



**THE BEST COMPLIMENTS
WE'VE GOTTEN OVER
THE YEARS CAME FROM
THE LEGENDS
LIKE BARRY WHITE.
WHEN WE PLAYED
“COME ON” FOR HIM,
HE SAID, “MAN, THAT
SOUNDS
LIKE ME.”**

The best compliments we've gotten over the years came from the legends like Barry White. We produced a record for him called "Come On." When we played it for him, he started laughing when it was done playing. And he said, "Man, that sounds like me." We felt like that was a great compliment. We did a song for Lionel Richie called "Don't Wanna Lose You." When the song was over, he began to laugh. I asked him, "What's so funny?" He said, "You guys just rewrote [the Commodores'] 'Just to Be Close to You,' but somehow it works when you did it. I can't ever do that. But you guys did it, and it's perfect." And that is what you want singers to feel like when you work with them. There are a ton of other examples as well. It's not rocket science. It's a mix of instinct, many blessings, and the talent from the people singing our songs, because Terry and I aren't going to do that. We can't sing. [laughs]

Looking back on the many hits that you and Terry Lewis have been a part of, what types of music equipment did you used on those classic songs?

Well, for us, it started early on when we were in Minneapolis. Back when everyone was into Moog synthesizers, we were into a synthesizer called the Oberheim. Once again, because we're from Minneapolis, we thought about things differently. The Oberheim synthesizer just had a sound that was different from the other synthesizers. It caused us to write different types of songs. I was listening to "Just Be Good to Me" by S.O.S. Band the other day, and the chords that were on there, along with the bass and texture, all came from the Oberheim. So I think that was an important part of what we did. The Roland 808 drum machine we used was big as well. It was a very influential drum machine. The original LinnDrum, which was the LM-1, was used on the early Time records. We did everything on [Janet Jackson's] *Control* album with the LM-1 machine. There was a drum machine called the [Oberheim] DMX that we used on Cherelle's record. There was a synthesizer called the Mirage. It wasn't held in high regard by a lot of people. I remember a company called Ensoniq made it. The crazy sounds you hear on Janet's "Nasty" record came from the Mirage. That was also a major influence on us. The recording techniques we used were important as well. We started out using twenty-four-track tape and everybody switched over to digital tape at one point in time. But we stuck with analog. There was a product called Dolby SR that came out that worked really well for us. We wanted to stick to the analog tape sound. The Dolby SR allowed us to use half the amount of tape that we normally used, but it also gave us a lot of low frequency range that was important to our records. Technologically, we just tried to keep up with everything that was happening. But these machines were instrumental in our innovations and served as the basis for what we created in our records.

As one half of one of the most important producing tandems over the past thirty years, did you and Terry Lewis know how influential your music would become and that it would change the course and culture around music?

No. You don't know what you're doing when you're doing it. We just tried to make the best records we could. We've been involved with a few things that we recognized early on that would mean something. When we were with the Time, we knew that was going to be different. We could tell by the way the audiences reacted to us and our songs at our concerts that it was going to be special. When people started coming to our shows dressed like us, we realized that we were having some kind of impact. When we did music for the S.O.S. Band, all of a sudden the 808 drum machine became a part of a bunch of songs. We figured that there was some type of influence there that people liked, and that was kind of cool. When we did Janet's *Control* record, it sounded different than anything else that was on radio at that time. The fact that it opened pop radio up to Black up-tempo songs was a big deal. If you remember radio at that time, the only way a Black artist could have a song on the pop charts was if it was a ballad. If it was an up-tempo Black record, it was basically only on the Black charts. When [Janet's] "What Have You Done for Me Lately" hit radio [in 1986], all of a sudden, funk was back on pop radio, and it opened things up again. In that moment, we realized that it was kind of cool that it happened. So, to me, it's kind of a series of steps. If you look back overall at the whole thing—which is something we don't do a lot of, honestly, because we're still focused on going forward—but we appreciate everything we've been blessed to do. I don't think we really ever look at it like we've been involved with so many movements, but what we've been happy about is that we were involved in things that changed people's lives in a positive way. ☀

Read the expanded interview at waxpoetics.com