



TIME
LIFE
MUSIC

SOUNDS OF THE SEVENTIES • 1978

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By 1978, disco music had been garnering occasional crossover hits, but Chic's **Le Freak** was the first by a black group to inject elements of rock into the idiom and make it truly hip. The single wound up selling four million copies.

The masterminds behind Chic were Bernard Edwards (who played bass) and Nile Rodgers (guitar). They met while jamming in New York City jazz clubs in 1970, and by 1972 had formed a fusion trio called the Big Apple Band, which took its sense of theatricality from Britain's Roxy Music. In 1976, they formed Allah and the Knife-Wielding Punks, a male and female punk-rock outfit that went nowhere fast and promptly disbanded.

Rodgers and Edwards moved toward disco not because they liked the music but because it seemed like the only way for blacks to win a recording contract.

They adopted an international, high-fashion approach that they felt would prevent them from being racially pigeonholed. Their demo was rejected by every label in New York before Atlantic president Jerry Greenberg took a personal interest and signed them.

By the time the single *Le Freak* was released, Chic had settled into a three-man, two-woman format augmented by studio musicians. This record took a popular gay-disco-rap phrase and turned it into slang, gave it an international flavor and created a new dance craze.

Their minimalist sound—guitar/bass interplay, scratchy funk-pop guitar lines, a wash of strings and female voices that seemed only half there—became so popular that Rodgers and Edwards became one of New York's hottest production teams for black *and*



white artists.

The Bee Gees had written a tune called **Night Fever** that seemed a perfect fit for the John Travolta disco movie, *Saturday Night Fever*, produced by their manager Robert Stigwood. But Stigwood thought the title sounded pornographic. He had heard the group perform a song in Bermuda called *Saturday Night, Saturday Night*, which evolved into *Stayin' Alive*. Manager and band decided to combine the "Saturday Night" title with the name of the new song and call the film *Saturday Night Fever*. By the end of the year, it was one of the biggest grossing movies in history. The Bee Gees set new records for producing No. 1 hits for themselves and for other Stigwood acts such as Yvonne Elliman.

Mike Chapman was another producer who had a good year in 1978. The Australian had been best known for collaborating with producer Nicky Chinn on recordings by British glam-rock stars such as Suzi Quatro (actually an American expatriate), Sweet, Gary Glitter and Mud. In 1975 he moved to Los Angeles, where he came across a demo tape by

a Kentucky band called the Exiles. Liking what he heard, Chapman scouted the group at the grand opening of an apartment complex in Lexington, Kentucky. He changed their name to Exile and gave them **Kiss You All Over**, which he described as a crass pastiche of soft rock and middle-of-the-road pop, with a fashionable snatch of disco.

Chapman also produced Nick Gilder's **Hot Child in the City**. Gilder, a veteran of the Canadian band Sweeney Todd, had moved to L.A., where he noticed many young prostitutes and their pimps on Hollywood Boulevard. But he was unable to turn his tale of a streetwise Lolita into an effective song until he rewrote it from the point of view of an aging lecher.

Not all music in 1978, however, was influenced by disco. Eccentric L.A. musicians managed unprecedented commercial success. Steely Dan—by now consisting of Donald Fagen, Walter Becker and various studio musicians—had their first platinum album with *Aja*, which yielded three hit singles, including **Peg**. Warren Zevon set himself apart from the wave of Hollywood singer-songwriters by writing tough, skewed

songs on complicated subjects. Linda Ronstadt cut two of his tunes in 1976 and two more in 1977. His friend Jackson Browne persuaded the one-time band-leader for the Everly Brothers to return from Spain, where he was living, and record a solo album in 1976. Browne produced Zevon's critically acclaimed debut, but it wasn't until 1978 that the singer-pianist reached a mass audience with **Werewolves of London**.

Randy Newman, the nephew of Alfred and Lionel Newman, who scored music for numerous films, had been writing hits for others since the early '60s, and had recorded his own debut album in 1968 when he was a staff arranger at Warner Brothers. His cynical, insightful tunes— invariably about winners who end up losing and losers who end up winning— were melodic, artfully arranged and rife with hooks, but they were hardly pop fare. **Short People** was meant to satirize bigotry, a perennial Newman theme which had been growing in importance for him, as evidenced by his 1974 ode to the South, *Good Old Boys*. *Short People*, like much of his material, was widely misunderstood—and the object of angry

boycotts. But the average-height (5 feet, 11 inches) Newman neither apologized for the song nor tried to exploit the new audience it attracted.

Patti Smith, the queen of the New York City punk scene, was another unlikely hit-maker. Smith, a poet and rock critic who had collaborated with playwright Sam Shepherd, turned to music with an independent label single in 1974 and made her album debut with *Horses* the next year. Her streetwise mysticism, along with her appreciation for three chords and a big beat, sustained her underground reputation until she fell off the stage during a performance in Florida and was hospitalized in 1977. She recorded her next album, *Easter*, in a studio down the hall from Bruce Springsteen, himself still just a critic's darling. Smith's producer Jimmy Iovine introduced the two, and Springsteen gave her **Because the Night**, which she revised and parlayed into her first hit single. She then went into retirement until the late '80s. Ironically, this marked the first time the Boss' name reached the top 20.

Queen and Kansas had more in common than a cursory listen might indicate.

The former were pre-punk Englishmen who combined glitter and metal with harmonies to create an arty arena-rock hybrid. **We Are the Champions** joined with *We Will Rock You* as a double-sided single that went platinum. Kansas was originally conceived as a marriage of Mid-western metal and English progressive rock, though by the time they recorded **Dust in the Wind** they had moved beyond Anglo-boogie into something they considered more metaphysical.

