Luther Vandross

By Paula Brooks

Backup Singer to Star

He dreamed of being a singer —now he is!

Luther Van Dross live, is truly never too much! He is a singer's singer, and as he proclaims onstage — he is not going to perform with anyone who can't sing as well as he can!

Surrounded by the likes of Cheryl Lynn, who opened the set and came back to sing the duet, "If This World Were Mine," the female leads from Chic and Kleer, along with call Bev for Back-G Malenaime, Luther's performance was a special treat. The combination of raw talent, and loving communication between the members of the group created a magical quality.

They frequently sang to each other, instead of merely talking, which was also a unique element. Luther's vocals cannot be touched by too many of the top 40 male vocalists — he simply outsings them all.

Cheryl Lynn

Luther grew up in this era. When 3 or 4 guys would get together on the corner and harmonize — when the Motown Sound dominated the R & B charts, and Motown was becoming centered around the devastating (especially to Luther) Supremes.

Luther is quick to name Diana, Dionne Warwick, and the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, as the three ladies having the most influence on his career. He is also quick reveal the fact that his fasination with the female voice.

Reading in an interview that Luther's grades in high school plummeted when Diana left the Supremes, was the first clue as to just how engrossed Luther was in his musical fantasy world.

He says, "I think I dreamed more as a kid, because I remember my mother used to always say "Get up and go downstairs and play", and all I used to want to do was draw pictures of The Shirelles — I,d draw Shirley, then I'd draw Micky, Beverly, and Doris.

Luther Van Dross

Then I'd see them on TV, and I'd draw them in their shimmy dresses. I was a real addict! Then I'd try to draw Dionne! I mean that's what I like to do — get into my headphones and listen to women like Valerie Simpson. I think I was consumed by my not yet defined musical ambition.

At that point it really wasn't defined that I wanted to be a musician — that I wanted to be a singer — as opposed to a producer, writer etc. Luther says his family consisting of two sisters, and a brother (he's the youngest), was very close-knit.

"My oldest sister Pat used to sing with The Crests (they had a hit called "Sixteen Candles".) They used to rehearse in the living room, and I used to always run in there and try to break it up. My sister would always call my mother to get me out of there.

One year my mother bought me a stereo for Christmas, and an Aretha Franklin album. I got into it with the headphones and it was all-consuming. At that point I knew I wanted to do it for real.

Luther remembers getting his first break, which began with studio work and commercials. "A friend of mine named Carlos Alomer was playing with The Main Ingredient, and David Bowie had used him on a session for his album "Young Americans".

Carlos invited me and his wife Robin to Philly, where they were recording, to visit him. Robin's also a singer, and we were sitting there (in the studio), and the music I was going by, and I said to Robin — Hmm? there's a big empty space there — I'd like to hear something go in there.

So I told her what I thought should go in there and I started singing, then we split up and did harmonies.

What we didn't know was that Bowie was sitting right behind the console listening. So he said "that sounds fabulous, please put it down!" Up to that point we had never been in a studio professionally at all — and he asked if I had any other ideas (Luther's face lit up)? I said do I have any other ideas!

So he let me do the vocal arrangements on the whole album, and I wrote a song called "Fascination", that he liked. I went out on the road with him, and when we came back, he introduced me to Bette Midler.

I did background on her disco

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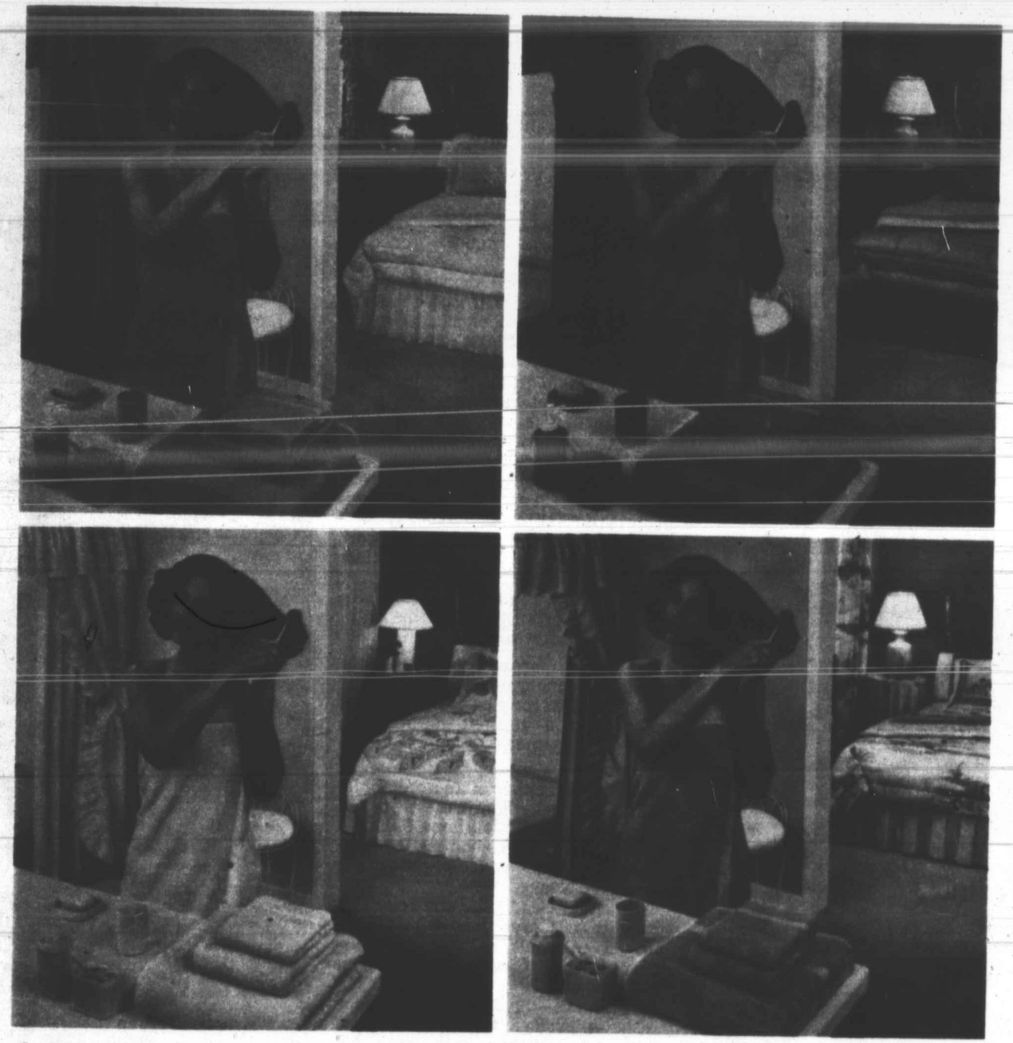

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