



**SOLID GOLD SOUL <sup>MID-</sup>'80s**



# SOLID GOLD Soul <sup>MID-</sup>'80s

1. GEORGE CLINTON • Atomic Dog
2. MTUME • Juicy Fruit
3. CAMEO • She's Strange
4. ASHFORD AND SIMPSON • Solid
5. DeBARGE • Rhythm of the Night
6. ARETHA FRANKLIN • Freeway of Love
7. READY FOR THE WORLD • Oh Sheila
8. YARBROUGH AND PEOPLES • Don't Waste Your Time
9. FREDDIE JACKSON • Rock Me Tonight (For Old Times Sake)
10. DENECE WILLIAMS • Let's Hear It for the Boy
11. KOOL AND THE GANG • Fresh
12. ROCKWELL • Somebody's Watching Me
13. RUFUS FEATURING CHAKA KHAN • Ain't Nobody
14. MAZE FEATURING FRANKIE BEVERLY • Back in Stride
15. RICK JAMES • Cold Blooded
16. POINTER SISTERS • Jump (For My Love)
17. MIDNIGHT STAR • Operator
18. COMMODORES • Nightshift

R838-26  
314541904-2

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UNIVERSAL MUSIC  
Special Markets

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2. Juicy Fruit
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MID-  
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TIME  
LIFE  
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UNIVERSAL MUSIC  
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COMPACT  
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R838 26  
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SOLID GOLD SOUL

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**By**

the mid-1980s, George Clinton was indisputably the King of Funk, the music's most inspired and whacked-out innovator. Clinton first entered the charts in 1967 with the Parliaments and the No. 20 pop hit (I Wanna Testify). A year later, he was in Detroit ring-leading a new creation known as Funkadelic, which put the era's experimental rock into a proto-funk context with hard-rock drumming, heavily distorted guitars and lyrics that laid out the funk cosmology Clinton was developing. And soon after that he added a new group known simply as Parliament. With essentially the same personnel, the two groups performed live together, while on record Funkadelic put an emphasis on instrumentation, improvisation and soloists, and Parliament was oriented more toward songs and singing. Picking up rhythmically where James Brown left off, Clinton created ever more elaborate

and outrageous scenarios and songs, as well as a whole new vocabulary to explain them; eventually, his music began crossing over to white audiences.

But Clinton was perpetually involved in contract disputes and lawsuits, and in 1982, having lost the rights to his groups' names, he began recording under his own —though still using many of the same musicians.

Clinton notes that he was in an “enhanced” state when he entered the studio to cut vocals for the unnamed track that became **Atomic Dog**—without realizing that the music was playing backward

due to an engineer's miscue, he began ad-libbing lyrics. “This is the story of a famous dog,” he announced, and from there the song just got weirder.

More than most of his contemporaries, Rick James fully appreciated just how completely Clinton and company had changed black music.



George Clinton

James's punk-funk, mostly about drugs and freaky sex, took him to the top—but he was starting to slip right about the time producer Quincy Jones boasted that he and Michael Jackson had stolen Rick's groove for *Thriller*. So on **Cold Blooded**, written about his then girlfriend, Linda Blair, James created a new groove, playing all the instruments himself while relying on synthesizers rather than guitars and horns.

In the post-disco era, black music took many directions. Rufus featuring Chaka Khan, consisting of a black female singer fronting a black-and-white funk-rock band, had keyboardist David "Hawk" Wolinski's tune **Ain't Nobody**—which Quincy Jones also wanted for *Thriller*. Wolinski's bandmates weren't wild about the song but cut it anyway. When their label declined to release it as a single, Wolinski threatened to pull the song from the album and give it to Jones and Jackson. The label relented, and Rufus got the hit. Aretha Franklin was still strongly rooted in soul when she cut **Freeway of Love**. Writer-producer Narada Michael Walden, who had made a demo of the song in the classic Motown style 18 months earlier, planned to record it himself but wound up giving it to



Rick James

Aretha; her version contains a sax solo by Bruce Springsteen sideman Clarence Clemons. The Pointer Sisters, originally a vocal quartet dressed in thrift-store threads and singing in a '40s harmony style, dabbled in rock and even country before trying a more dance-oriented sound with **Jump (For My Love)**.

The legendary writing-and-producing team of Nicholas Ashford and Valerie Simpson left Motown in 1973 to become performers themselves in a sleek, adult style. But **Solid**, their only No. 1 single, didn't come until 1984. Walking around New York City one day, Ashford heard some kids saying, "Yo, solid"; he told Simpson

later at home that he thought the phrase applied to their relationship, and they wrote a song with kid appeal to prove it. Another male-female pair, Yarbrough and Peoples, got **Don't Waste Your Time** from writer-producer Jonah Ellis, who was inspired by an episode from high school in which a pal became his new sweetheart after she informed him that his old girlfriend was cheating on him. *Midnight Star* was a mixed group in which female singer Belinda Lipscomb was backed by founder Reggie Calloway, his brother Vincent and fellow Kentucky State students; they had to leave for New York to start enjoying hits like **Operator**.

