

# Hot Cheese and the Fondue of Funk is a very tasty dish; Still Life doesn't get the people moving

by Eric Alper

"Welcome to the Still Life Party Ship," the hand-made sign said. Well, it didn't actually say that, but it should have. With go-go dancers, a juggler, a bar as soon as you walk in, and certain party animals with painted stars and checkerboards on the faces, it seemed like a bad *Fantasy Island* trip.

**Tattoo:** Look, boss. Ze band! Ze band!

**Mr. Rourke:** Yes, my little lisp-speaking love slave. The people you see are Hot Cheese. Their fantasy is to play at The Underground, with only the finest funk, disco and rhythm and blues classics to test their soundalike skills.

Get the picture? Opener Hot Cheese succeeded. With such get-on-the-dance-floor-hey-let's-boogie standards like "Sex Machine," Bowie's "Fame," "Le Freak" and "Superfreak," the band had the audience of 130 sweated up and ready for more.

York's very own Lester McLean and Andrew Craig, sax and keyboards respectively, excelled in the note-for-note musicianship category, especially during Stevie Wonder's "Superstitious."

Lead singer Nigel Barnes, looking like a cross between a *Solid Gold* dancer and Emmanuel Lewis doing an impression of a *Solid Gold* dancer, deserves mention as his voice gave Wild Cherry's "Play That Funky Music" the gnarl and whine it deserves. However, during Michael Jackson's "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," his range finally hit its limit; he sounded more like Barry White.

The backbone of Hot Cheese delivered strong solos when needed and kept the music tight from beginning to end. Drummer Paul Bannerman played stable enough to get a solid beat going, although he could have easily been replaced by a machine. Bassist Bob Bullock and guitarist Scott Element looked bored with their

## CONCERT

Still Life  
with Hot Cheese, the Fondue of Funk  
The Underground  
Wednesday, February 5

choice of instrument, but then, looking cool means to looking bored, doesn't it?

Some very lucky participants went home with sliced cheese given out while Barnes roamed the Underground for non-dancers. It's a good thing they're not called "Spinach Salad Dressing Liver Sauce," or the show could have become messy.

The shortest version of The Beatles "Nowhere Man" ever played ended their fine night. The intermission's music had all of two people on the dance floor — to "Woolly Bully," if you can believe it — which either says something about how well Hot Cheese played, or how bad the choice of music was on Wednesday night. I cheese...er, choose the former.

**Tattoo:** Look boss, it's the second act called Still Lize coming on.

**Mr. Rourke:** Ha ha ha — no, my smaller than a bread-box, cheap-working gopher. That's Still Life. Their unique sound combines the Caribbean and African music with urban rock rhythm and blues. Their fantasy is to find a place with an audience that appreciates their music.

Unfortunately, the Underground wasn't the place. Nothing against the band, whose hour-long set contained a diverse range of melodies and musical styles. The fact is, most of the audience had left by the half-way point. Maybe it had something to do with it being a school night. Or people were resting up for the new *Simpsons* show the next night.

You have to sympathize. But Still Life acted as if they were the house band to WOMAD. Singer Jon Magidsohn was a musical chameleon all night, sometimes a Sting-like falsetto, sometimes the chanter of Bob Marley's "Could You Be Loved?"

Taking its cue from Hot Cheese, the band shimmied and led tribal dances with the crowd during "If You've Got Money," which, coincidentally, is the same song for their video of the same name. Funkier sounds with thoughtful lyrics came later with "In The Sands" and "Time Is Yours."

Still Life has many different musical styles because of the backgrounds of band members. They told me it could only help them bring in outside sources and sounds to experiment with. The good times the band gives its audiences easily compares to a group they can relate to, The Shuffle Demons.

Bassist Dana Cross' Jamaican background gives the band a rich resource to draw from. Bryan Humphrey's drumming experience includes blues/rock heroes The Jeff Healey Band. He stole the show with a powerful drum solo that included Salsa, Indian beats to rock while the band steadily mixed different hypnotic pounding rhythms.

Leader (and ex-York student) Norman Liota wore the grooviest pair of jeans of the night. If I was about three feet taller, I might have fit into them. His "I only play one solo a night" guitar playing was bouncy and noteworthy, despite his decision to stay behind in the mix, to not overpower the superb playing of guitarist Tony Barrett.

Newest member Marc Lulham was an everyman for the evening, playing gentle, forceful breaths on his saxophone, dancing with the crowd, and taking turn on percussion.

With the dancers, the whole sunny *Love Boat* cruise kind of evening was reminiscent of a show that once happened on trampoline. The Hendersons were certainly there, late of Pablo Fanques fair — what a scene. Having been some days in preparation, a splendid time was guaranteed for all. And tonight there were two bands topping the bill.



