



people - places 'n' situwayshuns

By BILL LANE

•THE marriage of Shalamar singer Jeffrey Daniels and solo song star Stephanie Mills has come to a projected end, it appears. The demise of the coupling became official the other day when a statement appeared in the NY Daily News credited to Miss Mills confirming what numerous black publications had been saying a long time: in fact, almost from the day the two got married here in a whirlwind ceremony presided over by the Rev. James Cleveland. What else is new?

TRACY Morgan, the busy redhead who hosts the shows in the Cabaret room of the Playboy Club here, has come up with what looks to be a real winner for the place. It's called Playboy's Celebrity Night. It features professional show talent from all over the area; talent that happens to be, in some cases, out of work at the time but ready to do a quick show piece to keep in shape.

Morgan hosts the show, tossing off lively humor the likes of which she writes for many top-name comics of television and stage. Some of the celeb performers, however, are at the place because they are booked there, on a "gig." Like comic Larry Storch, designer and fashion critic Mr. Blackwell, comic and TV actor Phil Foster, famed midget Billy Barty and comic Scoey Mitchell. Mitchell, who was on hand for the kickoff program, says his opener has not been announced yet. Also on hand doing their show things were singer Laura McNaulty, comics Joe Morris, Kelly McDonald and the explosively witty fellow from Bangladesh, Jerry Bednob. Singer Sandra Chris won a lot of plaudits for her singing, making a lot of people wonder where were her hit recordings. And flautist Nika Rejto showed with her amazing "flutes and things" talent why Hubert Laws and the famed James Galway often call on her to accompany them when they are in Hollywood for concerts. She also caused the thought that she could do wonders in concert on her own, but where do you find a booking agent for concert hall flute players?

KURTIS Blow blew millions of black youth out of their musical chairs when he came on via records and radio with his kinetic "rap" recordings. It was not the first time that such peculiar talk salable product on the American market. A fellow named Larry Darnell had sold millions of his talk records years ago, especially one based on the song "I'll Get Along Somehow." And there were others. But Kurtis Blow used the music of today's black youth as a background for his esoteric outpourings that touched the minds of young men who secretly wanted to learn how to "get down" with speech rather than with their dancing feet.

Sylvia Robinson, who made hits years back with her "Love Is Strange" and "Pillow Talk" recordings, began recording special rap series, featuring the Sugar Hill Gang, the Funky Four and the Treacherous Three. She herself became known as the Queen of Rap. Jock Jack Gibson became Jack The Rapper.

But suddenly black radio began a ban on rap records. Some black program directors said the recordings were too profane. Some said they were "too black." How black one can or cannot be in black radio is anybody's guess. Many blacks years ago shunned and condemned the "jive talk" of Cab Calloway and the late Chicago Defender writer Dan Burley.

In fact, in those days it was more chic to be ebony than black. There were songs, like "Ebony Rhapsody." Billy Daniels was the only singer who got away with "Old Black Magic."

Nowadays, it's peculiar that black radio in banning rap records by black artists made a cross-over hit of the new rap recording of the white singer Blondie. Some black stations are also playing a Cockney-sounding "Wikiwrap" disc from Sam Records, also featuring a white singer. One fellow joked, "Next thing you know they'll be selling skin-bleach creams."

When disco was ablaze white discos were criticized for banning mostly black-speech disco songs in favor of those by white singers and musicians. Now some black-oriented radio stations are doing the same thing. Does the word upgrading become polysemic—with many meanings, one of which denotes becoming "like white?"

It would seem that way. If our young people sound "too black," we made them that way. They sound like us.

But just as whites took over disco, until it became tiresome, so are whites making a bid to master rap records. Rap songs. Rap talk.

I attended a club a few nights ago where the place was packed with whites from the L. A. news media and the recording industry. A young white fellow who's a music critic for a big daily newspaper was the in-house deejay, spinning rap records like they were the life blood of the place. People were gettin' down all over the dance floor. It was notable that virtually every song played was by a black singer, or a black group. Why? Because there are comparatively no white rap records with the funky black beat and rapidfire words of the streets. But they remedied that after awhile. Deejay Ken Tucker of the Herald Examiner put on a recording that featured only a soundtrack of stopdown, funky black music. And up to the mike stepped two white chaps called the **Age of Consent**, and they began to rap over the music background like two Anglo-Saxon Kurtis Blows.

I understand now that similar happenings are taking place all over the U. S., with white hipsters doing their level best to turn out their own brand of rap records. Before long, as a natural corollary, the white rock stations that have been playing black rap product will join the contemporary black-oriented radio stations and stop playing them. White rap will be in, and, once again, blacks will have helped to kill their own generic, indigenous creativity. Shades of the days when American blacks were ashamed of their spirituals, blues and jazz. Of course, the subsequent white stamp of approval may have made us proud, but it surely did not bring more money to our pockets. In most cases we lost it, to new white producers and promoters who knew a good money thing when they saw it.

The \$140-billion-a-year black consumer just might be spending himself into the poorhouse—by steadily seeking to buy white. His hard-earned money goes out of the community before it can do any other, less fortunate, blacks any good.

But maybe there's a bright side. Sylvia Robinson says her Sugar Hill Records is preparing to record white rap singers wherever she can find them. So, just as white insurance companies have for years hired black salesmen to gather black business, perhaps this black woman recording executive can upgrade her monetary coffers by tapping the white market the way Ewart Abner did when his black-owned V-J record firm recorded Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons.