

23/6/88

The latest in a long line of exciting soul singers to emerge from New York is 19-year-old Al B. Sure who recently beat 50 contenders to win the "Sony Innovator Award" - a contest to find the most promising black music talent. The judge who picked Al was none other than Quincy Jones, producer of Michael Jackson's albums.

After winning the competition, Warner Brothers quickly signed him and the result is a fabulous debut LP entitled "In Effect Mode." There are eight tracks blending snappy street funk with melting ballads, fitting into the new breed of progressive rhythm 'n' blues exemplified by Keith Sweat and Johnny Kemp. Al B. Sure's 'soft-focus' soul style comes across perfectly on the opening number "Nite and Day" - one of the best singles of 1988 with its breezy, summery feel. He may have borrowed a few ideas from Janie Jackson's "Funny How Time Flies When You're Having Fun," but he has crafted the song brilliantly. Unfortunately the other cuts do not match this high standard but they all stand up well in their own right, from the ballad "Oooh This Is Love Is So" to the more upbeat "Off On Your Own (Girl)" and "Rescue Me."

Another soul singer to watch out for is Los Angeles-based Gary Taylor whose new album is called "Compassion" (on 10

Records). It features a pleasant variety of songs with a general bias towards the more romantic soul. The Whispers and Vesta Williams (who have recorded some of Taylor's songs in the past) helped out with backing-vocals, and the production is crisp and enjoyable throughout.

After a few years away from the music scene Gerry Rafferty has followed his success as producer of the Proclaimers' hit "Letter From America" with a new LP entitled "North and South." These new songs were recorded last year with co-producer

Record Review

Hugh Murphy. They are Rafferty originals with strong melodies and arresting lyrics, plus a noticeable Celtic roots flavour reflecting his own Irish-Scottish background. They range in tempo from fairly slow "folky" ballads to gentle-rolling rock numbers. The guest musicians included Davy Spillane, guitarist Jerry Donahue and Dire Straits keyboard man Alan Clark.

Telstar Records have released a first class album called "Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons - The Collection," includ-

ing the greatest hits of their career spanning 16 years from "Sherry" in 1962 to Frankie Valli's "Grease" which was the theme song from the successful movie of the same name, written by Barry Gibb in 1978. In between were some memorable hits featuring Valli's falsetto vocal style, like "Walk Like A Man," "Rag Doll" and "Let's Hang On," and the more sophisticated "I've Got You Under My Skin," "Who Loves You" and "Silver Star" with its unusual change of tempo in the middle. Frankie Valli's smooth 1975 ballads "My Eyes Adored You" and "Swearin' To God" are also included, and the CD has two extra tracks.

LP Chart:

1. Nite Flite (Various)
2. People (Hothouse Flowers)
3. Tango In The Night (Fleetwood Mac)
4. Heaven On Earth (Belinda Carlisle)
5. Motown Dance Party (Various)
6. Dirty Dancing - Soundtrack
7. Popped In, Souled Out (Wet Wet Wet)
8. Provision (Scritti Politti)
9. Stronger Than Pride (Sade)
10. More Dirty Dancing - Soundtrack

Bob Woodhead

The enduring value of American black music

Record Review

A few weeks ago I wrote a brief review of Will Downing's self-titled debut album, but now with fewer new releases and more spaces in the column I can review it in the greater depth it deserves.

"Will Downing" is undoubtedly THE Soul album of the year and will take some beating. The Compact Disc version is well worth buying because it features a wonderfully

soulful bonus track entitled "So You Wanna Be My Lover" which is one of the best songs.

The other highspots are the first four cuts on the album, including the recent hit "A Love Supreme" and the new smash "In My Dreams" which is performed in a similar vein. "Do You?" is another summery soul number, and "Free" is a brilliant interpretation of the Denice Williams 1977 chart-topper.

There are some faster, dance-floor tracks on Side Two, which prove that

Downing's voice sounds good whatever the pace or rhythm of the song he is singing.

Emotional

The rise of Will Downing represents the return to an enduring value in American black music. His music depends on the emotional power of the human voice - a tradition once threatened by the dominance of disco and its later forms, rap, hip-hop and house.

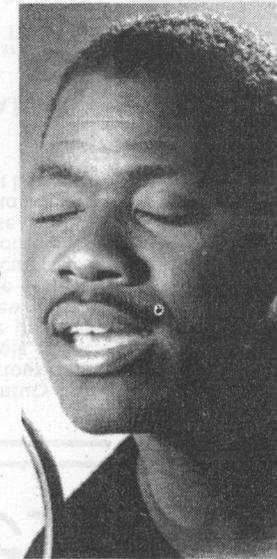
He comes from New York and first came to prominence via producer Arthur Baker's Wally Jump Junior And The Criminal Element project. Prior to that he had been singing professionally since he was 16-year-old, ostensibly as a session vocalist, having worked with Jennifer Holiday, Nona Hendryx, Rose Royce, Billy Ocean and D-Train.

Summer is always the traditional time for the best black soul releases and Summer '88 ranks as one of the very best. Regular readers will have no-

ticed that this column has been concentrating on these great releases but I can promise Rock fans that they have not been forgotten.

Forthcoming Reviews include albums from the likes of Rod Stewart, Status Quo, Aztec Camera, Scritti Politti and Fairground Attraction.

Finally this week it is back to Soul music again with Teddy Pendergrass, the man who was often mistakenly called Harold Melvin as he was the lead singer with Seventies Philadelphia group Harold



Will Downing

Melvin And The Bluenotes.

He has just issued a first class album called "Joy". Teddy was sadly confined

to a wheelchair after a horrific accident nearly claimed his life in 1982.

Happily his voice sounds as striking and distinctive as ever, and he was involved in other aspects of the production apart from vocals. The title track "Joy" is the best cut, but the other seven tunes are all good. The general mood of the LP is one of slow to mid-tempo funk rhythms, with Teddy's voice always sounding silky smooth.

LP CHART

- 1 Tracy Chapman
- 2 Push (Bros)
- 3 Idol Songs: 11 Of The Best (Billy Idol)
- 4 Roll With It (Stevie Nino)
- 5 Nite Flite (Various)
- 6 Tango In The Night (Fleetwood Mac)
- 7 Popped In, Souled Out (Wet Wet Wet)
- 8 Heaven On Earth (Belinda Carlisle)
- 9 Dirty Dancing - Soundtrack
- 10 Stronger Than Pride (Sade)

Bob Woodhead