



SOLID GOLD SOUL ^{EARLY} '80s



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1. THE GAP BAND • Burn Rubber (Why You Wanna Hurt Me)
2. LIPPS, INC. • Funkytown
3. RICK JAMES • Super Freak (Part 1)
4. THE WHISPERS • And the Beat Goes On
5. THE FOUR TOPS • When She Was My Girl
6. KOOL AND THE GANG • Celebration
7. SHALAMAR • The Second Time Around
8. JERMAINE JACKSON • Let's Get Serious
9. EVELYN "CHAMPAGNE" KING • Love Come Down
10. LEON HAYWOOD • Don't Push It Don't Force It
11. EARTH, WIND AND FIRE • Let's Groove
12. ARETHA FRANKLIN • Jump to It
13. RAY PARKER JR. • The Other Woman
14. YARBROUGH AND PEOPLES • Don't Stop the Music
15. THE GAP BAND • You Dropped a Bomb on Me
16. ATLANTIC STARR • Circles
17. DAZZ BAND • Let It Whip
18. CHAKA KHAN • What Cha' Gonna Do for Me
19. LAKESIDE • Fantastic Voyage

R838-25
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By

the early 1980s, African-American musicians had an unprecedented palette of sounds on which to base their music, from R&B, soul and pop to funk and disco and dance. The Gap Band—brothers Charles, Ronnie and Robert Wilson of Tulsa, Oklahoma—drew on all those musical styles while developing a funk 'n' pop sound that also looked ahead to hip-hop.

Forming in the early 1970s, the trio released one album on hometown boy Leon Russell's Shelter label and opened a tour for the rock star, who was then commuting between Hollywood and Tulsa. That proved to be a false start, but The Gap Band soon launched a string of hits that in 1980 culminated in their first No. 1, **Burn Rubber (Why You Wanna Hurt Me)**, a song producer and co-writer Lonnie

Simmons conceived from his own college memories and the recent experience of a Gap Band roadie. Its novel intro required two cars—one to rev and one to peel out—and was cut in the parking lot of the Hollywood studio where the band was working. The label initially vetoed

the sound effects, but a few copies of the original slipped out to DJs, who played it enthusiastically; right away, every radio station wanted that version. Between their next two chart toppers, the Gap Band scored a No. 2 in 1982 with **You Dropped a Bomb on Me**.

Yarbrough and Peoples came under the Gap Band's Total Experience label umbrella after playing their demo for Charles Wilson one night following a

Dallas gig. He took them straight up to Simmons' hotel room at 4 a.m. for a listen, and Simmons liked the duo enough to suggest they relocate to L.A., where he assigned Total Experience producer Jonah Ellis to help with a demo. One of the seven Ellis-penned songs they worked on was called "When the Music Stops," which in the studio morphed into **Don't Stop**

the Music. That single chased Burn Rubber up the R&B charts, and ultimately replaced it at No. 1 in early 1981.

Producer Leon Sylvers was responsible for numerous hits at Solar Records, beginning with his work with the group Shalamar. Solar



The Gap Band

was originally the Soul Train label, an arm of the popular television dance party, and Shalamar first surfaced there as a studio-only group that hit No. 10 in 1977 with Uptown Festival, a medley of Motown oldies. But somebody had to tour behind the single, so a vocal trio was formed that included youthful Soul Train dancers Jody Watley and Jeffrey Daniels. Veteran singer Howard Hewett replaced the original third member of the group, a move that paid off with **The Second Time Around**, Shalamar's first No. 1. The song was written by William Shelby, whose brother was a member of the Solar act Lakeside, about an old girlfriend in Dayton who'd dumped him; Leon Sylvers came up with the melody and the irresistible bass line.

Leon Sylvers also produced the Whispers, formed in 1964 by L.A. twins Walter and Wallace Scott during high school. After a respectable decade of recording, the five-member vocal group found that by 1980 disco had rendered their style obsolete, and they were fading fast when Sylvers (with William Shelby and Stephen Shockley) co-wrote and co-produced **And the Beat Goes On**, giving the Whispers their first-ever No. 1. The nine-man funk band Lakeside, meanwhile, had come to L.A. from Dayton and kicked around several labels with no luck. Then they signed with Solar, playing backup on numerous sessions before scoring themselves with **Fantastic Voyage**. The group produced

itself, writing in the studio by developing grooves first and then lyrics to fit; this song reflects leader Thomas Shelby's fondness for all things nautical. Evelyn "Champagne" King's **Love Come Down** was based on the spacious, orchestral Leon Sylvers sound, according to writer Kashif and producer Morrie Brown. Kashif played all the instruments except guitar, while King overdubbed all the vocal parts.

