



70s
dance party

TIME
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MUSIC

SONS OF THE
1978-1979
SOUNDTRACK

SOUNDS OF THE SEVENTIES • '70s DANCE PARTY 1978-1979

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COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

70s dance party

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- 2 Macho Man
- 3 Last Dance
- 4 Dance, Dance, Dance
(Yowsah, Yowsah, Yowsah)
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Chic seemed to come out of nowhere when **Dance, Dance, Dance (Yowsah, Yowsah, Yowsah)** was released late in 1977. Unlike many of the overnight sensations of the disco movement, however, this group had depth. Indeed, Chic proved to be a multiple threat—the band also performed with flair, while its team of Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards wrote and produced some of the era's landmark hits.

Bassist Edwards and guitarist Rodgers began working together in various bands around New York in 1970, before forming a rock-funk trio called the Big Apple Band with drummer Tony Thompson in 1976. They changed their name to Chic after Walter Murphy and the Big Apple Band hit with the classical-disco novelty *A Fifth of Beethoven* later that year. In early '77, unable to attract record company interest, they added vocalists Alfa Anderson and Norma Jean Wright (replaced by Luci Martin before they ever recorded)

and went disco. Their fresh take on the genre was a little more rhythmically flexible, and much less ornate, than most. The original demo of *Dance, Dance, Dance* was rejected by several labels before Atlantic bit, but the subsequent single sold more than a million copies in its first month. Bigger hits (*Le Freak* and *Good*

Times) were to follow, and Rodgers and Edwards also began writing and producing equally impressive sellers for Sister Sledge, Diana Ross and Deborah Harry.

The sound track to *Saturday Night Fever*, released late in 1977, won a Grammy Award in 1978 and became the biggest-selling album of all time, while solidifying the Bee Gees' hold on disco as both

artists and producers. Their little brother, Andy Gibb, did not make the sound track, but his **Shadow Dancing** was both his third U.S. single and his third No. 1; his brothers took a break on the set of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* to



write it with him. The trio also wrote **If I Can't Have You** for labelmate Yvonne Elliman, which did appear in *Saturday Night Fever*. The Hawaiian singer, who had moved from London to New York in 1974 to play Mary Magdalene in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, sang backing vocals on Eric Clapton's *I Shot the Sheriff* (as well as on his comeback tour). The Bee Gees actually wrote *How Deep Is Your Love* for her to sing, but label head Robert Stigwood insisted they record it, so they gave her this ballad instead.

The Trammps had no connection to the Bee Gees or RSO, but their **Disco Inferno**, which cleverly revived the popular '60s phrase "burn, baby, burn," was a welcome addition to the SNF sound track. The band, which sounded like the Coasters performing disco, belonged to the Philadelphia International nexus. So did Evelyn "Champagne" King, whose father had sung with the Orioles and the Harptones. The 17-year-old was filling in for her sister as cleaning lady at Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff's Sigma Sound studios when producer T. Life heard her singing to herself and

signed her to cut **Shame**.

The O'Jays and the duo McFadden and Whitehead recorded directly for Philadelphia International. With **Use To Be My Girl**, the O'Jays enjoyed their biggest R&B hit ever. Like much of the Trammps' work, the song was a disco overhaul of doo-wop, inspired by the fictitious Otis Day and the Knights in the smash John Belushi film *National Lampoon's Animal House*. Gene McFadden and John Whitehead had written *Back Stabbers* for the O'Jays and various other hits for Philly International acts. But as former members of the Epsilons, a band that opened for two years for its manager, Otis Redding, they longed to return to performing. Gamble and Huff resisted before finally giving them the go-ahead, at which point Whitehead exclaimed, "Ain't no stoppin' us now!" Knowing a hook when they heard one, the producers supervised the recording of a rhythm track for that title. Whitehead was supposed to write lyrics that night, but instead partied so hard that he returned to the studio the next day with nothing; rather than

tell his partner, he improvised lyrics as the track burned on. Amazingly, he required only one take, and **Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now** became a rallying cry for groups from sports teams to political demonstrators. Unfortunately, the song was not prescient, and they never made the pop charts again.

