



May 9, 2017

*AN EVENING WITH:*

*Earth Wind and Fire, Conversations with Ralph Johnson and Verdine White*

# NEWSLETTER

An Entertainment Industry Organization

## The President's Corner

Greetings All!

As we conclude the 2016-2017 year for the California Copyright Conference we are proud to finish with "An Evening With" interview featuring two members of one of the most dynamic and spectacular bands of all time Earth, Wind & Fire. Founded in the early '70's and still performing and creating today, Ralph Johnson and Verdine White have an amazing story to share! The legacy of the band's performances are matched only by their timeless and inspiring songs! The music of Earth, Wind & Fire has been the soundtrack for so many, and their continued musical excellence continues to satisfy through their wonderful songs of love, hope and inspiration.

I'd like to thank my co-moderator Ronny Schiff (who you will find out, worked with the band) for lending her expertise and insights to what I believe you will find to be a wonderful evening with two truly amazing musical legends!

It has been an honor and a pleasure to serve as your President this year and I would like to thank my Board for their constant support and creativity in providing quality panel topics this year! I would especially like to thank past President Diane Snyder-Ramirez and my Vice President Charley Londono for truly going above and beyond with some seriously heavy lifting that was needed earlier in the year!

In conclusion, I would like to thank you, the membership of the CCC for your wonderful support as well! We do this all for You!

Sincerely,

James Leach

**President, California Copyright Conference**

2016-2017

## **Earth, Wind & Fire - The History**

During the 1970s, a new brand of pop music was born—one that was steeped in African and African-American styles—particularly jazz and R&B, but appealed to a broader cross-section of the listening public. As founder and leader of the band Earth, Wind & Fire, Maurice White not only embraced but also helped bring about this evolution of pop, which bridged the gap that has often separated the musical tastes of black and white America. It certainly was successful, as EWF combined high-caliber musicianship, wide-ranging musical genre eclecticism, and '70s multicultural spiritualism. “I wanted to do something that hadn’t been done before,” Maurice explains. “Although we were basically jazz musicians, we played soul, funk, gospel, blues, jazz, rock and dance music...which somehow ended up becoming pop. We were coming out of a decade of experimentation, mind expansion and cosmic awareness. I wanted our music to convey messages of universal love and harmony without force-feeding listeners’ spiritual content.”

Born in 1941, in Memphis, Tennessee, Maurice was immersed in a rich musical culture that spanned the boundaries between jazz, gospel, R&B, blues and early rock. All of these styles played a role in the development of his musical identity. At age six, he began singing in his church’s gospel choir but soon his interest turned to percussion. He began working gigs as a drummer while still in high school. His first professional performance was with Booker T. Jones, who eventually achieved stardom as Booker T and the MGs.

After graduating high school, Maurice moved to the Windy City to continue his musical education at the prestigious Chicago Conservatory of Music. He continued picking up drumming jobs on the side, which eventually lead to a steady spot as a studio percussionist with the legendary Chicago blues label, Chess Records. At Chess, Maurice had the privilege of playing with such greats as Etta James, Fontella Bass, Billy Stewart, Willie Dixon, Sonny Stitt and Ramsey Lewis, whose trio he joined in 1967. He spent nearly three years as part of the Ramsey Lewis Trio. “Ramsey helped shape my musical vision beyond just the music,” Maurice explains. “I learned about performance and staging.” Maurice also learned about the African thumb piano, or kalimba, an instrument whose sound would become central to much of his work over the years.

In 1969, Maurice left the Ramsey Lewis Trio and joined two friends, Wade Flemons and Don Whitehead, as a songwriting team composing songs and commercials in the Chicago area. The three friends got a recording contract with Capitol Records and called themselves the “Salty Peppers,” and had a marginal hit in the Mid-western area called “La La Time.” That band featured Maurice on vocals, percussion and kalimba along with Flemons and Whitehead as the keyboardists/vocalists.

After relocating to Los Angeles and signing a new contract with Warner Bros., Maurice simultaneously made what may have been the smartest move of his young career. He changed the band’s name to Earth, Wind & Fire (after the three elements in his astrological chart). The new name also captured Maurice’s spiritual approach to music—one that transcended categories and appealed to multiple artistic principals, including composition, musicianship, production, and performance. In addition to White, Flemons and Whitehead, Maurice recruited Michael Beal on guitar, Leslie Drayton, Chester Washington and Alex Thomas on horns, Sherry Scott on vocals, percussionist Phillard Williams and his younger brother Verdine on bass.

