

THE SHIELD



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OLD COLUMBUS & OLD LIES



THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE IT HAPPEN



Photo by Eileen Whitehead

Tita Gray-Associate Director of Black Music Division at Capitol Records

By Michael Robinson
Special to THE SHIELD

Recently, I interviewed three Black A&R (Artists and Repertoire) directors/managers in the music business. These people are very unique and largely well known in the industry. We also discussed their lives after working hours. These strong people are proud to be Black, and they will share their inspirations with you. We will understand fully what makes them so proud and ready to reach the stars. There are other things in this article that will catch your attention, and some that you will find very touching to your heart.

I also found out a lot from them to help you and I understand the musical industry in the eyes of the A & R director/manager. With this interview, I hope you will get a clear understanding of them. Each one of them comes from different walks of life,

music, which is something you're not born with but you should come into the industry and work your way up to an A&R position so that you can develop an ear for good music. Good communication and diplomatic skills also help you to know the new sound. The job entails a combination of things: producers, writers, actors and a strong presence. I offer this to the managers of the acts and the producers to keep them dealing with our company and not taking their product elsewhere. VIVIAN SCOTT: A lot of belief in yourself, in your gut instincts, and belief in an artist takes a

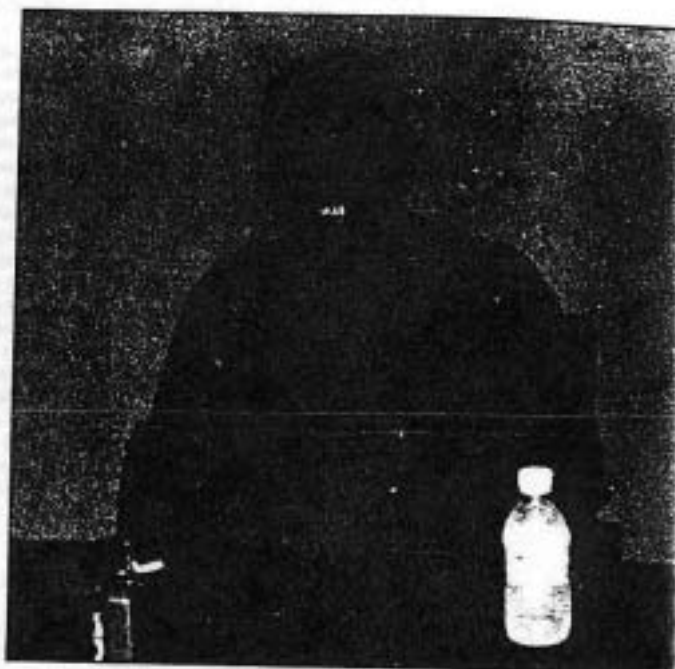


Photo by Deborah Brown

Jerome Sydenham-A & R Manager of Black Music at East-West Records

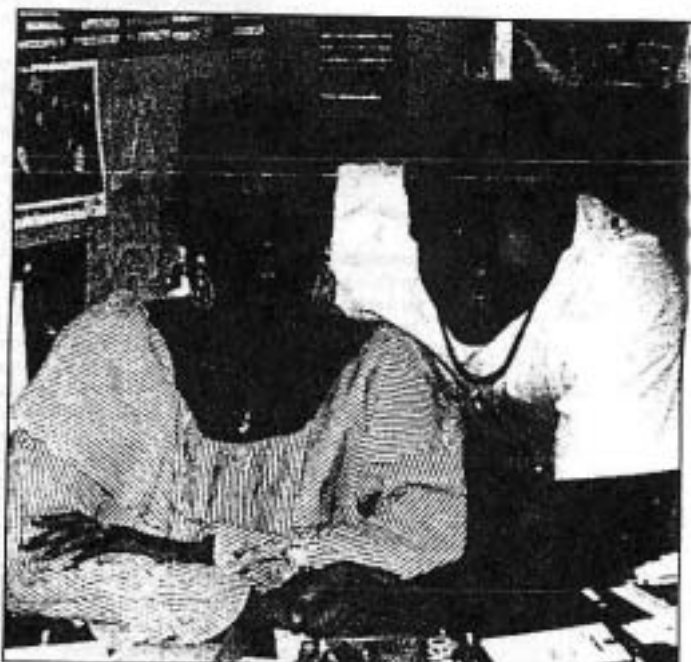


Photo by Eileen Whitehead

Vivian Scott- A & R Director of Black Music Division at Epic Records (with Staff Writer Michael Robinson, Jr.)

someone work for me! My first A&R job was at Polygram Records for two years. I've been at Epic, this coming January, for three years. I took baby steps to get here because if this ends I can go into things I've done before. Like being on the road, also the legal side of things such as: publishing and promoting concerts and this is because I've done it. I didn't just jump into A&R.

MICKEY: *Do you sign the artists yourself and what is the process?*

TITA: I have somewhat, something to do with signing artists to the label. The lawyer and business affairs department gets together, then I bring it to the president of the company, that is who I report to. It takes about two to four weeks and if it takes longer than that it's a big problem.

JEROME: Well the process works like this. If I find a new talent I want to sign, it will be signed. Its heard by the Executive, Senior V.P., and the Chairman of the company so they know what is going on. Then we have an A&R meeting where everyone voices their opinion. If the President says no we can't sign it, I say it has to be signed. It will be put no matter what it has to be approved by the chairman.

