Spotlight On.....

BRYANT'S: A NEW AND IMPROVED SOUL SHACK

By Frederick I. Douglass

Those of you who bemoaned the closing of the Soul Shack in the Lexington Market a year or so ago, will be delighted to know that the operators of that popular eatery have opened a sleek new supper club in the same location that features live entertainment and a wide array of entrees including prime rib, crab cakes, steaks and other gourmet cuisine.

"While we still maintain the Soul Shack on Monroe Street, we've come up with a streamlined, upbeat concept that's more compatable with the new developments that are happening in downtown Baltimore," says Kenny Bryant, the owner of Bryant's. "We've hired a chef from New York who can cook anything from quiche to beef bearnaise. He will be supervising our entire food operation, making sure that everything goes right. During lunch and the dinner hour we'll be offering first class table service with waiters who are artists at their craft, who have been trained to present food, not just place it on the table. Now we haven't forgotten our roots. Bryant's will still serve the most popular soul food items such as fried chicken and fish, beef over rice, collard greens, corn bread and minced barbeque. And chitterlings will be available as one of our gourmet items. You know it costs more to serve chitterlings than beef these days because when you start out cooking 100 pounds, you end up with about 40 pounds of food. So that's why chitterlings will carry a gourmet price tag."

Presently, Bryant's is only open to the public on Friday and Saturday evenings, although the club has been the scene of several gala private parties and dinners. Within the next two weeks or so, Bryant's is scheduled to be open everyday for lunch. One of the things that should attract some serious imbibers is the fact that the club's Happy Hour will begin at lunch and continue until about 6:00 p.m., with drinks being on sale at two for the price of one. Kenny Bryant says "considering the fact that many people who work in this part of downtown get off work at 3:00 p.m., we thought it would make sense to do something to accommodate them. We also wanted to do something to make lunch more affordable for our customers, so we came up with the idea of beginning our happy hour at noon." But good food is infinitely more important than liquor and good food is the foremost attraction of Bryant's.

Entertainment, of course, is also a major drawing card for Bryant's, with Bill Harris and Jennelle Fisher drawing larger and larger crowds on Friday and Saturday nights as the word gets around town that they are singing there. Future plans call for Bryant's to become the scene of nationally known entertainment. "Within the next three to four months, we plan to start bringing entertainers like Bobby Womack, Jean Carn and Jocelyn Brown to the club," says Mr. Bryant. "We feel that Baltimore is ready for a supper club that provides a wide variety of entertainment and different types of music including Top-40 and Jazz. We also are planning to do special nights.

"Another thing we'll be doing is a young professionals night on Tuesdays to cater to the up and coming people who work downtown."

Bryant's has immense potential to become one of the most frequented downtown watering and dining establishments, considering its convenient location in the Lexingon Market off Green Street, its good food and newly refurbished decor. Sporting a long highly polished bar, a new stage with an attractive, multicolored background that lights up, a new sound system for both the bands and the jukebox, Bryant's is far more interesting than the fern bars that have proliferated throughout the Baltimore area.

Be good to yourself -- visit Bryant's this weekend, treat yourself to a meal cooked in the finest southern tradition and enjoy the vocal stylings of Bill Harris and Jenelle Fisher.

Next week: The Sphinx Club

Kenny Bryant and Glendora Cox are the proud proprietors of Bryant's, a sleek new supper club.

Jennelle Fisher and Bill Harris are providing the entertainment this Friday and Saturday night at Bryant's in the Lexington Market.

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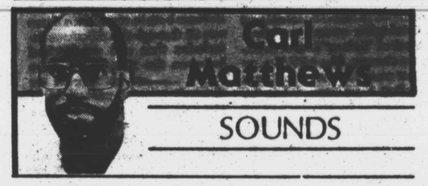


SOUNDS

JANET JACKSON
"Dream Street"

Let's see, now. Michael gave us "Farewell My Summer Love 1984," Jermaine brought us his self-titled LP on Arista, all the brothers came out with "Victory," LaToya released "Heart Don't Lie." It's Janet's turn now, with "Dream Street," her second album on A&M.

It was two years ago this month that Janet released her self-titled debut album, which stayed on the R&B album charts for a year.

She was just 10 years old when she was cast in the role of Penny Gordon on TV's "Good Times," and her first album came out when she was 16.

There are some notable similarities between this new Janet Jackson album and LaToya's current album even though different producers, arrangers and writers are involved. Thus I predict both albums will sell equally well.

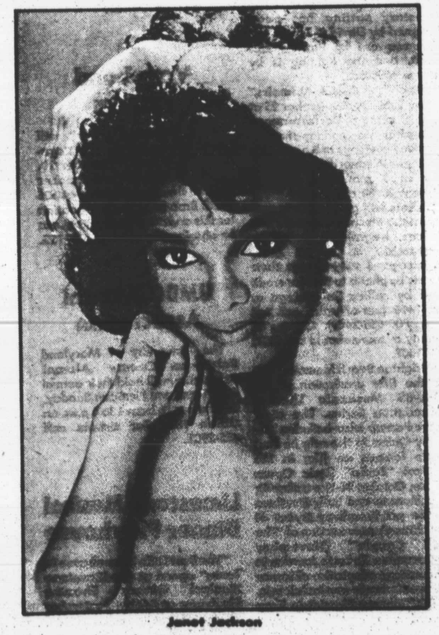
The first single from "Dream Street," "Don't Stand Another Chance," was produced by Marlon Jackson. The tune is exactly what you'd expect from Janet if you've heard her last album: a jumping pop/R&B number. The recent single by Cherelle, "I Didn't Mean To Turn You On," also has the same style of synthesizer playing, same rhythm, etc.

