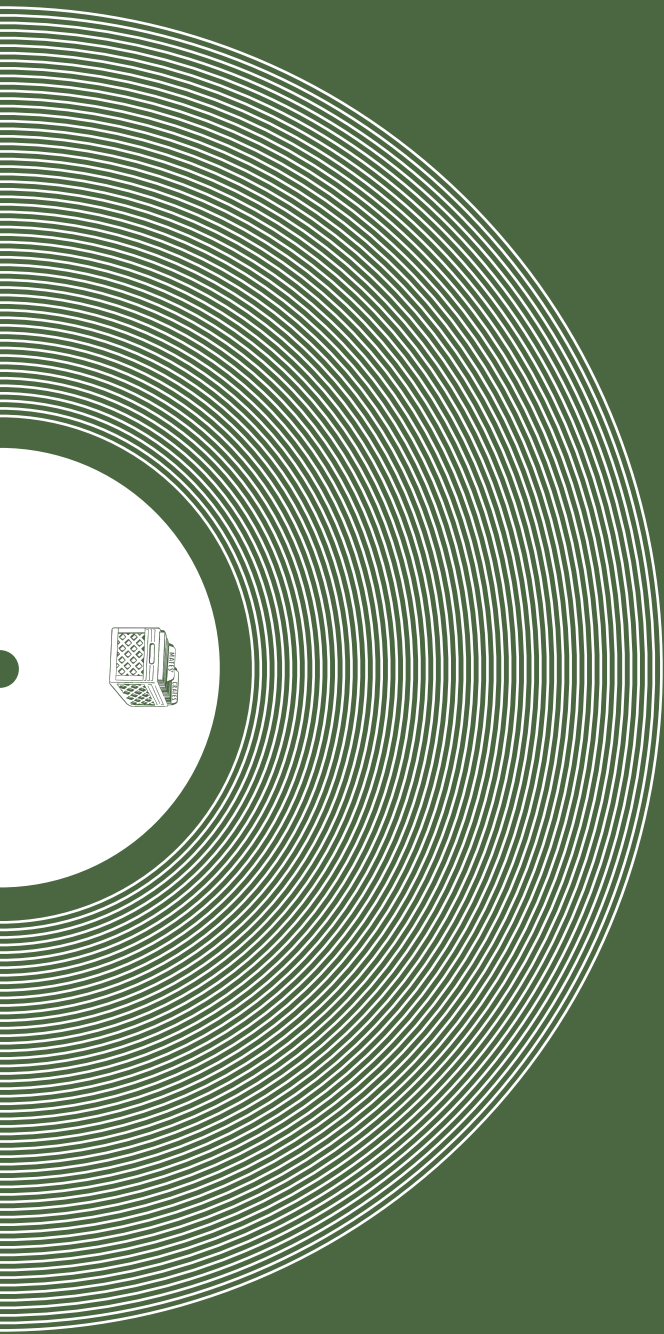


MATES' CRATES

100 Stories Behind The Songs

Andrei Sandu

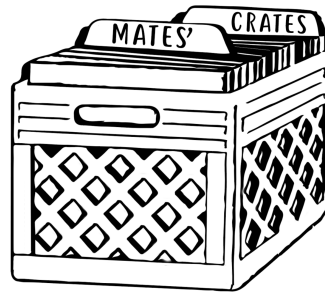




This book is dedicated to Toby, Josh, Beth, Charles, Felix, Hamish and Colleen, who all played a part in the Mates' Crates journey.

Thanks also to DJ Gilla, Andrew Ashong, Charlie Dark, Jed, Aditi, Kacper, Roberta, Harry and Rob for their encouragement.

And to everyone - musician, songwriter, producer or otherwise - who played a part in making the music happen.



Each piece is full of internet links to music, articles and more, which appear in underlined text. This includes the link next to each QR code to listen to the songs while you read the stories. You can click the bold page numbers to jump around the book too.

This e-book is best enjoyed in Two Page View (**View > Page Display > Two Page View** in Adobe Acrobat Reader or **View > Two Pages** in Apple Preview).



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Welcome

I'm glad you could join me!

Mates' Crates is my digger's diary, my opportunity to share the stories behind my favourite records - whether the story of how the music came about or how we came to love it.

Born out of an infectious curiosity about the who and the why, it's a journey through funk, soul, disco and beyond from which you might even come away with something new.

For the last few years, I've been playing and writing about records through my radio show and column. Find me online at matescratesmusic.co.uk.

