

# ENTERTAINMENT



**BIOGRAPHY OF FIESTA**

When a previously unknown group scores as solid a hit as Fiesta is doing with their Arista Records debut, the public generally infers that this first big score came from out of the blue. Fiesta, however, like the O'Jays, The Spinners and numerous other vocal groups to whom they have already been compared, have an impressive background in making music. These five vocalists have built steadily toward their current success, have developed their sound over the years on street corners, in gospel groups, in clubs. In other words, Fiesta had this coming, drawing inspirational influence from earlier groups, creating a distinctive musical signature through their vocal precision and ability to project a lyric.

The four-man nucleus of Fiesta -- Thomas Bullock, Thomas Wiley, Wesley Lee and Johnny Burton--were all bred within an eight-block radius in New Jersey and knew each other from school, social clubs, parties and other places where singers would harmonize. Fiesta was completed when Memphis-born Carl Sims joined up, coming out of the retirement imposed by the tragic air crash that took the lives of Otis Redding and The Bar-Kays. Carl had hung out at the Stax offices since grade school days, and while still in his teens he became The Bar-Kays' lead singer. On the night of the crash, he and the group's bass player took a commercial flight since there wasn't room for everyone on the private plane. The Bar-Kays were ultimately reformed, but Carl stayed out of the music business until hearing Fiesta.

Fiesta's leader Tommy Bullock, who prefers to be called Andre, was raised on gospel music. His father was a gospel singer, and when Tommy was 16 he began his career in a group known as the Swanee Quintet Junior, inspired by the famous gospel group the Swanee Quintet. He also listened to more secular music by artists such as The Temptations and The Spinners, and patterned his "free time" singing after those models, as well as from such influences as east-coast doo-wop, The O'Jays and Funkadelic.

Fiesta began to come together when Tommy met Thomas "Cookie" Wiley.

Wiley also sprang from a musical parental background, but with a significant difference: his father played in jazz and pop bands, and until he was nine or ten, Cookie would travel to gigs with his father. Soon thereafter he graduated to street corner rock and roll singing with his friends and, at 29, he is already a veteran musicmaker who credits Fiesta's versatility and persistence for keeping the members together through difficult adjustment periods. Classical piano, which he studied in school and still likes to play, has added to the diverse base that forms his musical character.

The son of a Georgia minister, Wesley Lee, Jr. sang in church and in school choirs, and has been a member of the Swan Silvertones. By the age of 13, he had moved to New Jersey, and his career followed the developmental route--from high school groups, to local groups, the professional performing--of so many artists, before his progress was interrupted by a stint in the U.S. Army. Wesley characterizes himself as the "serious" member of Fiesta, concerned with projecting a song's meaning, and has begun to compose original material for the group.

With encouragement of a very musical family, and aided by a teacher who recognized his potential, Johnny Burton's talents led him through a diverse musical background that included vocalizing in an Augusta, Georgia spiritual group called Echoes of Glory ("because I met some guys from the South and it sounded interesting") and forming his own pop group in his native New Jersey. Wes and Cookie recruited him into their circle, and they've been a unit ever since.

It's been a steady path to their debut album, and Fiesta, with tracks as exciting as "E.S.P.," is evidence that this group has taken up permanent residence in music's winner's circle.

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