

Don Cornelius: Soul Train Keeps Rollin'

Don Cornelius, the producer and host of Soul Train first started in show business as a news reporter at Chicago's WVON. "I've been a frustrated disc jockey my whole life. Most of my life I thought the whole thing was an unrealistic ambition because there were so few blacks in the field. After I got out of the service I really got interested for a minute in being a jock, but other things came first like making a living.

Early Days

"Before I got involved in show business I had a lot of jobs including driving a cab, a bus, selling tires and insurance. However in 1966 I got my nerve up and decided to take a fling at a three-month radio course. Taking the course didn't really give me the formal training needed but it gave me the incentive to go to the stations and ask for a job. Even though I had a diploma which didn't mean much, at least I didn't go in empty handed. When I made the rounds I got laughed at a bit, but a few people were interested in my maturity and the way I handled myself. I was thirty at the time and was a secure person as opposed to someone right off the streets. The funny thing though was that they were interested in me as an advertising salesman when I wanted to be a jock. It kind of turned me off, however I knew from experience that you have to sometimes get in any way you can and then expose your true colors once you've established yourself. Charley Pinkert, who is now deceased was the only black station owner in Chicago at the time. He liked me but told me that I was perfect for sales and not music. He told me the greatest rewards were in sales. So I kept looking. Eventually Roy Woods over at WVON hired me to do news. Roy and I were from the same neighborhood, and the job was \$50 a week. Roy actually created a job at WVON for me. When I was there I was the sixty minute man. I did everything. I would have paid them the \$50 a week just to work there. I always did news, and was the #1 substitute music man when people were sick. However I could never get a regular show. This used to make me very frustrated. I use to tell Roy that I loved news and then go to the program director that I loved music. I wanted to do music so bad, that I wished guys would get sick." Don laughed. Though Cornelius floundered on the edge of his dream goal, he never lost sight of it and his passion soon led him into a new venture — Soul Train.

"I began moonlighting at a UHF station in Chicago called WCIU. They were getting into black programming so Roy and I did a show there called The Black View of News. I was the sports guy and eventually became the anchor man. I developed a good rapport with the owners and in 1970 did a pilot which wasn't any more than black version of the Dick Clark show. I did the pilot for around \$400 or \$500 dollars and called it Soul Train. I got the idea for the name because the show was a traveling show. We used to take it around to local high schools and such so I got the idea of the train plus soul which was natural. Joe Cobb, a big jock in Chicago did the scream at the beginning of the jingle, which was the part that has become our theme. From that pilot I had the show syndicated across the country within a year. I had never dreamed that the show would take off like it did. I had wanted to create something like Bandstand but have a show with its own character that would showcase the artist and music he or she did. I never really tried to be exactly like Dick Clark because he's too good and it's hard to imitate the originator. Anybody trying to imitate Dick Clark is planning suicide. In turn, I think people trying to imitate me are also fatalistic. What I did try to do was to give my show its own character and identity. It's hard to have a super creative format because the show is music and dancing. Some things we do different are to shoot the scenes from different angles, have kids interview the artists and have the kids dance while the artist is performing. It's not ingenious, but it's our style. Just being a black show gave Soul Train its own character."

r&b additions to the radio playlists

KDAY — LOS ANGELES

Love Hangover — Fifth Dimension — ABC
Wish Love Was Magic — Street Corner Symphony — Bang
Movin' — Brass Construction — UA
Wild Cherry — Gene Page — Atlantic
Don't It Feel Good — Ramsey Lewis — Columbia
I'm Not In Love — Dee Dee Sharp — Phila. Int'l
Hitbound — This Is It — Melba Moore — Buddah

WCAU — PHILADELPHIA

Love Will Keep Us Together — Wilson Pickett — WR
You're My Everything — Lee Garrett — Chrysalis
Take My Hand — New York City — Chelsea
America The Beautiful — Ray Charles — Crossover

