Kevin Toney... former leader of Blackbyrds

Kevin Toney brings a wealth of talent and experience to his Fantasy debut album, "Special K."

Last year, Kevin was awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in the category of jazz performer. He used the funds to present a concert of originals and jazz standards, with a trio and special guests Andrew White and Ethel Ennis (a singer from Baltimore).

The former leader of the Blackbyrds, Toney is an exceptionally versatile keyboardist who also boasts formidable skills as a composer-he was reponsible for Blackbyrds hits like "City Life" and "Unfinished Business", and penned nearly all of the material on "Special K".

His expertise as an arranger-orchestrator is evident in his assured writing for voices and horns, and in a myriad of distinctive Toney touches, from synthesizer flourished to deep, deep grooves.

"I would define the music on "Special K" as multi-faceted and multi-stylistic", remarks Toney, who co-produced the LP with Orrin Keepnews. "To me, it's a concept album: there are no pure forms, but the diverse styles of music are fused in a unique and special way".

Kevin's mastery of idioms and instruments enables him to span the entire spectrum of contemporary black music with ease. Side 1's up-to-the-minute funk rhythms (propelled by drummer Ndugu and ex-Cameo bassist Aaron Mills) and vocal arrangements are especially effective on the lead track "Red Tape" and "On Your Feet". Side 2 strikes a quieter mood, with a rendition of the Coltrane classic "Naima" and the lovely ballad "A Good Feeling", which features Alton Green on lead vocal.

Kevin Toney grew up in a musical family and a musical city- Detroit, where he was born April 23, 1953. His older sister Cheryl gave him his first piano lessons when he was five, and he subsequently studied cello and saxophone. By age eight, he was composing and performing short classical pieces for piano, and just a few years later he won a scholarship to the Interlochen (Michigan) Academy of Music.

While in junior high school, Kevin's interest in popular music and jazz intensified. He attended Cass Technical High School in Detroit (which counts Ron Cater and Donald Byrd among its alumni) and played with a number of bands, one of which included guitarist Ray Parker, Jr. and drummer Ollie Brown (later percussionist with the Rolling Stones). "It wasn't an official group", Kevin recalls, "but the three of us jammed together a lot, and we'd hang out and talk about music. Then we went in very different directions!"

After graduating from high school in '71, Toney enrolled at Howard University in Washington, D.C., where Donald Byrd chaired the Jazz Studies Department. Byrd immediately hired Kevin to work in what was then the trumpeter's regular group. "We played funky jazz clubs like Slug's in New York", Kevin told an interviewer some years ago. "The band consisted of Byrd, myself, Barney Perry, who was the Blackbyrds' guitarist the first few records, and jazz cats like Joe Chambers, Stanley Cowell, Harold Vick, George Coleman and Billy Harper..."

Dr. Byrd introduced the young pianist to synthesizers, and drafted him into the student band that developed into the Blackbyrds. In 1973, Byrd brought the group to Fantasy Records, and for the next six years, closely guided their academic and professional careers.

During the Seventies, Toney and the other Blackbyrds were participants in a learning experiment that worked: as full-time music majors at Howard, they had the opportunity to study with a working musician both in the classroom and on the road. While adhering to an impossible hectic schedule of Blackbyrd recording dates, live performances, and radio and press interviews, they also had to meet the demands of their formal education: classroom assignments, projects and term papers.

The Blackbyrds went on to rack up three gold albums ("City Life", "Unfinished Business", "Action") and an impressive stack of honors including an Ebony Image Award and a Grammy nomination for the single "Walking In Rhythm". They toured the U.S. and Europe making countless concert and club appearances. The band met with wide critical as well as commerical success.

On the academic front, Kevin Toney finally earned his degree from Howard in both composition and jazz studies in 1978. He also married Phyllis Saunders, a poet and fashion designer who provided lyrics on several of "Special K" tunes. Although he appeared on the Blackbyrd's 1980 album "Better Days", Kevin had already made up his mind to leave the band. "I felt the need to expand my musical horizons", he says simply, "but they didn't want to grow in a direction which would fulfill my artistic desires". Toney had always maintained an active musical life outside of the Blackbyrd context. His working relationship with jazz saxophonist Andrew White, for example, extends back to Kevin's early days at Howard. To date, he has recorded 17 albums with White.

For the last four years, Kevin has studied composition with Russell Wollen, pianist with the National Symphony in Washington. (Kevin's compositions have been recorded by artists such as Sonny Rollins, David "Fathead" Newman, and Bill Summers). He also has a private teaching practice of his own.

