

ENTERTAINMENT

Soul Kiss: Delicious enough to eat

By Sandra L. West  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

"Soul Kiss" by Columbus, Ga. native Shay Youngblood (Riverhead Books 1998, Paperback \$12.00 207 pp) is a Peach State coming-of-age saga which exalts the power of words.

The cast includes Mariah, who grows up searching for love as segregation wanes; her loose-as-a-goose, pink-satin-slip-wearing, drug addict mother, Coral, who abandons her; her irresponsible artist father, Matisse, who is underachieving in California; maiden aunts Merleen and Faith who live graciously in Georgia surrounded by literature and music; and Mariah's from-the-wrong-side-of-the-tracks childhood friends who smoke, cuss and fuss.

What is startlingly beautiful about this disturbing saga is the achingly lonely tone throughout and the erotic perceptions of Mariah.

Coral, who bathed her child in surrealism and soft pink light bulbs, taught Mariah the power of words. She wrote them on bits of paper, every day. This is how young Mariah would learn vocabulary.

"The first evening Mama doesn't come back, I make a sandwich with leaves from her good-bye letter. I want to eat her words." When Aunt Merleen teaches her to tend a vegetable garden,

Mariah prays in un-churched fashion: "Secretly, I planted words written on scraps of paper. I tended them, spoke to them, and waited for things like love and pink, music and Mama to grow between the rows of leafy vegetables."

Mariah misses Coral, is titillated by female lovers and raped by a male stranger. Having escaped from her aunts, she is mistreated by her father who pumps her with Valium and paints her nude.

Mariah keeps everything inside until "words fly from my throat like birds. I spit out every detail like poison."

By the end of this troubling but lyrical novel, the abandoned young woman reconciles: "Alone in my room that night, I write down the last word my mother gave me. Water. I lift the edge of the paper to my lips and I drink it off the page, swallow it in two long syllables until it meets the place that is burning as brightly as day. It is as if the weight of a thousand stones has been lifted from my chest. I am light as a page in a blank book. I feel empty, but somehow whole... When she comes through the door I will drink her up in long greedy swallows. I remember each word my mother gave me and I savor the taste of her soul kisses."

Sandra West is a Richmond, Va.-based writer.

Juneteenth

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getting the news to the slaves on time.

"Other media outlets should get behind this holiday because it is an important time in our history," KCEP FM 88.1 programming director Louis "LC" Connors Jr. said.

The radio station donated the stage.

"This is a highly significant day in our history," said Edward L. Watson, president of Friends and Families of the West Las Vegas Library. "I just came to celebrate with my beautiful brothers and sisters."



Sentinel-Voice photo by John Broussard  
Event information provider Mary Jackson, seated, gives Blanche Walker, plenty of helpful information during Saturday's Juneteenth celebration.

Washington

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rather "in-your-face" colored outfit. But it all fits the music.

**The Scoop:** Was it your idea to go with the bright colors?

**Grover:** No, it was my wife and business partner, Christine's idea and the record label's. They agreed that since the music was so different, I should also have a different look for the cover.

**The Scoop:** What activities will you pursue later this year?

**Grover:** In the fall I'm really looking forward to doing the Fall Cognac Hennessy Tour. This tour also includes a jazz search for new artists. It gives us a chance to listen to the music of some of the finest young musicians in the country. We get about 400-450 tapes and narrow it down to the final four tapes. We then fly those four finalists in to New York. This year's jazz search finals are on October 3rd at The Bottom Line in New York City.

**The Scoop:** You played at President Clinton's 50th birthday party at Radio City Music Hall. What was that like?

**Grover:** It was wonderful. I had a chance to perform and see some friends that I hadn't seen

for a long time, especially seeing guys like Lou Merini (Blue-Loo) and Ralph McDonald. Ralph worked with me on some of my earlier albums. He wrote "Just The Two of Us," "Watching You, Watching Me," and had a hand in writing "Mr. Magic" and so many others.

**The Scoop:** You recently performed with John Williams and the Boston Pops Orchestra. Have you ever had a secret desire to conduct the orchestra?

**GROVER:** Sure, who hasn't? I think everybody has a secret desire to do that. That's one of the great elements of music—it's all inclusive...I'm performing on John's (Williams) latest CD with The London Symphony, called "The Hollywood Sound," which features music from great Hollywood movies. I'm doing a seven-and-half-minute version of some of the music from the movie "A Place In The Sun."

**The Scoop:** Isn't your son also an accomplished musician?

**Grover:** Yes, he's written songs with me. We wrote the song "Summer Chill," which is on the "Next Exit" CD. He's also a recording engineer and working for Geffen Records in L.A. My son loves L.A.'s weather.



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