Many old and familiar sounds, too, were on the radio and the charts in 1978. With **Use Ta Be My Girl**, the O'Jays made their move from topical songs back to romance; that summer, they celebrated their 20th anniversary with a show at L.A.'s Greek Theater. Eric Clapton wrote **Lay Down Sally** in the style of soft-country crooner Don Williams, with whom he formed a mutual admiration society. A modest country hit for Clapton, the single was covered by country singers Red Sovine and Jerry Paris. Joe Walsh, who had replaced guitarist Bernie Leadon in the Eagles just in time to add some overdue muscle to the group on its 1976 album, *Hotel California*, mocked super-

star decadence with **Life's Been Good**, Speaking of which, even Rod Stewart admitted that his **You're in My Heart** was a calculated attempt to placate former lover Britt Ekland, who had filed a \$12 million palimony suit against him. It worked, and once she withdrew the suit the cavalier Rod the Mod cheerfully claimed, "It wasn't totally about Britt. . . . It could have been anybody I met in that period—and there were a lot of them."

—John Morthland

DISCOGRAPHY

*Indicates highest Billboard chart position

1. Werewolves of London Warren Zevon • Music and lyrics by Leroy Marinell, Robert Wachtel and Warren Zevon. Polite Music. ASCAP/Zevon Music. BMI. Asylum 45472. © 1978 Elektra/Asylum Records. No. 21*

2. Baby Hold On Eddie Money • Music and lyrics by James Lyon and Edward Mahoney. Granjonca Music. BMI. Columbia 10663. © 1977 CBS Records, Inc. Produced under license from CBS Special Products, a Service of CBS Records, a Division of CBS Records, Inc. No. 11*

3. Because the Night Patti Smith Group • Music and lyrics by Patti Smith and Bruce Springsteen. Bruce Springsteen. ASCAP. Arista 0318. © 1978 Arista Records, Inc. Produced under license from Arista Records, Inc. No. 13*

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5. Hot Child in the City Nick Gilder • Music and lyrics by James McColloch and Nick Gilder. Beechwood Music Corp. BMI. Chrysalis 2226. © 1976 Chrysalis Records. Courtesy of Chrysalis Records, Inc. No. 1*

6. Lay Down Sally Eric Clapton • Music and lyrics by Eric Clapton, Marcy Levy and George Terry. Unichappell-Stigwood Music c/o Warner-Chappell.

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7. Hot Blooded Foreigner • Music and lyrics by Lou Gramm and Mick Jones. Somerset Songs Publ./ESP Management Co., Inc. ASCAP. Atlantic 3488. © 1978 Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 3*

8. Life's Been Good Joe Walsh • Music and lyrics by Joe Walsh. Wow and Flutter Music Publ. ASCAP. Asylum 45493. © 1978 Elektra/Asylum Records. No. 12*

9. Peg Steely Dan • Music and lyrics by Walter Becker and Donald Fagen. Duchess Music Corp. BMI. ABC 12320. © 1977 MCA Records, Inc. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 11*

10. Use Ta Be My Girl The O'Jays • Music and lyrics by Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff. Mighty Three Music. BMI. Phil. Int'l 3642. © 1978 Philly International Records. Courtesy of Philly International Records. No. 4*

11. We Are the Champions Queen • Music and lyrics by Freddie Mercury. Queen Music Ltd. BMI. Elektra 45441. © 1977 Original Sound Recording Queen Productions Ltd. No. 4*

12. Night Fever The Bee Gees • Music and lyrics by Barry Gibb, Robin Gibb and Maurice Gibb. Gibb Brothers Music c/o Careers Music Inc. c/o BMG Music. BMI. RSO 889. © 1977 RSO Records, Inc. Courtesy of PolyGram Special Products, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 1*

13. I Love the Nightlife (Disco 'Round) Alicia Bridges • Music and lyrics by Alicia Bridges and Susan Hutcheson. Lowery Music Co., Inc. BMI.

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14. Kiss You All Over Exile • Music and lyrics by Nicky Chinn and Mike Chapman. Chinnichap Publishing Inc. BMI. Warner Brothers 8589. © 1976 Mike Chapman Enterprises, Inc. Courtesy of Mike Chapman Enterprises, Inc. No. 1*

15. Short People Randy Newman • Music and lyrics by Randy Newman. Hightree Music. BMI. Warner Brothers 8492. © 1977 Warner Bros. Records, Inc. No. 2*

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17. Le Freak Chic • Music and lyrics by Bernard Edwards and Nile Rodgers. Chic Music, Inc./ Cotillion Music. BMI. Atlantic 3519. © 1978 Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 1*

18. Double Vision Foreigner • Music and lyrics by Lou Gramm and Mick Jones. Somerset Songs/ Evansongs Ltd./WB Music Corp. ASCAP. Atlantic 3514. © 1978 Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 2*

19. You're In My Heart (The Final Acclaim) Rod Stewart • Music and lyrics by Rod Stewart. Riva Music, Inc. ASCAP. Warner Brothers 8475. © 1977 WEA Records, B.V. No. 4*

20. Ooh Baby Baby Linda Ronstadt • Music and lyrics by William Robinson and Warren Moore. Jobete Music Co., Inc. ASCAP. Asylum 45546. © 1978 Elektra/Asylum Records. No. 7*



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The Author: John Morthland has been an associate editor for *Rolling Stone* and *Cream*. He has freelanced for virtually every rock magazine published during the last 20 years.

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