

Hotter Than July

by Gisele Marie Baxter
Review: Stevie Wonder,
Hotter Than July

Stevie Wonder is one of those special artists who have been marked throughout their careers with a quality of magic. The roots of his music are obvious—blues, Motown soul, jazz, reggae—but the sound he has developed is constantly distinctive, and the

effect can have a powerful immediacy. His song "Living for the City" is a classic; its fire slashes brilliantly through all trends and it sounds as wonderful today as it every did.

"Hotter Than July" is a fresh, sizzling record; an exuberant return to the roots after the often breathtaking lovely experiments of "Journey Through the Secret Life of

Plants". It should be a smashing success.

It is impossible to imagine Stevie Wonder writing a depressing song; even in the unhappy love songs his unique phrasing and assertive vocals provide a sense of strength, and of a great capability of joy. The first side of this album is entirely made up of romantic songs, which are infectious and exquisitely arranged. The

singing is tender, declarative, and always direct, and this music has a great deal of charm.

Side Two, however, is better. Except for "Lately" and "Do Like You" (a lively, bouncy number about Wonder's son and his love for dancing), it turns our attention to social and political concerns, and gives us three of the album's best tracks.

"Master Blaster" is, of course, one of the finest songs committed to vinyl in the past while. A brilliant marriage of reggae and Motown soul, which seizes us from the outset with its tight percussion, this is more than a tribute to Jamaica's reggae superstar, Bob Marley. It is a celebration of something very

good in the human spirit, and becomes an inadvertent to Wonder himself. His lead singing attains passion and vibrancy and throughout the chorus of his beautiful lyric, he counters excellently with his female back-up vocalists.

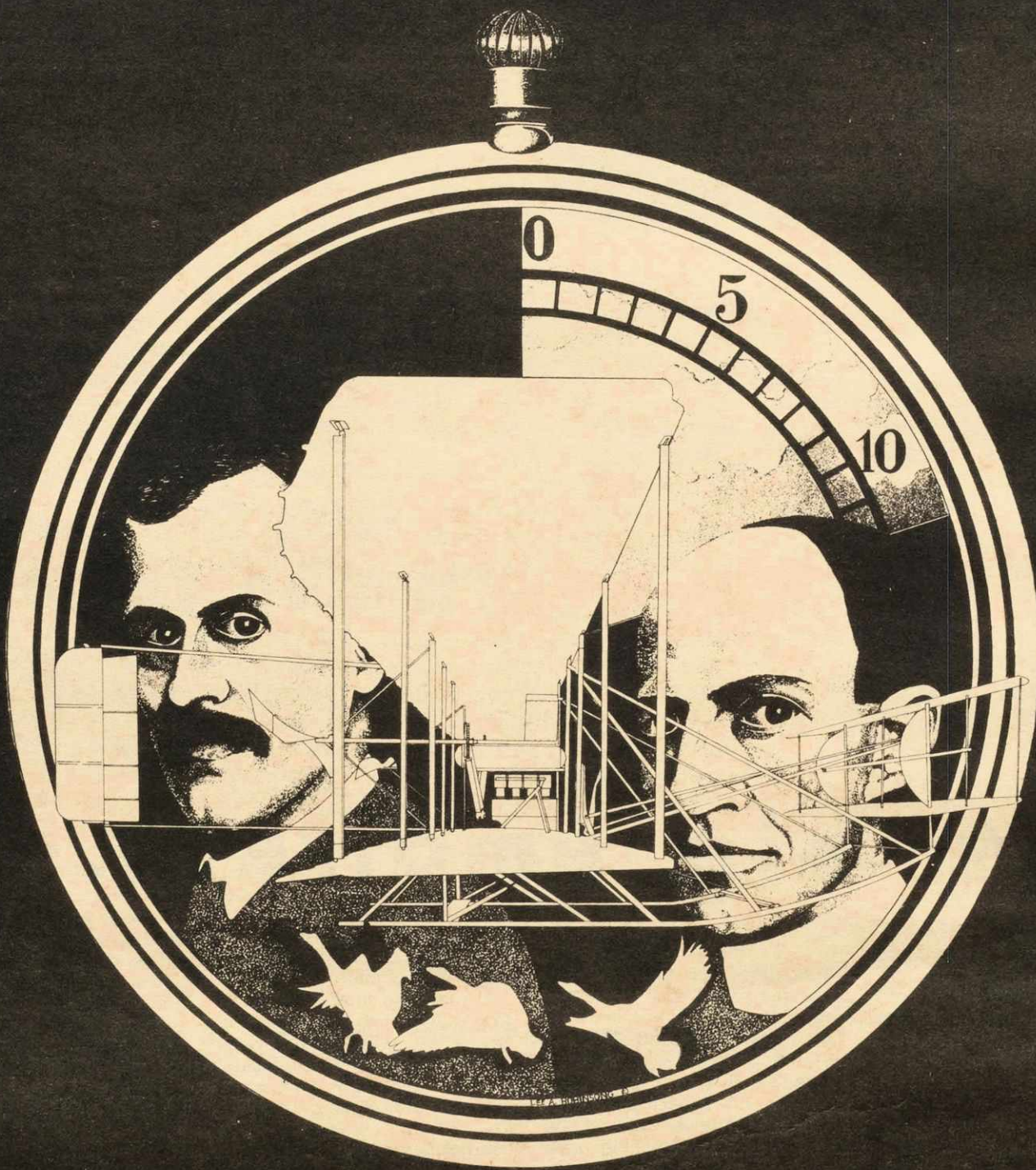
"They want us to join the fighting/ But our answer today/ Is to let all our worries/ Like a breeze through our fingers slip away"

"Cash in Your Face", a fine rhythm-and-blues number which effectively uses hand-claps, pointedly criticizes landlords and other businessmen who refuse people a fair

deal because they happen to be of another race. The lyrics have a sincere, angry edge: "You may have the cash but you cannot cash in your face".

"Happy Birthday" commences with some tight, catchy, synthesized reggae, which, along with the excellent percussion, propels the song. Sung and performed with joy, power and utter conviction, this song is a plea, echoed on the inner sleeve, to declare January 15, Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, a national holiday" both in recognition of what he achieved and as a reminder of the distance which still has to be travelled."

These three songs are songs of a man who believes in dreams, knows that they follow a rough road, but feels they can—*somehow*—be realized. They give the album, on which Stevie Wonder plays a variety of keyboard and percussion instruments, its primary importance.

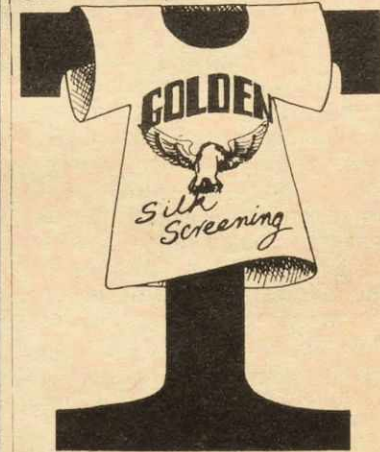


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