Benjamin Ashburn

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group spent \$32,000 last year on costumes.

"Our set cost \$70,000 for this year's tour," said Ashburn. "Sound and light is expensive, costing us \$30,000. There's four tractor trailers on tour with us and three buses. For a three month period, we leased Elvis Presley's airplane."

There was a time when the Commodores did a job at Smalls in New York on a one night basis, and later were hired for a month. Today, they are breaking house records wherever they go.

"And the good thing about it," he said, "Is that we feel we're just starting."

Ashburn indicated that he's working to make the Commodores a household name.

"When you reach a certain plateau, a lot of groups stop developing," he said. "The only thing for the Commodores to do is to institutionalize them like Led Zepplin. You start making them household words by making movies, documentaries, and participating in community type activities."

A rarity in the music industry, the Commodores-Ashburn association is all black.

"We are partners. We have a different and good relationship," said Ashburn. "The cats are so delicately clean that they don't want to live in New York or L.A. They live in Tuskegee and built homes there. It gives them more of a chance to be themselves.

"We are a total black entity," he added. "We have a black group, black publishing company, black production and we're with a real black record company."

Ashburn said that it wasn't intentional, it just happened that way. The Commodores are the first black entity.

It wasn't always that way PAGE 28

for black artists and managers. J.W. Alexander knows all about it.

At 61 years of age, Alexander has been a manager for 40 years. He managed the late Sam Cooke, Little Richard, Bobby Womack, Lynn Roman, Billy Preston, Johnny Taylor and Lou Rawls.

It all began for Alexander when he was singing with the Silver Moon Quartet from Kansas. He was also a secretary and soon they made him their manager.

"I received a letter that guaranteed me \$10 when we played a date." said Alexander. "The tickets for the show was 15 cents."

The group sang for church and social organizations. One time in Pratt, Kansas during the city's 21st anniversary celebration, the group was hired to entertain at \$25 per man per week.

Alexander wrote home to his mother that he was "gonna get rich."

Looking at the music industry today, Alexander certainly agrees that there is more money to be made. Black entertainers are better educated. They have had the chance to profit from the mistakes of others.

"But there's also a lack of real good talent coming along," he said. "Maybe there aren't as many places they can learn the trade.

"They are not as strong," he added from his California office. "The voice and creativity are not as strong. They are relying more on gimmicks than sheer personal talent."

Alexander thinks that people don't like to shell out a lot on money for concerts and get disappointed. Those under the age of 18 flock to concerts because they have nothing else to do. Once they h i t 18, people get sophisticated.

"Anyone can put together a stage and light show," he said. "What does smoke and bombs have to do with an artist's ability?"

of artists, Alexander feels that a manager must be patient.

"Most artists need someone to lean on. If you can contribute to someone becoming a better person, then you've got to have a shoulder to lean on," he said.

really advise and counsel the artist, deal with the agent, help to choose material and type of presentation. Road managers are more or less responsible for the mechanics of moving while personal managers are most responsible for generating income.

Melba Moore, actress and singer, stated recently in Washington, D.C. that she was grateful to her management.

"I'm their only client and there's a whole group of people working for me," she said. "I'm free to be an artist and they, Hush Productions with Charles Huggins at the helm, are doing a good job."

"I do all I can as an artist for them," she said. "I also sit in on business meetings not necessarily to contribute but just to listen. And they must do the same for my creative interest."

Moore feels that every artist is worth a certain price. They are salable in some areas and not salable in others, yet. It's management's job to stay on top of that.

"It's not a matter of working hard," she said.
"Good management is an art."

There's a nasty rumor going around the music industry these days. In order for an entertainer to be successful, he must be managed by someone who isn't black.

"That fallacy exists," said Alexander. "I think it's because it is a very lucrative business at times.

"When it comes to managing, people say blacks just can't do it. It's been proven that blacks can do it.

Look at sports. Look at Muhammad Ali and Don King."

There's also Marc Gordon managing the Fifth Dimension. Forest Hamilton managing The Dramatics. Berry Gordy managing Diana Ross. Charles Huggins managing Melba Moore and many other successful combinations.

Alexander feels there is a need for young blacks to come and learn everything they can about show business. There is a need for more blacks in the business side of show business.

Both managers faced racism from time to time working for their clients.

"I used to feel it," said Ashburn. "But it's like everything else.

"Everyone kicks your behind until you become important to them. It doesn't make a difference if you're black, blue or green. Everyone wants to be with a winner."

Teen Tips

By Paul Steiner

Belts made of large or small safety pins are very chic for party or disco wear.

plants hanging up high. Toss up an ice cube or two when required.

Party Idea: Put large cabbage leaves on a tray when serving snacks or small sandwiches.

Did you know that Plexite plastic pots are most often lower in price than clay pots in the equivalent sizes and shapes? They're lighter in weight, too.

Guitars should never, but never, be left near radiators, and certainly should not be placed in strong sunlight.

Easy Bet To Win: Who are the biggest users of lawnmowers? Answer: Cemeteries and golf courses, according to Toro Co. records.

Upcoming treat: Yogurtflavored soft chew candies, even orange-yogurt, strawberry-yogurt, etc., predicts flavor expert Bob Doris.

National Roundup

By Larry A. Still and Art Carter

The year has been hectic in the nation's capital — and throughout the country and the world — beginning with the bright promises of the Jimmy Carter inaugural and ending with the solemn disillusionment of increasing unemployment, plus the Africa crisis.

