# SOUNDS

By Carl Matthews

**BRANFORD MARSALIS**
**"Random Abstract"**
**(Columbia)**

You want a solid, straight-ahead jazz album from the Marsalis family, you got it — Branford's follow-up to "Renaissance" is here.

Branford, who turns 28 this month, has appeared on albums by a long list of famous names, including: Sting, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis (remember "Decoy"?), Tina Turner, Steve Coleman, and of course, brother Wynton Marsalis ("Think Of One" and other memorable LPs).

Branford can also be heard on "Digital Duke" with the Duke Ellington Orchestra conducted by Mercer. Branford appears on "Cottontail."

The quartet featured on Branford's latest is in top form. Kenny Kirkland is on piano, Delbert Felix is on bass this time out, Lewis Nash does the honors on drums.

Branford's acknowledgement to the great masters of jazz, past and present, is evident in nearly every cut on the new LP. Fans of Dexter Gordon (and other artists who recorded some of their best classic stuff for Blue Note many years ago) will appreciate the opening track, Wayne Shorter's "Yes And No," which finds Nash competently meeting the rhythmic challenge of this smooth cooking arrangement. Kirkland's talents are probably best showcased by "Crescent City," an original by Branford that somehow captures the spirit of the Coltrane of nearly three decades ago.

"Random Abstract" is concrete evidence that you don't always have to be a flashy show-off to produce top-quality material that people will buy. Marsalis collectors should grab Branford's latest without delay.

**STEEL PULSE**
**"State Of Emergency" (MCA)**

British reggae band Steel Pulse returns with a hip, modern sounding collection of music with a message, once again featuring David Hinds.

The group was formed in Birmingham, England in 1975. Their first single was "Kibuda, Mansetta And Abuku," which came out in 1976 on a small label. Their "Ku Klux Klan" single was one of their first reggae-chart toppers, in 1978.

"Earth Crisis" (1983) and "Babylon The Bandit" (1986) are among their best album releases.

The anti-apartheid title track rocks in true Steel Pulse form. The electric "Dead End Circuit" is punched up by synth-filled rhythm breaks which are relatively uncommon in most reggae recordings. "Love This Reggae Music" is a more disco-oriented track written by keyboardist Selwyn Brown.

## Music Notes

I often get into some stimulating discussions with folks who say they regularly read this column. Recently we got to talking about the new types of "singles" that the record companies are bringing out, cassette singles and 3-inch CD singles.

According to the folks at Arista Records, "sales of 7-inch black vinyl singles have declined steadily over the last few years." Music store executives have reported that sales of cassette singles have outnumbered black vinyl singles by a significant margin.

The cassette singles I've seen feature two to four cuts, sometimes with more than one version of a song, and with the same selections on both sides of the cassette.

Many of them are currently sold in these real long, slender cardboard packages that are of absolutely no use to the listener once outside the store — perhaps the long design deters theft.

Branford Marsalis

Steel Pulse

For many young folks who have Walkmans, but not regular ol' turntables, these cassette singles could be just the thing. But not for me — I find that I can still acquire the vinyl version and record it myself on my expensive home cassette deck, and end up with a tape that sounds better than the pre-recorded cassette version. So... to each his own.

As for 3-inch CD singles, price is apparently a very important consideration. People tell me, if they're going to spend $3.99 or more for a CD single, it better be a pretty darn good-sounding CD single.

CD singles are vulnerable to the same problems as their regular-size counterparts, plus they come with an additional problem: in order to play a 3-inch CD single on a CD player designed for regular CDs, you have to use an adapter. "How the heck do you get this devilish thing on this disc?" is what many frustrated new CD single buyers are sure to ask.


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# Superfest rolls into Baltimore Arena

## About Freddie Jackson

Freddie Jackson is the first to admit that he's a romantic. "They say I have bedroom eyes — and I work them as much as I can!"

But it was undoubtedly the voice that made a platinum-certified hit of the very first Freddie Jackson album, the Grammy-nominated ***Rock Me Tonight.***

And that masterful voice recaptures all the thrill of last year's introduction on his second Capitol album, ***Just Like The First time.***

"I feel I gave my fans better than the first album," says Jackson. "The first time is magical, brand-new, but I feel strongly that I gave the same quality, if not better, with this one."

In ten songs, produced by six different production teams, ***Just Like The First Time*** captures Jackson's richly soulful style in a variety of moods. "I sing from the heart," Jackson declares.

"I think I have a natural approach. I get a lot of feeling out of singing — I've gone into character, trying to relate to what someone else might go through."

***Just Like The First Time*** sports "just a tad more production," says Jackson. "That comes with growth. But it's still simple.

"I tried not to go off in another direction; I believe in first doing for yourself, to warrant someone else liking it. If it's what I want, then other people can enjoy it the way I do."

Jackson's own introduction to performing came as lead singer for numerous local bands, one of which, LJE, teamed him with a long-time friend, Paul Laurence.

"We were out there a lot of years, knocking on doors, doing clubs, like every struggling artist. It was fun times, actually; you do it at your leisure."

Still, Freddie was dead serious about making a career as an entertainer, and left LJE to audition in Los Angeles for the group Mystic Merlin.

