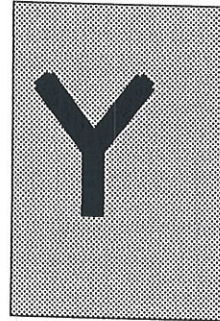


# Richmond's Most Prominent Promoter . . .



## The Great Hosea

*BY Christy Everson*



You might not recognize the name Fenroy A. Fox, but how about "The Great Hosea?" Still not sure? How about Michael Jackson, Marvin Gaye, Diana Ross, The Supremes, The Commodores, The O'Jays or Elvis Presley? These are just a few of the acts Fenroy Fox, better known as "The Great Hosea," has brought to town.

"I've done most all the big shows," says the local promoter, who then goes on to mention the names above. Fox got his start 35 years ago when he realized he had been giving away ideas to others that he could use himself. He held his first show in the coliseum that was on the corner of First and Clay streets in a converted church. It was called "Interpretations of the Stars" and featured local groups imitating the big acts.

"Thirty-five years ago I started out with that idea and never stopped," Fox said. "It was on a Monday night and I drew 1,900 people. Major Harris, who is a big act now, did Jackie Wilson. He did real well too."

Fox, as Hosea Productions, is a one-man show himself. He does it all. He contacts the agencies in New York, books the site, finds the investors, works with the radio stations to promote the show and even puts up the posters and handbills.

"Most of the time there are a lot of people who want to invest in these shows with you, but you have to be the guy who makes it work," he emphasized. "You've got to put out the posters and the handbills. You've got to do everything, because you've got to protect their money. So you've got to make that show work."

Making it work isn't always easy, and Fox has had to contend with everything from rumors to tragedy. Along the way, however, he has had opportunities most of us can only dream about, like eating with Elvis backstage at the Coliseum, or sitting and talking with Natalie Cole in her trailer at the fairgrounds.



On Elvis, Fox says, "Just sitting there listening to him talk about the things he was doing, you never would have imagined that he would die the way he did because the man had a lot of life in him."

Natalie Cole. "She's a home town girl," Fox said, "drinking tea and honey and talking about her daddy."

The O'Jays. "They're just home town boys. We would sit down and talk and tell jokes and lies." Diana Ross. "She was a feisty little woman. At times she could get real snappy. I love her, but she could come down pretty hard on you."

Marvin Gaye. "His people wouldn't let you get near the man."

While all this might sound glamorous to you and I, Fox says, "You have the opportunity to meet every act you bring in, but it doesn't bother me. I'm not worried about meeting these people. All I want to do is pay the management and make sure the show is done right."

"You can't get near a lot of acts. You just pay the management, and that's it. They treat you like anybody else in the audience."

Fox has even passed on invitations to the Grammy's, but then I guess if you've toured with Diana Ross and the Supremes, well . . . but more on that later. One of his biggest shows was Natalie Cole at the State Fairgrounds. In 1979, he sold 37,000 tickets, and people came from all over. But people in Richmond said Natalie would never sing at a fairground and Fox sold only about 20 tickets here.

"People have a tendency to believe what other people tell them in this town," Fox laughs. In 1980 we went back out there. Over 70,000 people came, and Richmond tried to kick the doors down. In this town, you've got to prove something to the people," he said.

Fame and celebrity status fall both ways in this town, Fox explains. "The only problem I have in this town is that I get blamed for every show. If it's a good show, I get the credit. If it's a bad show, I get the credit. All they know is Hosea, but if my name is not on it, it's not my show," he said.

While he's at every show he brings in to make sure everything goes right, Fox says he has just about stopped attending other concerts. He remembers being in line for a Luther Vandross show at the Mosque four or five years ago, and for some reason Vandross wouldn't perform. He had nothing to do with the show, but people turned on him wanting

their money back.

"I'm standing outside in line with everybody else waiting to get in, and they're on me wanting their money back," Fox said with disbelief.

Whatever, Fox must have passed the test. He's Richmond's most successful promoter and says most of the others who came up with him are now gone. He attributes his success to some help along the way from good people like Ben Miles, Manager of Power 92, and Kirby Carmichael of Q94, and to his honesty.

"When you tell people you're going to give them something, you do what you say, because if you don't, you can't last in this business," Fox said. "If people feel they can't trust you, they're not going to support you. They're not going to buy what you're trying to sell them. If you take their money on one thing, why would they come back to you on the next? So, I try to do what I say I'm going to do."

Fox's worst nightmare was when Pach Torres was killed outside the Coliseum following one of his shows, and even though Fox was in no way responsible, he still says it hurt him.