The inside Atlanta group was joined by the "Memphis Mafia" and the Detroit crowd early last January as The South rose again with the help of urban blacks in the North . . . In addition to well known Democratic National Committee executive Ben Brown and his entourage there is Martha "Bunny" Mitchell, in the behind the scene staff at the White House which includes Beth Lumpkins and Harriet Smith, aides to Press Secretary Jody Powell and Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan.

Many of the inaugural volunteers are still waiting in the wings for jobs pending the Carter reorganization . . . Ditto, Health, Education and Welfare and Labor Department applicants . . . Office of Education aide Sandra Gray is the key lady in the HEW shakedown.

Housing and Urban Development Secretary Pat Harris and Equal Employment Opportunity sister Eleanor Holmes appear to have gotten their shop together despite reports to the contrary . . . The ladies are talking soft and carrying a big clout.

However, the Carter brigade has learned that change doesn't come easy in the Potomac because the government diehards will not roll over . . . Ernie Withers Jr. is the quiet, efficient Brown aide responsible for the Memphis and mid-South connection . . . Motor City Mayor Coleman Young is still calling key shots from the midwest . . .

Changing of the old guard

Other major events during 1977 included the shifting of the leadership from the traditional Civil Rights front to the new political frontier with the Congressional Black Caucus under chairman Parren Mitchell (D-Md.) really on the case . . . Former Federal Communications Commissioner Ben Hooks is still reorganizing his new staff in putting new life into the NAACP for a possible shift to Washington . . . the National Urban League's exec Vernon Jordan supplanted PUSH's Jesse Jackson in becoming a new spokesperson for black demands at the NUL's mid-summer convention . . . Another summit meeting of black leadership was scheduled before year's end after some quarters grumbled that the first session in New York last September was not representative enough. Meanwhile, an off the record survey gave the NAACP a 70 identity rating among the public, with PUSH ranked 13; the Southern Christian Leadership Conference listed 11 and the NUL - 7!!!!

Eyes on the media

Hooks continues to blast the media for its biased coverage while eyeing veteran Jimmy Hicks, ex-New York Amsterdam News editor as his press aide. But he is still seeking younger blood for an overall communications chief . . . There was a mad scramble for Bill Drummond's White House Fellowship press slot after he returned to his Los Angeles Times Bureau "out of frustration . . . "we hear!!! Ex-EEOC public affairs chief Al Sweeney was in the running, but Carterites dug deep into his reported links with the Nixon Republicans . . . Ohio representative Lew Stokes was asked to come to Al's aid.

Despite the international turor over South Africa, the biggest issue for blacks is on the domestic front in the Bakke Case some of us are still allowing the press to define the

Promises, Promises and more Promises

issue . . . Dr. Kenneth Tollet of Howard U.'s Institute for Policy Studies, which originally sounded the Bakke alarm, says the intellectuals are still defending "reverse discrimination" of whites when the issue is obviously the "reversal of discrimination" of blacks There is a difference . . . Remember — The Civil War amendments did not propose to provide 40 acres and a mule for everybody to correct the evils of slavery . . . Can you dig it?

Is This Where You Came In? As 1977 closes out on the South African Crisis, some of us are beginning to wonder if "this is where we came in . . . " Remember the smash response to Alex Haley and Roots last January and the overwhelming pride in the Festival of Black Arts and Culture in Nigeria . . . Ambassador Andrew Young did ride out the storm caused by those who couldn't believe he should be making U.S. foreign policy Tanzanian President Julius Nyere and Nigerian Head of State Olugun Obusanyo did emphasize the U.S. new shift in policy during their U.S. visits along with the Panama Canal Treaty and Rosalynn Carter's visit to "changing" Jamaica. . . . Meanwhile, Nyere is telling African friends . . . "I left Washington, D.C. convinced that President Carter is sincere about ending colonial rule in South Africa and Rhodesia . . . " However, Nyere emphasized he made no deal on changing Tanzania's social course . . .

Non-Violence Now?

Although the African nations in the United Nations went along with Andy Young's ploy to get an arms embargo against Pretoria, following the U.S. veto of economic sanctions, more militant African diplomats said the action provides the need for eventual armed conflict in the near future Behind the latest South African debacle, some black brothers are talking about the need to risk all out conflict instead of pursuing the non-violent, non-alignment line . . . Speaking on a U.S. tour, exiled black S. African editors Percy Quobado and D. Kamazo predicted the non-violent course will prevail — for now Merry Christmas and Happy Kwanza!

Looking Ahead to 78

Beginning next year look for a new burst of publicity on the forgotten Martin Luther King Jr. and John Kennedy assassinations investigations, but nothing is really happening despite a muzzle on the new committee chief . . . And it still appears Congress will adjourn without passing the Humphrey-Hawkins full employment bill, despite all the tributes to Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey . . . As the senator told some admirers recently — "Where were you in 1968 when I needed you?" (in the presidential campaign against Nixon). And where are many of you NOW when the H-H bill is needed . . .? Passage of this bill could be greatest memorial to the senator for all of us, but the phony liberals and mighty militants are still 'doing their thing.'

Billions Later!

So-O-O-O-O, look for more pressure for government programs while the private sector keeps speeding downhill by trying to ignore the employment needs of millions. . . . President Carter will outline his urban policy in his January State of the Union message. The policy was previewed for the

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