"Dream Street" also includes "Two To The Power Of Love," a duet with Cliff Richard, the veteran English pop singer. This may not get played on a whole lot of album-oriented rock (AOR) stations, but producers Giorgio Moroder and Pete Bellotte have done a pretty good job of creating a Bee Gees record without the Bee Gees.

Or, there's the title cut, also produced by Giorgio — don't it make you wanna get down and breakdance?

As with The Jacksons' "Victory," about one-third of the album is forgettable, but for Jacksons fans a worthwhile buy.

Other cuts: "Pretty Boy," "Communication," "Fast Girls," "Hold Back The Tears," "All My Love To You," "If It Takes All Night."



Janet Jackson

LILLO THOMAS
"All Of You"

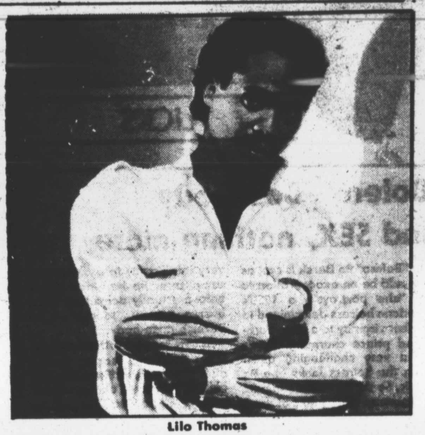
Lillo Thomas's second album on Capitol is titled "All Of You," and it features the R&B smash "Your Love's Got A Hold On Me."

His first album was last year's "Let Me Be Yours," which featured the single "You're A Good Girl."

Lillo first emerged on the music scene as a viable young singer, working in the recording studio with such artists as Evelyn King, Howard Johnson, George Benson, Kashif and Melba Moore (for whom he wrote the R&B hit "Mind Up Tonight").

Now, it is probably true that "Lillo" is not yet as popular a name in the music world as, say, "Peaba" or "Lionel" or "Luther." But remember this: everybody can't be in the top ten.

Lillo sounds capable of carrying a tune as well as Mr. Vandross and seems to do just as good a job singing ballads as Mr. Richie.



Lillo Thomas

The title cut, a pretty ballad in which he shares vocals with the above mentioned Melba Moore, is one of the best ballads he's done so far.

Motown fans may enjoy his version of "My Girl." The old Temptations hit is done in almost the same key and tempo, with a nice simple arrangement in which the horn parts have been replaced by synthesizers. Of course, I like the original better, but at least Lillo knows a good tune when he hears it. By the way, he wrote a few of the tunes on this album.

Time will tell how well this new album sells, but remember, everybody can't be in the top ten.

Other cuts: "Holding On," "Show Me," "Settle Down," "Never Give You Up," "I Like Your Style."

Tim Reid comes uptown in 'Simon and Simon'

By Peter M. McCauley

When the sitcom "WKRP in Cincinnati" was canceled in 1982, Tim Reid read between the lines: He knew it was time for him to get out of the sitcom business.

"I didn't like the direction sitcoms were going in," explains Reid, who portrays "Downtown" Brown in "Simon & Simon." "I don't know who's at fault, the writers or the networks, but they've lost the key of how to do a good sitcom. When 'WKRP' ended, all I wanted to do was a one-hour adventure series."

But his wish didn't materialize immediately, and the Virginia native ended up on another network — NBC — in "Teachers Only" — another sitcom.

"Today's sitcoms wouldn't even get on the air five years ago," says Reid. "The stories are silly; the characters are too broad. On 'Teachers Only,' I never knew who my character was, even after 13 shows."

What happened next, however, sounds too improbable even for the worst sitcom. "I got a call from a producer I knew from 'WKRP,'" Reid, 39, recalls. "He wanted to pitch a new character that he thought I'd be good for. It was a dream situation."

Tim Reid

The actor wasn't dreaming the pitched role was a regular assignment as Lt. "Downtown" Brown on "Simon & Simon." The role fit Reid's desire for a one-hour advanture perfectly; it did not, however, fit him physically.

Realizing the switch from comedy to drama is a strenuous one, the actor trained for two months, adding almost 20 pounds of muscle to his wiry frame, before debuting on "Simon & Simon" this past season.

"Going from Venus (the hip disc jockey character he played on 'WKRP') to an undercover cop required a big transition acting-wise," says Reid. "So it helped to see that I look much different, too."

And though Reid says he's glad that his days of "being stuck in the sitcom mold" are over, he believes his comedy training has helped him blend as a "Simon & Simon" team member.

"When I joined the show there were no ego battles" Reid says, recalling his quick acceptance by "Simon & Simon" stars Jameson Parker and Gerald McRaney. "The show's still called 'Simon & Simon,' not 'Simon & Simon and Brown.' I am a co-star and I know the situation. If my character looks good, then their characters look good.