Toney toured with Bill Summer's band last year, and frequently performs in the Washington area with his own groups, with singers, or a solo. For most of 1981, he played solo five nights a week at the Marriott Hotel in D.C., a gig which allowed him to utilize the full range of his musical knowledge. "I had a chance to really get into some styles I hadn't explored that much before", he says. "I certainly know more Cole Porter and Gershwin songs now than I did five years ago! I also played my own material, and tunes by other comtemporary jazz composers.

The Gap Band

"The Gap Band is filling the spaces between musical forms, filling the holes, the gaps," says Ronnie Wilson.

The Gap Band also fills the top chart slots with songs with songs like "Burn Rubber" (a No. 1 R & B single as well as a pop hit), and "Yearnin'" (Top 10 R & B and Top 40 pop) from "The Gap Band III," now a platinum album filling the spaces on their already crowded walls.

After all, "The Gap Band II" scored gold for this captivating musical unit, who have been filling a lot of gaps in the charts since scoring a No. 1 R & B single, "Shake," on their first Mercury-PolyGram album, "The Gap Band".

Hit songs like "Open Up Your Mind (Wide)," "Steppin'," "Oops (Upside Your Head)" and "Party Lights" have plugged The Gap Band into America's ears, and earned them admiration from the likes of Stevie Wonder, who asked them to contribute their talents to his "Hotter Than July" album.

"The Gap Band IV" (on Total Experience Records, marketed by PolyGram Records) finds this million selling act taking yet another successive step upward and outward on the fourth chapter of what promises to be a long and enjoyable story.

And there's no better opener for this slice of the Gap Band's musical magic than the single, "Early In The Morning," a scintillating ray of musical sunshine that should brighten the dance floors and radio waves of America.

Top Hits

Top Jazz Albums
1. Grayson / Tri-Athalony Group
2. We Want Miles / Miles Davis
3. Mystical Adventures / Jean-Luc Ponty
4. Breakfast Away / Al Jarreau
5. Come Morning / Grover Washington, Jr.

Top Spiritual Albums
1. Is My Living In Vain / Clark Sisters
2. Higher Plane / Al Green
3. When All God's Children Get Together / Rev. Keith Pringle
4. It's Gonna Rain / Milton Brunson
5. Oh / Shirley Caesar

Top R&B Albums
1. Stevie Wonder's Original Musicquarium / Stevie Wonder
2. Reunion / The Temptations
3. Keep It Alive / Dazz Band
4. Straight From the Heart / Patrice Rushen
5. Nancy / Deniece Williams

Top R&B Singles
1. Let It Whip / Dazz Band
2. It's Gonna Take A Miracle / Deniece Williams
3. Forget Me Nots / Patrice Rushen
4. Early in the Morning / The Gap Band
5. We Do A Long Way Back / Bloodstone

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TV Watching

By Vanessa Johnson

Friday

Muppet Show: A band of pig thievos are intent upon ruining singer Shirley Bassey's "Goldfinger" number when they discover the Muppet stage is decked with real gold bars. 5:30-6:00 p.m. Ch. 13.

Here's To Your Health: Why women are generally healthier than men. 6:00-6:30 p.m. Ch. 22 & 67.

Sha Na Na: Guest Gloria Gaynor performs "I Will Survive". 7:00-7:30 p.m. Ch. 45.

Baseball: The Orioles play the Yankees in New York. 8:00-11:00 p.m. Ch. 2.

Benson: Acting on what they figure to be a hot tip, Clayton and Kraus plunge into the stock market. Starring Robert Guillaume. 8:00-8:30 p.m. Ch. 13.

Saturday Night: Guests include reggae artist Peter Tosh. 11:00-12:00 a.m. Ch. 20.

Saturday

Super Ray Leonard's Golden Gloves: Pennsylvania vs Rocky Mountain in a series of bouts taped Dec. 10, 1981, in Des Moines, Iowa. 2:00-3:00 p.m. Ch. 13.

Black Horizons: Discussion on the 1980 Miami Riot and how it can be prevented from happening this summer, with job cuts and layoffs. Guests include Rabbi Murray Saltzman from the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and Ron Davis. Hosted by Dwayne Wickham. 7:30-8:00 p.m. Ch. 11.

Baseball: The Orioles vs the New York Yankees. 8:00-11:00 p.m. Ch. 2.

Today's FBI: Nick seeks evidence to nail a border guard suspected of the rape-murder of an illegal alien. Starring Harold Sylvester. 8:00-9:00 p.m. Ch. 13.

