

U.S. fans remember Aaliyah

By Kenji Jasper
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In my near ten years as a music journalist, I have seen and reported artists rising and falling, going from the hit to the miss in a matter of months (or sometimes even days).

I've seen arrests, nervous breakdowns, marriages, divorces, people coming out on national television. Some have gone to jail, found God and begun the lifelong quest to reach nirvana.

And I have also seen death.

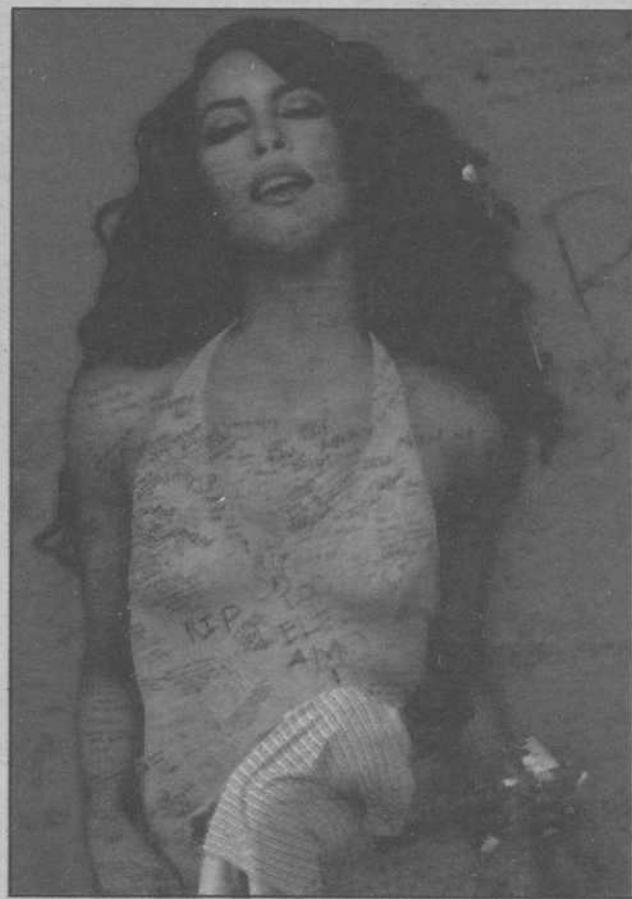
The overdoses and suicides, even the murders, just always seemed a complement to the chaos of the industry that is charged with easing the pain of wounded nations.

But when my cell phone rang in the middle of the night on August 26, 2001, in the middle of a loft party I'd crashed with a friend, I answered it with a sense of foreboding.

And as my big sister Kaypri told me that Aaliyah had died in a plane crash, I almost wished that I'd turned the ringer off.

The earth should have been shaking.

The laughing and swaying partygoers around me should have known on instinct that something in the world just wasn't right anymore. But they didn't. And as I pulled two other men into my blurry abyss of sor-



A Fan of singer Aaliyah writes message on a Sunset Boulevard billboard promoting Aaliyah's latest album Monday, in West Hollywood, Calif. Aaliyah, 22, and eight others died in a plane crash in Bahamas on Saturday.

(AP Photo/Kevork Djansezian)

row and unanswered questions, I felt like I'd stepped into another dimension.

I told myself that I had to be dreaming, that the Creator didn't allow things like this to happen. She was going to climb out of that plane's burning fuselage like a phoenix coming out of the ashes. But when I awoke the next morning, sluggish and fatigued, the sounds of her music past filled the air as Brooklyn

brothers bumped "Back and Forth" and "Are That Somebody" through their systems in ghetto remembrance.

What I wonder, beyond all of the sentimental but cliched expressions that will be made, is whether we'll really understand what it is that we lost.

I think that when it comes to men and the female performers they love, there are only a few categories. There

is the diva, the image of the woman who is larger than life, whose has a voice, and moves, an aura, that can seemingly stop bullets.

Then there's the sex bomb, the usually talentless, all-you-can-eat buffet of T&A laid out before us in hopes that we'll buy the CD for the cover art. She almost always falls away like dead skin.

And there's the soft and precious nice girl, wholesome and sexually repressed, marketed and packaged to appeal to our girl-next-door sensibilities. She never curses, drinks, smokes, or says anything suggestive. And we supposedly love her for that, because she forces our primitive imaginations to create everything she denies us.

Aaliyah was none of these types and all of them at the same time.

Her warm breathy vocals gave us the impression of a woman who was too cool to be categorized. Physically she gave us a little midriff and a lot to imagine with the kind of beauty that only appears a few times within a generation.

The songs she chose to sing candidly captured the image of a young black woman in relation to her man, or lack of one. She loved and scolded us, dismissed and welcomed, encouraged and challenged.

(See Aaliyah, Page 17)



Sentinel-Voice photo by John Broussard

O'Jays founding member Eddie Levert belts out a classic song to the capacity crowd at Sam's Town.

O'Jays

(Continued from Page 10)

Without missing a beat, a turn, a slide or a "Shoop-Shoop," newest member Eric Grant, and veterans Eddie Levert and Walter Williams showed up...and showed out at the Sam's Town Live venue Saturday night.

Admittedly, there is nothing like reviewing a full-house show. This taste of soul oversold and packed up the room, leaving not a ticket to be sold, or even scalped!

Unlike the average Vegas concert, there were no spares to be found.

Vegas fans were apparently thankful, if not joyous, and ostensibly appreciative of the return of a sound that took over the look and feel of soul music, and laid a foundation for many a new jack.

The intro to "Backstabbers," was received as if it was really 1972, and there really was a "party over here!" "Used To Be My Girl" had the feel of what Jill Scott would describe as "block parties and penny candies."

With Walter on the bottom playing the bass like a pro, every woman in the crowd blissfully felt like his "Darlin' Darlin' Baby," as the trio step-stepped and stepped across into a Temp-like slide again, and again.

It is a widely held opinion that a certain feel of class and style that once beamed thru the soul of R&B has become lost to a cash-ruled glitz.

Notwithstanding the numerous bands that have also stood strong, the O'Jays have led a class of living legends.

The trio has toured and been received the world over, skyrocketing more than 50 hit singles over the course of the 70s, 80s and 90s.

Sam's Town's one-nighter gigs have certainly showed up on the charts as a strong arm for the entertainment dollar here of late.

According to Entertainment Production Manager Mary Marshall, the Saturday show was sold to capacity at a maximum of 1,050 seats.

Casino managers Jenice Souza and Datron Green both agreed that the new Live series has revitalized Sam's Town, and given the property a fighting chance against the big boys who bring big names to the strip.

Besides the fact that The O'Jays packed Live beyond capacity, they gave a lively, entertaining, well-timed, well-arranged performance, with the help of an incredibly talented mini-symphony.

The band partnered well with the vocals of the veteran trio and was able to mix up a bit of salsa and new jack with the "old school" crooner's stylings.

It goes without saying that the brothers have cornered both the old and new school markets on style and class. After a night with the O'Jays, one can't help but sing...

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