



70s
dance party

TIME
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MUSIC

DISCO
1975-1976
CENTENARIES

SOUNDS OF THE SEVENTIES • '70s DANCE PARTY 1975-1976

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- 2 **The Hustle** Van McCoy
- 3 **You'll Never Find Another Love Like Mine** Lou Rawls
- 4 **You're the First, the Last, My Everything** Barry White
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The Philadelphia International label ruled crossover black music in the mid-1970s the way Motown had in the '60s. With disco assuming supremacy midway through the decade, the Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff label was a multi-chart threat with each new release.

So while **I Love Music (Part 1)** was the fourth R&B No. 1 for the O'Jays since their label debut, *Back Stabbers*, went all the way in mid-1972, it was also their fifth pop top-10 record during that period. Recording it took two days, longer than most Gamble-Huff projects; the studio band cut an extra-long rhythm track while Kenny Gamble was writing lyrics in the studio, then the group required extra time to work out its parts. Lou Rawls, like many of the label's top acts, was a reclamation project for Gamble and Huff; he came aboard in 1976, having last seen the pop charts in 1971 and the R&B charts in '74. **You'll Never Find Another Love Like Mine**, which Rawls

cut live with the band, might have been an admonishment to fans who had ignored him for so long—but it is equally telling that Kenny Gamble, who wrote the lyrics, was being divorced from his wife, singer Dee Dee Sharp, at the time.

Motown still hung in there. In-house producer Hal Davis perversely decided

that since disco was the antithesis of the Motown Sound, he

wanted to cut a disco record with flagship Motown artist Diana Ross. For the **Love Hangover** sessions, he bathed the studio in hot red lights and strobes to put Ross in a disco mood. And when the normally less-than-spontaneous diva laughed

in the midst of her vocals, he left

it in. The Miracles' **Love Machine (Part 1)** finally established a sound completely independent of Smokey Robinson, who had actually left the group much earlier. The single was pulled from *City of Angels*, a concept album about the vagaries of



stardom. The story line concerned a country girl who goes to Los Angeles to make the big time, but her former boyfriend, who jokingly calls himself the Love Machine, comes looking for her and winds up becoming the star himself. Despite its successful new direction, this synth-heavy No. 1 proved the group's last chart single.

The T.K. Productions labels, based in Florida, brought a Caribbean jankanoo flavor to disco, thanks largely to Harry Casey and Richard Finch. After beginning there as gofers, they were promoted to engineers; ultimately, the pair became the nucleus of KC and the Sunshine Band, as well as the company's top writer-producers. **Get Down Tonight** broke KC in the States after a pair of British hits. Labelmate Clarence Reid wrote and recorded **Rockin' Chair** himself, but was so displeased with the results that he sought to produce another version on Betty Wright, the company's top female singer. When Wright turned it down, Gwen McCrae got the honors instead.

Silver Convention came out of the thriving Munich, Germany, studio scene,

masterminded by the team of Silvester Levay, who played synthesizer and arranged, and producer Michael Kunze. After breaking in with the European hit *Save Me*, which featured three anonymous female voices, the pair came up with the riff for **Fly, Robin, Fly** (Kunze wanted to call it "Run, Rabbit, Run," but another song was already out under that title). When it came time to name the group, Kunze took his inspiration from Levay's nickname, Silver.

The Ohio Players and Wild Cherry were two very different breeds of funk from the Buckeye State. The former (originally known as the Ohio Untouchables) came from Dayton, and wrote their material communally by jamming in the studio—no witnesses were allowed except the engineer. They had just come off a tour of 48 one-nighters when they recorded their album *Honey*, which included **Love Rollercoaster**, in that fashion. Wild Cherry—basically singer-guitarist Bob Parissi and sidemen—came from Dean Martin's hometown of Steubenville. Parissi had broken up his first band and was managing franchise steakhouses

when he had to be hospitalized; while he was laid up, he decided to give music one last try, naming his new group after the cough drops on his nightstand. Parissi came out of the hospital ready to rock, but Wild Cherry's audiences wanted disco, so he scribbled the lyrics to **Play That Funky Music** on a waitress's order pad one night between sets. The group recorded it as the B side to their cover of the Commodores' *I Feel Sanctified*, but the tune quickly broke out on its own.

Frankie Valli had been recording without the 4 Seasons for nearly as long as he had been fronting the group, and his solo career was soaring in 1974 with the No. 1 *My Eyes Adored You*. As the group continued to wobble—its last top-30 record had been in 1968—he took **Swearin' to God** to No. 6 on his own in 1975. Later that year, Valli and the 4 Seasons, who by now actually numbered five, came back with *Who Loves You* and **December, 1963 (Oh, What a Night)**. The latter, co-written by the group's longtime manager-producer, Bob Gaudio, with his future wife,

Judy Parker, was originally set in 1933 and concerned Repeal. Neither Valli nor Parker was very happy with it though, so she wrote new lyrics while Gaudio revised the melody, and the new version confirmed that teen nostalgia will always be the most potent form of nostalgia in rock.

