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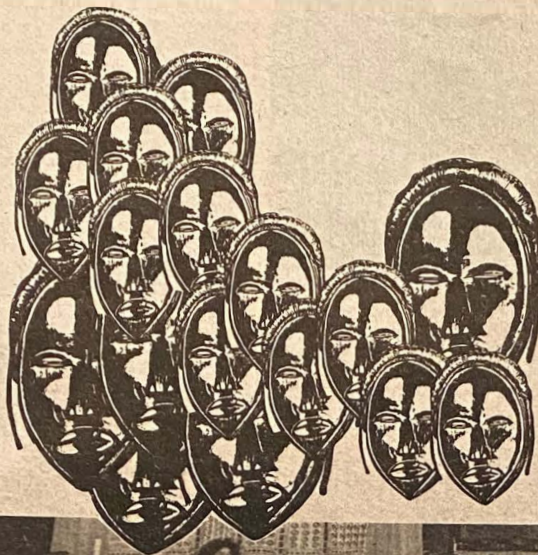
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VARIED VOICES OF BLACK WOMEN



GWEN AVERY
Piano, Vocals



MARY WATKINS
Piano

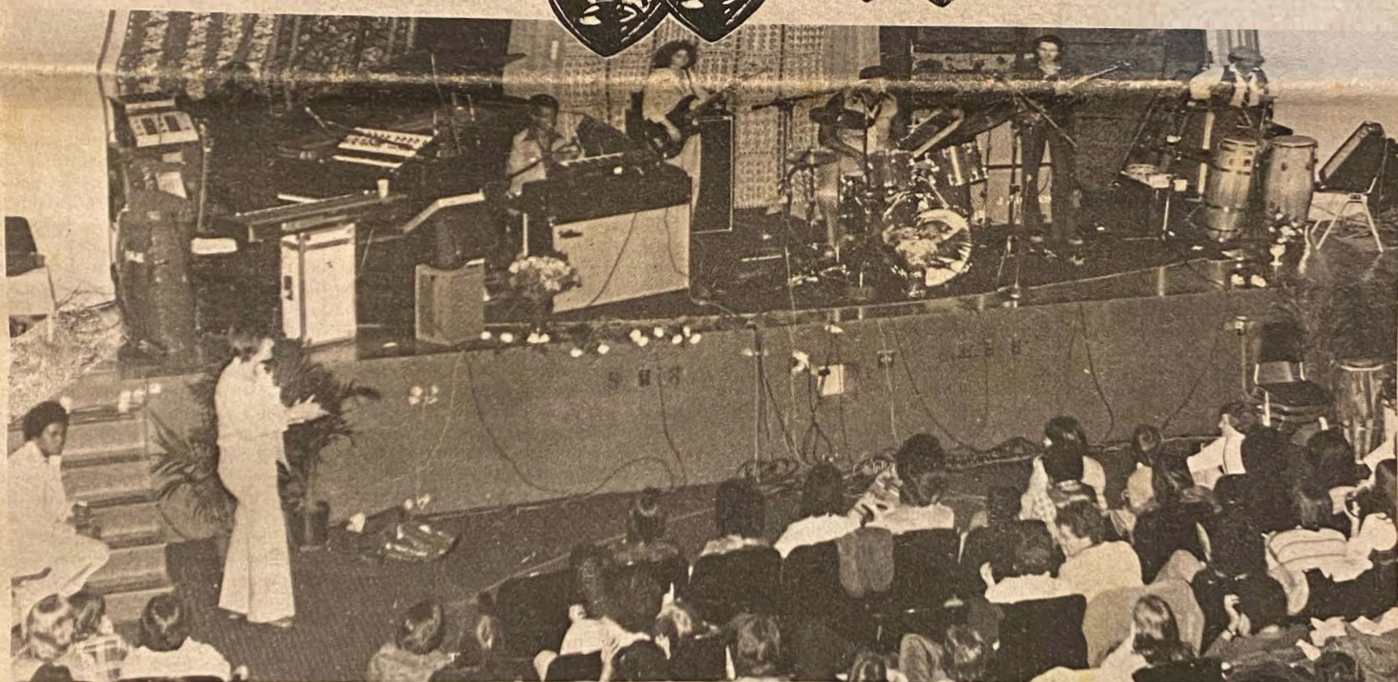


Photo by Gary Goodman



PAT PARKER

Poet

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LINDA TILLERY

Drums, Vocals

An Evening Of Words And Music

by Lynette Robinson

BESSIE SMITH MEMORIAL COLLECTIVE
A WOMEN PRODUCED EVENT

Sponsored by B. U. Women's Ctr.



From the moment I walked into Morse Auditorium and the guard informed me that there was standing room only and that I would have to wait for intermission, I knew I was in store for a treat.

I walked into the auditorium and sure enough it was packed! The crowd, composed of 99% women was singing "I'm on my way" along with Gwen. The atmosphere was congenial, everyone seemed to be having a wonderful time. I sat down on the floor (the only seat) and chimed in with the crowd. We continued to sing as the congas were warming up. Suddenly! from the left came a sister dressed in African garb who began to dance along with the beat of the congas. Her movements were like those of a gazelle, so swift, so confident, it was like she was being controlled by the sounds. As I watched her dance to the beat of the clapping hands, I felt like I was there, in the land of our ancestors, watching a tribal custom.

