## Commodores In The Starlight

By Jeanne Parnell

"All I want for Christmas is an 'easy' life and an easy time,' says the Commodores.

At last their time has come and stardom belongs to them. This soul-rock-jazz-disco sextet has been the most consistent, successful crossover single act in black music yet. The fact is that their latest album "Commodores" was shipped gold and has gone double Platinum since.

They have sold out every major auditorium in the country including the Superdome, Omni, the Forum, Nassau Coliseum and infinitum and grossed \$4.5 million thus far on the first half of the tour.

A rhythm and blues combo with a head for business acumen is what the Commodores are all about. This group of six, conceived while graduating from Tuskegee University, and dedicated to the proposition that their multi-talents would make money, now have a reputation in the business for being one of the most meticulous and scrupulous career builders in the music world.

They have waited for the right time playing second and sometimes third on other performers' tours. They began their ascension when Suzanne DePasse added them to the Jackson Five tour as a warm-up act.

Benjamin Ashburn their manager and surrogate father directed and helped them organize Commodores Entertainment Corporation, which handles personal appearances and disc production. Another company, Commodores Entertaining Publishing Company, handles the publishing rights to the tunes they write and perform. The publishing of the combo written songs is split with Motown, the company they record for. What is written for them by others is owned by them PAGE 18



Jeanne Parnell with the Commodores

"Movin On" named after one of their hit records is their transportation venture which has graced them with two trucks and a specially designed bus. When the vehicles are not in use by the group, they are leased to other celebrated peers like Boy Dylan and Bruce Springsteen.

The Commodores and Ashburn have looked forward to the day that the audience may cease to applaud or the group decides to unpack its suitcases to live in its sumptuous homes in Tuskegee without all the fanfare. Trust funds, pensions, and profit sharing arrangements for the company have been set up, which will accrue to each member the next eight to twelve years.

William King, the group's business administration graduate and choreographer, exemplifies the versatility of the group of members.

The group started with



MILAN WILLIAMS

disco several years ago in Harlem's Small's Paradise, their first job, starring rather than starving. The Commodores sang any artist arrangement with the nearest amount of rightness I've ever heard. Audiences would whisper the "Great

Imitators." "Machine Gun"
their first album was a big
hit for its disco beat, and at
last they were on their own
doing "The Bump" and "I
Feel Sanctified."

The combo foresight made them compose the ballad "Easy." Realizing that disco will not last forever they continue to plan for their future. So they "eased" their tune initially on to the pop chart, to find its way back on the soul charts.

A subject of great concern to them was the division of black and white musicians. Blacks listen to the soul radio and very rarely buy a pop hit. Whites listen to pop stations and buy what they hear.

The basic fault lies in the way the media and music business function, and nobody, absolutely nobody asked for the stratification or the loss of a lucrative listener.

In other countries like England, it doesn't matter if the music is black or white (Continued on Page 20)

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