He recorded the band's third and last album with them, but never toured and returned to New York with an even more burning desire to make it.

On leave of absence from his job as a word processor, Jackson played such New York nightspots as Sweetwater's, Tramp's and The Bushes.

He'd kept up his creative relationship with Paul Laurence, and sang backup vocals on tour and in studio sessions for Melba Moore, Evelyn King, Lillo Thomas, Angela Bofill, Mtume and other artists.

Then, one night, Paul Laurence invited Melba Moore to see Jackson perform — at a club called Freddie's, appropriately.

Melba was more than enthused, Jackson recalls: "I was singing 'Good Morning Heartache,' and she was just screaming.

"I knew people could relate to that song, but . . ." Moore's excitement led to a management deal with Hush Productions, and in turn to a Capitol recording contract.

"Once I feel the intensity, I come alive. My energies are jumping."

## Rhythm and Blues

BALTIMORE — The top rhythm and blues artists in the country will take the stage at the Baltimore Arena at 7:00 p.m. on August 7 when the 1988 Budweiser Superfest concert series comes to Baltimore.

Set to appear at the star-studded, super concert are Freddie Jackson, Teena Marie, Stephanie Mills, The Deele, and Force MDs.

The inaugural Budweiser Superfest concert series was held in 1980.

Since then, Superfest has performed to record audiences throughout the country, gaining recognition as one of the country's premier rhythm and blues concert tour.

Once again, the 1988 Budweiser Superfest will feature a state-of-the-art revolving stage which permits one group to break down or set up while another group is performing, minimizing "down time" between performances.

Last year, the Budweiser Superfest tour performed before more than 255,000 fans in 15 markets. The Superfest included such stars as Luther Vandross, Patti LaBelle, and Whitney Houston.

This year, the Budweiser Superfest will tour to 16 cities across the country.

In addition to Baltimore, other cities include: Greensboro, N.C.; New York; Dallas; Houston; Miami; Atlanta; Philadelphia; Detroit; Los Angeles; Oakland, Calif.; Chicago; Cleveland; St. Louis; New Orleans; and Washington, D.C.

Tickets are available at the Arena Box Office; Lyric Theatre; and all Ticketcenter outlets, including the Hecht Company.

The Budweiser Superfest is sponsored by Budweiser beer, a product of Anheuser-Busch, Inc. The national promoter of the tour is A-H Enterprises.

## About Stephanie Mills

BALTIMORE — Stephanie Mills began singing in her native Brooklyn, New York at the age of 3.

By age 9, she had landed her first Broadway role in a production of "Maggie Flynn." At 16, she gained national acclaim starring as "Dorothy" in the Tony-winning Broadway show, "The Wiz."

Today, her ongoing romance with contemporary music continues in the studio and on stage.

Mills' dynamic vocal abilities have sold millions of records around the world, earning her both the coveted Grammy and American Music Awards.

***If I Were Your Woman,*** her newest MCA album, is the latest step forward in Mills' steadily advancing career.

She entered the pop music world early — at the tender age of 11, she won the "Amateur Hour" contest at the legendary Apollo Theater for six consecutive weeks, winning her first professional booking as the Isley Brothers' opening act.

Later, she dazzled audiences in her triumphant five-year run of "The Wiz." Mills was determined to capture her exciting performance on vinyl; in 1979, teaming with James Mtume and Reggie Lucas, she recorded her debut album, ***Watcha' Gonna Do With My Lovin'.***

The LP sold over one million copies, launching two smash singles, the title cut and the rocking "Put Your Body In It."

The certified-gold ***Sweet Sensation*** LP came next — the album featured another pair of hits, the title tune and "Never Knew Love Like This Before" (yet another gold record).

1980 found Mills at a rare level of public and music industry renown. She won a Grammy for "Best Female R&B Vocalist" performance, as well as being chosen as billboard's "Top Disco Artist" and "R&B Female Artist of the Year."

Mills' star rose even further in 1981. Her ***Stephanie*** album won her an American Music Award for "Best Female R&B Vocalist" and a nomination for "Best-Selling Black Music LP."

She also wowed audiences touring with The Commodores and Teddy Pendergrass.

In 1982, Mills released ***Tantalizing Hot,*** followed by the Grammy-nominated ***Merciless.***

During the spring of '83, she branched out again, this time with a two-week dramatic acting role on NBC-TV's daytime drama "Search For Tomorrow" and ABC-TV's "Love Boat."

In 1984, she successfully returned as "Dorothy" in the revival of "The Wiz" — in doing so, she made history as the youngest actress ever to return to a Broadway role she had originally created.

During "The Wiz," Mills recorded ***I've Got The Cure,*** highlighted by "The Medicine Song," which reached No. 1 on the Billboard Dance charts.

Moving to MCA, her self-titled debut LP for the label brought her yet another No. 1 record, "(I've Learned To Respect) The Power Of Love.

From theater to pop and R&B, Stephanie Mills has combined a spectrum of styles and made them her own.

***"If I Were Your Woman"*** *is evidence that her prodigal talents have only deepened as her career has escalated.*