

Woody Guthrie Center's Love Saves the Day: the Subterranean History of American Disco Track List and Guide

Track list and descriptions by Tim Lawrence, author of *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970-79* and co-curator of *Woody Guthrie Center's Love Saves the Day, A Subterranean History of American Disco* exhibition with chloë fourté.

These 35 tracks trace the beginning formations of an underground sound that percolated through New York loft parties and after-hours establishments in the 1970s. Starting with tracks that dominated the beginning of the decade and tracking through Disco's "demise" in 1979, this list, while incomplete on its own, serves as a roadmap to the wider trends and changes of the party music sound, contextualizing important tonal shifts and rhythmic developments in the sound of the dance floor, while highlighting the importance that certain artists and trends represented to the scene and wider music industry.

Please use this list to guide your listening experience as you submerge yourself in some of the sounds of the decade's dance floors and New York's underground. — chloë fourte, co-curator.

1. Olatunji, "Jin-Go-Lo-Ba (Drums of Passion)" (Columbia, 1960)

Babatunde Olatunji, a virtuoso of West African percussion, traveled from Nigeria to the United States in 1950 in order to study at Morehouse College in Atlanta on a Rotary International scholarship. He applied to take a Ph.D. at New York University in the hope that this would enable him to pursue a diplomatic career but quickly ran out of money and turned to music in order to earn a living. After appearing as a featured soloist at a Radio City Symphony Orchestra concert at Radio City Music Hall in 1958 he was offered a deal by Columbia. Featuring four drummers and nine female singers, *Drums of Passion* was released the following year and became a national hit, effectively introducing African percussion to the American listener. Santana recorded a cover version of the track, "Jingo," but Francis Grasso at the Sanctuary and David Mancuso at the Loft — the two DJs and venues that exist at the heart of the story we are telling in this exhibition — preferred to play the Olatunji original. As Grasso told Tim Lawrence, "I said to myself, 'If Santana works then the real shit is going to kill them!' I was good at mixing one record into another so I played the Santana and brought in 'Jin-Go-Lo-Ba.' The crowd preferred the Olatunji, where there's no screaming guitar. They got into it straight away."

2. James Brown "Give It Up or Turnit a Loose" (King, 1970)

James Brown released the album *Sex Machine* in September 1970. The album artwork declares that it was "recorded live at home in Augusta with his bad self." In fact a lot of the album was recorded in a studio with reverberate and audience noise added to give them a live feel. Whatever the background to the album, it remains one of the most influential recorded by Brown and is considered by many to amount to the peak release of his most creative period. The title track remains one of the best known of all of Brown's recordings. However New York's downtown DJ community probably played "Give It Up or Turnit a Loose" more. David Mancuso, who would soon emerge as the most influential DJ (or musical host as he would go on to call himself) of the era, considered it to be one of the most popular records he selected during the Loft's run at 647 Broadway from 1970-74. Michael Cappello, an acolyte of Francis Grasso and another pioneering Italian American DJ, liked to wait for the break in "Give It Up", when Brown claps his hands and chants "Clap your hands now, stomp your feet now, clap your hands now, stomp your feet now, in the jungle brother" and then mix in "Law of the Land" by the Temptations, which opens with handclaps.

3. The Equals, "Black Skinned Blue Eyed Boys" (President, 1970)

Led by Guyanese-British musician Eddy Grant, The Equals released "Black Skinned Blue Eyed Boy" in 1970. The title of the song and its lyrics spoke to the integrationist utopia that started to form on many of downtown's dance floors of the early 1970s, with a cross-race figure who has

Black skin and blue eyes speaking of unity while protesting against the Vietnam War. “People, white is white / What’s black ain’t clover? / Together we’ll be when the war is over / You see the Black Skin Blue Eyed Boys / They ain’t gonna fight no wars / Oh, no / They ain’t got no country / They ain’t got no creed / People won’t be black or white / The world will be half-breed.” Gathering in the dark and placing more emphasis on listening and moving than seeing, divisions melted away on the New York City dance floor. David Mancuso told me: “I played that record heavily, but I heard it through Francis [Grasso], Michael [Cappello] and Steve [D’Acquisto, also an acolyte of Francis Grasso and a pioneering Italian American DJ]. Everybody loved that record. We all wanted music to get around. There was such camaraderie.”

4. Marvin Gaye, “What’s Going On” (Tamla Motown, 1971)

Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Going On” referenced social problems experienced by African Americans as well as the experienced of his brother Frankie, who had served in Vietnam. Motown owner Berry Gordy initially opposed the recording, concerned it would damage the label’s assimilationist, upbeat image. Released in 1971, the record was a big hit with New York DJs, including Steve D’Acquisto. It was also a big hit on Fire Island in the summer of 1971. Other anti-war/pro-peace songs that were popular with DJs included The Equals, “Black Skinned Blue Eyed Boys,” Willie Hutch, “Brother’s Gonna Work It Out” and Edwin Starr, “War.” All of these tracks mixed soul, rhythm and blues, and funk. David Mancuso told me that “The early years, 1970-74, were very significant and very important, and the music was simply the best.” He loved rhythm and blues, he loved soul, and he loved funk, as well .

