

THE

CHAMBERS

BROS

FOUR OF THEM ARE FROM MISSISSIPPI. They are beautifully black, gangly, rather like great Watusi warriors. In addition, there is one whose soft, cockney accent is almost missed, and justifiably so, because it has captured some of the phraseology of the Bronx, a great borough within the metropolis, New York, or more aptly referred to by the very hip as "The Apple." Also, a referent of the very hip, is The Chambers Brothers, who are to them, what is happening in music.

Just where they fit in music, however, is anybody's guess. For those acknowledgers of trends, fads, handles, or "bags," the Chambers Brothers belong to the pop scene; belong to the rock scenes; belong to the psychedelic scene; belong to the rhythm and blues scene; belong to the blues scene. In other words, all those juxtapositions mean they belong to the total music scene, and are playing every conceivable type of music there is.

The above, if it seems to be difficult to understand, is, and does require a stronger definition, but not the Brothers. They are the real, raw truth, and their music, which very recently has been accorded that all important reward, a Gold Record for selling a million albums, suggest only one thing; they are among the valid who will survive while the weak and unwarranted moonbeam chasers will have to look for new routes to renew the once bright music careers.

The Brothers, Joseph, George, Willie, Lester, and Brian Keenan, are creating their own moonbeam. Just how far it will take them in the music world is undeterminable at this time. Even the would-be critics, or so-called authorities are distributing false assumptions when they say the Chamber Brothers will pass with demise of pop music. How the Brothers feel about what they are doing, and what their future looks like, offers something more than a premonition.

Says George, the oldest of the brothers and the bass player of the group, "I don't know. We're trying to deliver some kind of message, like getting people together with peace and love instead of so much violence and everything."

George's priestly mannersism makes you assume immediately he is possessive of great wisdom. You take him point blank to be a sincere, dedicated, funky and soulful musician. The gutbucket from his axe leaves no doubt.

See the Chambers Bros.
at the Playhouse Feb. 1.

There is a majestic, king-like appearance to the youngest Brother Joseph, who makes you feel like a brother when first meeting him. He is for real, possessive of a steady mind, is articulate and eloquent, and reflects great warmth when greeting you with just a cursory, "Hey, what's happening!" And, also, under that handsome warrior expression is an alert mind both musically (he plays guitar and harmonica) and philosophically. He agrees with his brother George that, "With our music we try to bring as many people as we can together. It's like our crusade for togetherness."

Slight, and possessive of a slow, calculated way of putting words in front of words, Willie (also a guitarist) reflects a togetherness all his own, though in size he is the smallest of the Brothers. But you are compelled to agree with

him (specially if you are a fan of the Brothers) that they are trying to express themselves through their music. "We're trying to express the way we feel about life itself and our moods. We're trying to create something."

Lester, referred to in an article as "the harlequin of the group ... a pensive, humanistic



clown," belongs to only part of that quote, the "pensive humanistic" part. He is not as comedic or as clownish as the reference would have you believe. The derby he wears during all his performances and traveling, with the unorthodox snapped brim, might be suggestive of a clown. But the hat thing is not a gimmick, or to make you laugh, it is part of Lester's character ... his thing, and it is "part of the way I feel." His good taste in hats goes well with the good head the hat sits upon, and with a most appropriate philosophy for these times, "happiness, peace and love," he will explain exists within the group. As the group's vocalist (he also doubles on cowbell, harmonica and writing), he exudes his philosophy and through his Blues tinged choruses. In other words, he cooks!

Within the frame work of The Chamber Brothers' sound, rhythm has been the most compelling ingredient. It is the force of the percussionist that punctuates Lester's wailing vocalizing; that accentuates Willie's and Joseph's "gettin' into it" guitaristry, and gives the perfect balance for George's funky Fender bass figures. And it is all provided by Brian who is white, a condition that hasn't been too popular with many of the Brothers' black fans. But when asked how it feels to be the only non-brother and non-black member of the Chamber Brothers, he confidently states:

"Well I don't recognize it after all this time. It's been four and one-half years together, now, and we've done everything together. We've been through all the thick and thin, everything. Living together, eating together, laughing together, crying together, doing everything else but being all the same. The color has nothing to do with it."

Unquestionably, color had nothing to do with Brian being hired by the Brothers to handle their percussion department. George, who is Brian's stablemate in the rhythm department, responds to playing with a white drummer in this way. "I've played in front of quite a few different drummers, but from the very first time with Brian it's been just like clockwork,

everything is always together."

Lester responds to Brian's presence in the group, as though he were George's echo. "Having Brian with us has shown people you don't have to be too black, or too white to love one another. As far as I'm concerned he's got as much soul as anyone I've ever known."

The praises for Brian are justified mainly because being a part of the Brothers means being in tune with what the Chambers Brothers are all about. By his statement he is in concord with what they are doing and what they think of themselves "We don't bag ourselves. We like to try all kinds of stuff. But people ask you, 'What are you in? A soul bag? A psychedelic bag? What's your thing?' We just say it's Chamber Music."

And it is Chamber music— collective sound—which has captured audiences all over the world and brought about the recent demand for the Brothers in Europe (as of this writing the Brothers embarked on their first concert tour out of the United States). They are an accepted part of the music of today, although in many circles their music is not considered "soulful" enough for many of the black fans. In fact, these same fans doubt there is a valid sound soul to what the Brothers are doing, of which some of the Brothers have something to say.

"Yes we consider our music soul music," offered George. "We consider all music soul music. Probably not the kind of soul music that they play on the soul stations..." Then as though having a change of thought, George continued with: "Well, since we very seldom make it on the soul stations, I don't suppose we can call it soul".

Willie, who is like a tiger ... a quiet tiger ... examined the entire soul situation, and if the Brothers are in a soul bag at all.

"I don't put in any bag. I don't think there

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is a bag. It's more like free expression than soul or rhythm and blues."

The subject of soul is a very difficult one, usually, because a definition of what it is has not been fully covered. Willie, however, offered his.

"Soul is a feeling expressed thoroughly. And is within anybody that has the ambition to do that. Everybody has soul. Everybody is born with a soul. Soul is an inner feeling ... the way you feel, the way you express it."

Whether the Brothers have a soul sound or not depends on what you're listening for, and how educated your ear is to the different music which go into all of the music of today. For one, the blues makes up a great portion of what is taking place today. And the Brothers are heavily armed with the very essence of the blues. They also flavor their music with the attractive and exciting hues found in Gospel music. After asking the Brothers about their earliest days in Mississippi and what kind of music they listened to, there is a revelation by Joseph which explains their music growth pattern.

"Blues or pop music, we had no interest in at the time. Our family is very religious and in our house there was no fingerpopping, and there was no whistling either. My father was like a deacon and my mother was very involved in all the

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