation. The director is Joseph Uher, and further information may be obtained by calling 752-4197.

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More . . . more

* * * Graduates of the Peabody Conservatory of Music living in the York, Pennsylvania area will sponsor a special benefit concert on Sunday, September 26 at 3:30 P.M. in the Life Sciences Theatre at York College. Plans for the concert were made when the serious financial plight of the Conservatory was announced earlier this year.

The concert will include performances by Diane Susek, soprano; David Hudson, tenor; Michael Knaub, baritone, and Maribeth Knaub, soprano; Ignatius Gennusa, clarinetist; and Brenda Zellers Bamberger, pianist. All are graduates of the Peabody Conservatory.

Concert coordinator is Marjorie Jones, who is an alumna of Peabody and the founder and coordinator of the York College Candlelight Concert series.

The Edwin Booth Theater's fall children offering will be a puppet show on Saturday, September 25 at 1:00 p.m. This thirty minute production, "Jessica and the Purple Squirrel," is designed to especially appeal to 3-11 year-olds.

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25 SEP 25