



Grammy-winning producers Terry Lewis and Jimmy "Jam" Harris top the pop charts.

## Producers Lewis and Jam: radio monsters popping up in Minneapolis

By Michael Welch

**J**ANET JACKSON DIDN'T MAKE Flyte Tyme Productions good; she just made them famous. Had Flyte Tyme's Terry Lewis and Jimmy "Jam" Harris decided not to produce her album, the only thing about their careers that would have been different is the amount of publicity they would have gained. Though Jackson's *Control* album certainly hasn't hurt the Flyte Tyme pocket-book a bit, either.

Clearly, these Minneapolis studio masters enjoy more visibility than any other producers in music, but largely because they appear in one of Jackson's videos and have recently won a Grammy for their production. And most of the people who know them from those bits of exposure may be unaware of their two-year stint with The Time, the Prince spin-off band. But that's OK. A couple of good-looking guys like Jam and Lewis obviously like to see their pictures in magazines like *Rolling Stone* and on TV, but they don't need the media attention.

As far as musical success goes, what could be better than having people love your songs no matter who sings them? They've written "I Didn't Mean to Turn You On," "Just

Be Good to Me," "Innocent," "Saturday Love," "Tender Love," "Diamonds," "Keep Your Eye on Me" and Jackson's recent hits, "Nasty," "Control," "What Have You Done for Me Lately" and "When I Think of You." They've produced records for The S.O.S. Band, Herb Alpert, Cherrelle, the Human League, Alexander O'Neal, Klymaxx, The Force M.D.s—too many to name. They like challenges, too—an upcoming project is an album with Pia Zadora.

**Top of the pops:** The result of all this activity: Flyte Tyme was the top singles publisher on both the black and the pop charts in 1986. As the NAACP pointed out in a recent scathing, if incomplete, report, blacks have a limited number of

**Rather than move to the coast, they stayed in the Minneapolis slow lane.**

career opportunities in the music world (i.e., the number of blacks in the business end of music is not nearly commensurate with the number of black artists). In light of

this fact, the success of Jam and Lewis—as both artists and businessmen—is even more impressive. Their tight control over every aspect of their work has paid off.

Plain and simple, Flyte Tyme knows how to make good, infectious music that sells, sells, sells—and gets airplay, airplay, airplay. But Lewis and Jam are much less introverted than some of their contemporaries—namely Prince and

### MUSIC

Jesse Johnson—and they make little effort to erect a facade of mystery around themselves. They appear to be musical magicians to others, but most of their success comes from a diligent work ethic and an acute awareness of how they fit into music in 1987.

Or don't fit in.

Rather than try to succeed by playing a game with rules that are necessarily slanted against blacks, Jam and Lewis have worked outside the usual confines of the music business. They run a family-style organization—choosing who they work with on the basis of personal relationships rather than sparkling resumes or fire-eyed business acumen. They keep their record-label contacts to a minimum while freely

associating with artists and writers. This approach, seemingly backward in today's amoral business climate, has worked magnificently for Flyte Tyme. In addition, it has allowed them to remain in the Minneapolis slow lane, rather than moving to neurotic L.A. or manic Manhattan.

**Coming up together:** In the late '70s, the two friends from grade school were first musically united when keyboardist Harris joined Flyte Tyme, a band led by bassist/vocalist Lewis. But Flyte Tyme never got that many gigs because only a few clubs would book them, even though they played all the popular black tunes of the day.

Harris remembers only two Twin Cities clubs that consistently booked black bands: "The Nacirema on 40th and Fourth Avenue and the Elks and that was about it," he says. "You could play at the Fox Trap every once in a while, but no, I mean, there were not a lot of clubs. At that point there were quite a few bands: I had a band called Mind and Matter. Terry had, of course, Flyte Tyme; there was a group called The Family—not the one on Paisley Park—a group called Quiet Storm and...I mean, there were a lot of black groups and about three clubs to play."

The shortcomings of the local club scene at a time when bands like Flyte Tyme were trying to make their mark explains why Minneapolis has such a high profile in the international music scene now. Prince chroniclers have commented on how smart the kid was to not play around Minneapolis, instead taking his act straight to the major labels and making his shows special events.

But Prince and the acts that followed him (The Time, Jesse Johnson, TaMara, et al.) went right to the top because nobody at the bottom—local radio, press and clubs—would give them the time of day. Twin cities accountants, managers, label representatives and assorted hangers-on (who are, almost without exception, white) gladly share in the glory that black artists have brought to the area, but they were nowhere to be found back when Jam and Lewis, among others, were struggling to get gigs.

**Funky town, gotta move on:** This ignorance of what local black musicians were doing bothers Harris in retrospect, but at the time Prince set an example that inspired other acts. The Flyte Tyme band had been playing around the Midwest for about seven years. "But what really got us motivated," says Harris, "was the fact that Prince had just up and got out of here. And we said, 'That's the way to go.' So rather than pouring all your money that you'd make from gigs into band equipment, you'd put it into going into a studio and doing a demo tape. It just changed everybody's

perspective."

