

Dutch Robinson: The Soul That Survives

By Stephan MacLeod

Dutch Robinson's career has taken him all over the world. From the mean streets of the South Bronx to performing in the Bernard Shaw Theatre in England, Robinson's musical globetrotting has led him to Amherst, Nova Scotia, of all places.

Now that he has settled on four acres of land there with his family, life seems much simpler for the charismatic performer. When asked why he moved to Amherst, Dutch Robinson told me, "It's a good place for me to work and write, and for my child to grow up. It's safe and I don't have to look over my shoulder. I got Ducks Unlimited in back of me and a bird sanctuary in front of me. I'm surrounded by real animals. No more New York animals."

The peaceful environment of Amherst seems an unlikely home for someone with Dutch's experience and attitude, which has been shaped by years of struggling to succeed as a solo black artist in the music industry, and the streets-marts needed to survive growing up in New York.

Robinson was exposed to a wide variety of entertainers and musicians during his adolescence in South Bronx. His father, who was a classical singer who performed on Broadway and Vaudeville, tried unsuccessfully to discourage his son from a career in showbusiness, knowing firsthand how difficult it was for black performers to receive the respect they deserved in the music industry. Dutch Robinson's experience has taught him that,

"the streets are mean in New York and the music business is even meaner."

During the late 70's, Robinson was managed by Tommy Motolla (Mariah Carey's ex-manager/ex-husband). This gave him



Dutch conjurs up the spirit of Marvin Gaye.

an opportunity to work with many successful artists. He cowrote songs with Darryl Hall, John Oates, Melba Moore, Kid Creole and the Coconuts, and Network. Despite getting a record deal secured with RCA, an album produced by Bunny Siegler was never released. Motolla once told Dutch that he really didn't know what to do with a black act.

Racial discrimination was not the only obstacle to Robinson's career in the music industry. He claims, "They discriminate against old people too. If they feel that you're too old for the business, they feel you're not marketable. That's a form of discrimination too that they use in the music business."

One lesson he has learned about the music industry is the value in hard work, and performing. Being a talented songwriter, and having a powerful, five-octave vocal range was not enough for

him to succeed. He says, "You got to go out and make a name for yourself. You got to make people stand up and appreciate what you're doing. Just sitting around those mean streets of New York and waiting for a record deal without having some people follow you don't work too well."

When he was just seventeen years old, he travelled back and forth from his home in New London, Connecticut to New York trying to get deals and make contacts with people. When Robinson learned that the lead singer for the Ohio Players was drafted in the Vietnam war, he auditioned for the position, and got the part.

Travelling with the Ohio Players exposed him to a lot of negativity in southern United States like Alabama. Negative experiences on the road, and mistrust among his bandmates led him to quit the group after five years.

He said he left the Ohio Players because he was worried that staying in the band would have led to his self-destruction.

But leaving the band and starting a solo career was not an easy transition. He battled depression, drugs, and the frustration of having to start a career all over again. "I had been in that situation for five years, and when I got out of the Ohio Players, I didn't know how to function," said Robinson, "I had to find out what it's like to have musicians work for me."

He returned to New York and began using hard drugs, but he found the strength to pull himself out of that situation before it destroyed him. His faith provided him with a new beginning. "Luckily for me, God blessed me enough to give me a reprieve from all the garbage that was going on around me, and made it possible for me to live again," said

ENTER THE TAINMENT

功夫龍



A Ryan O'Connor Production