Earth, Wind & Fire recorded two albums for Warner Bros.: the self-titled 1970 album Earth, Wind and Fire and the 1971 album The Need of Love. A single from this album, “I Think About Lovin’ You,” provided EWF with their first

Top 40 R&B hit. Also in 1971, the group performed the soundtrack to the Melvin Van Peebles film *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*.

In 1972, White dissolved the line-up (except he and brother Verdine White) and added Jessica Cleaves (vocals), Ronnie Laws (flute, saxophone), Roland Bautista (guitar), Larry Dunn (keyboard), Ralph Johnson (percussion) and Philip Bailey (vocals). Maurice became disillusioned with Warner Bros., which had signed the group primarily as a jazz act, while he was more interested in combining elements of jazz, rock, and soul into an evolving form of fusion—a truly universal sound.

A performance at New York's Rockefeller Center introduced EWF to Clive Davis, then President of Columbia Records. Davis loved what he saw and bought their contract from Warner Bros. With Columbia Records, debuting with the 1972 album *Last Days and Time*, the group slowly began to build a reputation for innovative recordings and exciting, live shows, complete with feats of magic (floating pianos, spinning drum kits, vanishing artists) engineered by Doug Henning and his then-unknown assistant David Copperfield. Their first WB album, *Head to the Sky* went Gold in the summer of 1973, releasing a smooth tangy cover of "Evil" and the title track single. The first platinum EWF album, *Open Our Eyes*, yielded two R&B charters: "Mighty Mighty" and "Kalimba Story".

Maurice once again shared a label roster with Ramsey Lewis, whose Columbia debut *Sun Goddess* album went Gold in early 1975. The title track was released as a single under the name Ramsey Lewis and Earth, Wind & Fire.

The inspiration for "Shining Star" (one of EW&F's most beloved singles) was gleaned from thoughts Maurice had during a walk under the star-filled skies that surrounded the mountains around Caribou Ranch, Colorado, a popular recording site and retreat during the '70s. The track was originally included in the *That's the Way of the World* movie. "Shining Star" hit number one Pop in early 1975. It was included on their 1975 multi-platinum album *That's the Way of the World* that held the number one Pop spot for three weeks in Spring 1975 and earned them their first Grammy Award. The title track single also charted. The album additionally produced the classic ballad "Reasons," an extremely popular radio-aired track.

The multi-platinum album *Gratitude* held the number one Pop album spot for three weeks in late 1975. The album yielded "Singasong," which went Gold, and the tracks "Can't Hide Love," "Celebrate," "Gratitude," and the live version of "Reasons." In 1976, Maurice decided he wanted to record a spiritual album. The multi-platinum album *Spirit* parked at number two Pop for two weeks and boasted the Gold, number one R&B single "Getaway" (which also hit the disco charts) and "Saturday Nite." *Spirit* is remembered as one of EWF's best albums and sadly for also being the last project of producer Charles Stepney. He died in 1976 at the age of 45. Charles was a former Chess Records arranger/producer/session musician/multi-instrumentalist/songwriter and Maurice's main collaborator on his EWF projects.

The multi-platinum album *All 'N All* in late 1977, won three Grammys, and had arrangements by Chicago soul mainstay Tom Tom Washington and Eumir Deodato. The singles were "Serpentine Fire" and "Fantasy." The group's horn section, the legendary Phenix Horns (Don Myrick on saxophone, Louis Satterfield on trombone, Rahmlee Michael Davis and Michael Harris on trumpets) became an integral part of the Earth, Wind & Fire sound.

During this time, Maurice produced several artists such as The Emotions (1976's Flowers and 1977's Rejoice, which included the number one R&B/pop hit "Best Of My Love") and Deniece Williams (1976's This Is Niecy). In the late 'seventies, in association with Columbia Records, Maurice also launched a record label, ARC.

The multi-platinum greatest-hits set The Best of Earth, Wind & Fire, Vol. I included a cover of the Beatles' "Got to Get You into My Life" hit the charts in summer 1978. The group performed the song in the 1978 Bee Gees/Peter Frampton movie Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. Another single, "September," made it to number one R&B, number eight pop in early 1978. On the flip side was the enchanting popular radio-aired album track "Love's Holiday" from All 'N All.