Hence, Minneapolis became noted for its black musicians because of what the city *didn't*, rather than what it *did*, do for them. Some observers of the Twin Cities scene have bemoaned the lack of a musical "Great White Hope," but from Harris' perspective, white rock bands haven't become commercially huge partially because they could get gigs in town.

For the black bands, he says, "There was not a plush thing, where you could set your equipment up and stay in a club for two weeks...and make three bills, four bills a week. If you were doing that and you were comfortable with it and you got to play and the girls were coming up to you and you could get some free drinks...for the black bands, that wasn't it. But for the white bands that could do that...why would you want to leave that to do something else?"

Clearly, the white bands didn't have what could be called a "plush" situation, money-wise. Yet there were local labels such as Twin/Tone and clubs that wanted to do business with them. White bands could play anything from power thrash to synth-pop and still get by, while the black groups had to aim for mainstream and mass appeal.

**A Princely boss:** But Prince has been more than an example to Lewis and Jam; he was also their employer. Working with the *wunderkind* they learned that you have to place equal emphasis on the words "music" and "business" if you wanted to make it to the top. Prince drives his projects hard, and Harris often notes how he could make them sing things they didn't think they could sing, play things they didn't think they could play, and then make them dance, too. Prince, who eventually booted Lewis and Jam out of The Time when their own production jobs began conflicting with the band's gigs, isn't often compared to a high-school football coach, but he does inspire a definite self-confidence among those who work with him.

Jam maintains that Flyte Tyme doesn't feel the need to compete with their old boss. "When I pull out the charts and I look at the competition, I'm looking at 100 artists," he says. "Prince may have two songs, Jesse may have a song. We got Alexander; I'm worried about Luther Vandross, Freddie Jackson...I'm worried about that, I'm not worried about Prince's shit. Prince's shit, to me, is always going to be good. I'm Prince's biggest fan. He's the baddest mother-fucker around, to me—simple as that. We don't get a prize for beating Prince."

Despite the clean, razor-sharp sound of Flyte Tyme's work, their music is anything but sterile. Their studio is remarkably low-tech considering the high production values they maintain. But these two



started out as musicians, not producers, and they depend on good songwriting more than they depend on studio tricks.

Jam explains that their ability to produce music as diverse as the Human League and Herb Alpert stems from their experience playing live. During the heyday of Flyte Tyme, the band would have to play stuff like "Misty" for dinner sets, and then pull out the heavy funk later on in the night when people wanted to dance. New bands, he observes, are taking the Minneapolis-perfected "shoot for the top" approach too much to heart.

"That's one thing that I think is very unhealthy," says Harris, "the fact that now a bunch of people, especially the black bands, are just deciding, 'Well, we're not even going to do it [play live]. We're just going to do a demo tape.'"

**What have you done for me lately?** Flyte Tyme themselves have taken some knocks in Minneapolis for not working with any local bands. Harris counters that they're not looking for bands, they're looking for writers and producers who can help them do what they do. Former Time drummer Jellybean Johnson, for instance, is starting to write and produce for other artists (he did Nona Hendryx new single, "Why Should I Cry?") under Flyte Tyme's auspices.

But they've also brought relative unknowns into the fold. Harris offers an example: "A gentleman who's been instrumental in helping a lot of people out, [Twin Cities saxophonist] Morris Wilson, handed me a tape. He said, 'This is a girl named Lisa Keith. I want you to listen to her voice, see what you think, see if you can do something.' So I took the tape home, listened to it, and I'm, like, 'Yeah, she can sing good. But this song is bad. Who wrote this song?' Spencer Bernard wrote that song. 'OK, well, here, Lisa, good, you're signed. And Spencer, we're going to put this song on Janet Jackson's album.' Spencer Bernard's a rich man for writing that song. So it can happen like that.

"But Spencer came back and it wasn't like he had one hit. He came back and said, 'Oh, OK, I've got this other song, 'High Priority.' It went on Cherrelle's album. Spencer had like 20, 30 tunes over here. That's what we're looking for."

Flyte Tyme is also looking for other ways to branch out. Jam and Lewis need to vary their efforts and continue to learn new things about music in order to avoid any backlash that may come their way. Their Grammy award has certainly brought them prestige, but it's also put additional pressure on them. Or, as Harris puts it, "When they put 'Grammy award-winning producers' behind your name, you just feel a little bit more responsible not to put out no bullshit."

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FILM

*Gardens of Stone* has funeral oratory in place of pulpy conviction, and advertising-image nostalgia in place of romanticism.

## Coppola's latest wins Purple Heart

**Gardens of Stone**  
Directed by Francis Coppola

By Pat Aufderheide

**G**ARDENS OF STONE, FRANCIS Coppola's latest film, takes place mostly in and around Arlington National Cemetery. And the movie, sad to say, looks embalmed. It occurs in a 1968 lit to fit the colorization scheme for Sam Spade movies. In those warmly nostalgic hues, placed with elegiac music from Carmine Coppola, a solemn tale struggles to emerge.