For the movie *Footloose*, about a small Midwestern town that bans dancing, Tom Snow and Dean Pitchford wrote **Let's Hear It for the Boy** for the scene in which Kevin Bacon attempts to teach Christopher Penn to dance. The songwriters discarded their original version and rewrote it; next, they accepted and then rejected Deniece Williams' first recording—so she popped into a Manhattan studio and sang it

again. That time, everyone was satisfied.

Lead singer James Taylor wrote **Fresh** before joining *Kool and the Gang*; his new bandmates overhauled the lyrics and made the rhythm track more syncopated. *Cameo* was led by former session drummer Larry Blackmon, who conceived **She's Strange** as "thinking man's rap." *Maze* was fronted by veteran Philadelphia singer Frankie Beverly, whose group *Raw Soul* left for California right around the time *Gamble and Huff* were putting *Philly*



back on the musical map. Renamed *Maze*, his group recorded **Back in Stride**, the first of their two No. 1 hits, right after a major personnel shake-up, squelching rumors that they were

disbanding. Soul legend Marvin Gaye helped them get their first record deal and also suggested their name change.

Gaye was also an inspiration to James Mtume, a jazz veteran who turned to writing and producing soul and funk before forming the group he named after himself. He credited Gaye's Sexual Healing with clearing the path for erotic tunes like **Juicy Fruit**, which was much less orchestrated than Mtume's productions for other artists. The post-Lionel Richie Commodores saluted Gaye and Jackie Wilson on **Nightshift**. Drummer Walter Orange whipped up the groove while Ffranne Golde worked the Gaye and Wilson song titles into the lyrics and producer Dennis Lambert gave the single the feel of Rock and Roll Heaven, his earlier smash for the Righteous Brothers.

Ready for the World got a record deal after legendary Detroit DJ Electrifying Mojo (a.k.a. Charles Johnson) made the Flint, Michigan, sextet's indie single a local favorite. Their later hit **Oh Shella** sounded so much like a Prince record that fans mistakenly assumed it was about the Purple One's percussionist Shella E. Despite the fact that both the group DeBarge and songwriter Diane Warren had made ballads their specialty, she

penned their up-tempo party anthem **Rhythm of the Night** for the sound track to The Last Dragon; producer Richard Perry made it work for lead singer El DeBarge by overdubbing street noises. Freddie Jackson, who sang background vocals for Melba Moore, cut **Rock Me Tonight (For Old Times Sake)** at a recording session his boss gave him for his birthday.

But it may have been Rockwell who had the most serendipitous story. Kennedy Gordy was the son of Motown founder and chairman Berry Gordy Jr., and a writer for his dad's publishing wing, Jobete, but he couldn't interest anyone at the label in **Somebody's Watching Me** except staff producer Curtis Anthony Nolen. Working at his home studio on his own time, Nolen helped Kennedy polish the song and cut it, even persuading Michael Jackson to add his voice. Meanwhile, Kennedy, gazing at a Norman Rockwell painting, decided to go by the more Prince-like name Rockwell. Berry liked the single, which hit so big it surprised everyone—except perhaps Nolen, who had realized something that no one else had noticed: *Somebody's Watching Me*, with its ultra-paranoid vision, was set for release in the year 1984.

