

## "All aboard" for funk on

The ocean breeze makes its way up Sunset Blvd. to cool a warm and sunny Los Angeles day. Larry Graham stands on the balcony of his hotel room, overlooking that part of the strip where a forest of billboard advertisements on the latest records make this a particularly hazardous driving area. He would love that type of push for his product. Two albums on Warner Bros., "Graham Central Station" and "Release Yourself" received critical acclaim but failed to reach maximum sales potential. If it is to happen, this night will be a big step in that direction. His group will be playing at the Shrine and the house will be packed, billed with the Ohio Players, one of the hottest groups in the country.

You can sense the excitement in the quiet, easy-going, often humorous Leo. He knows that tonight is the one gig they have been waiting for, the one that will turn critic city out.

Keyboard-player, trumpeter, and group hester Herschall "Happiness" Kennedy, guitarist David "Dynamite" Vega, and vocalist/funk boxer Patryce "Chocolate" Banks all relax around the room, killing time, a little anxious to get it on. Larry's 8-year-old son, Darric, (a fine drummer) naps on the bed.

Tina, Larry's wife of three months, keeps phone interruptions to a minimum. Although married only a short time, Mrs. Graham is used to all this pre-date hustle and bustle. She and Larry have been a couple for a long time while Tina, 24, worked as an airline stewardess for World Airlines. They were married in Reno, Nevada, on February 8.

Natalie, the group's manager, rushes in to hand out the stage passes, which read in big bold letters "March 29 - In Concert - Ohio Players."

"See, now why do they do that?" Larry questions, "I mean they could have put our name on there somewhere. Even if it was so small it would've looked like we printed the pass, at least it could have been on there."

"One time they didn't even have our name on the marquis," he continues. "Natalie had to jump up and down just to get our names on the bill!"

Larry finds it a little hard to believe that people still haven't heard about Graham Central Station. They have been on and off the road now for two years, and mostly on for the past one. They have rocked audiences everywhere.

But it's not like Graham is complaining about his situation. Instead, he is



LARRY GRAHAM: "When we do our whole trip, we're trying to get the people off"

constantly sizing it up, and then attacking it. He knows the group makes good music, and the people need only to find out about it.

"I feel we've come up with good product," Graham says, "but whatever has happened to it after it has left us hasn't happened quite right. Hopefully it will happen this time, because we've been around enough. When we come out with something again, we won't be at the complete mercy of the distributors and the programmers."

"I think we've gotten enough exposure under these two

albums and all the touring we've been doing so that when our next album comes out and people go to buy it and it's not at this particular record store they might go downtown to get it. They just might do that now."

He pauses for a moment to reflect on the possibilities, then adds, "But for right now, we're going strictly on our show — what we can do before your eyes and ears."

This concern with the live performance must be the reason that the word is out: GCS is hot. They have appeared with some of the

biggest — Rufus; Earth, Wind, and Fire; War; and Billy Preston, to name a few — and everywhere the folks go home talking about the train.

Right now they are on tour with the Ohio Players, the group that's on fire, and when you're hot, you're hot. Everywhere they go the crowds have come to see the Players. Anyone else on the bill is just a delay. But the situation works both ways when you're number two you try harder. GCS tries very hard and they succeed.

As the Shrine set

progressed, it became apparent that what makes GCS run is a unique form of energy called "vibes," and it's recycled instantly. First, they send it out through the music. The audience gets it and sends it back through its movements. Then GCS sends it back through more music. It got so great the group had to come back for two encores, and probably would have gone on all night if it had been Graham's show.

"If they're responding to the music then it brings us way up," Herschall says, with Larry adding, "Especially in our case with no real hit records. So when they are responding to our music they are responding to what's actually moving them. We can't just fall off into something and everybody goes berserk because it's what they're listening to every day. What we're doing is out front and it has to be for real to cause any type of response."

If seeing is believing, then I say it's real, and they prove it every time they take the stage. They made the Shrine audience literally fight their desire to stay seated and be cool. They brought them to their feet and did it until they were thoroughly satisfied. The results are the same everywhere, almost predictable, good enough to have the show patented as a people mover. Larry explains:

"When we do our whole trip — when we put our show together — basically it's purpose is to get the people off. We do little visual trips and different things to tickle your ears and kind of play with the senses a little bit."

A little visual trip that caught the Shrine audience off guard came at the end of a hard and heavy version of "People," a tune written by Graham and Sly's brother, Freddie. The tune was a GCS warning about the faults in all of us and what our human condition may lead to. The tune's ascension into the climax was in the form of a Hendrix-influenced musical "war," ending in a sudden flash of light and the group's simultaneous disappearance! The effect was stunning, causing five seconds of pin-drop silence before the crowd broke into a frenzy.

"It's like a chef who gets down with the cooking," Graham continues. "He knows some things that tease the palate. We try to consider ourselves as cooks but with music. We try to tease the mind."

At a recent gig in Denver Larry recalls the brothers that had come in their Superfly suits ("With hats to the side," Herschall adds) and then kicking back and