

70s dance party

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SOUNDS OF THE SEVENTIES • '70s DANCE PARTY 1976-1977

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- 2 **Right Back Where We Started From** Maxine Nightingale
- 3 **Disco Lady** Johnnie Taylor
- 4 **Don't Leave Me This Way** Thelma Houston
- 5 **I Just Want to Be Your Everything** Andy Gibb
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- 18 Ain't Gonna Bump No More
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By 1976, Miami-based KC and the Sunshine Band had firmly established their brand of disco, which was heavily influenced by Caribbean junkanoo music. That sound, with its steel drums, whistles and cowbells over an infectious beat, created a party atmosphere that KC had no trouble reshaping for the ears of dancing Americans. (**Shake, Shake, Shake**) **Shake Your Booty** confirms the extent to which the band was feeling its oats. Though the lyric is ostensibly a simple command to dance, leader Harry Casey claimed that it was also meant to apply to living large off the dance floor—it was his way of saying “strut your stuff, be yourself.”

More than a few disco groups picked up the cry—though few tried to argue that they were talking about anything more than the dance life. By now, in fact, disco songs that celebrated dancing had become commonplace (and contrasted sharply with previous generations of pop dance songs,

which usually merely described the steps). Silver Convention, the Munich studio group, said it with **Get Up and Boogie (That's Right)**, which used different singers than the previous year's *Fly, Robin, Fly* debut. But this trio—Penny McLean, Ramona Wolf and Linda Thompson—was the one that stuck, and even toured

together. Few singers expressed the ethos with more flair and raw energy than Vicki Sue

Robinson. The daughter of a black actor father and a white folkie mother, Robinson was only 16 when she joined the original Broadway cast of *Hair*.

From there she moved into other rock musicals, some movie work and the original Broadway production of

Jesus Christ Superstar. At 21 she had her first record, though the exuberant **Turn the Beat Around** turned out to be her only foray into the top 10.

Johnnie Taylor came out of the soul era, sticking with Stax Records until the



legendary label bankrupted in 1975. When he switched to Columbia, his producer had a song ready for him. Don Davis had recently rewritten his own *Disco Baby* as **Disco Lady**—inspired by a combination of Curtis Mayfield's *Gypsy Woman* and an African dancer he had seen while vacationing in Spain. Taylor, an old-line soul man, was leery of disco and reluctant to cut it. But the red-hot funk of *Disco Lady*, which was about disco without aping the form, became the first-ever record to go platinum (the category, signifying sales of two million copies, had just been created because gold records were becoming so commonplace). The wily Joe Tex, whose humorous yet moralistic sermonettes had made him one of the most memorable stars of the soul era, found his way back onto the charts for the first time in five years with the hilarious **Ain't Gonna Bump No More (With No Big Fat Woman)**. Tex promoted the song by staging bump dance contests with large women at his shows.

Like Taylor, Englishman Leo Sayer, who had made his name as a fragile singer-

songwriter who performed in clown makeup, rode high up the charts with a syncopated song that was about dancing without using the disco beat.

You Make Me Feel Like Dancing was largely the work of his Los Angeles pop-rock producer, Richard Perry. Andy Gibb, "the fourth Bee Gee" (the first three Brothers Gibb made up the actual group), was brought to the States from Australia by Bee Gees manager Robert Stigwood due to his success down under. Brother Barry wrote him **I Just Want to Be Your Everything**, and Andy soared to the top of the charts with his very first American release.

Disco created its share of unlikely stars and unlikely records. Walter Murphy was a Madison Avenue jingle writer who had also arranged for Doc Severinsen and *The Tonight Show* Orchestra. The conservatory-trained Murphy decided that what disco really needed in order to establish its legitimacy was an infusion of classical music, so he began experimenting with various pieces, finally settling on Beethoven's *Symphony Number 5 in C Minor*. Though billed as Walter Murphy

and the Big Apple Band, he played nearly every instrument on **A Fifth of Beethoven**, as he called his new synthesis, and the chart-topping single eventually made it onto the *Saturday Night Fever* sound track.

Meco wasn't far behind. Trombonist Meco Monardo was a veteran of the West Point Cadet Band who, though he claimed to loathe pop music, played, produced and arranged it for some nine years (Gloria Gaynor's *Never Can Say Goodbye*, which he co-produced in 1974, was his first success). Enthralled by *Star Wars*—he saw it 11 times—he worked up a 15-minute disco treatment of several pieces of music from the film. On the strength of the movie's record-breaking box office receipts, Meco sold Casablanca president Neil Bogart on the idea without playing him one second of the music, and went into the studio with a 75-piece orchestra (himself on trombone and keyboards) to record **Star Wars Theme/Cantina Band**. The original movie theme, by John Williams and the London Symphony Orchestra, was just hitting the top 10

when Meco's single was released and shot past the LSO version in no time.

