

The Stars



Betty Wright

Betty Wright is ready. Ready to become as big a star nationally as she is in many parts of the country, and ready to make as big an impact on the pop charts as she has on the r&b charts.

Betty has been singing since she was three years old with her family's spiritual group, the Echoes of Joy, despite the complaints of her siblings that she was too loud. She moved on to singing solo in local talent shows in Miami, and in 1968 cut her first record with Clarence Reid producing for the Alston label. In 1972 she earned a gold record for "Clean Up Woman," and at the time she received the award, she also got a B in her vocal course at Miami-Dade Junior College, where she had the highest average of any black student. Miami-Dade, however, is not the only venerable institution to recognize Ms. Wright's talents. Says Rolling Stone of her last album, "Danger High Voltage": "When Wright tackles strong material and the band hits overdrive,

Betty Wright becomes one of the most exciting vocalists in pop." Creem Magazine says that Betty's voice is "young, strong, and full of nuances that can carry any kind of song well." And Boston's Real Paper summed up the the situation by saying: "Wright seems destined to fill the gap that Aretha Franklin left in her quest for a black MOR standing."

Cash Box spoke with Betty Wright after the mastering of her new album "Betty Wright Explosion" had been completed. The mastering was the hard part, she explained, because they had a hard time deciding which of her some two-dozen new tracks to use. Betty has written six of the ten songs selected for the record, and she says it has "more variety" than her previous albums. Also in the works is a label, Ms. B. of which Betty will be president, but will not record for. She will be looking for new, young talent; people who are as strong on record as they are on stage.

Things look very bright for this very young woman from the sunshine state, and it seems like the superstar status she has long deserved is about to be hers.



George McCrae, the oldest of nine, grew up in West Palm Beach, Florida. He began vocal training at the age of six in the church. Gospel singing led him to the high school glee club and to the formation of his own group. Upon his discharge from the Navy in early 1967, George started his singing career at a small club, The Kandy Bar, in his hometown. Six nights a week he performed, and six days a week he cleaned up and did maintenance at the place. "It was all part of the contract," McCrae remembers.

George soon moved on to other south Florida clubs, strictly as an entertainer. During one of these early dates, Betty Wright and her producer, Willie Clarke, introduced themselves and left a number to call regarding recording. George just held the number. "I didn't think I was ready, and besides, I was scared." Two years later, he was approached by Brad Shapiro, now a successful independent producer, and Henry Stone. Coincidentally, these were the same people Betty and Willie had told him about. George cut some local hits in Florida, and continued to play club dates.

In 1972 George dramatically changed professional



George McCrae

direction as he enrolled in college to pursue criminal justice studies. In the spring of 1974 he was approached again, this time by H.W. Casey and Richard Finch, then two young producer-writers just getting started. This was the proverbial big break. The resultant single "Rock Your Baby" on Stone's T.K. label went to #1 and became one of the biggest selling records of recent years.

Worldwide, McCrae is in great demand; he has completed exceptionally successful tours of South America, England, Spain, France, Belgium, Austria, Holland and Germany. He received Germany's top music award, The Golden Lion, and is the recipient of gold and platinum records for "Rock Your Baby" from many countries.

Born in Pensacola, Florida, Gwen McCrae is the youngest of five children. Reared in a religious and music-oriented household, the first singing she did was gospel music in church, and gospel groups were her early idols. "All my life I wanted to sing, but it wasn't until I was in high school that I really began to get serious about it. I used to sing in local clubs, and I started making a little money... it was very little at first. But even a measly \$7 meant something to me, because I was doing what I wanted," Gwen notes.

After two brush-offs a year apart, George McCrae was allowed to walk Gwen home — a week later they were married. After George got out of the Navy, they began a singing career as a duet, working small clubs in the south Florida area. Their first record was "Two Hearts In A Tangle" for Henry Stone's Alston label, which was a local hit in Florida.

Gwen broke out solo with "Lead Me On," which became a national r&b hit, followed by such tunes as "Ain't Nothing You Can Do," "He's Not You," "Leave The Driving To Us," "Keep Something Groovy Going On," "For Your Love" and "It's Worth The Hurt," before the success of "Rockin' Chair." George managed his wife's career until he clicked with "Rock Your Baby."

With two busy careers in the family, Gwen and George sometimes work together and sometimes do solo concerts. Off-stage they prefer to relax at their Florida home with their two daughters, but touring and

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