

SMASH HITS OF THE 70s



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- 1 YOU SEXY THING *Hot Chocolate*
- 2 HOOKED ON A FEELING *Blue Swede*
- 3 THE LION SLEEPS TONIGHT
Robert John
- 4 CHEVY VAN *Sammy Johns*
- 5 ME AND YOU AND A DOG NAMED BOO
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- 11 YOU MAKE ME FEEL LIKE DANCING
Leo Sayer

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Climax Blues Band
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Hurricane Smith

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- 2 Hooked on a Feeling
- 3 The Lion Sleeps Tonight
- 4 Chery Van
- 5 Me and You and a Dog Named Boo
- 6 Brand New Key
- 7 Little Willy
- 8 Hitchin' a Ride
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- 12 Couldn't Get It Right
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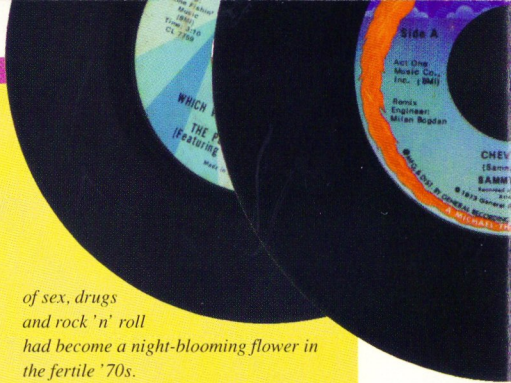
For many the '70s are the lost decade: a cultural Atlantis sandwiched between the hippie radicalism of the '60s and the incipient greed of the '80s. Not just an aesthetic wasteland concocted from polyester and shag carpeting, the '70s were a period when the values of the '60s—individual liberty, antielitism and respect for gender and racial differences became grounded in politics—where “doing my own thing” metamorphosed into “doing the right thing,” after national pride curdled amid political crisis. Yet despite a series of events that branded the '70s with an angry scar, people struggled to hold onto their optimism and innocence, however ironic, as depicted in those ubiquitous “Have a Nice Day” smiley faces. That sense of innocence unhinging was reflected in some of the songs that topped the charts during those years.

The Climax Blues Band from Stafford, England, made a run on the charts with the deceptively breezy **COULDN'T GET IT RIGHT**, but contained within the lines of this upbeat song is a restlessness that borders on a hazardous escapism, indicating that the '60s culture

of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll had become a night-blooming flower in the fertile '70s.

Sammy Johns's **CHEVY VAN** is another kind of road song—a fantasy ripped out of the pages of a men's magazine. This is a tale of a more sexually liberated time, when the driver of a spiffed-up Chevy van picks up a winsome hitchhiker with the face of an angel. Awakening from a snooze, she decides to repay the driver for his kindness in a time-honored manner. The song sold more than 3 million copies in 1975, reaching No. 5 on the charts, and van sales soared the following year.

While not so dramatic a song, **HITCHIN' A RIDE** by England's Vanity Fare also showed it was still possible to rely on the kindness of strangers. This is the tale of a man who receives a late-night





call from his girlfriend and, moved by her loneliness, he tries to reach her despite having neither a car nor train fare. This song bears a resemblance to the Box Tops' Letter, but that didn't stop this U.K. import from capturing the affections of its contemporary audience.


The image of life before the '70s energy crisis and long gas lines was idyllic—a time when the frontier still beckoned, as heard in **ME AND YOU AND A DOG NAMED BOO** by Lobo. Recorded in 1971, this is the story of another restless romantic who wants to hit the road with his girlfriend. The dog was added when the writer, Roland Kent LaVoie, who was having trouble finding something to rhyme with “Me and You,” looked up to see his German shepherd, Boo. LaVoie also took inspiration from Boo for his

alias, choosing Lobo, the Spanish word for wolf.

RIDE CAPTAIN RIDE was a more mythic traveling song, inspired by an episode of Star Trek, according to Mike Pinera, who wrote the song for his children after a drive on Route 73 in California. A spacey, Moody Blues-esque number, Ride unfortunately was the only hit for Tampa, Florida pop-rock band Blues Image, selling more than a million copies. Pinera left soon after to join Iron Butterfly, while member Skip Konte joined Three Dog Night, and the band eventually broke up.