Their live performances were stellar. Sellout crowds were spellbound by the band's bombastic performances. Their performances blasted a cosmic wave of peace, love and other happy vibrations to audiences using a combination of eye-popping costumes, lights, pyrotechnics and plain old good music. Sometimes they even threw in magic illusions. Earth, Wind & Fire's message was one of universal harmony, in both musical and cultural senses. "We live in a negative society," Maurice told Newsweek. "Most people can't see beauty and love. I see our music as medicine."

The multi-platinum album I Am hit number three pop in Summer 1979 on the strength of the million-selling single "Boogie Wonderland" with The Emotions (number two R&B for four weeks, number six Pop) and the phenomenal gold ballad "After the Love Has Gone," written by David Foster, Jay Graydon and Bill Champlin that stayed at number two R&B/Pop for two weeks. Their Faces album peaked at number ten Pop in late 1980 and was boosted to gold by the singles "Let Me Talk" (number eight R&B), "You" (number ten R&B), and "And Love Goes On."

The million-selling funk-ed-up "Let's Groove," co-written by The Emotions' Wanda Vaughn and her husband Wayne Vaughn, was the track that re-energized EWF's career, landing high on the charts, causing their Raise! album to go platinum in late 1981. Their next gold album was Powerlight in spring 1983, which included the Grammy-nominated "Fall in Love with Me." Their 1983 Electric Universe album stalled at number 40 Pop, breaking the band's string of gold, platinum and multi-platinum albums.

In 1983, Maurice decided he and the band needed a break. During this hiatus, Maurice recorded his self-titled solo album Maurice White and produced various artists including Neal Diamond, Barbra Streisand and Jennifer Holliday. Reuniting with the band in 1987, EWF released the album Touch the World and scored yet another number one R&B single, "System of Survival" and embarked on a corresponding nine-month world tour. This was followed by the 1988 release The Best of Earth, Wind & Fire Vol. II.

In 1990 the group released the album Heritage. Two years later, Earth, Wind & Fire released The Eternal Dance; a 55-track boxed set retrospective of the band's entire history. The appearance of such a project after a prolonged period of relative inactivity signaled to many listeners that the band was calling it quits, but that did not turn out to be case. In 1993, EWF released the album, Millennium that included the Grammy-nominated "Sunday Morning" and "Spend The Night."

Earth, Wind & Fire kept recording and in 1996 released Avatar and Greatest Hits Live; followed by 1997's In the Name of Love; 2002's That's the Way of the World: Alive in '75; Live in Rio, which was recorded during their 1979

“I Am World Tour;” 2003’s *The Promise*, which included the Grammy-nominated “Hold Me” and 2005’s *Illumination*, which included the Grammy-nominated “Show Me the Way.”

In 2000, the nine-piece ’70s edition of Earth, Wind & Fire reunited for one night only in honor of their induction into The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 2001, Eagle Rock Entertainment released the documentary *Earth, Wind & Fire: Shining Stars*, which contains rarely seen historic video footage along with in-depth interviews with the band members. Three of the group’s principle members—Philip Bailey, Verdine White and Ralph Johnson—each earned honorary doctorate degrees from the Arts and Media College at Columbia College in Chicago.

The EWF fanbase extends to heads-of-state: President Bill Clinton invited the group to the White House in 2000 as special guests at a State dinner and, in February 2009, President Barack Obama invited Earth, Wind & Fire to perform in the East Room at the White House for the first social event of the new administration, declaring in an interview with *Rolling Stone* that EWF were “rhythm and blues and pop staples for me.” 2010 was the year that saw Earth, Wind & Fire’s original members Maurice White, Phillip Bailey, Verdine White, Al McKay and Larry Dunn all inducted into the Songwriter’s Hall of Fame. And in 2016, the National Academy of Recording Arts & Science (NARAS) bestowed its highest honor, the Grammy® Lifetime Achievement Award, totaling nine Grammy® Awards for the group.

Because of Maurice’s diagnosis of Parkinson’s, he made his final public performance with the group at the 2006 Grammy Awards. Through it all, White credits his faith for his amazing success and guidance in overcoming his many challenges.

Sadly, Maurice died in 2016, but he remains the band’s heart and soul. Maurice reflected, “I wanted to create a library of music that would stand the test of time. ‘Cosmic consciousness’ is the key component of our work. Expanding awareness and uplifting spirits is so important in this day. People are looking for more. I hope our music can give them some encouragement and peace.”