5. Eddie Kendricks “Girl You Need A Change of Mind“ (Tamla, 1972)

Another soul track that helped form the bridge between soul and disco, with soul music’s embrace of gospel’s aesthetic of ecstasy one of the key bridging elements, Eddie Kendricks “Girl You Need A Change of Mind” was one of the most popular records David Mancuso selected at the Broadway Loft. Mancuso was often drawn to long records, which his dancers favored because it allowed for the music and the dance floor to expand. “Girl” was an album cut that provided a self-contained journey within the wider journey for the party. “It has three movements and I like things like that,” Mancuso told me. “It starts off very gradually and builds up and reaches this crescendo, this burst of energy. It was like a musical explosion of rhythm and sound. It was more underground than overground. It was a very intense record and it affected a lot of people.”

6. Babe Ruth, “The Mexican” (Harvest, 1972)

First available on the Babe Ruth album *First Base*, released in 1972, and then as a single in 1973, “The Mexican” was as popular at the pre-hip hop parties that were unfolding in the Bronx as it was at downtown parties such as the Loft (and thereby complicates the popular idea that the cultures that came to be known as disco and hip hop were largely separate, as is popularly believed). The recording captures the raw energy of the period as well as the way in which Latin elements were becoming increasingly influential with US artists. Profoundly shaped by the 1960s, David Mancuso listened to as much rock as he listened to rhythm and blues, soul and funk, and Babe Ruth is an example of the rockier end of the music he would select. The pre-disco downtown dance floor was at the cutting-edge when it came to embracing these sounds.

7. Manu Dibango, “Soul Makossa” (Fiesta, 1972)

David Mancuso and the somewhat lesser known Alfie Davidson were the first NYC DJs to play Manu Dibango’s “Soul Makossa” in a dance setting. Once again, the DJs who were spending time

at the Loft raced to find out the title of the song and within a matter of months the single had entered the Billboard charts. This marked the first time that, without doubt, DJ play led to a hit. That's because although DJ play was already generating sales, Dibango's release marked the first time a recording had entered the charts without radio play. The raw, funky, chant-heavy, African jazz aesthetic of "Soul Makossa" typified Mancuso's wide-ranging palette (a palette that he would be the first to acknowledge was heavily shaped by the openness and responsiveness of his melting pot dancers). The release also became one of the earliest songs recorded by an African artist to enter the charts and help popularize African music along the way. The roots of disco were not made of disco.

8. War, "City, Country, City" (United Artists, 1972)

Another Loft favorite, "City, Country, City" by Latin-rock outfit War first appeared on the album *The World Is a Ghetto*, released in 1973, and ran at 13 minutes 18 seconds, which was long even for a Loft classic. Mancuso and his dancers were drawn to the track's journey-within-a-journey structure as it moved between pastoral guitar and heavy Latin rhythms. As it happens the recording captured David's lifestyle at the time: the Loft host would prepare for a party from Wednesday onwards, remaining in the city until Monday morning, when he would take the bus to a small house in Mount Tremper, upstate New York, where he would spend Mondays and Tuesday decompressing. While DJs regularly hunted down Mancuso's selections so that they could play the selections when they DJed themselves, relatively few of them picked up on the War recording, in large part because its dynamic range and stop-start tempo could only be fully appreciated on the kind of high-end sound system—and the system that Mancuso built at the Loft amounted to the most developed stereo system the city had ever witnessed, hands down.

Mancuso built his first sound system around two Klipschorns speakers and two other sets of sets of Klipsch speakers, Cornwalls and Heresies, plus two AR [Acoustic Research] turntable. He drove these with McIntosh amplifiers, widely judged to be one of the best amplifiers to be paired with Klipschorns. The Klipschorns were noted for their sonic accuracy, a highly important feature for Mancuso, who wanted the system to neutrally reproduce the music recording as transparently and realistically as possible, as well as their efficiency and power, enabling them to drive a party. The Loft room we have created at the end of the show is not an exact replication of the Broadway of the Loft by any stretch of the imagination, but we have recreated some of the venue's most important elements, including two sets of Klipschorns and Cornwalls, plus an analogue amplify and mandatory mirror ball, a mesmerizing, reflective device that adorned the nightspots of the 1920s before falling out of fashion. Mancuso was the first to reintroduce the mirror ball to the 1970s dance floor. We will also be introducing a turntable into the system so that guests of the exhibition can listen to vinyl through the system, as would have been the case for the entirety of the 1970s given that the CD format wasn't introduced until the early 1980s. We hope you enjoy relaxing and maybe even dancing in this space!

9. Cymande, "Bra" (Janus, 1973)

The London-based band Cymande consisted of musicians who came from several Caribbean countries. Their name derived from the calypso word for "dove," which symbolizes peace and love, connecting them with the anti-war, communal sentiments of the downtown party scene that took shape in New York during the early 1970s. David Mancuso helped popularize "Bra," a reggae-dub-spaced-out track that was released in 1972 as a 7" single and also appeared on Cymande's eponymous debut album. In so doing he once again demonstrated of the breadth of music that could be heard at the Loft as well as other similarly-intentioned dance floors where DJs and crowds embraced a universal aesthetic. Inspired by the dance floor of the Loft as well as other progressive locations, music writer Vince Aletti published the first feature to highlight the way New York's DJs and dance floors were bringing a new sound into formation in *Rolling Stone* in September 1973. "Typically, the music nurtured in the new discotheques is Afro-Latin in sound or instrumentation,

heavy on the drums, with minimal lyrics, sometimes in a foreign language, and a repetitive, chant-like chorus,” Aletti noted.

