

Gaye: Lets His "Thang" Come...Down

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The Dark Bag

on 'licks - jams and tee-vee'

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By Greg Mims

(Courier Drama-Music Critic)

One of the things that never fails to amaze and impress me, is how flexible, immediate, and descriptive our language is. Now, I don't mean standard A,E,I,O,U type English, which is full of cumbersome, ultimately sterile things like gerunds, participial phrases, dependent and independent clauses as well as non-empirical referents. What I mean is standard, ain't nuthin' to it, what's happenin' / what we make happen, it's you baby Black English which, from where I sit, is full of life, bounce, us and the things we are about.

That's not to knock Shakespeare, as much as it is to recognize that what we've got ain't exactly no stage-joke.

In that Black people historically stem from an oral tradition, our language is not fixed or static, but everchanging, 'erchangin', eveh-changin, and ain't now two ways alike. Phrases, terms, expressions come and go at a rapid pace.

All of which brings us to look at a current recording which has not only added a new phrase to the language, but is more importantly the latest wrinkle in a major artist's career as well as a pleasing development in popular soul music.

Currently winging it's way into what it is we say, is the phrase "If the spirit moves you / Let me groove you / Let your love come.....DOWN"

The lyrics, of course, herald Marvin Gaye's newest release, "Let's Get It On" which along with "What's Going On" and "Trouble Man" (his two previous albums) establish him as one of soul music's most consistently creative forces.

After a long period of dormancy, Gaye resurfaced with the now classic "What's Going On" which elevated him far away and above from the "I love you Be mine baby" type soul romanticism. Fact is, the album sounds every bit as fresh, innovative and socially relevant today, as it did two years ago.

"Trouble Man" a film soundtrack, upon repeated listenings, strikes me as a minor masterpiece of slick, instrumental background music. And yes, it seriously rivals Issac Hayes' overrated "Shaft" score as top Black film soundtrack.

In the past then, we've seen Marvin Gaye, the social critic and poet of sorts, and Marvin Gaye, the film scorer. "Let's Get It On" reveals

another side of his multi-faceted character, or as it was put to me when I first asked a friend, what the album was about, "Man! That Marvin Gaye is going out and telling people to do it."

And whether or not you agree with Gaye's particular sexual philosophy, upon hearing the album, you'll have to admit that Gaye has put together perhaps the most attractively packaged and tasteful seductions ever heard on record. His attitude is uncluttered, without moralizing or drawn out top heavy soul searching, as in the extended raps of Issac Hayes. In this sense does he cut through the petty



pretenses and excessive theorizing that goes down around the prevailing sexual mores. "C'mon baby," he says. "Stop beatin' round the bush. Let's get it on."

Don't worry Ma, it won't necessarily make your daughters do anything they weren't going to do in the first place, however, it is very open and appealing to the extent that she might consider it.

Gaye has utilized the highly listenable techniques of his past two albums and applied

them to the subject of sex on "Let's Get It On" Surrounded by the same "wall of sound" technique as utilized by Phil Spector during the late 50's and early 60's, Gaye croons, coaxes and cajoles the listener with different aspects of the sexual experience. And although he quotes T.S. Eliot in the album's liner notes, ("Birth, copulation and death, that's all the facts when you get to brass tacks) the enclosed music he presents offers a considerably less sterile view of reality.

What saves the album from being a crass invitation to indiscriminate intercourse, is the meticulous production and quality of the music enclosed. Gaye himself has never sounded better than in this set of alternately gritty / polished vocals. His voice is often times double-tracked, giving each cut a fuller richer sound. Taking a leaf from Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye is tastefully everywhere, that is singing lead, and at the same time squeezing in an, unexpected but pleasing, groan here and a "Whooooo" there.

Doubtless, the "Let's Get It On" album will be compared, in terms of sound, to "Trouble-Man" and "What's Going On" and the similarities are there. However, those things evident on the previous LPs such as the abundant use of saxophone, the out and out hypnotic, often trippy rhythms, tension builds and much much polish, are redirected and cover new ground in the current release.

Generally "Let's Get It On" reveals a refinement of that particular style displayed on both "What's Going On" and "Trouble-Man". The lyrics, though not nearly as innovative as those on "What's Going On" are simpler, more direct and therefore instantly communicative.

Gaye is more than ably assisted in his efforts by an array of familiar Motown mainstays including David Van DePitte and Ed Townsend. Also featured is an all star group of musicians such as Welton Felder, bass, Joe Sample, piano, (both of whom are members of the "Crusaders") Bobbie Hall Porter, percussion, (she scored heavily on the "Bill Withers: Live" album) and David T. Walker, guitar (Walker has performed admirably on every Carole King LP).

All combine their talents and artistry to present a sensual and, yes, sexy trip, just waiting to be a part of your record collection and conversation, courtesy of Marvin Gaye, past poet, past film composer, present singer, song writer and, uh, seducer.