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## PANELIST BIOS

### **Ronny Schiff**

Over 2,000 music books and books about music bear Ronny Schiff’s name as editor, co-writer, agent, publisher, or author. Several of her music books have received the distinguished Paul Revere Award for overall concept and design excellence.

Most importantly, she produced four Earth Wind and Fire music compilations, numerous EWF band and choral arrangements, and individual books with Ralph Johnson and Verdine White. In addition, she’s produced music books for and worked with artists as diverse as Quincy Jones, Steve Vai, Joni Mitchell, Eric Clapton, Paul McCartney, Iron Maiden, and numerous jazz greats.

For Yamaha Music Division, Schiff was chief editor for the massive Music in Education project. She has represented many trade books on music that have enjoyed multiple printings, including John Braheny’s *Songwriting: The Craft & Business*, Paul Zollo’s *Songwriters on Songwriting*, Jim Beloff’s *The Illustrated History of the Ukulele*, Richard Niles’s *The Pat Metheny Interviews*, and, recently, Shelly Peiken’s *Confessions of a Serial Songwriter*.

She served for 10 years as Vice President of Audio Programming for DMI Music, where she established the Inflight Audio Programming Division by winning the prestigious bid for United Airlines, and subsequently added their Ted Airlines and Air Force 1 and 2 to the roster. Her Inflight Division won Avion Awards from the World Airline Entertainment Association for their channel programming. They also interviewed Earth Wind & Fire for United's Songwriter channel.

Schiff is a Past President of the California Copyright Conference, and past member of the Boards of Directors of AIMP and L.A. Women in Music. She has taught Music Business and Music History courses at UCLA Extension and Musicians Institute. Her undergraduate major was in Secondary Music Education. Her main instrument was viola, and she continues to play guitar, ukulele, and fiddle.

In addition to Ronny Schiff Productions, she is currently a career mentor at Musicians Institute.

### **Verdine White**

He is often called the most electrifying bass player in the world. A consummate entertainer whose primary goal is to ignite and excite his audience. Intelligent, articulate, charismatic, and outrageously stylish with a flair for the extraordinary.

Born and raised in Chicago, Verdine's father wanted him to follow in his footsteps and enter the field of medicine, it turned out, however that music chose Verdine instead. He started his formal training in his preteens studying the upright bass. "The instrument was standing alone in the corner of the orchestra class....tall, mysterious and majestic, so different from all the others, it called me and the love affair began."

After performing several years with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO), Verdine began his professional career playing the electric bass in local jazz clubs throughout Chicago and neighboring cities. His jaunts at the hot spots allowed him to perfect his inimitable style and technique. Already an accomplished bassist, Verdine joined his brother Maurice White in Los Angeles to form one of the most successful pop and R&B bands of all time....Earth Wind and Fire. (EWF)

For over 35 years, EWF's tour and concert performances have taken them around the world. Verdine's creative insight was instrumental in producing many of EWF's unforgettable performances, replete with spectacular costumes, laser lights, pyrotechnics and fascinating illusions. Raising the live concert bar to new levels.

On stage, Verdine's constant motion, enthusiasm and energy (to the point of disbelief) have deemed him the "ultimate fire" of the band. His musicianship keeps the elements in perfect alignment. Verdine's stand-out bass solos are one of the highlights of the show. Many ask, "How is he able to sustain the nonstop nuclear dynamism for over 90 minutes?" He has a few secrets. Verdine attributes keeping fit with his daily regime of Hatha yoga, meditation, a gym routine and eating a clean, healthy diet. The daily ritual keeps him ageless, energetic, focused and full of stamina. He gratefully approaches each performance like it's the first and last time he'll ever be on stage.

Remaining true to his passion of creating music, Verdine has also produced such groups as Level 42, Pockets, Red and the Boys and The Emotions. In addition, he was selected to land a seat as celebrity judge on "American Idol," and is the featured bassist on Jennifer Lopez's CD, The Reel Me. Adding to his visibility, he's also graced the covers of Monitor, Bass Player and Aware Magazines.

His instructional book, How to Play the Bass was so successful, it led to a follow-up video, Rhythm of the Earth-Advanced Bass Techniques.

Verdine strongly believes the key to his longevity and youthfulness lies in hard work, belief of mind over matter, faith in a higher power, and solid family support. Married for over 35 years, his wife and son have kept him focused on the value of life without allowing him to take things too seriously. He is a dedicated family man with hobbies that include fashion, reading, hiking, and sharing long walks with his wife and the family dogs.