10. Barrabas, “Woman” (RCA, 1972, played in New York in 1973)

Barrabas were a Spanish-based rock group. David Mancuso chanced upon their newly-released album when he travelled to Europe for the summer of 1973. He liked the album’s titles and bought the vinyl without listening to it, something he and other DJs would often do by necessity as pre-listening was nowhere near as easy back in the 1970s as it’s become today. Other DJs would often head to the Loft after they were finished working for the night, because regular discotheques were required by licensing laws to close at 3:00am or shortly after and the Loft was able to stay open to 6:00am and beyond because Mancuso didn’t serve alcohol—a deliberate strategy to gain freedom and allow a party to run its natural course. When Mancuso started to play “Woman” as well as the equally popular “Wild Safari” from the same album visiting DJs loved the record and David ended up ordering four boxes to hand out. The track captures the off-beat sounds that David and his dancers were drawn to. The Loft pre-dated disco and its musical range far exceeded disco (which is not to dispute disco’s innovative contribution and undoubted sonic breadth).

11. The O’Jays, “Love Train” (Philadelphia International, 1973)

It seems likely that New York DJs selected more music that had been recorded in Philadelphia than any other city during the pre-disco and early disco era. Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff, a prolific production, ran the most influential Philadelphia label of them all, Philadelphia International. They notched up their first hit with “Back Stabbers” by the O’Jays, which equated political backstabbers such as President Nixon, whose treacherous Watergate shenanigans were coming to light, and Senator Daniel Moynihan, who insisted that African American men were responsible for the continuing cycle of Black poverty, with a man whose backstabbing friends want to steal his woman. Despite the hard message, the song was danceable as well as instrumentally sophisticated, and set out Philadelphia International as a label that could communicate “a message in the music.” The O’Jays went on to release the lyrical more upbeat “Love Train,” which became an anthem on New York’s ever-optimistic dance floors. The record was particularly popular at the Loft, where Mancuso seized every opportunity to play records that contained lyrics about love.

12. Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes, “The Love I Lost” (Philadelphia International, 1973)

Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff originally recorded “The Love I Lost” by Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes as a slow record. Then they left the musicians to themselves—most notably the rhythm section of Ronnie Baker (bass), Norman Harris (guitar), and Earl Young (drums), or Baker-Harris-Young, as they were alphabetically known—and the musicians picked up the tempo. Baker, Harris and Young would soon establish themselves as the most popular rhythm section of the era, this in an era when records were in many respects defined by the feeling and groove generated by their rhythm sections. (Electronic drum machines wouldn’t come through until the 1980s.) Young became notable for inadvertently creating a new rhythm for the dance floor. “I thought the Detroit sound was unique,” he told me. “Motown used four-four on the snare—khh, khh, khh, khh—and the heartbeat on the bass—dmm-dmm, dmm-dmm, dmm-dmm, dmm- dmm—and they also used four-four on the tambourines.” Young, though, wanted to switch things around. “I would use cymbals more than the average drummer, and I realized that if I played the four-four [all four beats of the measure] on the bass I could work different patterns on the cymbals.” Young tried out the rhythm for the first time on Wilson Pickett’s “Don’t Let the Green Grass Fool You” followed by “Zing Went the Strings of My Heart” by the Trammps. Young then introduced the rhythm to Philadelphia International during the recording session for “The Love I Lost.”

The record became a favorite on New York's dance floors in particular. "The Love I Lost' was huge at the Gallery," Nicky Siano, the DJ at the Gallery, the second party to draw on the house party/invite-only/private party format David Mancuso introduced at the Loft. "Earl Young was responsible for the disco sound more than anyone else. It really caught on, and Philadelphia International produced hit after hit after hit." As I note in *Love Saves the Day*, "Whereas Motown's standard snare drum had tended to make for a somewhat monotonous experience on the dance floor, Young's thumping bass and flashing polyrhythmic cymbals simply compelled dancers to move their bodies." Although a four-on-the-floor bass beat appeared in other recordings, Young's was the most significant contribution to the birth of the disco beat would go on to define the yet-to-be-named genre of disco as well as, whether it was recorded live or electronically, inform a great deal of music that would go on to be released during the 1980s and beyond.

13. The Temptations, "Law of the Land" (Tamla Motown, 1973)

The four-on-the-floor bass beat spread. Producer Frank Wilson introduced it into the recording session of "Girl You Need a Change of Mind"—even though the result still sounded largely snare-oriented. A pioneering producer at Motown who is credited with introducing the sound of psychedelic soul, Norman Whitfield created a tougher, more disciplined, bass-driven four-on-the-floor for the rumbling, apocalyptic "Law of the Land" by the Temptations (a song that is incidentally psychedelic as well as soulful). The recording became a favourite through the downtown party scene and happened to be the last record David Mancuso was playing when officers raided and closed down the Loft in June 1974. We were like, "*Law of the Land*," David Mancuso told me.