"That really, really hurt me," Fox said. "We had no problems at the show whatsoever. All the sets had left the Coliseum and were at the hotel, and the manager, my partner and I were in the office when one of the ushers came in and told us some kid just got shot. My insides just dropped, because there's no amount of money you can make that can put a value on somebody's life."

Fox hasn't done a show for the kids at the Coliseum since then, although he doesn't blame them. "That one really just took a lot out of me," he said. "But I don't blame the kids because only one person did it. So you can't blame the kids, but it just affected me so much. There aren't too many shows to put on for the younger people now because of the violence," Fox notes.

The city discourages rap concerts because of the violence they tend to bring with them. "It's not that the city won't let me put on any acts, but I don't want to do something and have somebody's kid get hurt. Then it will affect me. It would hurt me. I don't want to see that happen, and you never know when it will happen. It only takes a split second for someone to do something."

It's also harder to book the big shows in Richmond because the facilities here charge more, Fox notes. Lately, Fox has been doing plays. He was



injured in an automobile accident in 1991, which he says slowed him down some. He brought "Lord I'm Coming Home" to the Carpenter Center and "My Grandmother Pray for Me" to the Landmark Theater. Overall, Fox estimates that about 96 percent of his shows have been successful. "I don't have a lot of problems with shows because I try to bring in the right ones," he said. His most successful show was The Fat Boys, UTFO, and Roxanne, Roxanne in 1985 at the Coliseum. The show was sold out with 12,000 to 14,000 people outside still wanting to get in. He charged \$8 in advance and \$10 at the door.

"The price was right, and all the kids came out," he said. "That was a great experience for me to see that many people, because I did it in 10 days."

Now, back to the Diana Ross story. Actually, it was Diana Ross who christened Fox "Hosea." Here's the story as Fox tells it.

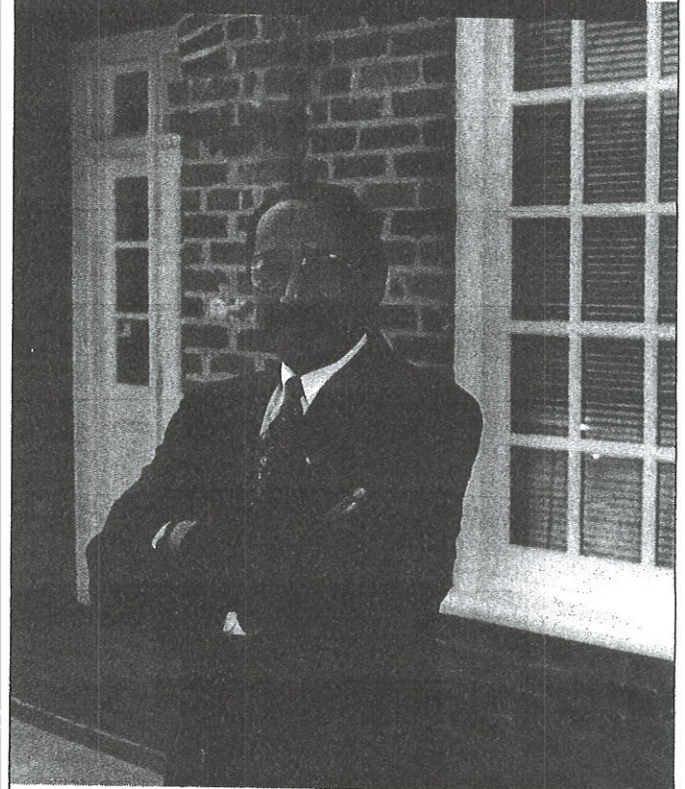
"Back in those days there was a guy called Stacy Henry. He had a band, and they used to hire his band to back the acts. At the time all you needed was a bass player, a guitar player and an amp. That was all they had. They didn't have all the big sound equipment like you have today at the Mosque. I was the number one MC around town at the time and the only one that went out on the road with any of the acts. When the Supremes came through Roanoke, they didn't have an MC to open up the show and by me being there with Stacy, they said why don't you go ahead and bring her on. Well, they couldn't use Fenroy as the MC, so we had to come up with another name. Diana Ross said I reminded her of a guy named Hosea. So from that time on I've been Hosea."

So, that's how a boy named Fenroy from Hanover County became the MC for Diana Ross and the Supremes and traveled around the country with her. They went to about 18 cities, Fox said.

Not bad for someone who says, "I was just a little country boy that came to the city. I hooked in, and there I was."

*(Christy Everson is a Richmond freelance writer and owner and president of Christy Communications and Public Relations.)*

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