March 6, 1988-----

A supersonic Concorde of sex and soul, the one and only Barry White flies through the banquet door at Army & Lou's Award Winning Restaurant on East 75th Street. Wearing a baggy midnight-black jacket, matching slacks and a lavender shirt, the big guy smiles and deci-bellows "hello."

The room shakes, the walls shiver and somewhere, beds salute.

Air Barry has arrived.

As one of soul music's most erotic songwriters and underrated producers, White has charted a lusty flight pattern: 103 gold albums, 38 platinum albums, 20 gold singles and 10 platinum singles. His own hits include "Never Never Gonna Give You Up" (1973), my favorite; "Can't Get Enough of Your Love" (1974); "You're the First, the Last, My Everything" (1977), and "It's Ecstasy When You Lay Down Next to Me" (1977). No wonder Air Barry has been missing in action.

The guy needed a rest.

White is on a short promotional tour for his new record, "The Right Night and Barry White," a continuation of romantic raps such as "For Your Love (I'll Do Anything)," which is not a remake of the 1958 Ed Townsend soul ballad, and "There's a Place (Where Love Never Ends)," in which White warns in his best velvet voice, "You know a kiss like that could really start something. . . ." The songs may be the same, but now it's sex in Sensurround.

"I'm using new high technology," White says over a modest order of Army & Lou croquettes. "Stevie Wonder and I were probably the first to deal with technology on a very fluent basis. I started in 1979 and was one of the first people to buy a drum machine. From that, I have emerged into the science of technology: computers and X7s. The only thing that is different in Barry White's music is the technology he is using. He still writes love songs.

"He still writes positive love songs."

The new album was recorded in White's elaborate R.I.S.E. (Research in Sound Excellence) home studio in Sherman Oaks, Calif. Between 1983 and 1986, White dropped out in an effort to raise $10 million to establish an independent studio and record company. "We found the finance money in Texas, but it was tied to oil," White says with a sigh. "The OPEC ministers had a meeting in 1986 that devastated the state of Texas and knocked them out of the box three days before we were able to put the deal together.

"But I was three teardrops too late.

"So if you don't make it, you go back and make the best record deal for Barry White and go back into production. And that's exactly

what I did. I went with A & M in 1986 and made a deal for 1987. We came out with the new record in September of '87."

Despite the layoff, White has managed to avoid the time warp that trapped other mid-'70s disco figures such as the Bee Gees. "I didn't have to escape from any disco acts," he says. "I've had many hit albums. The Bee Gees' arrangements were basically black rhythms. And Barry Gibb's sound was like black falsetto. So when I hear the word `disco,' I think of a time. When I hear the word `club' in 1990, I'll think of now because there will be another name then. They can put any title on mine they choose to, as long as the music is playing."

What will never go out of style is White's sexy approach to soul music. White broke into the field in 1966, producing acts as diverse as Jackie DeShannon, the Bobby Fuller Four (he produced Fuller's second album, "Let Her Dance," for Mustang Bronco Records), and Love Unlimited, who hit in 1972 with "Walking in the Rain with the One I Love." White's steamy 1973 debut album, "I've Got So Much To Give," gave an indication that White indeed would be the maestro with the mostro.

"I'm a record producer," he says. "And when every record producer finds an artist, they have to set out to find the artist's platform. What is he going to speak about? What is going to be his image, what is going to be his style? Barry White has a very unusual voice. And when you take that voice and put it with music, you can get a combination of strange things if the person who owns that voice knows how to work that voice. Well, the person who owns the voice and the person who makes the music for the voice happens to be the same person.

"If you look around in the record industry, you will not find a lot of artists who can produce and write for themselves - successfully. Because you have to be honest with one's self. Of course, you don't know if it's right or wrong until it comes out."

White credits his success to the fairer sex.

"If it wasn't for women, there would be no Barry White," he says. "Men have not given to my life. Women have given to my life. That's not saying men do not appreciate Barry White, because they do. But they don't appreciate him on the level that women do. Women understand the music; they can feel the music; they can see the sensitive side of Barry White. They've never met me, but they know that side. I knew I had attained that when my first album came out."

The dance rhythms in White's music have remained steady, most notably in gritty new material such as "Sho' You Right," off the new record. "You're still dealing with rhythms where you're hearing the drums real loud and Barry White was one of the innovators of that," he said. "So was Holland, Dozier and Holland at Motown. They're just grooves with ad-lib lyrics supplied to them. That's why rap music has emerged. And there must be a market for it. Otherwise, it wouldn't be selling. There's a lot of rap music I like. Like LL Cool J, Run-D.M.C. and Prince."

White is regarded as having an influence on young rappers, most notably in New York City. New rappers in New York are employing the drumbeat to "I'm Gonna Love You a Little Bit More, Baby" underneath their raps. And later this year, White will produce new material for Run-D.M.C.

"Everybody influences everybody," he says, soft-pedaling. "I was influenced by Jerry Butler, Ray Charles and Sam Cooke. So when I hear a new rapper say they're influenced by Barry White, those are just words to me. I have never considered myself a rapper. I have always considered myself a communicator - one who speaks of substance and things that can help other people better relate to each other. I've always considered myself a person who speaks of positive things."

White credits his broad musical base to his mother's classical music background. His mother, Sadie Carter, gave birth to White in 1944 while visiting Galveston, Texas. After Barry was born, she returned to Los Angeles, where she raised him with her husband, Melvin A. White.

"She can read and write music fluently," he says. "Until this day, I cannot read or write music. I didn't want to read or write; I just wanted to play. She played Beethoven, Bach and Bernstein. She played the classical masters. I mean, she would sit there at that piano and I wouldn't go outside and play - I'd sit right there and listen.

"So you listen to Barry White's music and you hear a lot of influences. There's jazz and a lot of Latin. To me, Latin music is the closest to black music. It's very rhythmic and it makes a statement. Latin music has fire, just like black music. I've been in Latin America, and I've heard songs, that if they were in America, they would be No. 1 hits."

White will take his show on the road this month, hitting Europe with the 38-piece Love Unlimited Orchestra '88. During the tour, he also will play in Puerto Rico and Miami, but won't fly over to Cuba - even though Cuban President Fidel Castro is one of White's biggest fans.

"Barry White is the only artist in the world that Castro invited to his country, to not only appear there, but to do an interview with him," White said. "It was 1978. I was there for eight days. I had done my research and was ready to go (with the interview), but when I got home, my attorneys felt it was too political to get involved with. But I remain very respectful to Castro.

"And anyone else who appreciates Barry White's music."