14. MFSB, "Love Is the Message" (Philadelphia International, 1973)

In 1973 Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff formed MFSB as the in-house band at Philadelphia International. MFSB stood for Mother, Father, Sister, Brother (a nod towards the city's name's Greek origins, which translate as "City of Brotherly Love"), although its musicians, including Ronnie Baker, Norman Harris, and Earl Young, preferred to flip MFSB into Mother Fucking Son of a Bitch. The line-up's debut album, *Love Is the Message*, included the hit "TSOP (The Sound Of Philadelphia)," which they recorded as the theme for the television show *Soul Train*. However, with David Mancuso and Nicky Siano at the fore, New York's cutting-edge DJs honed in on "Love Is the Message," which shaped a much deeper jazz-dance sophistication than the poppier, more frantic "TSOP". "More than any other release, 'Love Is the Message' defined the artistic and emotional potential of the textured disco aesthetic in which various layers of instrumental sounds could shift gradually or dramatically between different moods," I write in *Love Saves the Day*. Michael Gomes, the editor of the DJ newsletter *Mixmaster* (on view in the exhibition) and an omnipresent figure on the downtown party scene told me: "There had been nothing like it previously on Philadelphia. The O'Jays had a more R&B feel. All of a sudden there was this lush fluidity that had nothing to do with Motown. 'Love Is the Message' represented what disco would become."

15. Love Unlimited Orchestra, "Love's Theme" (20th Century, 1973)

Barry White formed Love Unlimited—a girl group that featured Diane Taylor, Linda James, and Glodean James plus a forty-piece backing orchestra—in 1969, and the band recorded its first chart hit in the spring of 1972 with "Walkin' in the Rain with the One I Love." The following summer, the Texas-born White released the group's second album, *Under the Influence of . . .*, deploying a lush, orchestrated aesthetic that suggests that, in tandem with the material emerging from Philadelphia International, the sonic symphonic had become a national phenomenon. Even though it was recorded as an album filler, "Love's Theme" provided a particularly stunning example of the new aesthetic, but 20th Century had other promotional priorities for the six-foot-three-inch, 270-pound White, who was simultaneously establishing himself as a major independent recording artist in his own right, having notched up hits with "I'm Gonna Love You Just a Little More Baby," "I've

Got So Much to Give,” and “Never, Never Gonna Give You Up.” Then, however, [pioneering Puerto Rican DJ] David Rodriguez and Nicky Siano [of the Gallery, the second significant Loft-offshoot party] paid a visit to Billy Smith, the label’s East Coast promotion under-assistant. “We went down into the basement and saw the Love Unlimited album on the shelf,” says Siano. “Billy said, ‘These are dead albums waiting to be trashed,’ and David replied, ‘They’ve got black people on the cover —give them to us!’ David and I started playing ‘Love’s Theme’ and it took off from there.” Realising he had nothing to lose, Smith distributed free copies of the LP to New York’s leading DJs, and, when demand spiraled, “Love’s Theme” was released as a single by the renamed Love Unlimited Orchestra. By February 1974 it had reached number one. “‘Love’s Theme’ was in the top twenty before it even got any airplay,” says Siano. “The power we had was phenomenal!” (From *Love Saves the Day*)

16. The Hues Corporation, “Rock the Boat” (RCA, 1974)

New York’s DJs were becoming a growing force. In October 1973 *Billboard*, the leading music industry magazine, published a story that acknowledged their influence on the charts under the title “Discotheques Break Singles” (on display in the exhibition). The city’s record selectors continued to shape what people were listening as well as dancing to when they started to play “Rock the Boat” by the relatively unknown Hues Corporation about a month later. In July 1974, the record hit the top of the charts and eventually went gold. When George McCrae’s similar-sounding “Rock Your Baby” reached the top of the charts later that same month it became clear that a new, DJ-led genre was breaking through via discotheques as well as invite-only parties. The new sound started to acquire a name, “disco,” short for discotheque, and by the end of the year Vince Aletti had started to publish weekly “Disco File” columns in *Record World* (also on display in the exhibition).

17. Gloria Gaynor, “Never Can Say Goodbye” (MGM, 1975)

Rooted in the lineage of Black Music, with gospel, R&B, soul and funk major influences, disco also became the genre that provided an arguably unprecedented platform for African American female vocalist. Their popularity can partly be explained by the way the downtown dancers in particular, many of them gay men, identified with their personalities and performances. Many of whom shared a background in gospel and the Black church, Black divas might not have predicted that their most ardent fans would in many cases be gay men, but these dancers as well as the wider spectrum of disenfranchised others who gathered on New York’s floors, appreciated their emotional message of resilience in the face of adversity that many of them sung about and even embodied. “Never Can Say Goodbye,” recorded by Gloria Gaynor, one of first disco divas to break through, appeared on the eponymous album released by MGM in 1975 and became an instant favorite with DJs. The record company, however, showed little interest in the record. That led Tom Moulton to dedicate a new “Disco Action” column in *Billboard* to ask why radio was playing “Never Can Say Goodbye” given that it was such a big hit in discotheques. As it happens, Moulton had already established himself as the city’s pioneering remixer, taking records intended for radio play and transforming them so they would be better suited to the demands of the dance floor. Record companies understood that Moulton’s mixes could turn out to be more popular than the original, to the point that MGM, no less, invited him to mix Gaynor’s album. *Billboard* editor Bill Wardlow backed Moulton in the dispute that followed and went on to sponsor the first of numerous annual disco conferences in January 1976. The conference became a hub for the spread of disco music and culture, and while some expressed concern that commercialization would lead to the dilution of its core practices, others welcomed the opportunity to ride on an increasingly lucrative wave, Gloria Gaynor among them.