Sunday

Gospel Variations: Groups include the Spirit and Truth Singers and Ricky Fowler. Hosted by Al Stewart. 8:00-8:30 p.m. Ch. 11.

Baseball: The Orioles vs the Yankees in New York. 2:00-5:00 p.m. Ch. 2.

Holmes-Cooney: A Matter of Pride: A preview of the June 11 WBC heavyweight title bout between winner Larry Holmes and Gerry Cooney, including a look at the fighter's regimens and their personal lives. 2:00-3:00 p.m. Ch. 45.

The Righteous Apple: Neck is mistaken for a prowler and shot by Sandy's aunt. Starring Myrel T. Williamson. 7:00-7:30 p.m. Ch. 22 & 67.

Up and Coming: The Wilsons take in a tough street kid who keeps hanging tough. Starring Tan Adams. 7:30-8:00 p.m. Ch. 22 & 67.

Merv Griffin: Guests include former Supremes singer Mary Wilson. 9:00-10:00 p.m. Ch. 5.

The Jeffersons: Conclusion. George seeks Lionel some unsolicited therapy when he invites a marriage counselor buddy to a night of poker. Starring Mike Evans. 9:30-10:00 p.m. Ch. 11.

ABC News Closeup: In 1974, in order to help minimize the impact of skyrocketing oil prices on motorists and homeowners, the Government established price controls on petroleum. But according to Phil Lewis (the broducer of this report), the new regulations led instead to increased consumer oil prices and resulted in the American public "being cheated out of billions of dollars". 10:00-11:00 p.m. Ch. 13.

Trapper John, M.D.: One person in a cost reduction program for low-income patients is actually a millionaire. Starring Madge Sinclair and Brian Mitchell. 10:00-11:00 p.m. Ch. 11.

Monday

Today's Black Woman: Actor Tim Reid is the scheduled guest. 6:00-6:30 a.m. Ch. 7.

Good Morning Washington: Jazz musician Billy Taylor is the scheduled guest. 9:30-10:00 a.m. Ch. 7.

Sha Na Na: Guest singer is Isaac Hayes. 7:00-7:30 p.m. Ch. 45.

Private Benjamin: Benjamin rigs a poker game to win back Sims' IOU from a loan-sharking sergeant. Starring Hal Williams. 8:00-8:30 p.m. Ch. 11.

Baseball: Either Detroit at Boston, Philadelphia at St. Louis or Los Angeles at Cincinnati. 8:30-12:00 a.m. Ch. 13.

Ain't Misbehavin': The original cast of the Tony-winning Best Musical of 1978 repeat their roles in this TV adaptation of the Broadway show. Starring Nell Carter, Charlaine Woodard, Armelia McQueen and Andre De Shield. 9:00-11:00 p.m. Ch. 2.

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NFL hiring policy hit

By Art Carter

Several professional football stars, including two ex - Washington Redskins standouts, blasted the National Football League, this week, for its failure to employ "an appreciable number of black coaches."

The group, spearheaded by Gene Upshaw of the Oakland Raiders, testified before the House Subcommittee on Employment Opportunities, Education and Labor, of which Rep. Augustus F. Hawkins, D., CA, is chairman. Upshaw is president of the National Football League Players Association.

Upshaw was joined in the testimony at the Rayburn Building hearing by William E. Pollard, representing the Citizens Panel on Equity in the National Football League, and Edward R. Garvey, executive director of the National Football Players Association.

Also testifying at the hearing were Msgr. George Higgins, adjunct lecturer, Department of Theology, Catholic University; Dr. Jomills Braddock Jr., research scientist, Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University; Brig Owens, assistant executive director, NFL Players Assn. and former Redskins;

Also Thomas Condon, executive committee, of the NFL Players Assn. and an active player with the Kansas City Chiefs; Kermit Alexander, former president of the AFL Players Assn.; Leroy Kelly, former NFL player with the Cleveland Browns and coach with the World Football League, and Jimmy Roland, former coach with the St. Louis Cardinals and Philadelphia Eagles.

Upshaw, who has been an active NFL player for 15-years, declared the NFL is guilty of "institutional discrimination." He emphasized that black players who make up 50 percent of the league constituency are directly affected by discrimination at the managerial levels in the NFL.

The "other half of the players" in the NFL realize that blacks have not been "treated fairly when it comes to jobs in the coaching ranks, or in the front office of NFL teams."

