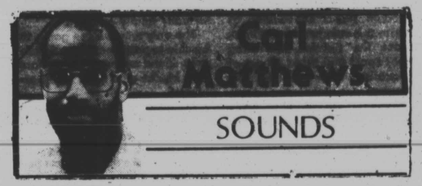


GRANDMASTER FLASH
"They Said It Couldn't Be Done"
(Elektra)

Let me tell you a little about an artist known as Grandmaster Flash. Flash, who was raised in the Bronx, has been well-known in the world of rap for years for his extraordinary talents as a disc jockey. He's made numerous rap records for Enjoy Records, Sugar Hill and now Elektra.

If you've heard his records you know that he's a Capricorn, and was born on New Year's Day (listen to his Sugar Hill 12-inch "The Birthday Party" for more information).

His first big 12-inch rap record on the Sugar Hill label was a classic called "Freedom," with the artist being billed as "Grandmaster Flash And The Furious Five." The rappers on that particular disk were: Melle Mel, Mr.Ness, Rahiem, Kidd Creole, Cowboy, and of course Grandmaster Flash. At the time of its release, it was one heck of a party record. Still is.

When it came to such record turntable techniques as "break-mixing" and "scratching," Grandmaster Flash was a true innovator. If you were into "scrotching," you had to enjoy his "The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel," one of the biggest selling "scratch mixed" records around, with excerpts from such tunes as "Good Times" by Chic, "Another One Bites The Dust" by Queen, and Flash's own hits.

Like all of his hits, this one was first released on 12-inch. A longer version of the track was later released on an album titled "Sugar Hill Greatest Rap Hits, Volume 2." As with many Sugar Hill artists, none of Flash's hits were widely available on 45s.

With "It's Nasty (Genius Of Love)," Flash and the gang managed to improve upon a somewhat weak Tom Tom Club tune. "Genius Of Love" has spawned a lot of rap records with the same background music, but I contend that Flash's disk was the best of these.

"The Message" earned Flash much critical acclaim. The "hard truths" about street life were what Flash rapped about on this rap classic, which also appeared on an album of the same name. Other noteworthy cuts on that album were "Scorpio" and an abridged version of the aforementioned "It's Nasty."

Grandmaster Flash's new group has a few new members. Melle Mel and Cowboy have moved on, while Kidd Creole and Rahiem remain, and are joined by three new members: Mr Broadway, Larry Love and Lavon.

A few notes about Melle Mel: It is Melle Mel who appears on such records as "Beat Street" and the recent "Step Off"; Grandmaster Flash is not on these records. The song "White Lines (Don't Don't Do It)" is credited to "Grandmaster And Melle Mel" and a remixed version of this tune is available on the "Grandmaster Melle Mel And The Furious Five" album, which also contains an abridged version of "We Don't Work For Free." The Sugar Hill 12-inch single "Jesse" is also credited to "Grandmaster Melle Mel."

In case you're interested, the group now known as Grandmaster Melle Mel And The Furious Five consists of the following members: Cowboy, Melle Mel, King Lou, Scorpio, Grandmaster E-Z Mike, Dynamite, Tommy Gunn and Kami Kaze, with Vicious Lee on the turntables.

It just so happens that I own a copy of every Grandmaster Flash, Melle Mel, and Furious Five hit single released on Sugar Hill, so no way would I miss out on a chance to review Grandmaster Flash's latest album on Elektra Records, titled "They Said It Couldn't Be Done."

The LP starts off with "Girls Love The Way He Spins." They probably do, but it seems that Flash is just warming up here; the spark that made "Freedom" exciting isn't there. Your average scratching appears on this one.

Having heard "It's Nasty (Genius Of Love)," I know what he can do with the Tom Tom Club; now his magic blesses Fats Waller's "The Joint Is Jumpin'." After all, if the Force M.D.'s can mix hip-hop and doo-wop...

Available on 12-inch (and 7-inch!) is Grandmaster Flash's "Sign Of The Times," included on this album. This is his latest "Message,"

Flash says new member Larry Love is "a great dancer," so in honor of all electric boogiers, we have "Larry's Dance Theme," one of the album's funkiest numbers with 100 percent danceable beat box rhythms and noise.

"Alternate Groove" could be Flash's answer to "Planet Rock" (big hip-hop thing from a few years back, in case you've never heard of it), and on "Paradise" we have mid-tempo R&B and pop, the kind with real strings and horns, etc.

Flash believes that it is more important to release socially significant songs rather than frivolous rap tracks because significance is what audiences want. Everybody has their own view of what is "socially significant," and it's a sure bet that this album will touch each person in a different way.