This book is a collection of the columns published on Liverpool's Melodic Distraction from early 2019 to late 2023, alongside tracklists from the radio shows. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

With love,

Andrei







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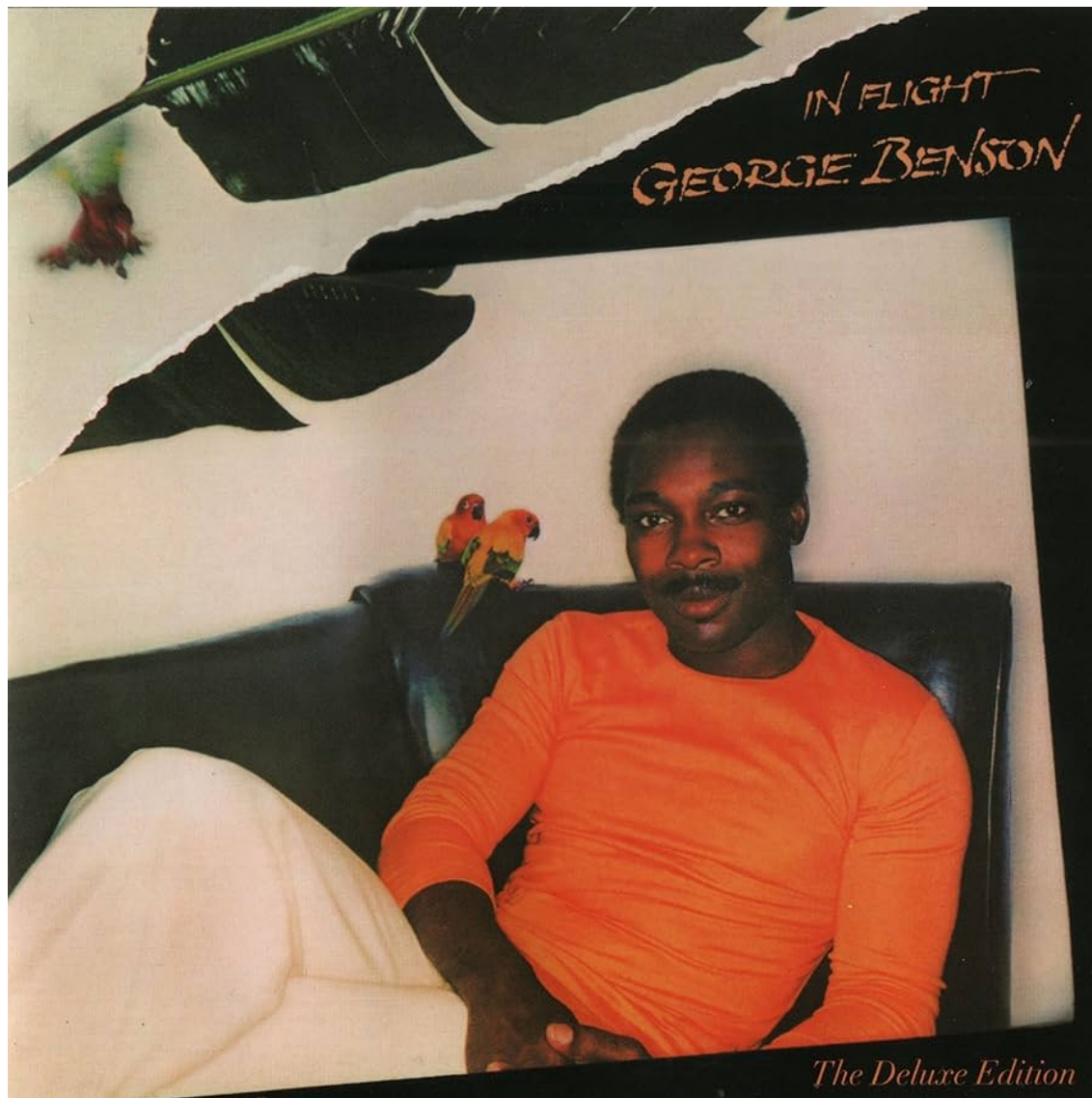
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George Benson - In Flight. © 1977 Warner Records Inc.



George Benson

The World Is A Ghetto



Label: Warner Bros.

Year: 1977

Discogs: George Benson – Give Me The Night

Listen:



George Benson - Give Me The Night. © 1977 Warner Records Inc.



Every few months, London legend Jon Rust hosts a record sale at the Libreria bookshop in Spitalfields. As part of the Standard Place crew alongside Oneman, Asbo, Martelo and Reecha, Jon's been broadcasting on NTS since its first week and was one of the first DJs on Boiler Room.

A few months ago, I found myself in Libreria while Jon was hosting a sale alongside singer-songwriter Andrew Ashong. I'll admit that I hadn't heard much of Andrew's music before meeting him there, but his personal warmth and wisdom is reflected in the beautiful range that he produces. "Love The Way" and "Flowers" (with Theo Parrish) are particular favourites.

Flicking through Andrew's crates while talking to him about how Romanian is the modern language closest to Latin (trivia he'd already picked up from an Uber driver that week), I pull out George Benson's "Give Me The Night". Andrew is appalled that I'm so excited by Benson's hit single but have never heard the B-Side. He snatches the record from me and runs to the turntable on the other side of the room.