Breakup was on Ace member Paul Carrack's mind when he penned **HOW LONG** in 1975. While many have supposed the song to be about a woman's infidelity, it was actually inspired by another band's attempt to poach Ace's bass player, Tex Comer. This song reached No. 3, but Carrack eventually left the band to play with Squeeze.

Pablo Cruise's **WHATCHA GONNA DO?** was legitimately about a breakup, thanks to singer Dave Jenkins's inattention to his ladylove. “It was just one of these things where I was too young to be in it,” the singer said recently, “but at least it inspired some good songs.”



Also inspired by the author's own life was **OH BABE, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY**, a rather sweet confession of social awkwardness. It was written and recorded by Hurricane Smith, the alias of Beatles engineer and Pink Floyd producer Norman Smith, during downtime at a Floyd session. Chart success was a surprise to Smith, as was the congratulatory telegram that John Lennon and Yoko Ono sent him.

Autobiography was also the subject matter in America's **LONELY PEOPLE**. It was co-written by group member Dan Peek, who wanted to inspire hope in people who thought they would never find "the one." Peek revealed, "I wrote it probably within a month of getting married to my long-lost love, Catherine. I had always felt like the melancholy, lonely person. And now I felt like I'd won."

Hot Chocolate's **YOU SEXY THING** dealt with the same subject. First signed to the Beatles' Apple label, the band moved to Mickie Most's RAK label and eventually released a string of U.K. hits, one of which was this saucy song, sung by the striking, head-shaven Erroll Brown. While it exudes a knowing seductiveness, the lyrics tell another story.

The lyrics of Melanie Safka's **BRAND NEW KEY** told several stories, or so thought some

radio stations. They banned the record for its supposed sexual connotation (it became the theme song for a wife-swapping club in L.A.) and drug reference ("key" was interpreted as meaning a kilo of marijuana). What fueled this gentle hippie soul to write such a controversial song? A McDonald's hamburger and french fries. Melanie, who had been a strict vegetarian for three years and had just come off of a four-week fast in which she drank only distilled water, submitted to "the voice of spiritual awareness." On the way home from McDonald's, she began writing **Brand New Key** and recorded it as an album cut at Allegro Studios on Broadway. Melanie's record company wanted to release the song as a single. She disagreed, fearing that it would damage her artistic integrity. Instead, this little ditty gave Melanie the biggest hit of her career.

Sweet, one of the pioneers of glam rock, began life as the Sweetshop in 1969. They shortened the name to Sweet, and hooked up



with the U.K. writing team of Chinn and Chapman, who provided them with a string of bubblegum anthems—much to the band's chagrin. Their raunchy **LITTLE WILLY**, an intentional double entendre, was a showstopper during live shows, but the stage high jinks became so sexually explicit that the Mecca Dancehall circuit banned Sweet in 1973.

Although Leo Sayer was never banned onstage for anything, someone should have prevented him from dressing up as a clown during the Show Must Go On Tour. Fortunately, he engaged the services of über-producer Richard Perry, who got rid of all that sartorial nonsense. A tossed-off phrase was responsible for Sayer's biggest hit, **YOU MAKE ME FEEL LIKE DANCING**, and the catchy song rode the charts at No. 1 for a week.

It took singer Robert John almost 21 years to get his first No. 1 hit, Sad Eyes, in 1979. Back in 1971, when he couldn't afford to be picky about material, he covered the Tokens' oldie

THE LION SLEEPS TONIGHT, produced by former Token Hank Medress. Though he wasn't thrilled about doing this song, he was surprised when it brought him his first Top 10 record. And no one ever suspected that a remake of B.J. Thomas's sappy 1969 hit **HOOKED ON A FEELING** by little-known Swedish group Blue Swede would go straight to the top of the charts. It's the distinctive "ooga chugga" chorus that made the remake so compelling, but it wasn't the band's own invention; the Swedes lifted it entirely from British producer Jonathan King, who came up with that caveman refrain. King released his version of *Hooked* in the U.K., but as is so often the story, Blue Swede got full credit.

—Jaen Uhelszki





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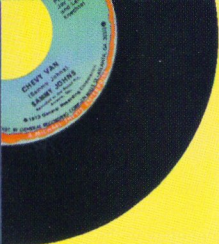
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