18. Donna Summer, “Love to Love You Baby” (Oasis, 1975)

Recorded in Munich by producer Giorgio Moroder and running at 16 minutes 50 seconds, "Love to Love You, Baby" took up the entirety of the first side of Donna Summer's eponymous debut album. As well as its length, which was by this point predictably popular on New York's dance floors, the song was also noticeable for Summer's erotic groaning, which for many dancers would have suggested not merely sexual self-pleasure but also the sensual pleasure of throwing themselves into the communal, undulating, hypnotic, ecstatic dance floor. Although "Love to Love You Baby"'s overall aesthetic was close to the kind of groove that was coming out of Philadelphia, Moroder decided to add extra thud to the four-on-the-floor bass drum, because he was primarily recording for a straight white German rather than a polysexual multicultural New York audience, and he judged that Germans would benefit from a simpler, clearer beat. Later in 1975, German line-up Silver Convention released "Fly, Robin, Fly." Like "Love to Love You Baby" it foregrounded a prominent four-on-the-floor bass beat plus streamlined rhythmic structure that would go on to define the emerging sound of Eurodisco.

19. Double Exposure "Ten Percent" (Salsoul, 1976)

Double Exposure, a Philadelphia band, released "Ten Percent" as the first commercially-available twelve-inch single with Salsoul Records, a newly-formed New York label run by three Sephardic Jewish Brothers, the Cayres. Ken Cayre drove the label forward by persuading the Baker-Harris-Young rhythm section and other notable Philadelphian musicians to deliver almost all of Salsoul's output, Cayre having himself had an epiphany while dancing at Le Jardin, a musically and socially progressive midtown discotheque. "This is the kind of music I want to make!" he said that night. "I want to make the kind of music that makes me feel the way this does!" By the time Cayre planned the release of "Ten Percent" other labels had released twelve-inch singles, which as the name suggests involved them pressing up a single on an acetate normally used for an album. That allowed for the grooves to be spaced out, making for hotter-sounding recordings, and also for records to be extended to feed the desires of the New York dance floor. Initially companies only handed twelve-inch singles to DJs, hoping this would encourage dancers to go out and purchase the seven-inch single. Cayre was the first to appreciate the commercial potential of the format, and employed Galaxy 21 remixer Walter Gibbons, who was renowned for his advanced DJing skills and homemade edits, to go into the studio. Using cut-and-tape editing techniques only, the master tapes having been held back, Gibbons more than doubled the length of the original until it stretched out to nine minutes 45 seconds. Although the producers and songwriters of "Ten Percent" objected to the way an untrained DJ had been given permission to mess with their artistry, the record became a sensation on the downtown dance floor and Cayre sold 110,000 copies of the record.

20. Double Exposure, "My Love Is Free" (Salsoul, 1976)

Although it didn't enjoy the kind of chart successes that the West Coast label Casablanca Records notched up on a regular basis, with Donna Summer the label's star signing, Salsoul was the label most favored by downtown DJs during the second half of the 1970s, and "My Love Is Free" was one of many standout tracks. The record was once again mixed by Tom Moulton, who turned it into a euphoric, nine-and-half-minute rollercoaster. "I started making drastic changes right from the beginning," Moulton told me. "People called me the doctor. They would bring me their sick record, and I would fix it. They all thought I was crazy in terms of the way I changed everything around." The mixer would start off by studying the recording at home, after which he would take it into the studio and ask for certain tracks to be taken out so that he could "hear what's hidden." Although the vocals were usually left alone, the instrumentation was almost always changed, and when the engineers said that Moulton was requesting the impossible he would reply, "Well, how can we create that illusion?" Unusually for a remixer, Moulton wasn't a DJ and he didn't particularly like dance environments, but he loved Black music more than anything in the world and dedicated his life to spreading soulful sounds in order to bring joy to people's lives. David Mancuso, who was

drawn to any song that included the word “love,” particularly liked “My Love Is Free,” judging it to be a perfect record.

21. Diana Ross, “Love Hangover” (Motown, 1976)

Diana Ross was already an established bona fide star by the time disco started to circulate during 1974 and 1975. The uptempo end of her emotionally-charged, uplifting recordings turned out to be a perfect fit for the dance floor, with “Love Hangover” one of the first to be played more or less on rotation. It was an especially popular selection at Nicky Siano’s Gallery. Much more of an extrovert performer than David Mancuso, Siano took to interspersing his DJ sets with drag performances, one of which involved him dressing up as Diana Ross the night that Grace Jones, a Black female diva on the rise, made an early performance at the Gallery. Siano reportedly stole the show.

22. Cerrone, “Love in ‘C’ Minor” (Malligator, 1976)

Cerrone’s “Love in ‘C’ Minor” captured the evolution of Eurodisco from its explorative early beginnings to a fully-realized subgenre that was beginning to outsell R&B-oriented releases that defined disco’s original sound. Lasting for an epic 16 minutes, the track combined “dirty talk” with tight production values, a throbbing four-on-the-floor bass beat, and symphonic strings that were notably more developed, orchestrated and insistent than anything recorded in Detroit and Philadelphia, two of the labels responsible for re-popularizing string sections in the first place. Alec Costadinos, the producer of the track, told me, “We had a different purpose than Philadelphia Philadelphia re-recorded songs with beautiful arrangements and fabulous singers whereas we recorded songs that were going onto the dance floor. We were disco-oriented and raw.” In fact the label invited David Mancuso to listen to the unreleased song before releasing it, to ask if he had any comments that they could incorporate. Participating on the condition that he wouldn’t be paid and no strings would be attached, Mancuso told them to leave it alone. He helped break the record at the Loft but maintains that he liked rather than loved it.