And almost does.

It's the tale Nicholas Proffitt told in his novel *Gardens of Stone*, translated in fits of literalism by Ronald Bass into a screenplay. Jackie (D.B. Sweeney) is an Army brat gung-ho for the "front" in Vietnam. Instead he's assigned to the "show biz" unit, the Arlington honor guard.

His disgruntlement is nothing compared to the bitter disillusionment of the NCOs who virtually adopt him. James Caan and James Earl Jones play the tough Vietnam vets Hazard and Nelson, who chafe at pseudo-soldiering on parade but who also know that "there is no front" in Vietnam, and that America can't win the war being fought against an entire nation. They're as passionately idealistic about soldiering as Jackie, but, seasoned by experience, far more conflicted about how to exercise duty honorably. The flashforward to Jackie's funeral at Arlington which begins the movie foretells the futility of their struggles.

**Movie-house hothouse:** It's a hothouse issue movie, about the moral crisis Vietnam poses for the military. True to the genre, each

character stands for a social type, carefully dressed with touches of individuality. The surrounding characters have the same iconic quality: Anjelica Huston, for instance, plays anti-war *Washington Post* reporter Samantha, who falls in love with Sgt. Hazard. She has friends like a supercilious anti-war lawyer who gratuitously picks a fight with Hazard. And she befriends Jackie's girlfriend Rachel (Mary Stuart Master-son), the daughter of an officer who looks down on Jackie as the son of an NCO.

Samantha and Rachel embody two sides of the plight of womanhood-in-war. Both are far sketchier as characters than the men; for instance, we never even find out what the implausible Samantha's beat is at the *Post*. Lonette McKee completes the female cast as Nelson's girlfriend; unfortunately, she mangles the Southern accent that is her character-tic in a role as boilerplate military-female.

These generic characters illustrate predictable conflicts. The canned quality is not the fault of the actors; the leads all have powerful screen presence, and you can see them working hard. But watching the likes of Caan, Huston and Jones trying to act in this cramped environment is like watching someone raging in a padded cell.

**Small is pitiful:** The film's small scale is exemplified by repeated scenes at a dinner table in Hazard's apartment. Exposition—such as Rachel's set-piece monologue on the damage war does to returning husbands—substitutes for incident. We are closeted with the ensemble cast, breaking out occasionally to static displays of Old Guard performances. (These are conducted by the Army Old Guard;

unlike in *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola got full support from the Army, which approved the script.) The war intrudes in a few TV vignettes, and sandwiched scenes of on-the-ground war murk that look like listless outtakes from *Platoon*.

But if the filmmakers were stingy with scale, they were lavish in production design (by Dean Tavoularis), which is lush without being evocative. The set design and lighting upholster the '60s in a nostalgic mode. You'd never know, watching this film, that it was a pre-retro era, that the smell of pot and the sound of rock (even in the military) or that plastic, neon and savagely cheap colors shaped the look of the time and conditioned an "alternative" back-to-the-earth look.

These are not questions of mere decoration. Production design defines the ability to evoke the era and the way people experienced its

### Generic characters embody predictable conflicts.

conflicts. But this film evokes the idea of a past, not the past in which the fierce and anguished subject of the film took place. It evokes innocence and naive idealism, real enough in the era, but not the kind that led Daniel Ellsberg to use the phrase "controlled stupidity." In fact, it's the hazy unreality of the film's central world that takes the sting out of its comic-book portrayal of anti-war protest. The filmmakers were striving for a "classic" look; the effect is not immortalizing but anaesthetizing.

**Political sabotage:** Like *Platoon*, this is a film whose underlying

theme is the betrayal of military patriotism by political sabotage (discreetly left vague). It lacks *Platoon*'s passionate romanticism of war, though. *Platoon* was built on a reverence for ancient war clichés, and on Oliver Stone's anger at the way the unwinnable little war made them impossible. *Gardens of Stone* has funeral oratory in place of that pulpy conviction, and advertising-image nostalgia in place of romanticism.

That's not the approach we've come to expect from the flamboyant Francis Coppola, who in such films as *The Godfather*, *The Conversation* and *Apocalypse Now* undertook the challenge to describe American culture and its contradictions on film, who has experimented ambitiously if sometimes disastrously in films such as *One from the Heart* and *Rumblefish*. But Coppola's also a bankrupt businessman, recouping losses by taking on assignments from the film industry. This, like *Peggy Sue Got Married*, is a pre-packaged project to which Coppola brought an abridged packet of his skills. Perhaps the fact that his son Gian Carlo suffered a fatal accident during production also has something to do with the perfunctory tone of the film's execution.

Whatever the reason, it's clear that *Gardens of Stone* is not a "Coppola film" in any authorial sense. In fact, it seems to be nobody's film. There are lingering traces of a project someone once cared passionately about, and they come from the general concept in Proffitt's book. But cool production professionalism is applied, in *Gardens of Stone*, to the corpse of that original project.

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