Moments later, the opening strings of "The World Is A Ghetto" fill Libreria. Damn. Benson's 1977 cover of this 1973 song by War (of "Low Rider" fame) is the most beautiful thing I've heard all year. It's the perfect fusion of upbeat funk and sultry jazz, while Benson's vocals seem to resonate without saying too much at all:



*Walkin' down the street, smoggy-eyed
Looking at the sky, starry-eyed
Searchin' for a place, weary-eyed
Crying in the night, teary-eyed
Don't you know that it's true,
That for me and for you,
The world is a ghetto.*

I hadn't heard poetry this clean since Pitbull rhymed "Kodak" with "Kodak". I'm by no means the first to recognise the near-perfection: "The World Is A Ghetto" has been sampled countless times. In house, Bob Sinclar's "The Ghetto" (from the same album as "Gym Tonic", **p.375**) draws heavily on Benson's keyboard and bass guitar, while Thomas Bangalter (one half of Daft Punk) twists a few seconds of Benson's hook into oblivion on "Spinal Scratch".

In R&B, Benson's opening strings feature throughout Big Pun and Fat Joe's "Glamour Life" while Destiny's Child's "Get on the Bus" draws heavily on Benson's guitar. In hip-hop, Kanye West's "Beat 1" from 1997 - when he had just started breaking through the industry as a producer - samples a variety of elements.

I have few words that seem to do "The World Is A Ghetto" justice, so I'm not going to try. But I don't need to try, this masterpiece speaks for itself.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, March 30th 2019**



14



The Joubert Singers

Stand On The Word



Label: Favourite (originally Next Plateau Records)

Year: 2015 (originally 1985)

Discogs: The Joubert Singers – Stand on the Word

Listen:



The Joubert Singers - Stand On The Word. © 2012 Favourite Recordings



Most famous as a Larry Levan remix not remixed by Larry Levan, this is surely one of the most iconic gospel disco records around.

I won't get too deep into the history of this record, mainly because Red Bull Music Academy covers it better than I ever could. In short, it was the first song that Phyliss McKoy Joubert - Minister of Music at Crown Heights First Baptist Church - ever wrote. Privately funded without a label or distributor, there was a fair chance that it wouldn't have made it further than the church's congregation.

Luckily for us, Tony Humphries of New Jersey's Zanzibar club stumbled upon the release while working at Birdel's Records in New York and was eventually

approached to mix a new version. Larry Levan also played at Zanzibar, but that's as far as the Larry connection goes.

In 2003, a white-label copy of Humphries' mix surfaced, with "*Larry 02*" written on it. Whether out of ignorance or the knowledge that anything with Larry's name on would sell, it's been distributed as a Larry Levan Mix ever since. (Unfortunately), I don't run a label, so have never had to think about how to shift copies, but "Stand On The Word" is one of the most fantastic pieces of music I've ever heard.

It's not surprising that it was a staple at David Mancuso's legendary Loft parties, where songs were played end-to-end, 'just as the artist intended'. The end-to-



end perfection of "Stand On The Word" lends itself to this approach, with those celestial opening keys inducing goosebumps before the choir has even sung a note. Accompanied by only drums, piano and a bass guitar, the vocals build and layer for four minutes before peaking just as the track begins to fade.

