

Magazine Article from the Portfolio of
Wheat Williams

“Monte Moir and The Time”. *Keyboard*,
November 1996, p. 14.
Interview concerning Morris Day and the
Time’s reunion tour.



MONTE MOIR AND THE TIME

And Robert Makes Three. In late 1995, singer Morris Day and Jerome Benton, drummer Jellybean Johnson, and Monte Moir reformed the band with ace touring and session pros from around the States. Keyboardist Keith Harrison, who had a Grammy in '82 with the Dazz Band for "Whip It," hails from Cleveland. Now there's a *third* keyboardist, Robert "Gi" Grissett, from Los Angeles. Do all those parts ever get in the way?

"Not with this band," asserts Monte. "This band is so tightly constructed. Everybody has a very specific part to do." The Time's arrangements and precision stage drill evolve through marathon jams. "We used to rehearse, back in the old days, four or five months before we went out on tour," says Monte. "It looks very simple. Everybody's doing their little steps and singing and playing a couple of keyboard parts. But it's a little more complicated than it looks," he winks. "As you'd rehearse, somebody would add a step, or somebody would add some extra parts to beef up that part, and we'd be constantly reworking the show and putting the flow together."

Lay it Down Live. One constant with the Time has been a refusal to use sequencers or sampled phrases. "Even back in the old days," says Monte, "we never used that stuff. Everything you hear is live, mistakes and all." As far as instruments, they keep it simple and road-ready. The foundation of their sound is the same as it's always been: twin Oberheim OB-8s, played by Monte and Keith. "We're looking for more," says Monte. "They're awfully hard to find. I'm surprised that Oberheim hasn't come up with a rack version, or something. Everybody seems to want one."

Rounding out Monte's gear are a Kurzweil PC88 and Roland JV-880 and E-mu Vintage Keys modules. Keith uses a Roland A-50 to trigger his new Roland M-VS1 Vintage Synth expander module, which he loves. Gi plays a Korg

01/WFD and an Ensoniq ASR-10 sampler, and carries all his sounds on floppy disks.

Back In Time. Monte Moir was 23 in 1981 when Prince became a household name and Minneapolis became ground-zero for the '80s funk explosion. Moir, Jellybean Johnson, Jam, and Lewis had a band called Flyte Tyme (which later became the name of Jam and Lewis's production company). Prince and Morris Day made the recordings that were credited as the Time's first album, and then recruited Flyte Tyme to become Morris's new band.

Monte was the one member of the Time with schooled chops. "After high school, I got really serious about playing piano and building up my classical repertoire, and I studied with a Brazilian jazz player named Manfredo Fest. When I first started college, I took some of your basic music and theory classes." Monte was only one class away from a business degree when the call came to create the Time. Just last year, at 36, he completed his degree.

In all these years, he's remained in Minneapolis, which is also still Jellybean's home. In addition to his work with the Time, Monte has produced and played on tracks for Janet Jackson, Denice Williams, Gladys Knight, and Alexander O'Neal. He continues to write and produce, and looks forward to shopping a solo pop project and pursue a publishing deal.

It's been seven years since their last album, but the Time have been packing houses across America all year long. "It's gratifying. We didn't know what to expect when we first started," says Monte. "I think people, especially in the R&B groove, are getting back to wanting to hear live music."

On occasion, Jam and Lewis sit in with the Time, making *four* keyboardists and two bass players. Both Jam and Lewis and His Purpleness have expressed interest in producing an album for the new band. The Time will arrive. —Wheat Williams

They speak softly but lay down a mighty groove. They dress to kill. They have the power to vamp endlessly on an evolving two-bar phrase while the frontmen work the crowd into a frenzy. And it is all absolutely live. They come from Minneapolis, and they are Morris Day and the Time.

Protégés of Prince, the Time were there at the start of the Minneapolis sound, and became an icon of funk/dance music in the '80s. They reunited a year ago, and today they're on their first full tour of America since the peak of their success in 1984, when the Time was featured in the movie *Purple Rain*. We caught up with them in Atlanta for the Midtown Music Festival, and again during the Olympics at the Underground Atlanta stage, where they played for thousands of ecstatic festival-goers.

Integral to the Time's sound was the double keyboard counterpoint of founders Monte Moir and Jimmy Jam. In the mid-'80s, Jam, along with Time's bass player Terry Lewis, left for a stellar songwriting and production career. They were responsible for Janet Jackson's hit albums, among many others.