23. Loleatta Holloway, “Hit and Run” (Salsoul, 1977)

One of the most significant developments in remix culture occurred when Walter Gibbons approached Ken Cayre and asked the Salsoul boss if he could remix “Hit and Run” by Loleatta Holloway, a Chicago-born R&B singer whose voice was second-to-none when it came to raw power and emotion. Holloway had already performed at the Gallery, where the enthusiasm of the crowd took her by surprise. “I was really surprised that the gay crowd was so into me,” she told me. “I didn’t have to build them up. They were already there.” Gibbons got lucky when Cayre agreed to provide access to the multitrack tapes, the first time a label boss had trusted a DJ with this level of responsibility. Instead of having to resort to the cut-and-paste techniques that define the remix of “Ten Percent,” Gibbons was now able to listen to each individual track and decide how he wanted it to appear (or be removed from) the final mix. Restructuring the original album version, Gibbons more or less doubled the length of the recording, placed greater emphasis on the Baker-Harris-Young rhythm section, removed the string section as well as most of the horns, and in perhaps the boldest move made by any remixer to date also removed the first two minutes of Holloway’s vocal as well as all of her verses. He also extended a section that featured Holloway’s improvised vamping from three minutes to five minutes. “This version is really so different from the original,” Tom Moulton wrote in his *Billboard* review, “that it must be classified as a new record.” The twelve-inch release confirmed Gibbons to be the most experimental, risk-taking remixer of his generation. In going about his work, he also demonstrated the radical aesthetic potential of disco as well as dance music culture more generally.

24. T-Connection, “Do What You Wanna Do” (TK, 1977)

Salsoul remained the label of choice for New York's DJs but Ken Cayre would have been happy to sacrifice a slice of his label's credibility in exchange for the kind of bona fide hit Henry Stone's Miami-based TK records managed to notch up on a regular basis. Stone followed up George McCrae's chart-topping "Rock Your Baby" with a success of releases by the likes of the Ritchie Family, KC & the Sunshine Band, Peter Brown, Funk Machine and T-Connection. "TK was owning the market place, Vince Pellegrino of CBS told me. When the label released a compilation at the end of 1977 its sales rep took a side-swipe at Salsoul when he commented, "We want this to attract more than just the disco freaks, so we're including legitimate hits and not just obscure disco records." With its bold lyrical injunction and flights of instrumental freedom, TK Connection's "Do What You Wanna Do" appealed to the freaks as well as the geeks.

25. Kraftwerk, "Trans-Europe Express" (1977)

Electronic music pioneers Kraftwerk had already established a reputation for progressive experimentation by the time they released *Trans-Europe Express* in 1977. The album developed the theme of journeying begun on *Autobahn*, this time exploring the rhythmic dynamic of traveling by train rather than car. "Not exactly light entertainment, but quite incredible, especially on a powerful system," a somewhat unsure Vince Aletti noted in his review of the track in *Record World*. "Highly recommended for freaky crowds, otherwise a little too off-the-wall." Although David Mancuso found the record to be too mechanical for his taste, others discovered a form of technological soul in its electro-funk rhythms and melodic search for meaning. Uptown DJs such as Afrika Bambaataa became particularly attached to the record and Bambaataa, working alongside producer Arthur Baker, would go on to combine the melody of "Trans-Europe Express" with the beats of "Numbers" (a subsequent Kraftwerk release) when they released "Planet Rock" by Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force, a record that marked early hip hop's transition into a more overtly electronic framework.

26. Donna Summer, "I Feel Love" (1977)

Giorgio Moroder produced Donna Summer's "I Feel Love" as the final track for *I Remember Yesterday*, a concept album that took listeners on a journey through time. "I wanted to conclude with a futuristic song," Moroder told me, "and I decided that it had to be done with a synthesizer." The producer put together the backing track before coming up with a melody, with the bass line featuring a short sequence of notes, thanks in large part to the limited capability of the Mood synthesizer. "It was very difficult to work because the oscillators didn't have a quartz to keep the frequency steady, and so it was always out of tune," Moroder added. The resulting track was completely electronic save for the bass drum (Moroder felt the Moog's pre-set was insufficient) and Summer's vocals (which she delivered as if possessed and ecstatic). The result was quite unlike anything disco track before it, with "Trans Europe Express" the only meaningful comparison—even if David Mancuso adored "I Feel Love" as much as he disliked the Kraftwerk release. Successfully combining experimentalism and functionalism, "I Feel Love" anticipated and in part inspired Detroit techno's breakthrough during the second half of the 1980s. Its influence continues to reverberate, especially in electronic dance music circles.

27. The Rolling Stones, "Miss You" 1978

Following the runaway success of the RSO movie *Saturday Night Fever*, which broke box office and album sales records on the back of a coming-of-age movie script, a charismatic performance by John Travolta and a soundtrack dominated by the shrill energy of the Bee Gees, disco entered into high gear and left the music in a state of shock when it outsold rock music during 1978. Nobody saw that coming, except maybe the Rolling Stones, whose "Miss You" led the legendary rock group surprise critics and fans alike by picking up the disco groove. In truth the move wasn't

that shocking. As disco gathered momentum during the second half of the 1970s a notably wide range of musicians started to record the new dance genre. Heavily influenced by rhythm and blues, rock had also started out a dance-oriented genre before progressive rock interfered with its flow during the early 1970s, with the Rolling Stones occupying the more danceable end of the genre. While a real antagonism would emerge between rock and in particular punk on the one hand and disco on the other, there were always points of overlap. The cross-genre exchange would gain in momentum as a plethora of rock and punk-oriented downtown venues (including the Mudd Club, Club 57 and Danceteria) opened in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