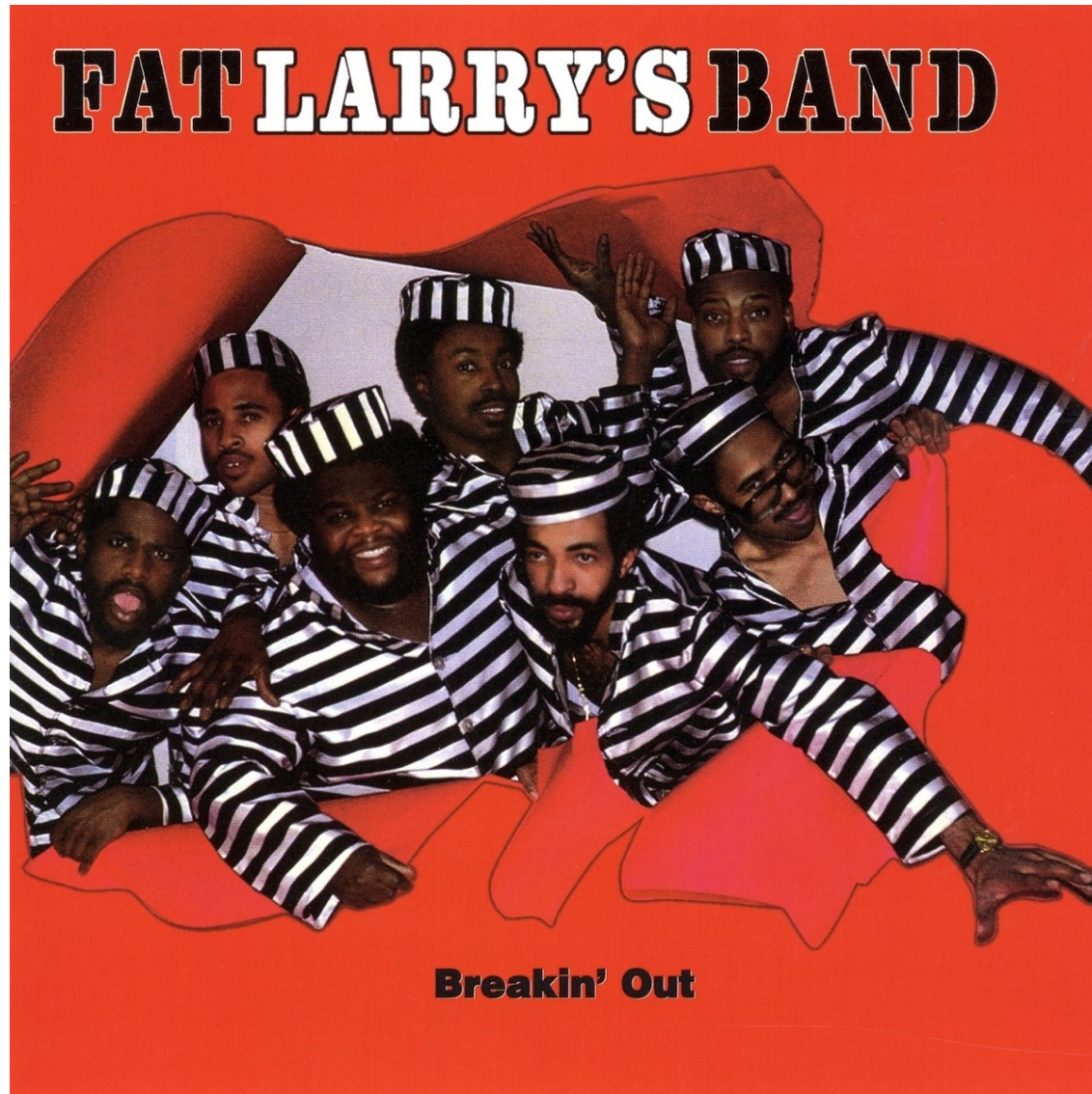
I was lucky enough to hear Horse Meat Disco play this at Newcastle's World HQ a few years back, borrowing from Mancuso's playbook and leaving a good thirty seconds of silence after it finished as the crowd simply took in the experience.

I was also pleased to find that The Joubert Singers are still around,

closing Mister Saturday Night's 250th party with a surprise live performance just last summer. Hearing a DJ hit play on this record was in itself such an experience that I can barely imagine the real deal.

Who knows what other gospel treasures are waiting to be found in the bargain bin of a New York record store...

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, April 14th 2019**



Fat Larry's Band - Breakin' Out. © 1982 Unidisc Music Inc.



Fat Larry's Band

Act Like You Know



Label: We Men of Talent

Year: 1982

Discogs: Fat Larry's Band – Act Like You Know

Listen:



Fat Larry's Band - Act Like You Know. © 1982 WMOT Records Inc.



Like many who weren't around in the early eighties, I first discovered this funky scorcher on Grand Theft Auto: Vice City's Fever 105.

Formed in 1976 by drummer and vocalist "Fat" Larry James, Fat Larry's Band are best known for "Act Like You Know" and "Zoom". Tragically, the band performed for just five years after their two biggest hits, folding when James had a heart attack in 1987.

Nonetheless, "Act Like You Know" surely cemented their legacy. Two things about the record are noteworthy, and both are heavily represented in the track's YouTube comments. The first is that irresistible baseline, and the second is quite how many listeners, myself

included, were introduced to it by Vice City. Taking each in turn.

I was really surprised to discover that Fat Larry's iconic bassline is in fact from a boogie record called "Help is On The Way", released a year earlier by The Whatnauts. By extension, all the times I've heard that bassline sampled – by De La Soul, Beverly Knight and even Little Mix – actually owes very little to Fat Larry.

Indeed, it seems The Whatnauts are no strangers to being sampled. Kanye West samples "I'll Erase Away Your Pain" on "Late", and "She's Gone To Another" on "Last Call". Wu Tang's RZA sampled "Message From A Black Man" on "You Can't Stop Me Now".



A Tribe Called Quest sampled "Why Can't People Be Colours Too?" on "Oh My God". But enough about them.

YouTube is awash with comments like "... brought me here" and "listening in 2019", but I think there's something to it. If Vice City hadn't brought them here, would they and the thousands of other likes on those comments be listening in 2019? Would they have ever heard the song at all?

