

[UPBEAT MUSIC]

BETH FRIEND: This Janet Jackson song, *What Have You Done For Me Lately?*, is on her latest album, *Control*, that has just gone triple platinum, having sold three million copies. The songwriter producers of this and numerous other recent hit albums are Jimmy Jam Harris and Terry Lewis, or Flyte Tyme Productions. Friends and fellow musicians since junior high school, these two Minneapolis Blacks make their musical magic in a very unassuming little brick building on Nicollet and 43rd.

SPEAKER: We're not into the serious pressurized industry. We don't look at it like that. We got into it for the fun of it. And we still try to have a lot of fun. And by bringing the artists out of their element, which is normally either LA or New York, and bringing them up here to a very relaxed atmosphere, which is Minneapolis, we seem to get a lot better results.

BETH FRIEND: That's putting it mildly. The four-year-old incorporated partnership currently has three singles on the national music charts. Its worldwide record sales for 1986 have reached 10 million. And the hits just keep on coming, as Harris and Lewis choose to work with musicians they say are in need of a little something extra. For example, the SOS Band started with a platinum album, then produced two albums that sold only 100,000 copies each. Flyte Time has since brought them three gold albums in a row.

SPEAKER: We always used to say we're like doctors we fix things. And now, with Janet's project, we say we're safe crackers. That we-- well, we feel that we're like the right combination. It's the producer and the artist. It's the combination that makes it work.

BETH FRIEND: It works off of Lewis's strength in lyric writing and day-to-day business operations and Harris's music writing talents and technical in-studio skills. Both former members of a band called The Time, Lewis and Harris are part of a Twin Cities Black Music Community that, contrary to popular perception, did not spring up overnight. Its members have long struggled in a town that offers them very few venues in which to make a living.

SPEAKER: The Black community, as far as musicians, I think the reason they're successful now is basically because they didn't have the opportunity to play the clubs and they didn't get the breaks locally. We had to take a different avenue to get to where we are now, which was to go and actually make records and do demos, and do that route.

BETH FRIEND: Which they did. The first one to make it was *Prince*. And from there, it all snowballed as he gave opportunities to other Black musicians. Now, the unfortunate thing is that listening to Minnesota's airwaves, you wouldn't know about the success of many of these musicians, including the Flyte Time people because local commercial stations give little or no airplay to Black music.

Call it racism, call it ignorance, call it the dollars and cents demands of an almost exclusively white market. The reality is that local radio stations are at best slow in picking up Flyte Time's releases. Example, this year, *Saturday Love* sung by Alexander O'Neal and Cherrelle was a top 20 pop record nationally and a number one record on the Black charts, but it never got played up here.

SPEAKER: It's ironic because if somebody is from here and they listen to the radio, they think the number one song in the country probably is Limited Warranty. You see what I'm saying? Because that's what they are being programmed. Or the suburbs, which they played a lot of the suburbs. And I'm not against them playing that. I mean, I think that's great.

But if you're going to support some local talent, I'd say support more of it.

BETH FRIEND: Because Flyte Tyme Productions is going to keep supplying it. With help from Bill Wehrum, this is Beth Friend.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

What have you done for me lately?