They Put On A Show

During the past six years since the Commodores released their first recording "Machine Gun," they have had their first four albums go "gold" (sell at least 500,000 copies), followed up by two "platinum" albums (sold 1,000,000 or more copies), a double platinum album that sold more than 2,000,000 copies, and two triple platinum recordings which sold an astounding 3,000,000 milion copies each.

Those of you who are quick with mental arithmetic have already figured out that the Commodores have sold in excess of 12,000,000 albums, or an average of 2,000,000 albums a year since 1974.

Additionally, they have sold millions of 45s with at least seven of their singles reaching the top five on the nationwide trade charts in Billboard and Record World.

Another impressive statistic about the Commodores is the fact that their tour of 90 United States cities in 1978 grossed more than \$9,000,000, eclipsing the track records of all other entertainers playing arenas with 6,000 to 20,000 seats.

The 1980 Commodores' tour is designed to be even bigger and better, both in terms of showcasing the act and ringing up even more astronomical dollar figures. "We're trying to maximize our return on our investment in this tour and, at the same time, give people a Hollywood style production," says Lionel Richie.

A graduate of Tuskegee Institute's economics curriculum, Lionel takes a hard nosed, pragmatic toward music for a living.

"Before making this tour, we took a long look at trends in the music industry and the economics of today's America.

"We figured that since people have to pay upwards of \$10.00 or more to see a concert, no matter if they were in a 5,000 - seater or a 20,000 - seater, that we would pull out all the stops and develop a show for the big arenas that seat 20,000 or more people. We couldn't even get our set into some of the smaller halls."

The set for the "Commodores Celebrate 1980" tour is so futuristic it could be used in "Star Wars" or "The Empire Strikes Back." The performing surface is

A symbol of togetherness and public awareness categorizes = the activities of top group The Commodores. In their new presentation, they use a set which costs a quarter of a million dollars. DAWN visited with them as they prepared to launch their current blockbuster.

By Frederick Douglass



Lionel Richie and William King were hard at work putting together the new set when DAWN Magazine came to call.

stretch skyward, providing multiple levels for staging the various components of the act.

Hidden in the center of the nine
foot - high tiers of steps is a
compartment which opens mid concert to allow Lionel Richie's
concert baby grand piano to roll

The see - through lucite piano top allows Lionel to constantly be seen through a halo of alternately flashing lights which surround the

strument's lid.

Illuminating the \$250,000 set from above, a battery of nearly

edge of the 88 - keyed in-



Newest formal portrait of The Commodores

400 lights scintillates alternating patterns of red, blue and green.

A sci - fi dimension is added to the show by five laser beams that sliced through Washington, D.C.'s Capital Center, creating shimmering surrealistic images. Tons of amplifiers and other electronic gadgetry spill off the stage and line the floor below. A light high up near the ceiling emblazons the name COM-MODORES. Yet another set of lights near the rear of the stage spells out group's name letter by letter and then by syllables.

than 60 people eight hours to put the set together before a concert and up to four hours to break it down after a show. You would think that the Commodores would be too busy rehearsing and making promotional appearances on their tour to be involved with nitty - gritty details like overseeing erection of their set and its transportation to the 95 cities they will be visiting in 1980.

"Wrong, absolutely wrong!"
asserts trumpeter and vocalist
William King who manages the
group's internal business affairs.
"We try to maintain control of
everything in the least way involved with our performance.
When you're doing a 95 - city tour,
everything has to be done
precisely. When people come see
the Commodores in concert they

Ronald continues, "We joined Motown in 1972, but we didn't release our first album "Machine Gun" until 1974. We were different from what Motown was accustomed to dealing with.

"They wanted us to work as a vocal group, along the lines of the Temptations, Four Tops and other Motown stars. But we felt that black music was changing, so we didn't want to give up the fact that we were a self - contained act.

"We didn't want to work in front of an orchestra, or do any of the other traditional things. We had a distinctive sound we were striving for, a sound that came from our listening to many different kinds of music ranging from jazz and blues to classical as well as Country & Western."

Sticking to their guns, the Commodores waited until they could do their own brand of music and even went on to record

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