28. Ian Dury, "Hit Me with Your Rhythm Stick" (Stiff, 1978)

Standard analysis has it that punks hated disco, in particular because the genre was perceived to revolve around slick studio production and lyrics that celebrated having a good time. CBGB, New York's flagship punk venue, didn't even have a dance floor. But as James Chance, the leader of the Contortions, told me, the lack of a dance floor at CBGB was frustrating to him and many others, and when punk discotheques such as the Mudd Club started to open during 1978 punks were surprisingly quick to explore the potential to crossover with disco. The development marked the beginning of a post-punk phase that witnessed heterodox line-ups including the Bush Tetras, DNA, Defunkt, ESG, Liquid Liquid and the Contortions come through, while pioneering punk/new wave bands such as Blondie and Talking Heads became increasingly open to incorporating a diverse range of sounds into their basic punk aesthetic. A powerful postpunk scene also emerged in the UK, with the Clash flying the flag as they combined punk with dub, funk, rap and even elements of disco. Also rooted in punk's politics of resistance, Ian Dury in the Blockheads went in the same direction with releases such as "Spasticus Autisticus" (Dury grew up with polio) and most successfully "Hit Me with Your Rhythm Stick". Once renowned for its opposition to disco, which centred on the slicker, more commercial end of disco rather than its downtown incarnation, punk had grown to love the disco beat.

29. Instant Funk, "I Got My Mind Made Up (You Can Get It Girl)" (Salsoul, 1978)

As the Bee Gees-dominated *Saturday Night Fever* became the best-selling album of all-time during 1978, and as the sound of Eurodisco came increasingly to the fore, disco arguably became increasingly divorced from its Black roots. Yet beneath the headlines disco line-ups rooted in funk, R&B and soul principles continued to release cutting-edge music, none more so than Instant Funk, a New Jersey band produced by Bunny Sigler, another key Philadelphia figure who became a key figure in Salsoul. Walter Gibbons was brought in to remix "I Got My Mind Made Up" and, as far as I was able to determine, all but completed the recording when he became sufficiently concerned with the record's flagrant lyrics that he quit, becoming a Born Again Christian. Larry Levan, a Loft baby and African American gay man who had held down DJing residencies at the Continental Baths followed by invite-only, Loft-inspired venues the Soho Place and Reade Street, and was now DJing at the Paradise Garage, described by the cutting edge Prelude remixer François Kevorkian as "the Loft on steroids," was invited to complete the mix. At that particular point Levan had only completed one remix, "C Is for Cookie" by Cookie Monster and the Girls, so the increasingly influential DJ was light on experience, and it seems likely that Gibbons introduced most of the remix's most radical elements, including its hardened percussive sections—already a Gibbons trademark. Whatever Levan's input, the record made it clear that disco's rootedness in Black funk, gospel, R&B and soul lived on. Levan would soon become the city's most inventive and prolific remixer, more or less re-inventing dance music with each new mix he came out with, in particular during his 1979-83 heyday—a period that witnessed the downfall of disco as well as its rebirth as a more open and mutant genre. Levan's remixes of "Heartbeat" by Taana Gardner's and "Don't Make Me Wait" by the Peach Boys became powerful emblems of what dance music could sound like when freed of corporate agendas that took over much of the sound during 1978 and 1979.

30. Sylvester, "You Make Me Feel" (Fantasy, 1978)

As I wrote in a New York Times feature titled "15 Songs That Shook New York's Queer Dance Floors in the 1970s and '80s," published in 2022: "The first record to feature lyrics about being an out-and-proud gay man came from the musical performer Charles "Valentino" Harris, who released "I Was Born This Way" as an apparently one-off release on Gaiee. "I'm happy, I'm carefree and I'm gay," the singer hollers over soulful instrumentation. Motown distributed the record, and two years later its label head Berry Gordy arranged for the gospel vocalist Carl Bean to deliver a cover; it later inspired Lady Gaga's Pride anthem "Born This Way" (Valentino isn't credited). That left Sylvester, an African American out gay man raised in Watts, California, to release the ultimate gay male disco anthem of all time, "You Make Me Feel," which celebrated the feeling the singer felt on the disco dance floor, especially when dancing with a gay man. The release was also notable for the production of Patrick Cowley, a cutting-edge synthesiser pioneer who lived in San Francisco. "You Make Me Feel" grew out of the electronic aesthetic laid down by "I Feel Love" yet if anything showcased a more pronounced synthesiser as well as a more obviously ecstatic vocal and melody line.

31. Chaka Khan, "I'm Every Woman" (Warners, 1978)

Black women raised in the gospel church also continued to support disco's claim—ongoing in face of the inrush of Eurodisco and line-ups alternatively inspired by the Bee Gees—to be the most significant development in African American music since the breakthrough of soul. As I write in *Love Saves the Day*: "Sylvester crossed over into the pop charts, and so did a number of his girlfriends." Joining a long line of African American female vocalists who formed an ever-present continuum of performers who pre-dated the rise of disco, Evelyn "Champagne" King emerged as a key artist with the release of "Shame," which featured Instant Funk. Linda Clifford, a white member of the sisterhood, broke through with her soaring rendition of "Runaway Love," thanks in part to the vocalist's feisty, improvised rap around the themes of vengeance, fire, and accusation. Further sisterly breakthroughs included Cheryl Lynn's debut, "Got to Be Real," and the artist's first solo hit outside of Rufus, which became one of the ultimate musical expressions of female self-confidence.