VIVIAN: What I do is bring it back to the company and pass it among my peers and get feedback. I do have signing power because I have proven myself to the company. There were people that I was successful in signing that the company didn't believe in such as Shabba Ranks. I am very fortunate to have this power and success.

MICKEY: *What were your first plans/dreams for yourself when you were a little girl/boy?*

TITA: Well, subconsciously I did want to get into the music industry because my mother and grandmother sang, not professionally but they would sing around the house. We had a big piano in the house and my grandmother wanted me to learn how to play but I wanted to play basketball!!! Because that's what everybody did on my block in Boston, Massachusetts and I was good at it. Also, I wanted to be with my boyfriend and I didn't care about playing the piano.

JEROME: I wanted to be a pilot, I was interested in aviation. When I was about 13, I was interested in law and communications. While growing up, I collected music and when I realized I had such a collection of music, I started to focus on music more.

VIVIAN: I always wanted to be in the music business. Where that came from was being in church and I couldn't sing. I knew that because I had no talent, I had to be on the other side of things, which is the business side. The first thing I wanted to do was to promote concerts because I was an avid concert goer. Just the live aspect, I think, really pulled me in. I also promoted church competitions, but once I found out how much money it takes to promote a show and how much you can lose, I quickly put that aside.

MICKEY: *What are some of the let downs of this part of the business?*

TITA: The only let down I encountered happened when I wasn't allowed to do what I was hired to do. I don't care about the perks and all the money and all of that other stuff. If you're not going to let me do what you hired me to do, I'd rather you let me go

someplace where I can.

JEROME: Certain corporate aspects that restrict you. I think the biggest let down is that the radio is not open to new music. Radio affects the music you're trying to break into. Most record companies, of course, not mine. People don't get to hear the music because radio does not play it. Radio is a let down and a corporate is a little bit of a let down though, not as much as radio. Otherwise, I don't think I have to deal with the political aspect as much as others, because I work for good Black people. **VIVIAN:** Not getting a hit, believing in something, as in signing a group, believing in making a great record and not having company support. Yes, record companies are designed to make money, but there are a hundred acts that have to go out in a year. Somebody is going to get lost in the shuffle. Everything at the record company is not a priority. I work at a company that has a very small roster in my department so our acts do get a fair chance. I don't like the back stabbing and vindictiveness in this business. It is very hard also to separate personal and professional in this business. Unfortunately, you have to play that game or deal with it and I am very happy I can deal with it and not play in it.