Cultural media have expanded beyond recognition since 1982, and every video game or vlogger that introduces a new generation to great music is something to be cherished.

The Grand Theft Auto series' in-game

radio stations pioneered the idea that a video game could play this role. Vice City took this more seriously than ever before, with the seven stations released as a CD-boxset alongside the game itself. Fever 105 has always been my favourite, not least because its fictional host – "Oliver "Ladykiller" Biscuit" – was modelled on the legendary Barry White.V

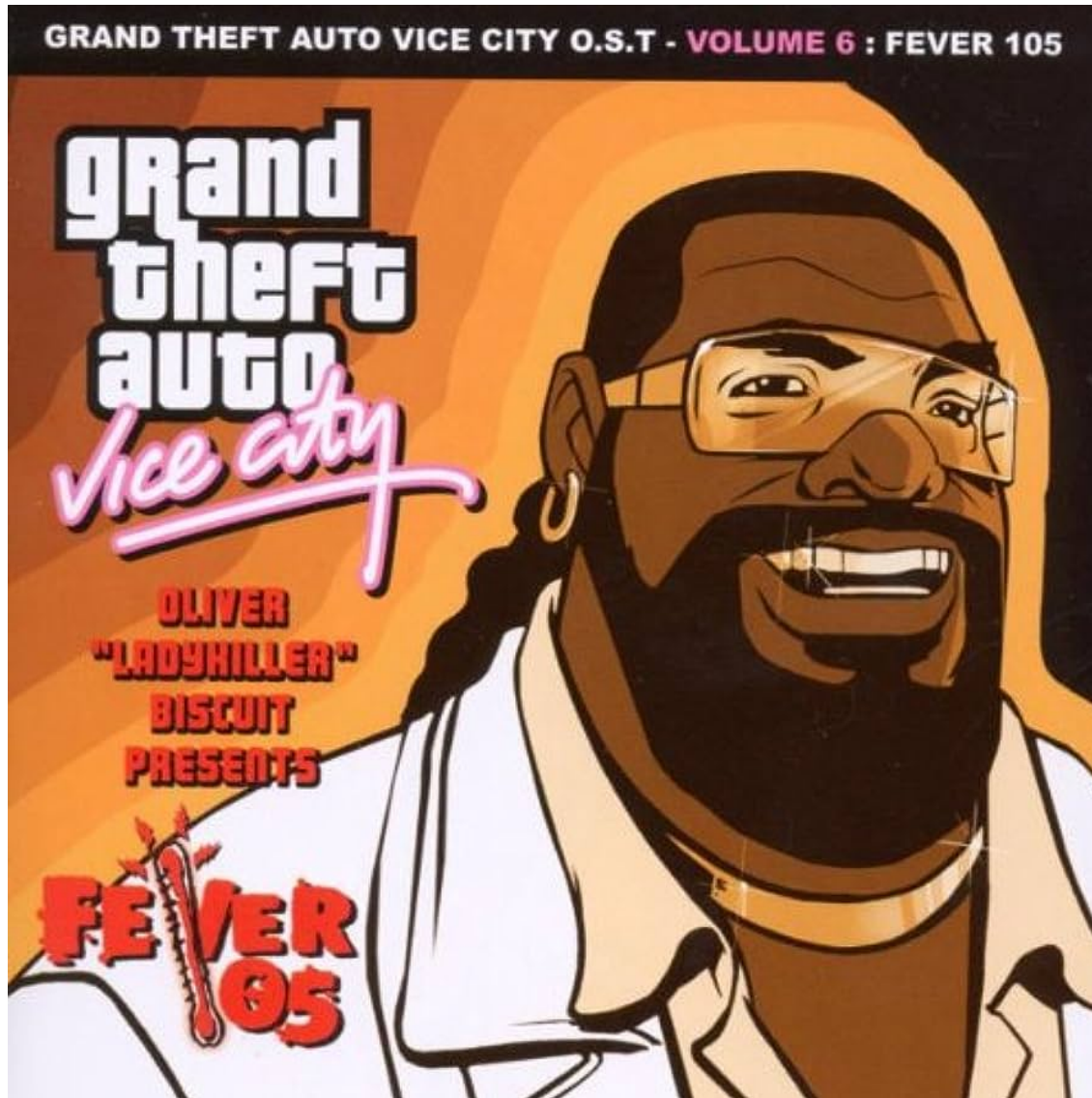
ice City sold over 18 million copies. In so doing, Fever 105 probably introduced millions of players to iconic tracks like Rick James' "Ghetto Life", Mtume's "Juicy Fruit", Oliver Cheatham's "Get Down Saturday Night", and "Automatic" by The Pointer Sisters (p.395).



Craig Connors, Rockstar's former Music Director who oversaw the soundtrack of every game in the series so far, has given some interesting interviews on the process.