Other cuts: "Rock The House," "Jailbait," "Who's That Lady," "Alternate Groove."

Grandmaster Flash

While We're On The Subject Of Rap Records

I just want to briefly say a few words about a trio of interesting rap records that are currently on the national black singles charts. All of them are about a certain young lady named Roxanne.

They are: "Roxanne, Roxanne" by UTFO on Select, "The Real Roxanne" by Roxanne With UTFO on Select, and "Roxanne's Revenge" by Roxanne Shante on Pop Art.

The "Roxanne, Roxanne" track contains all of the elements found in all popular rap records, and no doubt the syllables just flow out of these guys' mouths as smooth as high-quality pancake syrup.

However, these disks also contain much of what's wrong with rap records. First of all, the rhythm tracks are uninspired and unoriginal, just your usual drum machine noise. Second, there is almost no melody to speak of.

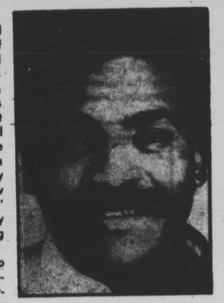
If these records are an accurate reflection of what the "hip-hop culture" is about, then it is in sorry shape indeed, for much of this material seems to reflect disrespectful attitudes, negative thinking, and non-constructive criticism.

However, I am assuming that these records are **not** an accurate reflection of "hip-hop culture"; I don't really know, so I'll just listen to this stuff as humorous entertainment.

Ronnie Laws in Towson March 8

By Frederick I. Douglass

Ronnie Laws, a rough and tough saxophonist from one of the nation's most musical families, will be blowing his golden horn next Friday (March 8) in Towson State University's auditorium during a concert where "Mr. Nice Guy" will stand firmly on "Solid Ground" while applying "Flame" to both "Friends & Strangers" of "Every Generation" to find out how "Pressure Sensitive" Baltimoreans can be when they come down with a blazing "Fever."


Ronnie Laws

Ronnie's roots are knee deep in Jazz with his grandfather being a one-man-band and harmonica vituouso and a mother who is a gospel pianist. "There was always music in the house when I was coming up in Houston, Texas," says Mr. Laws. "My brother Hubert, who has recorded Jazz and classical music on the flute, was the oldest and he got us all started. My sister Eloise is a singer and an actress. I'm very excited about an album that Hubert and I just finished producing for my sister Debbie. Anyway, I had no choice but to learn how to play and when I was 12, I started playing saxephone. There was a lot happening music wise in Houston and I was around some of the future members of the Crusaders. By the time I was in high school, I had my own band, the "Lightmen."

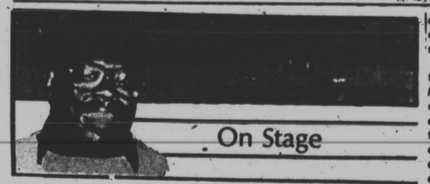
Following high school, Ronnie decided against pursuing a potential career in professional baseball and opted to attend Stephen F. Austin College in East Texas. His first professional break came shortly after he graduated and moved to Los Angeles. Based on his seputation as an outstanding musician, he was asked to join Earth, Wind & Fire.

Describing his experience with EWF, Ronnie says "My year-and-a-half with the group was one of the greatest experiences of my life. It gave me a chance to travel, meet people all over the world and to gain exposure with a wide variety of music lovers. But my long range goal was to become an independent musician, so I had to leave the group to pursue my own dream. I worked for a while with Hugh Masakela, and then I decided that if I was going to do my own thing, I had to go out completely on my own and I began freelancing."

By 1976, tangible manifestations of Ronnie's dream began to reveal themselves through the release of his first LP "Pressure Sensitive," the biggest selling record to date issued on the Bluenote label. He followed up with an impressive series of albums that include "Fever," "Friends & Strangers," "Flame," and "Solid Ground."

Expanding his musical horizons, Ronnie Laws made his recording debut as a singer on the album "Solid Ground" by crooning four of the eight cuts on the LP. "I feel that you should maximize whatever natural gifts you have," says Ronnie. "There was a time when I didn't feel

(Continued on page 5)



Theater Exchange successfully reworks "Waiting for Godot"

The Theater Exchange, a dramatic company from England, is currently presenting a partial adaptation of "Waiting for Godot", entitled "No Waiting" at the Theater Project through March 10.

As one who is not particularly fond of theater of the absurd and other experimental forms of theater, or at least they were experimental some years ago, I was a little wary of going to see this play.

During the 60s I saw a number of productions that were meant to be innovative, daring and thought provoking, yet ended up being aimless stage business and posturing. Much of it was not even entertaining.