MICKEY: *Do you feel you are a part of making someone famous? Why?*

TITA: Well, it hasn't happened yet, it's about to happen and I think I will make a couple of people famous. I've been here a year, at Capitol, but like I said I just really haven't had the chance to do what I needed to do, up until recently. I think I will be responsible for making people famous, only because I am going to make sure they get the right songs and productions, to have a good album. The only thing you'll never know is if the consumer will want it.

JEROME: Absolutely, because when you are an A&R person you are directly responsible for giving someone the opportunity to be exposed to the public and hopefully become a star. You feel very much so, somewhat responsible. It is a nice feeling when you find something and turn it into a hit or even just being involved with the process. It's just a nice feeling to make them a star. And you should move on to the next raw talent and do the same thing.

VIVIAN: Oh, absolutely! It was a team work situation on making Shabba Ranks who he is right now. Most Black people heard his music in the clubs. Three out of the five Reggae songs played were his songs. Shabba was very well known in the Black community, but I was very successful in bridging him in some R&B sector of things, like a song with Maxi Priest. Also into the hip-hop arena we have the first reggae artist to have the no. 1 rap song on the Billboard rapper's list. We're doing it again with his new album. We have Johnny Gill, Queen Latifah, and Chubb Rock. I feel much more successful breaking Reggae opposed to Shabba, specifically, because we've just written another page of history. This wave of music was able to open other doors for other artists who are getting paid "crazy" money for deals. Whereas they used to sign deals for \$40,000 or \$50,000, now it's \$200,000 to \$300,000 plus marketing and promoting money. I also signed Sister

Souljah.

MICKEY: *What are the good points of the industry?*

TITA: I think the rewards are that you get to meet a lot of people because you deal with so many parts of the industry. You deal with managers, lawyers, and artists and in some situations the artist's parents. You just meet so many people, it makes your networking so far and vast. I think the biggest rewards are when you have a successful project and to some people this could mean 300,000 records sold. It could mean platinum or double platinum records. But to me, it's just if you feel the artist in you felt you did the best to make this record happen. Plus, the company has to believe its a good record. Maybe the public is not ready for it but you put 200% into it and you came out with something that's great, then that's the biggest reward. I just feel like it's the best you could do and you got some good out of it. Of course, if I got someone that sold 15 million records, the rewards would be financially good also. In conclusion, the biggest reward is the networking that comes out of it. It's just all your efforts.

JEROME: I love music, that's the most important thing. I am a real music lover. I feel music, although, I am not a person that looks for a hit. Music makes me happy. On the job or off the job. Since I deal with music on a day to day basis. In the studios, editing, mixing and putting music together, picking singles and sequencing music, those are the things that make me happy. Music is up there with one or two other things!!

VIVIAN: I make a lot of money and have a lot of fun doing it.

MICKEY: *Have you ever been interviewed by a college newspaper?*

TITA: I did a panel for NYU, but it was for publishing at MCA, but I've never done a Black newspaper before. *You are the first.*

JEROME: No, I haven't. I have never been interviewed by any publications before. *You are first.*

VIVIAN: The answer is no and yes you're my virgin voyage. (She laughs).

MICKEY: *What is your goal? Is it here or elsewhere?*

TITA: My goal is to be an entrepreneur, that's what I would like, there's no ifs or buts about it. It's what I always wanted to be, it's what I will be though, in what aspect I'm not sure. I am not the type of person to put all my eggs in one basket. Although, this industry is like home to me. I also like the hotel business, maybe something in the Caribbean or Florida. I always read and take a lot of courses to keep my mind working because the music industry offers no permanent success. You should always branch out and look at other things. I am still thinking about law school but the ultimate is the entrepreneur, that's my goal.