Amii Stewart was a new act who scored with an old song in **Knock on Wood**, while Peaches and Herb was an old act that scored with a new song in **Shake Your Groove Thing**. The former, the daughter of a Pentagon employee, arrived in London as an actress and assistant director with the touring company of *Bubbling Brown Sugar*. Though she claimed to hate disco, her remake of Eddie Floyd's 1966 *Knock on Wood* was nothing but—and far outsold the original. Like Stewart, Peaches and Herb were from Washington, D.C. Herb Feemster (who called himself Herb Fame) and a different Peaches (Francine Barker) had been a hit duet of the '60s before he quit and became a cop in 1970. Seven years later, he revived the group with model Linda Green as Peaches.

After a slow start, they triumphed with *Shake Your Groove Thing*.

In these, the waning years of disco, several veterans were trying different approaches. Earth, Wind and Fire teamed up with the Emotions, a female vocal trio, for **Boogie Wonderland**. EWF leader Maurice White had been producing the fellow Chicagoans (lead Wanda and sisters Sheila and Jeanette Hutchinson) ever since their move to Columbia after Stax, their previous label, folded in 1975. With **Ladies Night**, Kool and the Gang were working with a new producer (Eumir Deodato) and a new lead singer (James Taylor) to forge a new pop sound that would put them back in the top 10 for the first time since 1974.

Donna Summer's **Last Dance**, from the *Thank God It's Friday* sound track, won two Grammys and an Academy Award® (the Oscar® was for writer Paul Jabara). It was another convincing step in her campaign to reshape herself as a serious pop-soul artist, rather than a



disco doll—something her labelmates the Village People would never be accused of doing. In 1978, producer Jacques Morali wrote a batch of tunes with gay themes, and then put together a group to perform them as gay icons (construction worker, cowboy, biker, etc.). **Macho Man**, their first hit, set the tone for this camp act.

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GG's **Disco Nights (Rock-Freak)** was a rock-disco fusion that the New York group had been performing since the early '70s, when both the song and the band had different names. Foxy served as the T.K. Productions house band in Miami while KC and the Sunshine Band were on the road. Touring themselves, the quintet was chastised by a Maryland club owner for chanting the phrase "get off" onstage.

The group retaliated by writing a song with that name and performing it the next night, only to be removed from the club by six bouncers. They returned to Miami and recorded **Get Off**, and two weeks after it got them booted from the club it began climbing the charts. Chicago native Peter Brown, another T.K. artist, enjoyed his greatest

singing success with **Dance with Me** (he would later write *Material Girl* for Madonna).

Heatwave was launched in Germany in 1975 by a pair of U.S. Army vets. **Boogie Nights** was their biggest hit, and their career began tapering off shortly afterward when composer (and keyboard player) Rod Temperton quit to write for Aretha Franklin, George Benson and Michael Jackson (he wrote *Thriller* and four songs for *Off the Wall*). A Taste of Honey was a Southern California group fronted by Janice Marie Johnson (vocals and guitar) and Hazel Payne (vocals and bass). They played primarily for U.S. military bases in Europe and the Far East, until the band was ridiculed at an Air Force gig for being led by women. Johnson and keyboardist Perry Kimble responded by writing **Boogie Oogie Oogie**, which won them a Grammy for Best New Artist and gave them a more appreciative audience.

—John Morthland

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DISCOGRAPHY

**Indicates highest Billboard chart position*

- 1. If I Can't Have You** Yvonne Ellman • Music and lyrics by Barry Gibb, Maurice Gibb and Robin Gibb. Stigwood Music, Inc. (Unichappell Music). BMI. RSO 884 (1978). © 1977 PolyGram Records, Inc. Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc. No. 1*
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- 5. Disco Nights (Rock-Freak)** GQ • Music and lyrics by Keith Crier, Paul Service, Herbert Lane and Emanuel LeBlanc. Arista Records, Inc. 0388 (1979). © 1979 Arista Records, Inc. Courtesy of Arista Records, Inc. No. 12*
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- 9. Boogie Wonderland** Earth, Wind and Fire with The Emotions • Music by Jon Lind, lyrics by Ailee Willis. Charleville Music/Irving Music Inc./EMI Blackwood Music Inc. BMI, ARC 10956 (1979). © 1979 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a division of Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 6*
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