I don't want to suggest that what I'm putting together is in any way profound, but I love how exploring the makeup of a single record can lead down rabbit holes as diverse as RZA, Beverly Knight, and the role of new media in promoting older music. I love the tangibility of vinyl, but who am I to deride video games, Spotify's algorithm or Little Mix if they're helping sustain music history.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, April 26th 2019**



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. © 2002 Take-Two Interactive Software Inc.



Fab Mayday - Porn Wax Ten. © 2015 Tusk Wax



Fab Mayday

Avventura In Guinea



Label: Porn Wax

Year: 2012

Discogs: Fab Mayday – Porn Wax One

Listen:



Fab Mayday - Porn Wax One. © 2012 Tusk Wax



Exploring the origins of this limited-pressing adventure in leftfield edits took me down a real rabbit hole.

Almost three years ago now, I found myself in Barcelona's Discos Paradiso, rightly listed as one of Vinyl Factory's fifty best record stores. Opened in 2010 by a pair of crate-diggers who started selling their flea market finds on Discogs, the obsession with rarities shines through in their well-curated collection.

Thumbing through the crates, I came across a hand-stamped, plain-sleeved 10" with 134/300 scribbled on in marker pen. After discovering that it was pressed on fluorescent pink vinyl, "Porn Wax One" had certainly caught my attention

enough to warrant a listen.

"Avventura in Guinea" opens with a minute of rolling drums and strings before giving way to a baseline with simple, driving force that reminds me a little of Donna Summer's "I Feel Love". It's a mesmerising roller which only breaks a few times to play out a bit more of the forgotten gem that it samples. I don't know what that is, but would love to find out.

On the flip, "Mogollar" samples a 1970 tune called "Garip Çoban" ('Strange Shepherd') by Turkish psychedelic rock group Moğollar ('Mongols'). Active since 1967 and still going today, they are recognised by many as founders of Anatolian rock, a genre which



incorporates elements of Turkish folk.

Fab Mayday's club-ready edit layers Moğollar's haunting vocals over more rolling drums and instruments that I don't have a good enough ear to identify. I can see it fitting in the same way I've heard Ricardo Villalobos play Ahmed Fakroun's "Gelty" (p.241) at Fabric.

The two weird and wonderful edits are by Italian DJ and producer Fab Mayday, whose lovingly-translated Facebook biography asserts that *"his productions makes people dancing around"*.

The label is part of the eclectic Tusk Wax family, alongside Horn Wax and Trance Wax. This interview with its eccentric founder reveals a fair bit about their

philosophy. Fab Mayday returned to Porn Wax for the label's tenth release with some more equally-weird, equally-wonderful productions, of which I rate "Viaggio In Gambia" in particular.

My struggle to find online recordings of "Porn Wax One", my half-fulfilled challenge to find the original songs that Fab Mayday sampled, and my enjoyment of "Garip Çoban" made me reflect a bit on the mystique around some DJ edits.

Sampling the rarest lost gems on vinyl-only limited-pressings can certainly create a hype that isn't achievable when literally infinite copies of an MP3 are available on Beatport. That drive to dig deep is certainly one way of introducing listeners to under-appreciated music.



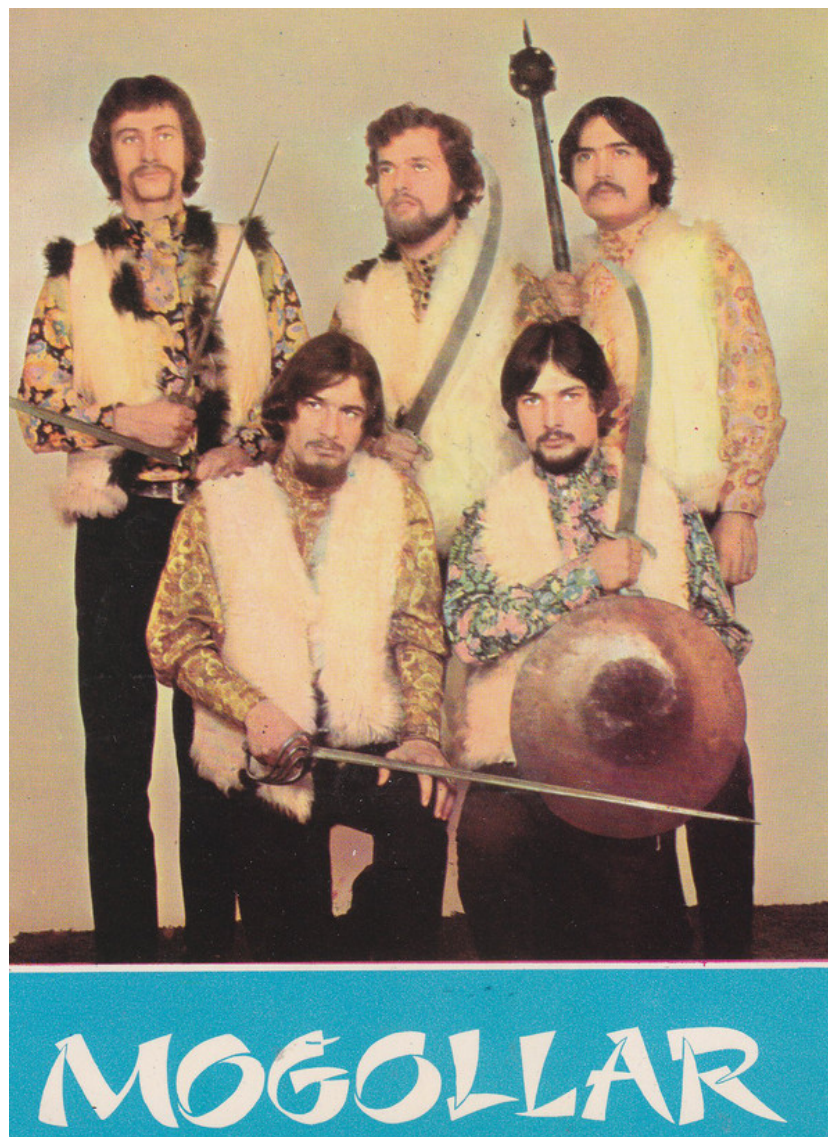
But whether printing nothing but a logo on the record is the best way of pointing people towards obscure gold like "Garip Çoban" is a matter for debate.

