

Music Hath Charm — Slavery

from page 22

Tramaine, whose debut album placed on the inspirational charts several months ago, or his friend Andrea Crouch, who has been attracting inter-racial audiences to his gospel concerts for nearly a decade, or even his older brother Edwin Hawkins, who sold over a million copies of "Oh Happy Days" in 1969, Walter Hawkins has had little success in cracking the white market.

The bearded singer-pianist speculated that the emotion-charged, often uptempo music he performs with his 43-voice Love Center Choir is too intense for many white listeners. "I think we're a little too hot, too raw, too wild or whatever," he explained. "I will not prostitute myself or compromise just to reach the white market, however if I cross over, fine, but I think it's important for our people to feel we belong to them."

His two biggest-selling albums 1975's "Love Alive" and 1978's "Love Alive II" on the Waco, Texas-based Light Label, both featured the Love Center Choir. His next album, recorded last February at the Oakland Auditorium Theater and set for release next month, highlights the Hawkins family, a nine member group that includes Edwin and Tramaine, in addition to the Tower of Power horn section and Maurice White, leader of the secular soul group Earth, Wind and Fire.

"I'm always thinking in terms of broadening our market," said Walter, who is determined to reach a wider audience without watering down his style or compromising the religious content of his lyrics. "When you think of a gospel artist of the caliber of an Andrea who sells two to three hundred thousand units with

each album and has been doing that for the past seven years, then something's wrong with the marketing strategy. If all these churches are full every Sunday all across the country and you're only reaching two to three hundred thousand, you're not reaching the entire gospel market, let alone crossing over into some of the other markets.

"The strategy behind our new album is that the material is a little bit more progressive than what we've been doing. I thought that if we did it live, it would add enough of spiritual flavor so that it would not be offensive to the gospel market and at the same time would have appeal in the secular market."

Walter Hawkins began his professional career in the late '60s as a member of the Northern California State Youth Choir of the Church of God in Christ, which was directed by brother Edwin. When the choir's custom-made recording of "Oh Happy Day" surprised everyone involved by becoming one of 1969's biggest pop hits, the group changed its name to the Edwin Hawkins Singers. After three years of touring, Walter dropped out to form Selah, a short-lived-message-oriented secular group. "A lot of people tried to say that there was something that happened between Edwin and myself, but nothing ever did," Walter said of his departure from the Hawkins Singers.

Walter turned the active directorship of the Love Center Choir over to Edwin two years ago. "The choir has been real good for Ed," Walter explained. "When the Hawkins Singers dissolved, he didn't really have his own baby. Since then, the choir has really sparked his inspiration to write

from page 5

go back to."

Blacks, initially brought to American shores to perform cheap agricultural labor, have lost their land - to ignorance and traditions, to unscrupulous land dealers and in exchange for the dreams of life in the big city, Brown said.

The agriculture commission report also says blacks who are offered the chance to farm, whether they have lived on the land before or not, often refuse because of tales from pre-Civil War days.

"I imagine the slavery still has a lot to do with it," Sams said. "They feel like we were more or less chattels at one time. They read the history and they don't want to be associated with farming too much."

Stories of post-Civil War farming also discourage blacks from farming according to the report.

"Blacks did not always receive payments due them. Because the majority of blacks were illiterate, they were unable to detect unfair practices by unscrupulous land owners," the report

Black Common Market Asked By Hatcher

Richard G. Hatcher, mayor of Gary, Ind. says a "Black Common Market" of cities suffering from the flight of white businesses has been proposed.

The market would be composed of cities with black mayors and would be similar to the European Common Market and designed to help bolster the economies of such cities as Gary, Detroit and Newark, N.J., Hatcher said.

Under Hatcher's proposal, cities in the "Black Common Market" would specialize in certain industries, lowering the costs of production and thus lowering costs to consumers.

The proposal was made by Hatcher at a two-day conference of black leaders of Operation PUSH headquarters in Chicago.

says.

A 1939 letter from a black sharecropper shows the problems blacks faced in farming:

"That means that the sharecroppers would not get but 3 bales of cotton out of 8 bales, so all of the farmers began to give the labor notice to move. Sharecropper Walter Johnson wrote to a Lincoln University professor before moving his family.

Even blacks fortunate enough to own land did not fare much better

"The great tragedy in East Texas is that the blacks owned the land and they let it get away," Brown said.

It got away several ways.

"One of the biggest contributors to the great decline in black property is a failure of the elderly owners to write wills," the report says. "A pervasive superstition among many older rural black people is that if they write a will, it is at that point they will die"

Bennett Productions Holding Auditions

The Marion Bennett Productions Inc. is holding auditions for trials, a video film for a television series, January 19 & 20 at Zion Methodist Church, 2108 Revere from 6:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m.

The auditions are open to all ages and no experience necessary. There are 50 different parts available. For further information, contact Randy T. Williams or Patricia Mickel at 648-7806 or 643-7907.

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