

**J**ames Harris III and Terry Lewis are regarded as one of the greatest producing tandems in the history of recorded music. During my phone conversation with James Harris (better known to the world as Jimmy Jam), the groundbreaking fifty-five-year-old producer, composer, songwriter, arranger, and mixer fielded my questions with the same depth and creativity that has propelled him to achieve earth-shattering success with his legendary partner since the early 1980s.

Hailing from the Southside of Minneapolis, Minnesota, Harris found himself surrounded by music as a child. His father, James "Cornbread" Harris Sr., a famous local musician, always had musical instruments lying around his house. His mother constantly played various types of music there. At the tender age of five, Harris began playing the drums. A few years later at twelve years old, he was playing drums at regular gigs with his father's band in clubs throughout Minneapolis.

The trajectory of his life would change at thirteen years old when he would cross paths with a young bassist named Terry Lewis at the University of Minnesota through the Upward Bound program. Over the next few years, they remained friends and played in rival bands against Prince and Morris Day. By the early 1980s, Lewis finally convinced Harris to join his band Flyte Tyme, not as their drummer but as their keyboardist. Soon thereafter, Day and Lewis mutually agreed to form the Time due to a deal Day had struck with Prince over the usage of a track Day wrote for his *Dirty Mind* album.

During this juncture, Harris and Lewis decided to go to Los Angeles after the Time's first tour was over. They began creating demos with a four-track recorder, Harris's keyboard, and Lewis's bass. Their demos eventually landed in the hands of Dick Griffey at Solar Records through the assistance of Leon Sylvers and A&R Dina Andrews, who helped them set up Flyte Tyme Productions. They would get their first work in 1982 on Dynasty's *Right Back at Cha!* and Klymaxx's *Girls Will Be Girls*, both on Solar, and the S.O.S. Band's album *S.O.S. III* on Tabu Records.

The following year, while working on the S.O.S. Band's next album during a short break from Prince's 1999 tour (with Prince, the Time, and Vanity 6), Harris and Lewis ended up missing one of the shows in Texas due to inclement weather and were consequently terminated from the band by Prince.

Following their removal from the Time, they fortified their union as a songwriting and production team, charting with the S.O.S. Band's 1983 hit, "Just Be Good to Me"—the same song they were working on when they got fired. Since then, they've produced sixteen number one hits, and their seamless strokes of genius have reverberated in gold and platinum throughout popular culture for the past three decades. They've produced seminal hits for some of pop, R&B, and gospel's music royalty including Janet Jackson, Michael Jackson, Gladys Knight and the Pips, New Edition, George Michael, the Human League, Boyz II Men, Chaka Khan, Mariah Carey, Usher, Barry White, Lionel Richie, and Mary J. Blige. What is still evident is their desire to craft masterful art.



(opposite) Promo photo of Flyte Tyme duo Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis for 1992's *Mo' Money*.