



NEWS FROM A&M RECORDS

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MELVIN VAN PEEBLES

(A Biography)

(A Slave Aint Supposed to Die a Natural Death)

Melvin Van Peebles, A&M recording artist, writer, and producer, has just completed his second album for the label, entitled, "Aint Supposed to Die a Natural Death." His first was "Brer Soul."

The quote: "A slave aint supposed to die a natural death."

Van Peebles has been primarily known for his work in films (his "Story of a Three-Day Pass," made in France, was a highlight of the 1967 San Francisco Film Festival, and he is currently completing his first American film, to be released by Columbia Pictures--called "Watermelon Man," starring Godfrey Cambridge and Estelle Parsons), and in literature (the author of numerous novels including "A Bear for the FBI," published by Trident Press).

Van Peebles explains how he first got the idea for his albums:

"I was lying in bed here in the States listening to some Black Soul music, and I couldn't hear anything I could relate to as far as a meaningful lyric was concerned. To hear that type of lyric I had to go all the way back to the early black singers--Blind Lemon Jefferson, Jesse Fuller, Leadbelly, early Jimmy Rushing--to get a meaningful Black lyric. They weren't saying the same thing--but they were telling it like it was in their time."

So Melvin went to New York, got together "some of the heaviest jazz people I know to play on this album," and recorded his songs telling it like it is, this time around, and called it "Brer Soul."

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Telling it like it is is what Melvin is all about. His albums mark a return to the idiomatic language that is his race's, set to exciting music that is black rooted. "But," cautions Van Peebles, "these are records for everybody to dig. They're albums that Black people can understand, but if white people take the time to learn the niceties of Black culture, they will be able to appreciate them as well as anything else."

When Van Peebles first began to put "Soul" together, he was not interested in emulating anything that "had gone down before." "I didn't feel I had to put in those chords that would let people know I'm hip to the classics, or those certain words that everybody could understand. I simply said 'Forget it baby,' and concentrated on doing my own thing, and getting as close to my reality as possible."

Although both albums are filled with lyrics that are "Niggerese," as Van Peebles labels them, they are basically universal in concept. "You can step into Harlem, the Fillmore, Watts, any black neighborhood in this country, and it's all the same town with the same problem."

Adds Melvin, "The racial situation is so crushing in America that it grounds down practically all differences, and blacks are pretty much the same throughout the country. Granted we've never been allowed to feel the sense of a larger black community, but it exists. There exists even a larger community than this--the community of human beings. If the white community ever gets its head halfway straight perhaps it will be able to see THAT universality in the human experience. A universality that transcends geography and color."

Van Peebles cites all the famous writers down through history who were writing in their own particular areas, in their own particular languages. "People

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like Shakespeare and Cervantes were countries apart, and languages apart. But they wailed deep enough, and long enough to transcend these boundaries. What they laid down transcended geography, color, and language. Actually I feel the same thing is true of my album--it is universal in the human condition."

The artist feels that his affiliation with A&M is a positive step toward the recognizance of the Black artist. "The Black artist's situation in America today is very unique. The white majority has made him feel that everything he had going for himself was wrong, while at the same time they were stealing the artist blind left and right.

"I feel that I've made room for other Black cats to move in and do their own thing. Actually it can help Black people get rid of the artistic schizophrenia that the whites demand. These records are exactly what I want to say--the way I want to say it."

Amen." - Bob Garcia.

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MELVIN VAN PEEBLES
AINT SUPPOSED TO DIE A NATURAL DEATH
On A&M Records

Produced and Conceived by Melvin Van Peebles

Arranged and Conducted by Warren Smith

Melvin Van Peebles-vocals

Warren Smith-drums, percussion

Bross Townsend-piano, organ, electric harpsichord

Herb Bushler-bass, electric bass, violin, tambourine

Carl Lynch-guitar, bass guitar

Nat Woodard-trumpet, cornet

Al Gibbons/George Barrow-tenor sax, soprano sax

Howard Johnson-baritone sax, Flugel horn, tuba

'Nuf Said'