Quantity is sometimes kept low for financial reasons - as Tusk Wax put it, "too many labels fall by the wayside after trying to press too many units - best to keep small and fun rather than adding the risk of needing to sell a bunch of records." That said, other limited pressings - like "Woman"/"Midnight" by dubstep icon Loefah - would have no trouble selling ten times more copies than were produced. It's complicated. But I digress...

Closing with a bit of trivia, it turns out Sony used Moğollar's "Garip Çoban" in

the 2007 "This Is Living" commercial for the PlayStation 3. The ad is *unbelievably* weird, overly-sexualised and probably wouldn't be allowed today. How do the veteran Turkish rock pioneers feel about their song being played over raunchy visuals to sell a games console? I'm not sure, but I hope they were at least consulted...

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, May 12th 2019**



Mogollar. Photograph source unknown. Found on psychedelicbabymag.com.



Aretha Franklin - Get It Right. © 1983 Arista Records LLC



Aretha Franklin

Get It Right



Label: Arista

Year: 1983

Discogs: Aretha Franklin – Get It Right / Jump To It

Listen:



Aretha Franklin - Get It Right. © 1983 Arista Records Inc.



Where to begin? Through quite unlikely means, this is one of the records that got me into disco.

The year was 2012 and my tastes ran as deep as slightly pre-international fame Disclosure. Skream had moved on from dubstep and his year of flirting with disco had just begun. Making sure that every passer-by in the sixth-form common room could see you were streaming a Boiler Room was the only way to spend a free period. All that brought me to a Skream b2b Disclosure set, which opens with Aretha's "Get It Right".

Two years later, I bought the record - one of my first. Written by the inimitable Luther Vandross as a follow-up to their

1982 collaboration "Jump To It", both the instrumentation and the vocals are phenomenal. Whilst a scathing review by Rolling Stone's Don Shewey described the duo as "unable or unwilling to transcend mediocre material", I'm far more positive.

Brazilian session musician Paulinho da Costa features on percussion, which explains why those opening drums are quite so enthralling. One of the most recorded musicians of all time, this man has worked with everyone. Seriously, look him up. Once you know to listen out for it, that percussion is hard to ignore, particularly in the break.

Beyond the driving bassline, Vandross' influence is felt throughout. Indeed, he's