Van McCoy and Barry White were show-biz vets who managed to step out front via disco. A friend of McCoy had been urging him to check out a new dance the kids were doing at the Adam's Apple in Times Square. The producer sent an underling in his place, and, based on his description, wrote **The Hustle** to fill out an album he was working on. It not only became a theme song for the era, but the first and only No. 1 of his brief recording career. White's **You're the First, the Last, My Everything** was a rewrite of a previously unrecorded country song ("You're the First, the Last, the In-Between") that his friend Sterling



Radcliffe had penned 21 years earlier. Radcliffe had bought Christmas presents for White's kids back in one of his scuffling years, so this was the maestro's payback; though he kept only Radcliffe's chord changes and part of the melody—and then changed those once he got in the studio—White gave his friend co-writing credit.

The Ritchie Family was not a family at all. Producer Jacques Morali, who would go on to concoct the Village People, used countless different vocalists on their sessions; this remake of Xavier Cugat's 1943 hit **Brazil** was done with Philly singers and musicians. The Sylvers, however, were the real deal: 10 siblings whose intricate harmonies caught the ear of producer Freddie Perren, known for his work with

the Jackson 5 at Motown. His co-writer, Kenny St. Lewis, suggested the motif for **Boogie Fever**. Earth, Wind and Fire's **Shining Star** was featured in the music-biz exploitation flick *That's the Way of the World*. The Andrea True Connection, fronted by a porn-film star, exploited the most obvious aspects of both disco and her

chosen field with **More, More, More (Pt. 1)**. But longtime friends Sylvia Robinson (of the '50s duet Mickey and Sylvia, who hit with *Love Is Strange*) and Shirley Goodman (of *Let the Good Times Roll*'s Shirley and Lee) demonstrated once and for all how disco ought to sound. Producer Robinson talked Goodman, who was working as a secretary at Playboy, into cutting vocals over a dynamic Donnie Elbert track. Shirley tried **Shame, Shame, Shame** first with Hank Ballard, but sang with a local songwriter named Jesus Alvarez on the final version. (Elbert, eased out of the picture, moved to England and cut a song with an identical melody called *You're Gonna Cry When I'm Gone*, prompting Sylvia's husband and business partner, Joe Robinson, to buy out the master.) *Shame, Shame, Shame*, though it hovered outside the top 10, became one of the most sizzling, and most irresistible, singles disco ever produced.

—John Morthland

DISCOGRAPHY

**Indicates highest Billboard chart position*

1. Play That Funky Music Wild Cherry • Music and lyrics by Robert Parissi. Sweet City Records Inc./R.W.P. Music. ASCAP/Epic 50225 (1976). © 1976 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a division of Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 1*

2. The Hustle Van McCoy • Music and lyrics by Van McCoy. Warner-Tamerlane Publ. Corp./Van McCoy Music, Inc. BMI. Avco 4653 (1975). © 1975 Amherst Records, Inc. Courtesy of Amherst Records, Inc., by arrangement with Celebrity Licensing Inc. No. 1*

3. You'll Never Find Another Love Like Mine Lou Rawls • Music and lyrics by Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff. Warner-Tamerlane Publ. Corp. BMI. Philadelphia International 3592 (1976). © 1976 Philadelphia International Records. Used courtesy of Philadelphia International Records. No. 2*

4. You're the First, the Last, My Everything Barry White • Music and lyrics by Barry White, Tony Sapa and Peter Roadcliffe. So-Vette Co./Unichappell Music/Super Songs. BMI. 20th Century 2133 (1975). © 1974 PolyGram Records, Inc. Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc. No. 2*

5. Love Machine (Part 1) The Miracles • Music and lyrics by Warren "Pete" Moore and William Griffith. Jobete Music Co., Inc./Grimora Publishing. ASCAP/Tamla 54262 (1976). © 1975 Motown Record Company, L.P., under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc. No. 1*

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7. December, 1963 (Oh, What a Night) Frankie Valli and the 4 Seasons • Music and lyrics by Judy Parker and Bob Gaudio. Jobete Music Co., Inc./Seasons Music Company. ASCAP/Warner/Curb 8168 (1976). © 1976 Warner/Curb. Courtesy of The Four Seasons Partnership. No. 1*

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12. Boogie Fever The Sylvers • Music and lyrics by Kenny St. Lewis and Freddie Perren. PolyGram International. ASCAP/Bull Pen Music Inc. BMI. Capital 4179 (1976). © 1975 Capital Records, Inc. Courtesy Capital Records, under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets. No. 1*

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14. Love Rollercoaster The Ohio Players • Music and lyrics by Clarence Satchell, Leroy Bonner, Ralph Middlebrooks, William Beck, Marvin Pierce, Marshall Jones and James Williams. Mercury 73734 (1976). © 1975 PolyGram Records, Inc. Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc. No. 1*

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16. Shame, Shame, Shame Shirley and Company • Music and lyrics by Sylvia Robinson. EMI-Aoril Music Inc. ASCAP/Gambi Music Inc. BMI. Vibration 352 (1975). © 1974 Sugarhill Records. Licensed from Rhino Records, Inc. No. 12*

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18. Brazil The Ritchie Family • Music by Ary Barroso. English lyrics by S. K. Russell. Peer International Corp. BMI. 20th Century 2218 (1975). © 1975 PolyGram Records, Inc. Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc. No. 11*

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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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RB40-06



