

Concert In Review

Black Fire-'A Moving Experience'

By W. PATRICK HINELY
Black Fire is an experience; people expressing themselves directly to an audience. Even with the now-familiar fact, usually passed off in "polite" white society like the one we have at W&L as the same old sad story or whatever that Black people have been oppressed by our white-oriented society for centuries, **Black Fire** showed few signs of retaining any encultured oppression manifestations. These people are not negroes; they are Black.

And proud of it, too. Proud enough to throw some insults at the whites in the audience, most of which were appropriately made, and delivered in all manners, from the quietest subtlety to straight "up against the wall" type rhetoric.

The group has many facets on stage: music, drama, and dance all intermingled with varying amounts of sociopolitical overtones.

The dance and music is very straightforward: its emphasis are simplicity and directness. These people have no sophistications or hangups about the artistic possibilities of the human body. **Black Fire** is raw without being uncooked—they just have a different recipe. And that's very rare these days.

Most of the dance music came from a 5-man percussion section. I could hear some sources of Santana and the Winter Consort coming out of those kids. Few of the performers in the group are over 15; many will probably be established commercial artists in a few years, if they want to be.

The movement of the rhythms, expressed in sound, words, or movement, or more often all of these together, carry the spirit of happiness. The dance is free, unfettered movement, relating directly to the environment where it came from. What came through is the closeness

to nature of an unwesternized culture in Africa. Some less enlightened people tend to think of such a culture as "jungle Bunnies," but I reckon Los Angeles would look pretty weird to someone whose heritage is unspoiled jungle.

There was also an Aretha Franklin-type singer with Supremes-type backup. They could also be commercial successes. The piano player had a way of weaving in and out of the vocal music at just the right times, and laying out a few of his own chords now and then, also at opportune temporal locations. The real cohering agent of **Black**

Fire's production is the character of Granny. She appears on stage and talks at various times about various things, bridging together, albeit roughly at times, what would otherwise appear to be an incoherent melange. Her role combined that of emcee, political mouthpiece, sage, and actress. She's not a bad dancer, either. Audience participation was encouraged but hard to get. Some VMI Keydets did get into it, and by the end of the evening I got the feeling that every Black person in Lee Chapel was aware of a racial unity. Johnny Morrison, president of SABU, expressed great happiness

at this as a first at W&L. For a while, it scared me. Larry Alexander summed it up quite well when he said the idea is to get it on with this this unity among people—not Black people, not white people—just **PEOPLE**.

Of course, that's hard to do, especially for the members of **Black Fire**. It's very easy to forget about working for universal consciousness when Richard Nixon is trying to take away the money that feeds you. As I walked around downstairs after the show, among the sounds of tired and happy children packing up their costumes I thought I heard

a few rumbling from inside Robert E. Lee's crypt. It's about time.

Last night, the I. C. Norcom High School Concert Choir presented a program of Black Music from the past and present. Black Culture week will continue with three more main events—tonight at 8 p.m. in Lee Chapel, the Leslie D. Smith Memorial Lecture with speaker, Rep. Parren Mitchell (Md.). Tomorrow night, at the same time, there will be a symposium in the chapel "On Being Black." The week will culminate with SABU's Culture Week Ball, with music by Black Rock on Saturday night.

Letters

To the Editor

Black Week Attendance

To the Editor of the Ring-tum Phi:

I find it extremely difficult to express the distress I feel over the poor response of the Washington and Lee community, faculty and students alike, to the student-sponsored Black Culture Week. I am embarrassed when a group of young people come all the way from Birmingham, Alabama to perform to empty seats and light fixtures; I am embarrassed when a Black State Senator from Virginia comes to speak on the subject of Black Education to a group of no more than fifteen students and twenty faculty and administrators. But embarrassment is the least significant of my emotions—I am horrified by the implications of the indifference we as a community exhibit to both the ideal and the organizers of the Black Culture Week. These are our fellow students whom we ignore, whom we even fail to recognize as an entity when they organize to tell us something about themselves. And what is this Black ideal that we so casually ignore? Nothing less than what we as a university espouse as our highest ideal, the creation of a community of understanding and trust based on communication and respect—respect surely for our own social and intellectual heritage, but also a respect for the heritage and problems of those with whom we will never be able to meaningfully relate unless we make a positive attempt to understand. The Black Culture Week provides us all with the opportunity to gain that understanding. It is tragic that we do not take advantage of it.

Ralph Smith, '73

'Black Fire' Insulting

To the Editor of the Ring-tum Phi:

I write regarding the flagrant spectacle in Lee Chapel last Sunday sanctioned by this university.

Certainly our SABU brothers could have presented a less offensive aspect of Black culture devoid of cheap jokes about General Robert E. Lee and/or the genitals of the President of the United States.

I see no profit in promoting one culture by the demolition of another.