Upshaw declared that NFL owners refuse "to recognize that such a problem does indeed exist." The players, Upshaw stressed, feel that until the owners recognize the problem nothing can be done.

He charged that the NFL has "hidden behind the promise that there is a lack of 'qualified' blacks, yet there has been a constant stream of talent supplied by black colleges in the NFL, many of all - pro stature and many qualified to coach in the NFL."

Upshaw's testimony disclosed that he had discussed the situation with Commissioner Pete Roselle, but Roselle says "his hands are tied." Yet Roselle said he had asked the owners to make changes, but "the owners are slow or unwilling to bend."

Pollard, who represented a group of citizens "concerned about changes of racial discrimination in the NFL," as indicated in a year - long study conducted by Dr. Braddock. Pollard is director of the AFL-CIO Department of Civil Rights.

Pollard asserted that the panel had come to the conclusion that "there were serious discrimination and employment exclusion problems in the NFL in the selection of assistant and head coaches who are eminently competent."

He charged that the NFL has "a network for recruitment of coaches which limits and denies equal opportunity especially to blacks, and aside from the network blacks are excluded from coaching opportunities in other important ways."

As an example, Pollard pointed out that most coaches are selected from the so - called central leadership positions (quarterback, center, guard and linebacker), but black professional players are steered away from these positions, even after they have played these positions in high school and college."

The study found that over the 26 - year period — 1960 - 1979 — there were 261 assistant coaches and 68 head coaches hired from the ranks of former players, but among this group there were no black head coaches and only 20 black assistant coaches.

Garvey who has been NFL Players Association executive director since 1971, urged the subcommittee to "carefully examine the abysmal record of the NFL in hiring black assistant coaches, head coaches and in front office positions."

Garvey declared "It is apparent to any careful observer of the League that no black had been hired as a head coach in modern times, very few assistant coaches were black, and several teams had never hired a black in any non - playing capacity."

In concluding his testimony, Garvey told the subcommittee "You can do a great service not only to the National Football League but to the American people who look to sports as a model for the rest of society . . ." if you use your good offices to continue to focus attention on the lack of opportunity for blacks to be hired as coaches, etc.

(Photo by Courtney)

CONGRESSMEN Augustus (Gus) Hawkins, left, and Harold Washington listen to witnesses outline examples of discrimination in the hiring of coaches in the National Football League. In center is an unidentified staff worker.

Photo by Courtney

AT OVERSIGHT HEARING on equal employment opportunity in the National Football League at the House of Representatives, Thursday, witness included, from left: Dorothy Height, president, National Council of Negro Women; Roy Jefferson, and Brig Owens, former Washington Redskins players, and Johnny Roland, former NFL coach with the St. Louis Cardinals and Philadelphia Eagles. Owens is assistant executive director, NFL Players Association. Rep. Augustus Hawkins, D., CA., is chairman of the committee.

TOP FROSH — Desiree Clagon of District Heights, MD, has been honored as a leading contributor to the Northeastern University women's basketball team. A starter in all 28 games of the Lady Huskies, she led the contingent in assists, a feat lauded by coach Joy Malchodi.

AT LONG LAST — Probably one of the world's two best boxers, pound for pound, aaron Pryor appears near the big money that has been denied him so long. Last weekend, the junior welterweight champion was offered $1 million, plus $100,000 training expenses to meet Alex Arguello in a title match in September.

Man who 'saved' coach cited along with schools' athletes

"I couldn't do this if somebody hadn't given me a chance . . ."

It is refreshing to encounter a young man who remembers he got his start because an adult helped him along the way.

This thought occurred recently at the sports banquet honoring athletes at St. Frances-Charles Hall High, a small East Baltimore school run by the Oblate Sisters of Providence. The order, now in its 154th year, and the oldest order of black nuns in U.S. Motherhouse, is in Baltimore.

The coach, 36-year-old William E. "Bill" Wells, was at the mike to introduce the guest speaker to his players who had won the citywide basketball championship.

Instead, he departed from his written notes to tell them a personal story — "I was one of the street boys about 20 years ago when this man I am about to introduce said he had a job for me.

"I was about your age then, and he said I could work as tennis instructor at the YMCA's Camp Mohawk, down in the country, but I was used to being on the city streets, and I wasn't sure I would like it."

He had the audience in rapt attention. He paused, choked a bit, and continued, "I went with him to the YM camp and after a while I was promoted to village director. I stayed 7½ years. I am here to say thanks to this man.

"I can truthfully say for me and other boys you brought along to a brighter life, we will always remember you, Mr. Alonzo Paul Moss."