"No Waiting" was thought provoking, entertaining and unpredictable. It also utilized a number of theater techniques to enliven the proceedings.

The play was thought provoking because it offered a number of insights into the lost dreams and broken expectations of human existence as well as the resiliency and perserverance of the human spirit in the face of numerous factors that can crush that spirit.

Two characters, Ishmael and Mephistopheles act out various scenes showing the societal forces that rob humanity of sustenance both nutritionally and psychically.

As the play begins, Mephisto, who is in reality the Devil, places a loaf of bread on a string attached to a fishing pole. He goes behind a backdrop to watch as he reels it away from hungry travellers who might try to eat it.

Ishmael, a seemingly timid and put upon traveller, enters. His actions indicate that he has been kicked out of wherever he is coming from. He makes small complaining noises and futilely shakes his fist.

Ishmael makes a number of attempts to get the loaf of bread off Mephisto's string. Finally, he comes upon the idea of stepping on the loaf to immobilize it and then taking it off the string. An example of humanity's ingenuity and fortitude is given by this example.

Mephisto is chagrined by Ishmael's ingenuity and he sets out to deprive him of the loaf of bread and the container of bacon that Ishmael has saved.

Mephisto arrives in a number of guises each time Ishmael prepares to eat his bacon sandwich and talks him out of the food. The guises run the gamut from actor, to evangelist, to doctor, to underworld salesman to deranged military man who allows himself to be beaten silly with a frying pan to prove his toughness and his preparedness to halt the Russians.

Later in the play Ishmael and Mephisto go on a tour of the world but find it unappealing and depressing, visiting places such as Poland which is closed for repairs when they visit Warsaw.

The two then decide to open a nightclub named The Resurrection where they provide the entertainment through, song, dance, magic and repartee with the patrons of the club, the audience. The two even serve drinks to the members of the audience.

The joy of the club is only temporary and eventually the imaginary club closes and the two men must face the despair of the end of the road. The last, stark image that the audience sees is the two men draped over brooms that have used to sweep up their club and also used as dance props. The image is that of two men being crucified.

One could leave the theater with a hundred interpretations of the play. Ishmael, according to the Bible, is the illegitimate son of the patriarch Abraham by his Egyptian concubine Hagar. The son and his mother are eventually sent away to found the Arab nation. Mephisto, the Devil, according to the Bible is the angel who is cast out of heaven.

Both men are outcasts who never allow their spirits to be broken by rejection and adversity. They adapt no matter how bitter the circumstances. The signposts at the end of the road where the men meet list Baltimore and Auschwitze, the Nazi death camp.

Lee Beagley (Ishmael) and Geoff Atwell (Mephistopheles) give excellent performances as mimes, and actors and David Giles the musician who supports their efforts on a number of instruments added greately to the mood of the show.

"No Waiting" is enjoyable, thought provoking and very engrossing.

— Ronnie Laws

(Continued from page 4)

totally confident in my voice, but singing was something I always knew that I could do, but I ignored my voice for a long time after I started playing saxophone and became involved in instrumental music. I just became so fascinated by being able to make music with an instrument, that I gave up singing. But I'm coming to the realization that the voice is the most perfect instrument and I also believe that singing will enable to gain greater popularity."

Glenn Jones will appear at Charlie's/Georgetown on Friday, March 8 and Saturday, March 9. There will be two performances at 8:30 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. Reservations are required. For more information call 202-298-5985.

Currently, Ronnie Laws' musical career is mushrooming with his tune "City Girl" gaining considerable popularity during 1984 and his making a major tour during 1985. "I was very pleased with the way people responded to 'City Girl,' especially in New York City where I really got an opportunity to make a dent in a market where I wanted to succeed. That record also did very well in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., two places where I really enjoy playing. I'm looking forward to my concert there next weekend."

Ronnie Laws has another single coming out entitled "Paradise" that should push him up on the Top-40 charts. He has really come a long way since he heard King Curtis and David Fatheon Newman whose musicianship inspired his saxophone stylings. "When I first heard King Curtis playing 'Soul Serenade' on soprano sax, I knew that I just had to become a musician and play my horn as skillfully as he did," says Ronnie Laws, a saxophonist and vocalist who is making big waves these days.

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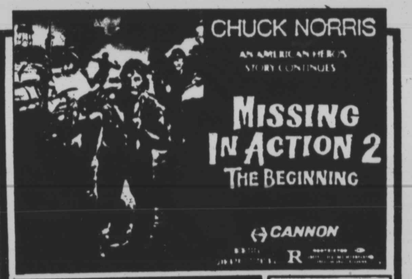
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