The lead singer of Still Life belts out a tune (or the lead guitarist — it's hard to tell from this photo). He could be singing "Le Freak" or "Sex Machine," but you shouldn't let that discourage you: the band's show at the underground had everybody boogieing. • photo by Alok Sharma

# Alex Haley, author of *Roots* — an appreciation

Author Alex Haley died on Monday. He died in a Seattle hospital of a heart attack, he was 70 years old.

Haley was the Pulitzer prize winning author of the Autobiography of Malcolm X and *Roots*, two pivotal works in the literature of African American history.

Haley was born 1921 in Intheca New York. When he was 18 Haley joined the army as a mess boy. Out of boredom Haley began to write. While enlisted Haley had a few works published and when he retired from the army in '59, he sought to pursue a career as a professional writer.

In 1962 Haley began the Playboy interviews, among them was the famous interview with Malcolm X which led to the writing of Malcolm X's autobiography.

In 1966 Haley began extensive research into the writing of *Roots*. His research took him from the national archives in Washington to the west coast of Africa. In Africa, and again back in the United States, Haley was able to piece together the remarkable history of seven generations of African Americans.

In this month designated to celebrate and encourage education about our history, it is time to take a renewed look at *Roots*. The following is a review of the book written two weeks before Haley's death.

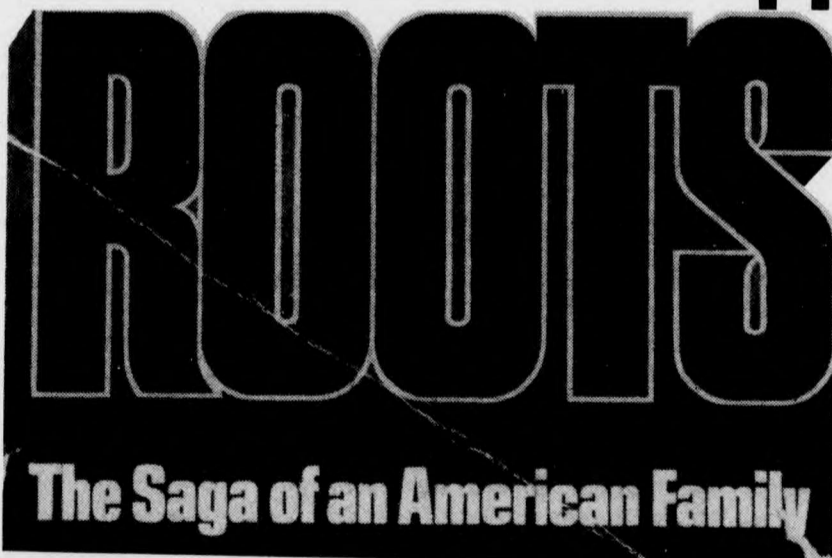
by Michael Bowe

*Roots* is a powerful and intricate historical narrative beginning in 1750 with the birth of Kunta Kinte in the village of Juffure in West Africa and ending seven generations later with the birth and maturation of Alex Haley. *Roots*, an undertaking of epic proportions, is aided by the use of countless historical sources and by the imaginative penmanship of Haley.

Haley begins his novel with a rich telling of the rite of passage into

manhood that young Kunta Kinte experiences. As the story proceeds, with all its intricate and refined details of daily life in Africa, Kunta is captured.

Startled, overpowered and captured by toubobs (white men) and Black slates (black traitors) Kunta and the reader are unwillingly swirled into a world of unbelievable horrors, betrayal, torture, hopelessness, despair, hatred and intense anger. Kunta and other newly enslaved Africans of various tribes and tongues are rounded up, repeatedly raped and whipped into submission as they resist.



To their horror, their eyes, chest, buttocks and private parts are explored by the captors. The men and women are then branded and placed in chains at the bottom of a ship destined for America. The reader is left emotionally numbed as the enslaved Africans literally eat the soil of Africa.

As the long journey to America begins so does the unfolding of terrifying tales of unbelievable torture and inhumane conditions:

"The urine, vomit, feces that reeked everywhere around him had

spread into a slick paste covering the hard planking of the long shelves on which they lay...The only thing that could take Kunta's mind off the toubobs — and how to kill them — was the rats...Their nose whiskers would tickle between Kunta's legs as they went to bite a sore that was bleeding or running with pus. But the lice preferred to bite him on the face..." (177, 192)

It took me years to finally build up the courage to read this moving saga.

I was fearful of the emotions it would provoke. Along with many others, I had seen the made for television version, but the movie is far from being the book's equal. The movie distorts and renders incomplete the factual and historical accounts of the book. Unlike the mini-series, the book is much more than an account of the brutality of slavery. It is about the love, hopes, dreams, relationships, cultures and creativity of Black people.

arts  
film • theatre • galleries • music

*Roots* was written over fifteen years ago. And where many have chosen to skip over it on the shelves of a book store because of its size, its historical slant or because they dismiss it as "just another book about slavery," *Roots* still stands as one of the most significant and moving accounts of the single most horrific episode in the history of North America, and the courage, beauty and resilience of those who lived through it.