

Though the solo career of Nona Hendryx has not hit the heady heights of Prince, like the royal one, she has broken down doors and embraced the dynamics of rock when she has so desired.

Hendryx is quietly spoken, firm in her convictions, often finds the subject of our discussion humorous, is quite matter-of-fact on important issues and is a self-confessed tennis player.

On her new LP *Female Trouble* she works with several hot producers, guests include Peter Gabriel, Mavis Staples and George Clinton, and there's even a track written by one J Coco — Prince, maybe?

Hendryx laughs, but she doesn't bother to deny that Prince was behind 'Baby Go Go'.

"The confusion comes from Prince crediting the song to J Coco for whatever reason. It could be out of... humility? Tax evasion? I don't know. But it was requested of me not to make it public. And in my effort to obey his wishes I started making up some wild stories about how I got the song."

Did Prince play on the song?

"He did on the track that he sent me, but I didn't want to take a track that Prince had produced and put my vocal on it, it'd be too Prince. I didn't want his track, I just wanted the song."

Was he happy that way?

"Yeah, he was thrilled with it. I sent him a copy of the finished version, I was in Japan at the time and he sent me a fax saying 'Supercalifunkalistic. Love it, Prince.'"

Guests on the 'Baby Go Go' include P-Funkateer George Clinton and singer Mavis Staples. Do they feature in the video?

"George is, but Mavis couldn't make it. George never misses a chance to be in the

Asking for Trouble Nona Hendryx: Why Should I Cry

The sounds of funk and rock have been fraternising lately in Rick Rubin's Def Jam rap and in Prince's Paisley Park.

But from her first solo album in 1977, Nona Hendryx made it clear that she liked "power chords," though black American performers were — and still are — confined to a soul or funk bag by both fans and media. Rock is no longer "strictly off-limits" for black performers.



public's eye. He's there being his foolish self. It's a great video."

How did they come to be on the song — were they in town?

"On Prince's track he does a lot of different voices, so I thought about people I could work with, and George is a great character. George lives in Detroit, so he came down one Halloween, one year ago last night. He was dressed for the occasion. George doesn't have to dress up. He wakes up dressed up."

"Mavis is a singer I've admired for years and I got in

touch with her in Chicago and asked her if she could come and do it. She said, 'Sure.' The

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other person I wanted on it was Jeff Beck, but he couldn't make it."

Instead of Jeff Beck, Nona Hendryx's longtime mean mutha guitarist, Ronnie Drayton, plays the riff. Nona named the

12" of 'Baby Go Go' 'The Superstitious Mix' because "It's got a great bassline a bit like Stevie Wonder's 'Superstition,'"

You've worked with several producers — would you prefer to work with just one collaborator?

"I prefer working with one producer, but the people I wanted to work with were all committed and it was difficult to pin them down for one album. So I had to re-think it and use different people."

Two of the producers Hendryx wanted to work with were Jam and Lewis of Flyte Tyme and Alex Sadkin, who died in a car accident recently.

She did work with Flyte Tyme, but not without problems:

"They were able to do the album, but I wasn't willing to do it the way they wanted. I worked

"Why Should I Cry?" was called 'Why Must I Cry'... which to me is a very wimpy approach for a woman to take in this day and age."

with them on two songs, but there was a lot of compromise on my part to let them totally create the music without my being there, and then have me come in and just function as a singer. That's not the way I work with people. So for them to do an entire album, they wanted me to do it that way, and I couldn't do that."

Hendryx has written four solo albums and several albums for Labelle, so I was surprised when she said that Flyte Tyme wanted her to use *their* songs. At the time, she was also surprised. But she got some writing credit on one of their songs.

"Why Should I Cry" was

called 'Why Must I Cry,' which is to me a very wimpy approach for a woman to take in this day and age, and so I wanted to change the title. The lyrics were different, they were lyrics people would not believe me singing, so I said, if I am going to sing this, I need to change these lyrics. They did open up that much in the way they work. But I didn't get as much credit for the lyrics as I should have."

Flyte Tyme have put Alexander O'Neal, Janet Jackson and Human League on the charts in recent years. Do they treat your material in a different manner from, say, a British pop band like Human League because you're in the funk and soul vein?

"Well, you're dealing with men to begin with [Hendryx finds this matter humorous] and you're a woman, and they automatically assume the stronger position. Then if you're a singer, they approach you primarily as a singer rather than as an artist or musician — they assume the upper hand again. Whereas the Human League are fronted by guys. So it's more of a guys' thing — I'm sure you understand that better than I do. I think it's that type of thing rather than being English or being funk."

Despite difficulties with Flyte Tyme producers Jellybean Johnson and Spencer Bernard, the single 'Why Should I Cry' is a very successful collaboration.

"Definitely. I knew what I wanted was their style of production not their style of songs. I think they are talented and I needed to compromise. But there is only so far I will."

It's ironic that much of Nona Hendryx's success has been with dancefloor hits such as 'I Sweat (Going Through the Motions)' or recent singles, where her music is hardly lightweight dancefloor fodder. Does the success on the

dancefloor conflict with the more serious side of your music?

"When I perform I move a lot. I like rhythm and I like to be able to feel it, so I'm going to make music that way. Also, I'm not serious, like being boring, but I care about situations. I care about life and that's going to come across in my music."

"With my audience there's no problem, they like to go out and

"I upset MTV by the colour of my skin and by my existence."

party, have a good time and dance, but they are also people who are involved and take up issues and try to change things or help the situation."

On 'I Know What You Need' you've slipped in the lyric, "You don't need MTV," the opposite of Sting's sentiment. Are you trying to upset MTV?

"I've upset them already. That was a reaffirmation of how I feel. I upset them by the colour of my skin and by my existence."

Has 'Baby Go Go' been on MTV?

"No. No no no no. And you won't see it either."

I thought MTV had shown an interest in George Clinton's weird videos?

"You're imagining that. You have a vivid imagination. The black artists they show on MTV are artists they can't ignore. The ones they need like Michael Jackson. But if you get down in the trenches where the real black music or funk music is — you're not going to see these artists on MTV."

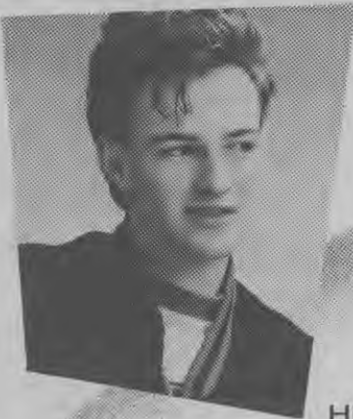
Do you feel your songs with a heavy rock element are succeeding for you?

"I think they're very much a part of my music. If I can't express something in the funk

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It's not just the power

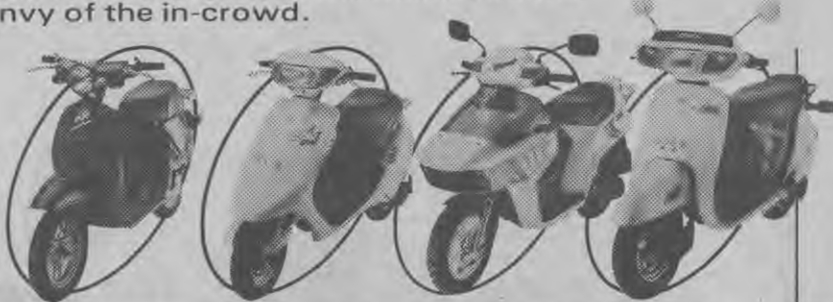
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