

# Music

By C.A. Bustard



## Mardi Gras Festival (State Fairgrounds)

The local grapevine had it that this weekend's Mardi Gras Festival at the State Fairgrounds was not all it was cracked up to be—specifically, that headliner Natalie Cole would not show.

The grapevine was wrong. Ms. Cole arrived in a convoy of limousines about 10:30 last night. Preceded by soul crooner Beabo Bryson, she put a romantic final touch on the first day of a festival that, so far, has been blessed by an impressive cast of black pop performers, first-rate staging and sound and an audience whose mellow, festive mood was matched by sunny, temperate weather.

A good thing, too, because the two-day event has attracted one of the area's largest outdoor crowds in memory. Estimates of the turnout ranged from 25,000 to 50,000 late last night. Another influx of Washington area patrons was expected in the wee hours, and still more after daybreak.

Because of the rumors circulating locally—as pervasive as they were incorrect—a majority of the audience was from out of town, according to the festival's promoters. A check of license plates in the parking lots showed patrons coming from as far away as New York and Indiana.

The show they experienced and many locals missed was a dance concert-cum-weekend camp out on a grand scale. The northeastern corner of the fairgrounds was a sea of filters, tents, lean-tos, lawn furniture and strolling or dancing bodies.

The mixture of sunny weather and disco-oriented music might seem an odd combination—a bit like dining on Hue L. Wellington and Nehi Orange—but the climate and sound merged neatly into an afternoon of fun for a crowd that ranged from toddlers to the middle aged. After dark, the serious partying commenced; and with the music expected to continue until well past midnight and overnight camping permitted on the grounds, the good-timers—for once—didn't have to consider the clock.

They came well-equipped for a celebration. The playthings familiar to anyone who frequents black shows—tambourines, whistles, maracas, glow-in-the-dark devices of all kinds—were there in abundance, and helped spark the crowd to pull on a show almost the equal of what was coming off the stage.

Because of the outdoor setting, however, it was not as dressy an event as a Coliseum concert. Festival garb ranged from the conventional cutoffs and halter tops to vividly colored Afro-Caribbean outfits and drum trunks

the cooler. The aroma of barbecued chicken and ribs wafted over the crowd from a backstage mess tent throughout the show.

The musical lineup was a bit more predictable, with the emphasis on a steady, chugging dance beat, spiced with a few interludes of romantic ballad singing.

The show got under way yesterday with two area acts, Ujima and Production Company, the former offering an appreciative audience its usual blend of hard rhythms and rich harmonies, the latter mixing things up a bit with jazzy instrumental solos and exuberant, complex vocals from Sonny Cain and Delores Day, the husband-and-wife leaders of the band.

Veteran singer Betty Wright brought the crowd to its feet with a succession of her hits, climaxing her set with a version of "Cleanup Woman" that turned into a medley of '70s romantic soul hits.

Hard-core dance party music followed from the likes of Chocolate Milk, T-Connection and Con-Funkshun, with Bryson and Ms. Cole putting a mellow cap on the first night of the festival.

More of the same is expected today, with the locals opening for Ms. Wright, Sun, Cameo, the Bar-Kays and Ashford and Simpson. The music should continue until about midnight, the promoters said.

If the weather holds, and the crowd's mood continues to reflect that meteorological perfection, the Mardi Gras Festival ought to go down as one of the year's most memorable musical sessions.

Hopefully, the show also will put the lie to an assumption still made widely around here—that a backbeat, a young crowd and an outdoor venue are too volatile to mix.

## Band Clinic Planned at VSC

*Times-Dispatch Staff*  
ETTRICK — Virginia State College is offering its first marching band clinic for high school students. Moses Hall, director of bands and assistant professor of music, has announced.

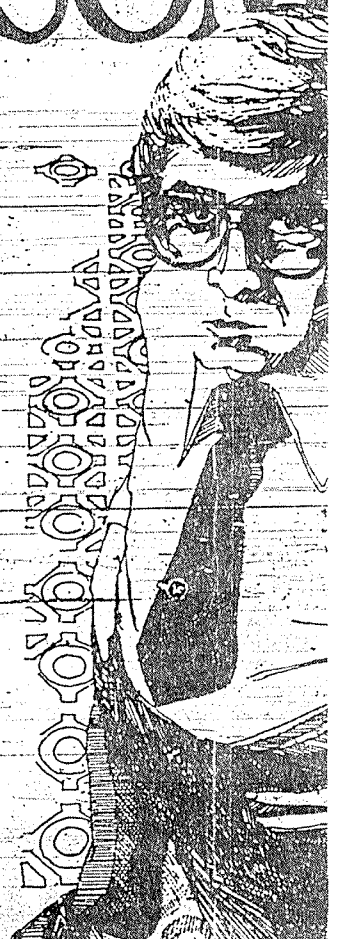
The clinic will be held July 30-Aug. 5 on campus. A registration fee of \$20 per student will be charged. Room and board are available on campus for \$5.10 a day.

Hall said the clinic will emphasize marching skills, and students will be shown the Moffitt style of marching, which includes patterns in motion.

Basic drum corps routines and sessions for percussion and flag corps members are included in clinic.

Additional information can

# "WE'VE YOU AMC SOM



J  
U  
L

2