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Jam & Lewis expand their perspective; label boasts new president, new energy. (James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, Terry Lewis) (Artists & Music) (Company Profile) *Janine McAdams*.

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Label Boasts New President, New Energy

NEW YORK--Perspective Records, the 9-month-old co-venture between superproducers James "Jimmy Jam" Harris & Terry Lewis and A&M Records, has come into its own. As 1992 gets under way, the label has a new president, new staffers, a Grammy nomination for debut group Sounds Of Blackness, a surprise R&B top 10 hit by Mint Condition, and an upcoming multi-artist soundtrack for "Mo' Money," starring Damon Wayans.

The new energy at the label comes right from the top. "We brought in Kevin [Fleming as president] because not only is he our friend, he also has record company experience and radio background," explains Harris. "With the team now in place to really maximize whatever creativity is coming up, we can establish long-term careers."

"The most important thing to me is to be able to take creative, innovative, totally different marketing concepts and put them in a format that can be accessible to a business that generally only works in one way--the way they've known forever," says Fleming, who was appointed president of Perspective in December.

"What has made Flyte Tyme so successful is doing what they wanted to do the way they wanted to do it. That will continue," says Fleming of Jam and Lewis' 10-year-old production company. (See story, page 23).

Among the promising new projects for the label is the "Mo' Money" soundtrack, especially in light of the boom in black-oriented films and the strong sales showing for recent multi-artist black soundtracks like "New Jack City" and "Juice." Set to feature new music by Sounds Of Blackness, Mint Condition, Ralph Tresvant, Johnny Gill, Karyn White, Color Me Badd, Queen Latifah, and others, the album will be shipped in June to coincide with the Columbia Pictures release.

Harris calls the project "an opportunity to work with acts that we love," including some the producers have never worked with before.

Perspective had three acts emerge in 1991. Faring best was Sounds Of Blackness with its gold-certified "The Evolution Of Gospel," nominated for a Grammy in the best-gospel-album-by-a-choir-or-chorus category. Mint Condition, which led off the album "Meant To Be Mint" with the uptempo "Are You Free Girl," has roared back with the slow-building ballad "Breakin' My Heart (Pretty Brown Eyes)." And Lo-Key's first single, "Attention: The Shawanda Story," got some critical raves but hardly any airplay.

Mint Condition's "Breakin' My Heart," last week at No. 8 with a bullet on the R&B singles chart and a bulleted No. 24 on the Hot 100, is an example of the music finding its market. First picked up as an album track in New York as far back as last summer, the single was officially released in November and has grown since then.

"There are always going to be surprises in this business--it's fickle," says Mint Condition's Stokely of the single's success. He thinks the secret is the combination of lyrics and instrumentation: "I've heard women say that that is their anthem," he explains, "and the music is reminiscent of the '70s bands."

The Minneapolis band will continue to promote the record with appearances at radio and tours of traditionally black colleges. A video for the single was unveiled Feb. 14.

In 1992, label plans include building Mint Condition on the R&B and pop charts and laying groundwork for Lo-Key's April album debut. Also due this year are debut projects by Krush, a female quartet; vocalist Lisa Keith; and young singer Bobby Avila (formerly on RCA).

Up until now, Perspective has relied heavily on A&M's marketing, promotion, and sales teams. While both Harris and Fleming praise A&M's support and cooperation, the addition of key staffers allows the new label a new measure of independence.

"We're becoming more self-reliant--we have to be," says Fleming. "Too often when you look at black departments at major companies, you see an executive having to go to have someone else dictate to you the mode of operation. Fortunately we're now in a position that we can do the things that we need to do, if we make a mistake it's OK." Perspective still utilizes A&M's creative services, video, and some marketing and sales support.

In addition to Fleming, Perspective has recently added Brenda Walker as operations manager in the Los Angeles office; Felicia Jefferson as product manager in Los Angeles; and Don Clemmons as artist development manager. Fleming says he is looking to fill staff positions in marketing, sales, and promotion--areas that he will oversee. Fleming is based in Minneapolis, as is Sonya Kates, A&R coordinator for the label.

Fleming, a Minneapolis native who first met Lewis in high school and later met Harris while a club DJ, brings a wide range of experience to his new post. He was music director, then program director at various radio stations, finally at KJFJ Los Angeles; did promotion and A&R work at Island Records, which he left as VP of A&R in 1989; then became VP of urban and film music at Third Stone Records.

Both Fleming and Harris are enthusiastic about the new energy at Perspective. "The work ethic started at Flyte Tyme without question has been manifested in Perspective, here as well as in Los Angeles . . . Jimmy and Terry want to win. And when you have people who want to win, then you work hard."

PHOTO : Meli'sa Magic. Pendulum artist Meli'sa Morgan, center, celebrates the completion of recording her next album project with a party at Los Angeles' Roxbury. She is joined by actress Vanessa Bell Calloway, left, and dancer/singer/choreographer/director Debbie Allen.

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