WDAO — DAYTON

Queen Of Clubs — KC — T.K.
Supersound — Jimmy Castor — Atlantic
Can't Hide Love — E.W&F — Columbia
You See The Trouble — Barry White — 20th
Midnight Sunshine — Soul Children — Columbia
I Thought It Took A Little Time — Diana Ross — Motown

WSOK — SAVANNAH

Jealousy — Major Harris — Atlantic
Instant Love — Main Ingredient — RCA
Hip It — Hosanna — Calla
Hope We Get To Love — Marilyn McCoo & Billy Davis — ABC
Ain't Gonna Tell — Carl Carlton — ABC
Spanish Hustle — Fatback Band — Event
24 To 20 — It's Been A Long Time — Stuff 'n' Ramjett

WCKO — FT. LAUDERDALE

Love Hangover — Diana Ross — Motown
Love Me Right — Gary Toms Empire — PIP
Hope We Get To Love In Time — Marilyn McCoo & Billy Davis — ABC
42 To 31 — Born To Get Down — Muscle Shoals Horns
44 To 33 — Love And Understanding — Kool & Gang
41 To 34 — Spanish Hustle — Fatback Band
29 To 12 — Heavy Love — David Ruffin
20 To 13 — From Us To You — Stairsteps
14 To 3 — Happy Music — Blackbyrds
26 To 22 — Get Up And Boogie — Silver Convention

WVCO — COLUMBUS

I'll Be Good To You — Brothers Johnson — A&M
Can't Hide Love — E.W&F — Columbia
You Know How To Make Me Feel So Good — Harold Melvin — Phila. Int'l
Am I Wasting Time — Love Committee — Ariola
What You Need Baby — Caprells — Bano
31 To 17 — Daylight — Bobby Womack — UA
26 To 11 — Treat Me Like A Man — Dramatics — ABC

WDIA — MEMPHIS

Can't Hide Love — E.W&F
I Wish You Well — Bill Withers — Columbia
Love Hangover — Diana Ross — Motown
Young Hearts Run Free — Candi Staton — WB
More, More, More — Andrea True Connection — Buddah
20 To 11 — Supersound — Jimmy Castor
24 To 14 — Get Up And Boogie — Silver Convention
23 To 15 — Heavy Love — David Ruffin
25 To 17 — I Got A Feeling — Al Wilson

WBMX — CHICAGO

How About Love — Chocolate Milk — RCA
Midnight Lady — David Morris, Jr. — Buddah
All In The Family — General Johnson — Arista
I'll Never Stop Loving You — Solomon Burke — All Platinum
Let The Music Play — J.G. Lewis — IX Chains
Strangers — Larry Saunders — Soul, Inc.

WBUL — BIRMINGHAM

Midnight Sunshine — Soul Children — Columbia
Daylight — Bobby Womack — UA
Love And Understanding — Kool — Delite
Tell The World — Harold Melvin — Phila. Int'l
Travelling Man — Masqueraders — ABC
Love Will Keep Us Together — Wilson Pickett — WR

WNOV — MILWAUKEE

Get Up And Boogie — Silver Convention — Midland
I Love To Love — Al Downing — Polydor
We Get By — Al Jarreau — SB
Let Your Mind Be Free — Brother To Brother — Turbo
Starbright — Syl Johnson — Hi
Make Me Twice The Man — Notations — Gemigo

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BACKSTAGE AT THE GROVE — Shown above is Natalie Cole celebrating her recent SRO appearance at the club. On hand to help join Natalie in the festivities are from left Bhaskar Menon, chairman of the board of Capito Records & EMI Industries, **Cash Box's** Jess Levitt and Larkin Arnold, vp and general manager of the soul division of Capito.

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the way ... **Amherst Records** has the hits. Three new releases that should establish this young company out of Buffalo are: "Making Love In The Rain" by **Black Ice**, "I Choose You" by the **Chicago Gangsters on Gold Plate** and "(I've Learned Now) What It Takes To Love" by the **Campbell Brothers**.