As he turned over the mike, the older man gave him a hearty hug and handshake. He, too, was surprised by the unexpected tribute.

Now 71, Moss is associate general executive emeritus of the Baltimore YMCA. Before his retirement five years ago, his assignments included directing the Y's resident camp in Huntingtown, MD, now known as King's Landing.

There was pride in his voice as he told the young athletes and their parents how their coach, Bill Wells, was active in the Dunbar High School Hi-Y Club when their paths first crossed.

"He was eager to learn and didn't mind the long hours. In those days, we had to travel the 60 miles to camp, starting from Baltimore early in the morning, working all day and returning late at night, but Bill stuck with it. We both came from large families so we were able to work well together . . ."

Today, Bill Wells is senior director at Madison Square, the city recreation center operated by the Department of Recreation.

He also coaches the basketball teams at nearby St. Frances-Charles Hall High. The school has no gym and practices at the center.

Under his guidance, both the boys and girls from the school won citywide titles in the Catholic Youth Organization League. They also qualified for national competition.

The girls' season record was 9-1. They placed second in the Mid-Atlantic national meet in DC.

The boys' record was 9-2. They placed third in the Mid-Atlantic.

Sister Rita Michelle and Lawrence Dukes assisted the girls' team, and Steve Butsch was righthand man to Wells with the boys.

Wells says he gets great joy from coaching young people and he does not mind the long hours or the hard work. "Something gave me a chance . . . I wouldn't be here if Mr. Moss hadn't taken time with me."

Wells is a graduate of Morgan State University, and has a family of his own. His wife, Marvis Gainer Wells, is a city teacher. They have a six-year-old daughter, Keita.

A. Paul Moss and Bill Wells
veteran Y official thanked for the rescue

Md. youth cops junior double

BLOOMINGTON, IN — John Parker of Prince Frederick, MD, added the 200 - meter dash title Tuesday to the 100 - meter championship he won Monday to become the only double winner in the U.S. Junior track and field meet.

Parker, who will attend George Mason University in the fall, covered the 200 - meters in 20.86 to qualify for his second event in next month's Junior Pan American Games in Venezuela.

Finals were held in 14 events at the Indiana University track. The meet is open for athletes who will not be 20 years old by the end of the year.

High school all-stars to play stadium June 25

The First Crown High School North - South All - Star Game of Maryland will be played next Friday (25th) at Memorial Stadium, beginning at 4:30, prior to the Orioles - Tigers game.

An Orioles ticket will be required for admission.

The game will be played under the auspices of the Maryland State Association of Baseball Coaches and is sponsored both by Crown Central Petroleum and the Orioles. A recent rule change permits, for the first time, the scheduling of high school all - star games in Maryland.

Brooks Robinson will serve as honorary chairman of the event which will bring together 30 of the top Maryland players, all of whom are graduating seniors, from 212 public, private and parochial schools in the eight Maryland Scholastic Association (MSA) regions around the state plus the City of Baltimore.

A selections committee comprised of coaches will process player nominations and will recommend those with the best qualifications for a special workout. The final selections will be based on performances at that practice session.

The North Team will include players from Baltimore City and the following counties: Allegeny, Baltimore, Carroll, Cecil, Frederick, Garrett, Harford, and Washington.

The South team will consist of players from Anne Arundel, Calvert, Caroline, Charles, Queen Anne, St. Mary's, Dorchester, Heward, Kent, Montgomery, Prince Georges, Talbot, Worcester, Somerset, and Wicomico counties.

Stark given 4-year pact

When the Colts drafted punter Rohn Stark on the second round last spring, club officials said they had every intention of signing the Florida State all-round star.

They did just that over the weekend, offering him a 4-year contract.

Stark, 23, is being counted on to help a Colts' defense that was the worst in the NFL last season. Besides kicking punts with a long hang time, Stark is a gifted athlete who can scramble and throw when necessary. Colt coaches contend.

A clause in Stark's contract stipulates that he will not be able to train for the 1984 Olympics. While at Florida State, Stark was a decathlon star.

Later Colts' start urged

Mayor Schaefer is calling for a citizen's referendum to push ahead the starting time of Colt games from 2 p.m. to 1 p.m.

The Colts begin their games an hour later than the 27 other NFL teams because of a city charter ordinance. But the mayor introduced legislation Monday that if approved by the City Council would allow voters to decide the issue on the November ballot.

Val Pinchbeck, the NFL's director of broadcasting, said the starting time eliminates the Colts from possible nationally televised games and regional broadcasts.

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