



JACK LLOYD

Pop Sounds

Syreeta Preparing For a Major Tour

The arrival of a talented young performer named Syreeta is about two years behind schedule, but Syreeta — who happens to be the former Mrs. Stevie Wonder — figures the delay worked out for the best. Two years ago, all the little things that can go wrong would have caused a case of ulcers, she noted. But "now all the pieces are finally falling into place nicely," Syreeta said.

In addition, Syreeta's relationship with her former husband has never been better. They not only talk to each other like civilized folks, but Stevie had a major role in the production of both of Syreeta's albums for Tamla Records, which is a branch of the Motown label.

"We were married when the first album came out," she said, "and divorced when we did the second album."

Stevie produced "Syreeta," released two years ago, and her most recent LP, titled "Stevie Wonder Presents Syreeta." In addition, Stevie and Syreeta collaborated on writing about half of the songs on each album, which is a nice way for divorced people to behave.

On New Album

This post-matrimonial rapport is also evident on Stevie's own new album, "Fulfillingness' Final Finale," which has Syreeta among the background singers on one of the tracks.

"Paul Anka came into the studio and a lot of other people," she said, "and I'm just one of these people who gets everyone together. You know, let's have a party — that kind of thing. So we all got together and sang on the recording."

Syreeta (Syreeta Wright is the full name) evaluated her three and a half years of marriage to Stevie Wonder, generally acknowledged as a "genius" in pop music circles, as "fun," but —

"Steve was into music totally . . . And there was a void, a little gap in my life. I wasn't singing much at the time . . . Things are different now. Now I understand what he was going through at the time. So we lost a little piece of paper but gained much more. We gained understanding. I'm very proud of the way our relationship has grown. The ugliness that so often goes with divorce doesn't have to be."

A Good Manager

During the interview last week, Syreeta was gearing herself for her first major tour — a tour that will bring her into Philadelphia's Bijou Cafe in the very near future.

All of this failed to happen after the release of her first

album for a number of reasons. "For one thing, you need a good manager," Syreeta said, "and I didn't have one at the time. Now I do. He's involved and concerned. It was frustrating at the time, but looking back, I think I'm better able to handle things now."

Actually, Syreeta's first shot came six years ago. She recorded a single for Motown which did "absolutely nothing." She then took a secretarial job at Motown and periodically filled in as a background singer on recordings and cutting demonstration records for singers such as Diana Ross.

"It was during this period that I met Stevie and our relationship developed," Syreeta noted. And it was Stevie Wonder who spotted her potential as a writer.

"I wrote poetry since I was 6 years old," she said. "But it was very personal. I had no intention of anyone ever seeing it. But Stevie had this tune and asked me to write lyrics for it. I didn't have much confidence but finally I wrote the lyrics for "Signed, Sealed and Delivered." Well that record sold two million copies, and that gave me a lot of confidence."

She is an elegantly talented lady, and even though Joni Mitchell's appearance at the Temple University Music Festival this Wednesday and Thursday promises to be a repeat of her concert at the Academy of Music last winter, there should be few complaints from her fans. The music she writes and sings — the old songs and the newer material — defies "interpretation" by other singers. No one sings a Joni Mitchell song better than Joni Mitchell, and few artists since the palmy days of Peter, Paul and Mary have found greater cross-section of appeal. She has become a genuine pop star without sacrificing the integrity of her music. Never mind the fact that she has discarded the basic folkie attire of another era for slinky gowns and that she has learned something about showmanship.

She is a stunning talent and her music is always honest. Sometimes painfully so. Her frequently brooding, sometimes slashing lyrics reflect the life and times of Joni Mitchell. Her music is of such a highly personal nature that there is often the sensation that Joni Mitchell is telling us more about Joni Mitchell than we have any right to know. Yet the spell she casts on stage continues to bring us back for more.