Bumps Doogan caught **Walker** and his **All-Stars** at the **Starwood** last week and said Jr. really rocked and roiled. Jr. is back on the scene after a too long absence and has a hit on his hands with "I'm So Glad." **Phoebe Snow** looks to have an r&b smash on her hands with "Two Fisted Love." Also look for two other records to be crossover smashes. Believe it or not **Boz Scaggs** has come up with a very funky record for **Columbia** entitled "It's Over." It's a smash ... **Hamilton, Joe Frank & Reynolds** also look to have another crossover hit with "I'm Fakin' In Love Again." Both will be big records on both charts.

Windy O'Grady, the disco machine in Chicago, called to say that **Pat Lundi's** new single on **Pyramid** entitled "Let's Get Down To Business" is the latest smash in the Chicago discos.



LEONE THOMAS ON DON RECORDS — Leone Thomas who used to be the vocalist with Pharoah Sanders has signed on with Don King's Don Records. His first single for the label is entitled "Thank You Baby." Shown above celebrating the signing are from left to right: Rudy Lucas, promotion manager for Don Records, Lloyd Price, director of the Don King music division; Nate Adams, a&r director; Jesse Boseman, co-producer; and Leone Thomas (seated).

The **Horizon** series on **A&M** is cookin'. Look for outstanding new LPs from the following in the very near future. The **Paul Desmond Quartet** "Live." **The Revolutionary Ensemble** with an LP entitled "People's Republic." **David Liebman** and **Richie Beirach** with "Forgotten Fantasies." **Ira Sullivan** with "Ira Sullivan," and a new LP by **Mel Lewis** and **Thad Jones** entitled "New Life." **A&M** is also hot in the soul field. Look for a new "Reggae Spectacular" LP featuring **Jimmy Cliff**, **Greyhound** and the **Harry Johnson All-Stars**. Also expect new LPs from **Billy Preston**, featuring **Sly Stone** and **Buddy Miles**, **Carl Graves**. **LTD** and a soundtrack by **Quincy Jones** entitled "Roots." Also LPs by **Esther Satterfield**, **Charlie Hayden** and **Joan Armatrading**. The **Brothers Johnson** will be touring with Quincy when he takes his review on the road in August. Their LP "Look Out For #1" is receiving tremendous response all over the country.

A very lovely couple came up to the **Cash Box** offices last week. Their names are **Brian** and **Brenda Russell** and they have an exciting and enjoyable new LP out on **Rocket Records** entitled "Word Called Love" and a single entitled "Highly Prized Possession."

Brian is a **Taurus** and hails originally from Scotland. **Brenda** is an **Aries** and is originally from New York City. Both migrated from Canada to L.A. about three years ago. While in Canada they were in a group on **GRT** called **Dr. Music**. While with **Dr. Music** they had one #1 smash in Canada entitled "Gospel Rock." When not working with the group they wrote jingles. When they first came to the states they worked as background vocalists on both the **Sonny & Cher** and **Sonny** shows. Also they sang background for fellow **Rocket** recording artist **Neil Sedaka** on "Laughter In The Rain." Both **Brian** and **Brenda** said that probably the most exciting event of their lives was appearing with **Elton John** and the **Beach Boys** at **Wembley**. "It was so incredible singing before such a vast audience that I nearly fainted before I went on," **Brian** said. Both **Brian** and **Brenda** write lyrics and music and some of their tunes have been done by other artists. "Please Pardon Me" is on the new **Rufus** LP and is also going to be recorded on **Stanley Turrentine's** new LP. **Anne Murray** is another artist that has used their material. **Brenda** is into all kinds of music but hopes the musical scene will shift back to good songs with realistic words & music. When **Brian** and I work together on songs to try to play off each other with our ideas to get the most out of what we're working on. We can write any type of material. r&b, pop, country, whatever, because our musical backgrounds are diverse," she said. Besides being happy about their latest LP the two are also very happy that they are expecting their first child in the very near future ... that's soul.

jess levitt