The Four Tops were also experiencing hard times in 1981. In fact, the onetime Motown hit-makers had no label when they signed a production deal that year with David Wolfert. **When She Was My Girl** was a synthesizer demo Wolfert had received that lacked a bridge; once it was finished, he cut the tracks in L.A.,



then shipped the tapes to New York for the quartet to overdub vocals. It became their first No. 1 since 1966.

Among other veterans still going strong, Aretha Franklin racked up her first chart topper since leaving Atlantic Records with **Jump to It**. Producer Luther Vandross and his writing partner, Marcus Miller, worked out the tune during breaks from rehearsals for Luther's Saturday Night Live musical guest appearance; Miller, a former member of the SNL band, had returned to help back him.

Inspired by a passage from the Qur'an (the sacred text of Islam), Kool and the Gang keyboardist and musical director Khalis Bayyan (formerly Robert Bell) came up with the catchy "Come on, let's all celebrate" outro to the 1979 comeback hit Ladies Night. He and the band fleshed it out for **Celebration**, which in January 1981 was the theme song for the Super Bowl and served as the homecoming salute to the American hostages freed from Iran.

Stevie Wonder co-wrote and produced **Let's Get Serious** for Jermaine Jackson, who'd been recording solo since 1972 (he resigned from his family group, the Jacksons in '76). Wonder also handled drums, piano, synthesizer,

guitar and some vocals on the track. Singer-keyboardist Leon Haywood's career had been up and down since the early '60s, when he supported Big Jay McNeely and then Sam Cooke; **Don't Push It Don't Force It** turned out to be the Houston singer and keyboardist's biggest hit ever. With its vocoderized intro and edgy arrangement, **Let's Groove** marked



Earth, Wind and Fire's move away from pop and back toward a harder funk sound. Chaka Khan's **What Cha' Gonna Do for Me** was written by L.A. singer-songwriter Ned Doheny and guitarist Hamish Stuart of the Average White Band. Khan was hanging around the studio while Doheny laid down a guide vocal for AWB to follow when they recorded the song, and wound up joining him behind the mike; a few months later, she cut the tune herself.

Among newcomers, Dazz Band scored Motown's 92nd No. 1 with **Let It Whip** ("Dazz" stood for "danceable jazz"). Lipps, Inc. debuted with **Funkytown**; the "group" consisted of Minneapolis writer-producer-multi-instrumentalist Steven Greenberg and vocalist Cynthia Johnson, Miss Black Minnesota of 1976. Brothers Wayne, Jonathan and David Lewis of White Plains, New York, were the nucleus of the otherwise changeable Atlantic Starr, whose **Circles** was polished black pop.

But it was two new crossover stars who brought in the decade most effectively. Buffalo, New York, native Rick James was AWOL from the U.S. Naval Reserves when he played with Neil Young in the '60s Toronto band the Mynah Birds. In 1978, after working at Motown as a staff writer and producer, he became an artist, playing a brand of "punk funk" that was full of references to kinky sex and drugs.

Super Freak (Part 1) was his second-biggest pop hit, in 1981, and James stayed popular most of the rest of the decade. Ray Parker Jr. was a Detroit session guitarist who as a teen played on some Motown sessions and then moved to L.A. to join Stevie Wonder's band in 1972. On his own, he fronted a band initially called Raydio, and later known as Ray Parker Jr. and Raydio. **The Other Woman** was the first release under Parker's name alone.

Though he will probably forever be known for Ghostbusters, one of his most atypical hits,

Parker joined James in setting a standard that endures for music that is both pop and hard funk.