He believes artists should remember to give back to the community and the world in general. He's doing just that as the co-founder of the Verdine White Performing Arts Center, a non-profit organization that helps underprivileged and at-risk youth to become musicians by offering lessons, scholarships, and grants.

Verdine's gifts as a visionary, entertainer, producer, musician and fashion trendsetter touches fans, friends and family with a refreshing sincerity and sense of humor that forms a lasting bond forever.

## **Ralph Johnson**

California born, Ralph Johnson remembers watching a local variety show ("The Johnny Otis Show") as a child, and patting his hands together to various beats. His father bought him a pair of drumsticks, which were followed by drums, and he began to take drum lessons. He grew up listening to a lot of music, but mainly jazz and the popular Motown sound. Ralph's family moved to Inglewood, California and he remembers seeing the Forum being built; envisioning himself playing there one day. A few short years later, his dream would indeed become a reality.

By 1968, he joined a local band called, The Master's Children, and throughout this period, he intensely and vigorously practiced, played and honed his drumming skills. Ralph played drums at the venerable local club, Maverick's Flat (nicknamed "The Apollo of the West") that was frequented by many musical celebrities. Maurice and Verdine White dropped by one night, checked out Ralph's performance, and were impressed. Late 1971, Ralph received a phone call to audition for Earth, Wind & Fire. He joined them and became the drummer/percussionist/vocalist with the group.

Broadening his music chops, Ralph fondly remembers working with the late arranger/orchestrator for the band, Charles Stepney, and discussing arrangements and music theory. He further credits Maurice White for influencing the young musicians to keep their minds open by exploring the music possibilities around them.

In 1984, when Earth, Wind & Fire took a hiatus, the group members split and began to work on various projects. Ralph and Al McKay worked with Motown and produced the Temptations hit single, "Treat Her Like a Lady."

The band re-grouped in 1987 and for seven years, they toured and played around the globe. By 1994, Maurice decided that he would retire from touring with Earth, Wind and Fire. With Maurice's blessing, the newly reformed band took Earth, Wind and Fire on the road without their legendary leader.

Ralph has a broad reach in the industry, as his resume reads like a "who's who" of music royalty. In addition to performing and recording with Earth, Wind & Fire, Ralph has produced, written or performed on several artists' compilations such as: Blue Magic, Stanley Turrentine, The Temptations, Johnny Adams, Chuck Carbo and Tape Beatles. And his songs have been sampled by Jay-Z, Keyshia Cole, Ghostface Killah and The-Dream, and the list goes on from there.

In a collaboration with Siedah Garrett, who penned "Man in the Mirror," they have written and recorded "Have a Very Merry Christmas." Ralph's talents extend beyond music and film. His book/CD package is Drum Exercises for the Pop, Funk, and R&B Player. And, if you've caught one of the EWF shows, you've probably seen Ralph Johnson perform a series of karate moves at the end of the night when he is introduced. He has practiced martial arts for over 20 years and holds first-degree black belts in both American Tang Soo Do karate and Kung Fu San Soo.

In April 2000, Ralph Johnson and keyboardist/bassist, Morris Pleasure met to begin a new conceptual jazz project, which morphed into "Auto Caviar," with Steen Kyed on acoustic guitar. Their premiere album, Transoceanic showcases special guests lending their artistry to the band, including, George Duke, Philip Bailey, Janet Jackson, Pam Johnson, Howard Hewitt, Jonathan Butler, Paulinho Dacosta, Gary Bias, and others...

Along with Philip Bailey and Verdine White, Ralph is one of the three remaining founding members of Earth, Wind and Fire, a band that has reigned supreme for 45 years. Ralph can now be found at center stage adding his own brand of slick choreography and smooth vocal stylist artistry to support Earth, Wind & Fire's signature vocal sound that their fans have grown to love for over the past forty years. They are still touring to sold out audiences worldwide.

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*For more information please contact Reggie Calloway at 818-400-7528*

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**SAVE THE DATE: Tuesday, September 12, 2017**

Join us at the Sportsmen's Lodge Event Center  
12833 Ventura Blvd., Studio City, CA 91604

**6:15 PM Check-In | 6:30 PM Cocktails**

**7:00 PM Dinner**

Please visit our website, [theccc.org](http://theccc.org), for more information and enjoy your Summer!