But Casablanca's biggest success story would continue to be Donna Summer, who grew up singing in Boston churches and joined the Munich cast of *Hair* in 1967, when she was just 18. She made a big splash with her 1975 debut, *Love to Love You Baby*, but her next four singles failed to dent the top 10. **I Feel Love** changed all that by climbing to No. 6, and its synth-pop sound made it one of the most influential singles of the year.

Rose Royce's **Car Wash**, written and produced by Norman Whitfield, was the theme of an upbeat, influential movie of the same name. Whitfield, formerly of Motown, had originally put Rose Royce together in the early 1970s to back the Temptations, one of the groups he was producing, on tour. Thelma Houston had come into the music business in 1969, with pop-meister Jimmy Webb writing and producing her debut album. But her gospel-



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laced pop voice did not get the proper treatment until 1976, when Hal Davis produced her *Any Way You Like It* LP for Motown. He had just heard the Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes album track **Don't Leave Me This Way** at a party, and felt the right remake could be a hit; Houston's explosive vocals turned him into a prophet. The Commodores, who had signed with Motown in 1971 (though they didn't record until 1974), were coming into their own with tracks like **Brick House**, but did not become dominant until they moved into soft ballads the next year with *Three Times a Lady*.

Brick, whose disco-jazz fusion featured Jimmy Brown on vocals, sax and flute, grew out of Wednesday afternoon jam sessions at Southside Sound studios in the Atlanta suburb of College Park. They were prized most highly for their session work, though **Dazz** charted impressively as a debut single. The Sylvers were 10 brothers and sisters from Memphis, and though they entered the disco era impressively with the No. 1 *Boogie Fever* in 1976, the next year's

Hot Line proved their last top-10 single. Tavares were five brothers of Cape Verdean descent from New Bedford, Massachusetts. Guided by former Motown producer Freddie Perren, they hit the pop top 10 for the only time in 1975 (with *It Only Takes a Minute*), but **Heaven Must Be Missing an Angel (Part 1)** came close to repeating the trick.

Then there was the English contingent. Maxine Nightingale arrived in the States in the early 1970s, after appearing in British productions of *Hair*, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Godspell*. **Right Back Where We Started From** was her first, and biggest, American release. Hot Chocolate, an interracial rock and soul group from London that was produced by pop whiz Mickie Most, enjoyed a longer chart run stateside. They had been around since 1970, when they remade John Lennon's *Give Peace a Chance* as pop-reggae for the Beatles' Apple label, but their sound gelled in the mid-'70s with tracks like **You Sexy Thing**. That song was not exactly disco, but when it came over the speakers people had a hard time staying off the dance floor.

—John Morthland

DISCOGRAPHY

**Indicates highest Billboard chart position*

1. (Shake, Shake, Shake) Shake Your Booty

KC and the Sunshine Band • Music and lyrics by Harry Casey and Richard Finch, Harrick Music, Inc./Longitude Music Co. BMI, T.K. 1019 (1976). © 1976 T.K. Records, a label of Rhino Records Inc. Produced under license from Rhino Records Inc., by arrangement with Warner Special Products. No. 1*

2. Right Back Where We Started From

Maxine Nightingale • Music and lyrics by Pierre Tubbs and Vincent Edwards, Sony/ATV Songs ATV/EMI Virgin Songs Inc. BMI, United Artists 752 (1976). © 1976 EMI Records USA. Courtesy EMI Records USA, under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets. No. 2*

3. Disco Lady

Johnnie Taylor • Music and lyrics by Harvey Scales, Albert Vance and Don Davis, Longitude Music Co. BMI, Columbia 10281 (1976). © 1976 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a division of Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 1*

4. Don't Leave Me This Way

Thelma Houston • Music and lyrics by Kenneth Gamble, Leon Huff and Cary Gilbert, Warner-Tamerlane Publ. Corp. BMI, Tamla 54278 (1977). © 1976 Motown Record Company, L.P. Courtesy of Motown Record Company, L.P. Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc. No. 1*