—John Morthland



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- 2 Funkytown** *Lipps, Inc.* • Music and lyrics by Steve Greenberg. Red Sea Songs/Pick's Music Inc. BMI. Casablanca 2233 (1980). © 1979 Casablanca Records. Courtesy of Casablanca Records. No. 2*
- 3 Super Freak (Part 1)** *Rick James* • Music and lyrics by Rick James and Alonzo Miller. Jobete Music Co. Inc. ASCAP. Stone Diamond Music Corporation. BMI. Gordy 7205 (1981). © 1981 Motown Record Company, L.P. Courtesy of Motown Record Company, L.P. No. 3*
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- 5 When She Was My Girl** *The Four Tops* • Music and lyrics by Marc Blatte and Lawrence Gottlieb. Universal MCA Music Publishing, a division of Universal Studios, Inc. ASCAP. Casablanca 2338 (1981). © 1981 Motown Record Company, L.P. Courtesy of Motown Record Company, L.P. No. 1*
- 6 Celebration** *Kool and the Gang* • Music and lyrics by Khalis Bayyan and Kool and the Gang. WB Music Corp. ASCAP. Second Decade Music Co./Warner-Tamerlane Publ. Corp. BMI. De-Lite 807 (1980). © 1980 Motown Record Company, L.P. Courtesy of Motown Record Company, L.P. No. 1*
- 7 The Second Time Around** *Shalamar* • Music and lyrics by William Shelby and Leon Sylvers. Portrait/Solar Songs Inc./Notting Dale Songs Inc. ASCAP. Solar 11709 (1980). © 1979 Dick Griffey Productions. Courtesy Solar Records; under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets. No. 1*
- 8 Let's Get Serious** *Jermaine Jackson* • Music and lyrics by Lee Garrett and Stevie Wonder. Black Bull Music Inc./Jobete Music Co. Inc. ASCAP. Lee Garrett Music. BMI. Motown 1469 (1980). © 1980 Motown Record Company, L.P. Courtesy of Motown Record Company, L.P. No. 1*
- 9 Love Come Down** *Evelyn "Champagne" King* • Music and lyrics by Kashif (Michael Jones). Kashif Music/Songs of Universal Inc. BMI. RCA 13273 (1982). © 1982 BMG Entertainment. Courtesy of the RCA Records Label, under license from BMG Special Products. No. 1*
- 10 Don't Push It Don't Force It** *Leon Haywood* • Music and lyrics by Leon Haywood. Irving Music Inc./Jim-Edd Music. BMI. 20th Century 2443 (1980). © 1979 Mercury Records. Courtesy of Mercury Records. No. 2*
- 11 Let's Groove** *Earth, Wind and Fire* • Music and lyrics by Maurice White and Wayne Vaughn. EMI April Music Inc./Music Sales Corp. ASCAP. ARC 02536 (1981). © 1981 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a division of Sony Music, a group of Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 1*
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- 13 The Other Woman** *Ray Parker Jr.* • Music and lyrics by Ray Parker Jr. Raydiola Music. ASCAP. Arista 0669 (1982). © 1982 Arista Records, Inc. Courtesy of Arista Records, Inc. No. 2*
- 14 Don't Stop the Music** *Yarborough and Peoples* • Music and lyrics by Lonnie Simmons, Alisa Peoples and Jonah Ellis. Taking Care of Business Music. BMI. Mercury 76085 (1981). © 1980 Polydor, Inc. Courtesy of Polydor, Inc. No. 1*

- 15 You Dropped a Bomb on Me** *The Gap Band* • Music and lyrics by Lonnie Simmons, Rudolph Taylor and Charles Wilson. Taking Care of Business Music. BMI. Total Experience 8203 (1982). © 1982 Mercury Records. Courtesy of Mercury Records. No. 2*
- 16 Circles** *Atlantic Starr* • Music and lyrics by David Lewis and Wayne Lewis. Almo Music Corp. ASCAP. A&M 2392 (1982). © 1982 A&M Records, Inc. Courtesy of A&M Records, Inc. No. 2*
- 17 Let It Whip** *Dazz Band* • Music and lyrics by Reggie Andrews and Leon Chancler. Ujima Music. ASCAP. Hey Skimo Publishing Company. BMI. Motown 1609 (1982). © 1982 Motown Record Company. L.P. Courtesy of Motown Record Company, L.P. No. 1*
- 18 What Cha' Gonna Do for Me** *Chaka Khan* • Music and lyrics by Jamie Stuart and Ned Doherty. Longdog Music/Joe's Songs Inc. ASCAP. Warner 49692 (1981). © 1981 Warner Bros. Records Inc. Produced under license from Warner Bros. Records Inc. No. 1*
- 19 Fantastic Voyage** *Lakeside* • Music and lyrics by Tiemeyer McCain, Marvin Craig, Norman Beavers, Frederick Lewis, Otis Stokes, Stephen Shockley, Fred Alexander, Mark Wood and Thomas Shelby. Circle L Publishing/Portrait/Solar Songs Inc./Nana Music/Different Stokes Music/Tiemeyer McCain Publishing/New Lake City Music. ASCAP. Solar 12129 (1981). © 1980 Solar Records. Courtesy Solar Records, under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets. No. 1*

* Indicates highest Billboard R&B chart position

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The Author: John Morthland has been an associate editor for *Rolling Stone* and *Creem*. He has freelanced for virtually every rock magazine published during the last 20 years.

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