—John Morthland



**SOLID GOLD SOUL**  
MUSIC '80s

- 1 Atomic Dog** *George Clinton* • Music and lyrics by Garry Shider, David Spradley and George Clinton. Southfield Music Inc. ASCAP. Bridgeport Music Inc. BMI. Capitol 5201 (1983). © 1982 Capitol Records, Inc. Courtesy of Capitol Records, under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets. No. 1\*
- 2 Juicy Fruit** *Mtume* • Music and lyrics by James Mtume. Mtume Music. BMI. Epic 03578 (1983). © 1983 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\*
- 3 She's Strange** *Cameo* • Music and lyrics by Thomas Jenkins, Charles Singleton, Nathan Leftenant and Lawrence Black. Universal PolyGram International Publishing Inc. ASCAP. Cameo Five Music/Universal Songs of PolyGram International. BMI. Atlanta Artists 818384 (1984). © 1984 Mercury Records, a Division of UMG Recordings, Inc. No. 1\*
- 4 Solid** *Ashford and Simpson* • Music and lyrics by Nickolas Ashford and Valerie Simpson. U S Music & Media. ASCAP. Capitol 5397 (1984). © 1987 EMI Records. Courtesy of EMI Records. Under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets. No. 1\*
- 5 Rhythm of the Night** *DeBarge* • Music and lyrics by Diane Warren. BMG Songs Inc. ASCAP. Gordy 1770 (1985). © 1985 The Universal/Motown Records Group, a Division of UMG Recordings, Inc. No. 1\*
- 6 Freeway of Love** *Aretha Franklin* • Music and lyrics by Narada Michael Walden and Jeffrey Cohen. WB Music Corp./See No Evil Music. ASCAP. Arista 9354 (1985). © 1985 Arista Records, Inc. Courtesy of Arista Records, Inc. No. 1\*
- 7 Oh Sheila** *Ready for the World* • Music and lyrics by Melvin Riley Jr., Gordon Strozier and Gerald Valentine. Ready for the World Music Inc./Trixie Lou Music. BMI. MCA 52636 (1985). © 1985 MCA Records, a Division of UMG Recordings, Inc. No. 1\*
- 8 Don't Waste Your Time** *Yarborough and Peoples* • Music and lyrics by Jonah Ellis. Taking Care of Business Music. BMI. Total Experience 2400 (1984). © 1985 Mercury Records, a Division of UMG Recordings, Inc. No. 1\*
- 9 Rock Me Tonight (For Old Times Sake)** *Freddie Jackson* • Music and lyrics by Paul Laurence Jones. Universal MCA Music Publishing, a division of Universal Studios, Inc. ASCAP. Capitol 5459 (1985). © 1985 Capitol Records, Inc. Courtesy of Capitol Records, under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets. No. 1\*
- 10 Let's Hear It for the Boy** *Deniece Williams* • Music and lyrics by Thomas Snow and Dean Pitchford. Ensign Music Corporation. BMI. Columbia 04417 (1984). © 1984 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\*
- 11 Fresh** *Kool and the Gang* • Music and lyrics by James Taylor, Ronald Bell, Robert Bell, Curtis Williams, George Brown, James Bonnellford, Sandy Linzer and Charles Smith. Warner-Tamerlane Publ. Corp. BMI. De-Lite 880623 (1985). © 1984 Mercury Records, a Division of UMG Recordings, Inc. No. 1\*
- 12 Somebody's Watching Me** *Rockwell* • Music and lyrics by Rockwell. Jobete Music Co. Inc. ASCAP. Motown 1702 (1984). © 1983 The Universal/Motown Records Group, a Division of UMG Recordings, Inc. No. 1\*
- 13 Ain't Nobody** *Rufus featuring Chaka Khan* • Music and lyrics by Hawk Wolinski. Windswept Music. ASCAP. Warner 29555 (1983). © 1983 Warner Bros. Records Inc. Produced under license from Warner Bros. Records Inc. No. 1\*
- 14 Back in Stride** *Maze featuring Frankie Beverly* • Music and lyrics by Frankie Beverly. Amazement Music. BMI. Capitol 5431 (1985). © 1985 Capitol Records, Inc. Courtesy of Capitol Records, under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets. No. 1\*



- 15 Cold Blooded Rick James** • Music and lyrics by Rick James. National League Music Inc. ASCAP. Gordy 1687 (1983). © 1983 The Universal/Motown Records Group, a Division of UMG Recordings, Inc. No. 1\*
- 16 Jump (For My Love) Pointer Sisters** • Music and lyrics by Marti Sharron, Stephen Mitchell and Gary Skardina. EMI April Music Inc./Anidraks Music Inc./Welbeck Music Corporation/EMI April Music Inc. ASCAP. Planet 13780 (1984). © 1983 BMG Entertainment. Courtesy of RCA Records Label, under license from BMG Special Products. No. 3\*
- 17 Operator Midnight Star** • Music and lyrics by Belinda Lipscomb, Reginald Calloway, Boaz Watson and Vincent Calloway. Calloco Music Inc./Midstar Music Inc./Sony/ATV Songs LLC (Epic Solar), BMI. Solar 69684 (1984). © 1984 Solar Records. Courtesy of Solar Records, under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets. No. 1\*
- 18 Nightshift Commodores** • Music and lyrics by Walter Orange, Dennis Lambert and Franne Golde. Walter Orange Music. ASCAP. Careers-BMG Music Publishing Inc./Franne Golde Music/Rightsong Music Inc. BMI. Motown 1773 (1985). © 1984 The Universal/Motown Records Group, a Division of UMG Recordings, Inc. No. 1\*

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 Recording Producer/Consultant: Joe Sasty  
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 William Schurk, Jan Stanley

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**The Author:** John Morthland began writing about music as an associate editor for *Rolling Stone* in 1969, and has written for virtually every music magazine published in the three decades since. He is the author of *The Best of Country Music* (Doubleday, 1984) and is currently a contributing editor for *Texas Monthly*. He lives in Austin, Texas.

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