



70s dance party

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SOUNDS OF THE SEVENTIES • '70s DANCE PARTY 1972-1974

- 1 **TSOP (The Sound of Philadelphia)**
MFSB featuring The Three Degrees
- 2 **Rock Your Baby** George McCrae
- 3 **The Love I Lost (Part 1)**
Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes
- 4 **Pick Up the Pieces** AWB
- 5 **Fire** The Ohio Players
- 6 **Never Can Say Goodbye**
Gloria Gaynor
- 7 **Hollywood Swinging**
Kool and the Gang
- 8 **Dancing Machine** The Jackson 5
- 9 **When Will I See You Again**
The Three Degrees
- 10 **Love Train** The O'Jays
- 11 **Rock the Boat**
The Hues Corporation
- 12 **Everlasting Love** Carl Carlton
- 13 **Never, Never Gonna Give Ya Up**
Barry White
- 14 **Tell Me Something Good** Rufus
- 15 **Do It ('Til You're Satisfied)**
B. T. Express
- 16 **Keep On Truckin' (Part 1)**
Eddie Kendricks
- 17 **Doctor's Orders** Carol Douglas
- 18 **Love's Theme**
Love Unlimited Orchestra

SEE PROGRAM NOTES INSIDE

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Whether the Jackson 5 are considered the last of the '60s Motown Sound groups or the first of the 1970s, there is no doubt that as disco replaced soul music, the brothers were in their most precarious position ever as 1974 began. Their last pop smash had been 1971's *Never Can Say Goodbye*, which was also their last R&B chart-topper. True, 1973's *Get It Together* had peaked at No. 2 on the R&B charts, but of their previous four singles, the best had stalled at No. 5 R&B, and the others barely made the top 10.

The boys seemed to be putting their best ideas into their various solo projects. Then came

Dancing Machine

The song, co-written by J5 producer Hal Davis about a young woman he knew, was sizzling, but the Jacksons' performance outdid anything they'd done before—perhaps because, as Michael Jackson later said, they considered this song, and disco, to be their ticket out of teeny-bop and into adult

music. Michael also felt that the record was better promoted than its immediate predecessors because it was the first J5 single released after brother Jermaine had married Motown prexy Berry Gordy's daughter, Hazel. *Dancing Machine* went all the way on the R&B charts, and finished only a notch lower in the pop rankings:

as a group, the Jacksons would never do that well again.

For former Temptations falsetto Eddie Kendricks, the breakthrough came in 1973 with the chart-topping **Keep On Truckin' (Part 1)**. His seventh single since going solo in 1971, this was the first to penetrate

the pop top 40 (and the R&B top 10, which he would continue to occupy for three years).

Disco created a new hierarchy in soul music, and the hottest label around was Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff's Philadelphia International. Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes joined the stable in



1971—one year after the charismatic Teddy Pendergrass signed on as their drummer and lead singer—and soon ranked alongside the O'Jays as one of Gamble and Huff's top acts. Originally a ballad, **The Love I Lost (Part 1)** got cranked up in the studio until it emerged as pure Philly disco—and became a No. 1 R&B hit.

Love Train, a sort of disco update of Martha and the Vandellas' *Dancing in the Street*, was the O'Jays' first pop No. 1 ever, though the group had been around since 1963 (and had been with Gamble and Huff since signing with their Neptune label in 1969). The Three Degrees, with Sheila Ferguson singing lead, joined the label in 1973 after nearly a decade kicking around the chitlin circuit. While **When Will I See You Again** proved their most successful single, they were already well known as the voices on MFSB's **TSOP (The Sound of Philadelphia)**.

That song, with its irresistible beat and sleek orchestrations, could not have been more accurately fitted. The players—Gamble and Huff's studio crew

(the band's initials stood for Mother Father Sister Brother)—had been around in some form since the early '60s (though some claim that *The Horse*, the 1968 song attributed to Cliff Nobles and Co., was the first true MFSB single). The Philly International personnel was fluid enough that some 30 musicians could claim to be members—although only 11 received royalties on this single, which was written by Gamble and Huff upon learning that impresario Don Cornelius was looking for a new theme song for his popular TV dance party, *Soul Train*.

Born in Texas but raised in Los Angeles, Barry White had been around the music biz since age 11, when he played piano on Jesse Belvin's *Goodnight My Love*. From there, he worked his way into various roles as sideman, producer and arranger (he wrote and arranged Bob and Earl's 1963 *Harlem Shuffle*). White came into his own as an artist and producer during the disco era, using a 40-piece orchestra to create such baroque hits as his own **Never, Never Gonna Give Ya Up**. But **Love's Theme**, by the Love Unlimited Orchestra, was White at

his glitziest. The instrumental was the overture to *Under the Influence of...*, an album by the female trio Love Unlimited (featuring White's wife, Glodean James), and segued into the title song, giving DJs and dancers a good long ride, and ultimately making the overture a much bigger hit than the single it introduced.