5. I Just Want to Be Your Everything

Andy Gibb • Music and lyrics by Barry Gibb, Gibb Brothers Music. BMI, RSO 872 (1977). © 1977 PolyGram Records, Inc. Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc. No. 1*

6. Star Wars Theme/Cantina Band

Meco • Music by John Williams, Fox-Fare Music, Inc. BMI, Millennium 604 (1977). © 1976 PolyGram Records, Inc. Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc. No. 1*

7. Car Wash Rose Royce • Music and lyrics by Norman Whitfield, Duchess Music Corp. BMI, MCA 40615 (1977). © 1976 MCA Records, Inc. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 1*

8. Dazz Brick • Music and lyrics by R. Ransom Jr., Reginald Hargis and Edward Irons, Trolley Music/Silver Cloud Music Inc. ASCAP/Bang 727 (1977). © 1976 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a division of Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 3*

9. You Sexy Thing

Hot Chocolate • Music and lyrics by E. A. G. Brown and Tony Wilson, All Nations Music, ASCAP/Big Tree 16047 (1976). © 1975 EMI Records Ltd. Courtesy EMI Records Ltd., under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets. No. 3*

10. You Make Me Feel Like Dancing

Leo Sayer • Music and lyrics by Vinyl Poncia and Leo Sayer, Alma Music Corp. o/b/o Silverbird Ltd, ASCAP/EMI Blackwood Music Inc. BMI, Warner 8283 (1977). © 1976 Chrysalis Records. Produced under license from Rhino Records Inc., by arrangement with Warner Special Products. No. 1*

11. A Fifth of Beethoven

Walter Murphy and the Big Apple Band • Music by Walter Murphy, based on Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, R.F.T. Music Pub. Corp. BMI, Private Stock 45073 (1976). © 1976 Thomas J. Valentino, Inc. Courtesy of Valentino Inc., by arrangement with Celebrity Licensing Inc. No. 1*

12. I Feel Love

Donna Summer • Music and lyrics by Donna Summer, Giorgio Moroder and Pete Bellotte, Rick's Music, Inc. (O.P.Ed. Intro/Soy Yes Music), BMV, Casablanca 884 (1977). © 1978 PolyGram Records, Inc. Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc. No. 6*

13. Heaven Must Be Missing an Angel (Part 1)

Tavares • Music and lyrics by Kenny S. Lewis and Freddie Perren, PolyGram Int'l Publ. o/b/o Perren-Vibes Music, ASCAP/Songs of PolyGram Int'l, Inc. o/b/o Bull Pen Music Inc. BMI, Capitol 4270 (1976). © 1976 Capitol Records, Inc. Courtesy Capitol Records, under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets. No. 15*

14. Get Up and Boogie (That's Right) Silver Convention • Music and lyrics by Silvester Levay and Stephan Prager, Edition Butterfly/Edition Meridian, Midland International 10571 (1976). © 1976 Midland International, Courtesy of Michael Kunze for Butterfly Productions, Gruenwald / Germany, by arrangement with Celebrity Licensing Inc. No. 2*

15. Turn the Beat Around Vicki Sue Robinson • Music and lyrics by Peter Jackson and Gerald Jackson, Dunbar Music, BMI, RCA 10562 (1976). © 1976 BMG Entertainment, courtesy of The RCA Records Label, under license from BMG Products. No. 10*

16. Hot Line The Sylvers • Music and lyrics by Kenny St. Lewis and Freddie Parren, Bull Pen Music Inc./Songs of PolyGram International, BMI, PolyGram International, ASCAP/Capitol 4336 (1977). © 1976 Capitol Records, Inc. Courtesy Capitol Records, under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets. No. 5*

17. Brick House Commodores • Music and lyrics by Thomas McClary, Milan Williams, Walter Lee Orange, Lionel Richie, Ronald LaPread and William King, Jobete Music Co., Inc./Libren Music/Hanna Music/Cambree Music/Macawrite Music/Old Fashion Publishing/Walter Orange Music, ASCAP/Motown 1425 (1977). © 1977 Motown Record Company, L.P. Courtesy of Motown Record Company, L.P. Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc. No. 5*

18. Ain't Gonna Bump No More (With No Big Fat Woman) Joe Tex • Music and lyrics by Buddy Killen and Bennie Lee McGinty, Tree Pub. Co. Inc., BMI, Epic 50313 (1977). Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a division of Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 12*

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'70s DANCE PARTY 1976-1977 was produced by Time-Life Music in cooperation with PolyGram Special Markets, a division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc., 825 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10019.

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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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