32. Gloria Gaynor, "I Will Survive" (Polydor, 1978)

Somewhat unfortunately as soon as Gloria Gaynor's promised that she would "Never Say Goodbye" she all but disappeared from the disco scene. It wasn't for lack of releases. Rather, her subsequent songs didn't capture the imagination of the dance floor in the way of her breakthrough hit, and she remained in the culture's background right through its heyday, right until the May 1978 release of "Substitute," which included "I Will Survive" on the B-side. Working from the DJ booth at Studio 54, midtown's ultimate commercial/celebrity discotheque, which contribute significantly to disco moving into the limelight after it opened in the spring of 1977, Richie Kaczor preferred "I Will Survive" to "Substitute" and became the key figure to draw attention to the record. Polydor subsequently released "I Will Survive" as the A-side and the record went on to top the charts in March 1979.

Four months later growing popular discontent with disco peaked at the "disco sucks" record burning rally held at Comiskey Park in Chicago, where talk radio and rock DJ Steve Dahl arranged for 40,000 disco songs to be blown up. The backlash against disco coincided with the over commercialisation of the genre, which accelerated after the opening of Studio 54 and the release of *Saturday Night Fever*, and resulted in record companies churning out increasing numbers of generic records. Yet the backlash wasn't just about the exploitation of disco. It was also rooted in the growing alienation experience by the white working class of Middle America, whose incomes and job security had decreased during the 1970s, and who felt particularly threatened as a second recession loomed towards the end of the decade. Looking for scapegoats, it was easy to turn on disco, which offended many people's rock and folk sensibilities, and was also populated by

marginalised groups—people of colour, the GLBTQ community, and women—who were (falsely) perceived to have made gains during the 1970s at the expense of the so-called “traditional” working class (meaning white working class men and their representatives).

If these groups had congregated on the dance floor with more comfort than others, an ethnically white, male rebellion against disco would make it clear that they didn’t want to follow in the footsteps of *Saturday Night Fever’s* John Travolta and attempt to make the dance floor their own. It remains important to challenge the homophobic, racist and sexist behaviour that infused the disco sucks movement, which wrongly and offensively blamed marginalised communities for much wider social problems that they had in no way caused. At the same time acknowledging that the disco sucks movement was rooted in a form of defensiveness helps us understand that its protagonists weren’t operating in conditions of their own choosing, and that they were not the first group to react in an exaggerated way when they felt their existence was under existential threat.

It was in this context that Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive” became an even more powerful anthem. The song already articulated a timeless message of hope—that with determination plus some great lyrics and a melody it’s possible to survive heartbreak. Now it came to embody an entire movement. It didn’t matter if half a population turned against disco, a name that had come to embody a movement that always surpassed a single genre and name. Disco could survive the attacks. All it required was heart, solidarity and more music. As Michael Gomes told me of the post-disco downtown party scene, “We didn’t miss a beat.”

33. Chic, “Good Times” (Atlantic, 1979)

Released in June, a month before Steve Dahl led the “disco sucks” rally, the release of “Good Times” by Chic demonstrated that disco remained as fresh, dynamic and inventive as ever when musicians were able to enter into the studio and express themselves with freedom. Chic had already contributed to the redefinition of the disco aesthetic, with their sound featuring a tight, machine-like rhythm section made up of guitarist Nile Rodgers, bass player Bernard Edwards and drummer Tony Thompson, upon which they would lay shimmering instrumentation and vocals. By 1979 disco had established itself as a producer’s medium, with figures such as Costantino, Moroder and Jacque Morali shaping disco’s increasingly seamless sound and often recording music that featured session musicians rather than an actual performing band, as was the case with the Village People. For some this development took disco too far away from its earthy dance floor and street origins: respite would come after the downfall of disco in the late 1970s and the re-emergence of a more open-ended dance sound (one that was reminiscent of the early 1970s) in the early 1980s). Before then, “Good Times” demonstrated that it was still possible to record a sonically perfect track featuring high-end production values while also generating music that oozed funk, soul, style and personality. Chic dressed in glamorous white dinner suits but their music was all about connecting with working-class Black people and disadvantaged others who, like many of their predecessors, turned to music and dance for cathartic release. “Good Times” went on to sell five million copies. Connecting with the street, its instrumentation was copied by the Sugar Hill Gang when they released “Rapper’s Delight,” the first rap record. Queen went on to recreate Bernard Edwards’s bass line on “Another One Bites the Dust.”

34. Ozo, “Anambra” (DJM, 1977)

David Mancuso would often close his set by playing Ozo’s “Anambra,” the final cut on the band’s debut album, *Listen to the Buddha*. The song features percussion, bells, a flute, vocal harmonies and the chanting of a mantra, *Om mani padre hum*. If Mancuso and his dancers experienced Loft parties as a journey, through music and sound, the contemplative, ethereal, spirit-conscious “Anambra” offered those gathered with a prayer-like ending. “Nobody played Ozo other than

David,” Loft regular and WBLS radio presenter Mark Riley told me. “It was almost a gothic, dirge-like song. People would go crazy over it. They’d kind of get into a whole trance-like thing”

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