Fire was the Ohio Players' first single without their longtime frontman Walter "Junie" Morrison, who quit to join the Parliament-Funkadelic traveling circus. Like most of their hits, the music and title grew out of a group jam, with Leroy "Sugarfoot" Bonner writing the lyrics; it became their first No. 1 pop hit. The Hues Corporation duplicated that feat with the infectious, reggae-laced **Rock the Boat**, a hit made in the discos. After their stand in a Las Vegas lounge got them record company attention, the trio signed a recording contract; this single, originally meant as an album track, was pulled from their debut after their producer noticed how well it went over with live audiences. But radio turned a deaf ear for months, until disco DJs made it a huge dance-floor hit.

As an instrumental by a self-contained Scottish band, **Pick Up the Pieces** was an even bigger oddity. AWB (short for Average White Band) were given their name by Bonnie Bramlett when they opened along with Delaney and Bonnie and Friends for Eric Clapton's 1973 comeback show at the Rainbow Theater in London. After one seat-of-the-pants American tour with equipment borrowed from the Who, AWB re-grouped when Jerry Wexler signed them to Atlantic. This Crusaders-influenced No. 1 single was marked by the criss-crossing guitars of Hamish Stuart and Onnie McIntyre and the catchy sax solo by Malcolm "Molly" Duncan.

Rock Your Baby, one of the sharpest hits H. W. Casey and Richard Finch wrote and produced for Florida's T.K. operation, was actually meant for George McRae's wife, Gwen. When she turned it down, Casey and Finch approached Betty Wright, and then such male label-mates as Latimore and Timmy Thomas. Finally, they turned it over to George.



whose yearning, understated vocal provided the perfect finishing touch. Billy Nichols of the Invaders, a popular East Coast club band, said he wrote **Do It ('Til You're Satisfied)** as a means of motivating himself, but he wound up giving the tune to his friends in B. T. Express (formerly Brooklyn Trucking Express). Nichols wanted them to do the song as a chant, repeating the title over and over, but at their insistence he relented and came up with lyrics.



Rufus was fronted by South Side Chicago native Chaka Khan (born Yvette Marie Stevens), a former Black Panther who took as her name the Swahili word for fire. Stevie Wonder's **Tell Me Something Good** marked the group's debut. Detroit native Carl Carlton was signed at age 12 by Golden World, a Motor City label

hoping to make him the next Little Stevie Wonder. But his biggest hit, a remake of Robert Knight's 1967 **Everlasting Love**, didn't come for another decade, when he was studying chemistry at Tennessee State (where his father taught music).

Kool and the Gang was launched in 1964 by Robert "Kool" Bell as the Jazzjocs

(his dad had played with Thelonious Monk), but had evolved into a completely different sound by the time of *Wild and Peaceful*, which yielded the hard-funk chant **Hollywood Swinging**. Gloria Gaynor, an East Coast club singer, made her breakthrough with **Never Can Say Goodbye**, a song previously released by the Jackson 5 and Isaac Hayes and written by Clifton Davis, a preacher's son who later starred in the '80s sitcom *Amen*. Another TV crossover was Carol Douglas, who had kicked around TV commercials and bit parts, off-Broadway shows and even an early-'70s stint on the rock 'n' roll revival circuit as a member of the Chantels before she hit with **Doctor's Orders**. Those jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none credentials were typical of so many who gained a new life when disco took over—artists who faded almost as quickly as they had surfaced.

—John Morthland

DISCOGRAPHY

**Indicates highest Billboard chart position*

- 1. TSOP (The Sound of Philadelphia)** MF5B featuring The Three Degrees • Music and lyrics by Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff, Warner-Tamerlane Publ. Corp./Sony/ATV Songs LLC Epic Solar BML Philadelphia International 3540 (1974). © 1974 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a division of Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 1*
- 2. Rock Your Baby** George McCrae • Music and lyrics by Harry Casey and Richard Finch, Longitude Music Co. BML TK 1004 (1974). © 1974 TK Records. Produced under license from Rhino Records Inc., by arrangement with Warner Special Products. No. 1*
- 3. The Love I Lost (Part 1)** Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes • Music and lyrics by Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff, Warner-Tamerlane Publ. Corp. BML Philadelphia International 3533 (1973). © 1973 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a division of Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 2*
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- 6. Never Can Say Goodbye** Gloria Gaynor • Music and lyrics by Clifton Davis, Jobete Music Co., Inc. ASCAP/MGM 14748 (1974). © 1974 PolyGram Records, Inc. Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc. No. 9*

- 7. Hollywood Swinging** Kool and the Gang • Music and lyrics by Ricky West and Kool and the Gang. Delightful Music Ltd./Gang Music. BML De-Lite 561 (1974). © 1973 PolyGram Records, Inc. Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc. No. 6*
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- 12. Everlasting Love** Carl Carlton • Music and lyrics by Buzz Cason and Mac Gayden. Rising Sons Music, Inc. BML Back Beat 27001 (1974). © 1974 MCA Records, Inc. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 6*
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TIME-LIFE wishes to thank William L. Schurk of the Music Library and Sound Recordings Archives, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, for providing valuable reference material.

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