JEROME: Well, I am very young so I have a lot of time to explore other possibilities to foresee my career at the record company. Give me another five years of life, who knows I might be president of a company, if all things go well with the music. But it's a very unpredictable business. Maybe in a few years, I might not be able to hear things the same or the sounds might change but right now everything's looking good. I should be here for a while because I am very

committed to what I do. Regardless, I do have some interests in small record companies like independent projects of my own and productions. Really, my main concern is the record company and these other things would be on the side. As time goes on I will see how things develop and whatever becomes the most interesting or possible thing for me to do. It will be within the music industry!

VIVIAN: Something you will never believe, my goal is to make enough money where I will be able to live comfortable. I would also like to open a birthing center in Harlem, where women can have babies the way they should. In a very humane, serene environment as opposed to a very cold sterile hospital situation. I was lucky to have a very wonderful situation when giving birth to my daughter, Loren. I think we all need to learn about what happens to our bodies during pregnancy. This in turn led me to go to Georgetown with the intentions of becoming a mid-wife.

MICKEY: Name the artist that you work with in some kind of way.

TITA: I have worked with Lisa Fischer, Full Force, New Edition (We are both from Boston and MCA that type of thing). I also worked with an artist on Virgin Records named "Helen Bruner".

JEROME: I worked with En Vogue, Gerald Levert, Das EFX, Big Bub, (formerly from the group Today), Yo-Yo, Ten City, a very good dance group. Simply Red, Smooth, Cindy Mizelle, which is a new artist who has not yet been released. The Lynch Mob, which is an Ice Cube hard-core Rap group. Those are the most previous ones but the one I am most proud of, which has yet to come out, is a very unique project from the U.K. They will represent the new sound from London.

VIVIAN: I work with Shabba directly and also a new artist I signed who is my female answer to Shabba, whom you've met, named Lady Patra, short for Cleopatra. I'm also responsible for getting mixes for Michael Jackson Luther Vandross, and Sade. Also, there are new acts that I will be helping to pick out songs, producers for the roster, which has about 30 to 40 acts. I am also working on a John Singleton movie which Janet Jackson stars in called Poetic Justice. I personally will be doing the sound track for the movie.

MICKEY: What is your favorite color and why?

TITA: Blue. All different shades of blue. I just think blue goes from being real deep to real pretty. I think yellows, reds, and pinks are typical girls colors and black and the other hard colors are the boys colors. For some reason blue is in the middle. It can be very soft or aggressive.

JEROME: Green, because I grew up in Nigeria in West Africa and the environment was very, very green. I am a very outdoor type of person and I also have a little bit of a green thumb. I like grass, trees, and flowers, it's very complex, like my attitude. And, of course money.

VIVIAN: Black because it's a very basic and simple color and I consider myself a basic and simple person. It goes with my personality. We also know, it doesn't get dirty quick so when I come in to work in the morning and I know that I am going out later, I can just throw on a different pair of earrings and a scarf.

MICKEY: Who are your favorite group(s)?

TITA: I like some serious jazz and some serious raps. I could even listen to some old King Pleasure, also Betty Carter, Sarah Vaughn, and Tribe Called Quest.

JEROME: I don't think I have a favorite group. I like all areas and categories of music. At home, I like jazz. House music at clubs and R&B at work. This question is too difficult to answer.

VIVIAN: Earth, Wind & Fire is my favorite.

MICKEY: So, you and my mom have something in common.

VIVIAN: You know it! I can't believe after ten years I remember horn lines, melodies, and little background parts. We've just put out an Earth, Wind & Fire box set, that consists of three CD's. It's called the Eternal Band. Also the P. Funk Family like George Clinton, Gap Band, and etc. Also Sly Stone, Kool and the Gang. All these groups would sell out a show every time.

MICKEY: Who is your favorite singer?

TITA: That's easy Chaka Khan, she gets all the points.

JEROME: I like different singers for different reasons like Chaka Khan, she's a classic, a diva of R&B, I love her. In rap I like the "old school" rappers like RUN-DMC, KRS-1, Ice Cube, EPMD, Pete Rock & C.L. Smooth, and also the Leaders of the New School, too.