Gwen sings with a strong inner expression, it was like she was transmitting a new strength to all of us, faster and faster went the beat, faster and faster danced the woman, louder sang the voices, power, power, power and then it was over. Gwen pranced around the stage and claimed "I love you". The crowd stood up and cheered, she is truly a beautiful performer.

Demita Frazier was the M.C. for the evening, she did a fantastic job. She introduced the next performer Mary Watkins as a woman who "is going to take everyone out because she is so beautiful." And take us out is just what she did, her music was so mellow that I closed my eyes and sat back and emptied my thoughts. You have to hear her music to fully appreciate the essence of the message relayed to the crowd of about 500 sisters gathered together, exposing themselves through a sound that just like everything else in the world is unique because we are unique. The voices in harmony were like angels. So sweet was the sound, so strong the voices, so clear the message as they slowed down the pace to a mellow madness. Then Mary introduced her next number entitled "Witches' Revenge". She said, "The next number is the most intense, let your imagination wander, . . . when I speak of revenge it is that I love myself and I do for myself to make me happy and I can reveal it through my sounds." The melodies that arose from the band made your mind wander to places where a witch would venture to concoct a brew, and believe me those sisters cooked! They then slowed things down with "I Hear Music". Again I allowed the music to take my mind. I couldn't help it, and the expressions on the faces of the audience told me they shared the same sentiments. As she slowly faded the music down to a whisper, I could hear things like; "Go ahead sister, tell it to me" and "She's super!" During the last number, she invited Gwen Avery back on stage and they sang "Yesterday's Children", which had a rocky beat that immediately drew everyone out of their seats and begin to clap and dance. The mood had changed and the air was filled with rhythm. A really amazing concert!

Mary then introduced the band, which consisted of Linda Tillery on drums and lead vocalist; Vicki Randle, percussions and lead vocalist; Jerene Jackson, who smoked on lead guitar during "Witches' Revenge"; Colleen Stewart ('mad scientist') on keyboards and synthesizer; and Barbara Cobb on bass guitar. They were all super-women!

During intermission I learned that the dancer Deta Galloway was not with the show, but began to dance on her own. Originally from Jamaica, she explained that whenever she is at a concert and the music gets to her, "it's like I'm possessed. I must dance."

The next woman up on stage was Poet Pat Parker. When she came up, and said that the night before she had *tried* not to be too heavy, I knew that tonight the best was yet to come. Her readings were from her three publications: *Pit Stop*, *Child of Myself* and *Woman-Slaughter*.

The most moving of her readings dealt with our system of justice in relation to the death of her sister Shirley. The title is "Woman-Slaughter". It is about the murder of her sister shortly after she and her three sisters had come to bury their father, Buster. The crowd was still as she read her poem. "Hello? Hello? Police? My life is in danger, my husband means to do me some harm . . ." She read on and on, tears formed in her eyes as she read in detail the merciless killing of her sister who with a friend was shot three times in the back. The husband received three years for manslaughter. The irony of the whole thing was that because she lived with another woman and slept in the same bed, it was assumed she deserved to die. They tried to degrade her, our system of injustice! Pat received a standing ovation for her poetry. I strongly recommend that you buy her book.

As an introduction to her next poem she said, "When I think about things, I try to see how far they can go, so I wrote this poem, 'Movement In Black' ". She was joined by Gwen, Linda, Mary and Vicki, each taking a turn telling something about their slave experiences as black women. "Movement in black, movement in black, Can't keep us back . . ." they chanted. The essence of the poem was a history of black women's lives through the years. The next phrase sums it up perfectly: "I am a survivor, I am a survivor, I am a Black Woman."

The last performer was a bad! bad! Linda Tillery from Boston! Linda, whose roots are in the church, streets, studio, in her heart, began with a song from her album entitled *Linda Tillery* called "Brand New Thing". All the songs she sang seemed to end so mellow after beginning with so much strength. Her next selection was from another album, *Lesbian Concentrate*, called "No Hiding Place". It began, "My sweet Sherry, how long will you run, freedom is not a gift, there's no hiding place for you. My sweet sister, let my heart tell you how. I know your fear of losing all that's dear, but trust your heart to let you know and to recognize a choice or the sound of your own voice . . ." Then she did a song in church folklore entitled "Freedom". She says it's a part of our

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heritage that she will always carry with her. The song was so beautiful that she brought tears to not only her own eyes, but to the eyes of many others. She received a standing ovation and a 3-minute-long applause. “We are proud of our level of musicianship. We want to get it across that it is possible to produce high quality music. We are hoping that as a band (Linda Tillery’s band was the one performing) we can present a different image, a way for women to see the needs of working together and supporting each other.”
— Linda Tillery.

I found this to be one of the most enlightening events that I’ve been to in Boston. As an ending to my article I chose Pat Parker’s poem from *Child of Myself*.

*i woman i
can no longer claim
a mother of flesh
a father of marrow
I, Woman must be
the child of myself*