Sincerely,
 Pete Cimmino, '74

The Parking Problem

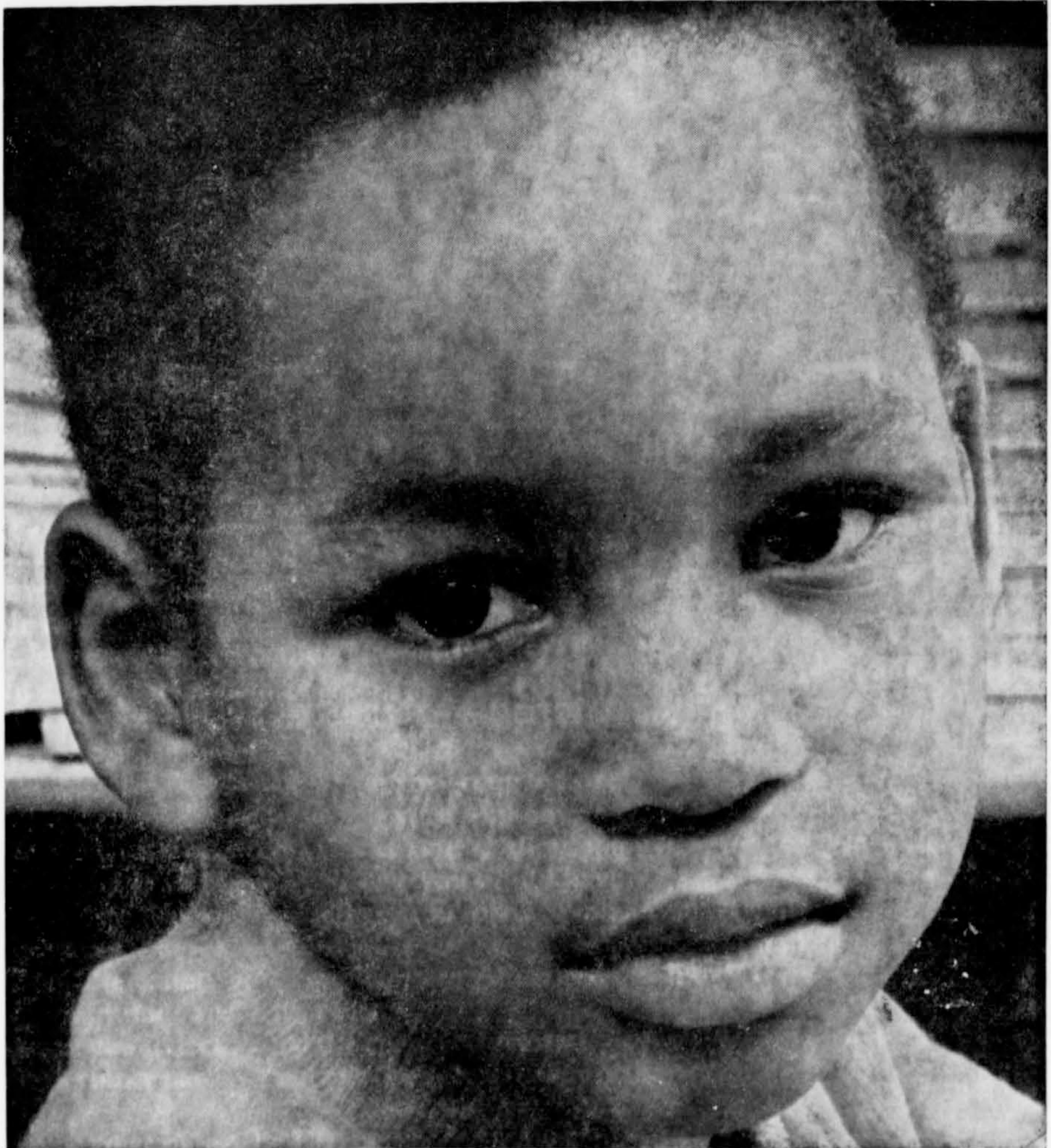
It is with great regret and with a fear of running an old subject into the ground that I find it necessary to write on the subject of the university parking facilities.

I received the communication from the university proctor's office before school this year, and I was greatly encouraged by the new half-mile plan. It excited hopes of an efficient and adequate parking system, and for a while the hopes seemed well founded. However, all too soon there was the roar of bulldozers, and my hopes began to fade.

Granted, the parking lots by the old Kappa Alpha house, the C&O Railroad station, the Coca-Cola bottling plant, and the gates are in good condition. However, they are hopelessly inadequate to meet the new condition caused by the "progress" of the university expansion.

The condition of which I speak concerns the parking lots behind and below Doremus gymnasium. The walk up to the rear doors of the gym has been completely obliterated by the construction. The driveway to the upper parking area itself has been greatly reduced in size by the cutting in of the new road to the law school and the storage of water and sewer pipes.

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**Pictures talk.
 Some little boys don't.**

Some inner-city ghettos have special schools. For little boys who don't talk.

Not mute little boys. But children so withdrawn, so afraid of failure, they cannot make the slightest attempt to do anything at which they might fail.

Some don't talk. Some don't listen. Most don't behave. And all of them don't learn.

One day someone asked us to help.

Through Kodak, cameras and film were distributed to teachers. The teachers gave the cameras to the kids and told them to take pictures.

And then the miracle. Little boys who had never said anything, looked at the pictures and began to talk. They said "This is my house." "This is my dog." "This is where I like

to hide." They began to explain, to describe, to communicate. And once the channels of communication had been opened, they began to learn.

We're helping the children of the inner-city. And we're also helping the adults. We're involved in inner-city job programs. To train unskilled people in useful jobs.

What does Kodak stand to gain from this? Well, we're showing how our products can help a teacher—and maybe creating a whole new market. And we're also cultivating young customers who will someday buy their own cameras and film. But more than that, we're cultivating alert, educated citizens. Who will someday be responsible for our society.

After all, our business depends on our society. So we care what happens to it.



Kodak
 More than a business.