VIVIAN: I don't think I have a favorite singer, maybe Luther. Recently, though, I have become very impressed with "Michael Jackson" BECAUSE OF HIS HBO SPECIAL. He's a real professional, he doesn't miss a beat or hit a flat note. He is our best Black

"MAKE IT HAPPEN", Continues on Page 29

BOOKSHELF

The Ice Man Inheritance: A Critical Analysis

By Siddiq Bello
Special to THE SHIELD

"The necessary re-education of Blacks and a possible solution of racial crisis, strangely enough, can only begin when Blacks fully realize this central fact in their lives: The white man is their bitter enemy" (Chancellor Williams, 1976). (Italics mine)

If the above quote upsets or disturbs you, think twice before reading the rest of this article it might drive you crazy. The Ice Man Inheritance is a "Racist Book" according to its author Michael Bradley, because it theory address the question of race and cultural behavior. If we accept this definition then my criticism of this book is not that it is "racist" but that it isn't "Racist enough". This book explores what Michael Bradley feels to be the causes of European culture and thought. The most destructive and aggressive culture to have ever been manufactured. In the very brief (but busy) history of European existence there has been little if any time dedicated by Europeans to the study of their culture - the time spent lauding its superiority doesn't count. Perhaps this is because they occupied most of their time by stealing, warring, murdering or otherwise destroying anything they could not control (a time consuming occupation by any standards!). It is due to this that further explorations into the causes and effects of European world domination is needed. The Ice Man Inheritance is an interesting and thought provoking, if not very accurate, attempt at this. This exploration into the destructive nature of European psycho-biology is especially interesting given that the author is himself a European, born in Canada, trying to find out why "the problem with the world is white men". Though the book is very technical it is also very readable and is recommended to all Africans who wish to further their knowledge of European thought and to Europeans who want to explore a very plausible explanation of the cause of their uniquely destructive thought system.

Bradley's argument is very complex and deserves a more in-depth explanation than the one that follows, unfortunately space will not allow. We can only present Bradley's basic theory and hope that our brief explanation does it justice. Bradley is asking the question why are we (Europeans) so uniquely aggressive and destructive? Why does our violence stand out from the rest of hue-manity?

Bradley seeks the first part of the answer in early hue-man evolution. Sapience means to think and Homo Sapiens (anatomically modern people, US), means thinking man. In this context sapience is a morphological (physical) as well as a cultural trait. Bradley makes an argument for the rethinking of "sapience" as a completely cultural trait and not a morphological evolution. Therefore sapience did not evolve but was crossed by diverse populations at different times in different geographic environments. The character that makes the "crossing of the sapience threshold" possible is an awareness of the past, present and future and the desire to communicate between them. This means that despite morphology any being that demonstrates an awareness of the continuum of time and attempts to communicate through it, is functionally sapient. There are only two known beings which demonstrate conclusively this kind of awareness and they are Neanderthal and anatomically modern hue-manity. A key to Bradley's argument is his belief that Neanderthal was first.

Bradley seeks the second part of the answer in the manner in which the sapient threshold was crossed. Sapience is the awareness of the past, present and future, once this cultural hurdle was "crossed" man was now in an temporal environment (time), which he attempted to inhabit. The temporal environment, it must be remembered, is a non-biological environment and hue-mans are biological beings. The attempt to inhabit time caused the need to communicate in and through it. Religion satisfied the past temporal communication need and writing satisfied the future temporal communication need. Given that terrestrial beings were highly territorial, this behavioral trait was carried over into the temporal environment (time). In this environment territorial rules did not apply because there was no rivals with which to compete or competitors to guard resources against. There was no one in the temporal environment to compete with or defend against except the past and the future, our children and our parents. The "instinctual" aggression of territorial beings required that the uniqueness of each lifetime be protected from the past and the future. The present identity became the resource that was necessary to defend from the past and the future. The present identity had to be "better than" both past and the