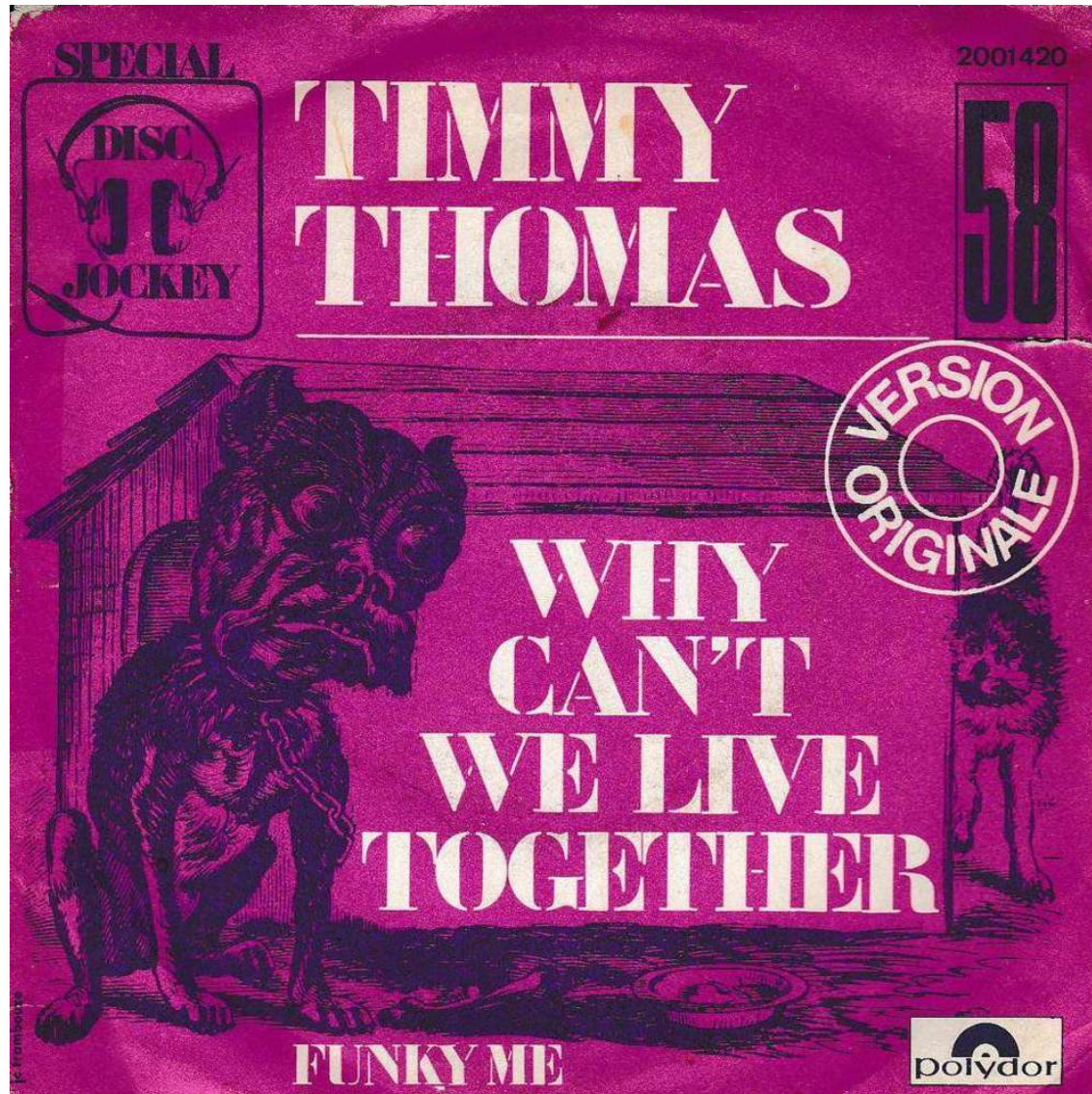
present on backing vocals, though the female voices dominate.

It's also impossible not to mention that the lyrics are just wholesomely motivational. Suddenly the day ahead doesn't seem quite so daunting. I'd never ruin it for myself by setting it as my alarm, but I brushed my teeth to this record every morning for about six months.

I've often thought that I'm keen to get a tattoo but too indecisive to commit to inking on any one thing forever. "Get It Right" opens with "Alright gang let's start from number one, let's throw down till it's done". Are those lines the solution to my dilemma? Absolutely not. Can you imagine.

Still a certified dancefloor heater though.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, May 26th 2019**



Timmy Thomas - Why Can't We Live Together. © Polydor 1972



Timmy Thomas

Why Can't We Live Together



Label: Vogue

Year: 1972

Discogs: Timmy Thomas – Why Can't We Live Together

Listen:



Timmy Thomas - Why Can't We Live Together. © Vogue P.I.P. 1972



Forty years before Drake got calls on his cell phone, one-hit-wonder one-man-band Timmy Thomas performed this soulful call for peace and unity.

I picked this 45 up in Nice last year, a re-release on the suitably French *Vogue Records*, with a live version on the flip.

Calling the instrumentation 'stripped-back' would be an understatement: Thomas accompanies himself on the organ while the Bossa Nova setting of a rhythm machine ticks along behind. Producer Steve Alaimo almost re-recorded with a full band, but chose to leave the message at the fore. Allmusic's Andrew Hamilton calls it one of the cheapest hits ever made, topping the R&B chart, hitting number three on the

Billboard Pop Singles and eventually selling over two million copies.

Thomas started writing when he heard reports of the Vietnam War's death toll. The line "no matter what colour, you're still my brother" was influenced by Thomas' visits to South Africa during Apartheid, and "Why Can't We Live Together" was used for the broadcast of Mandela's election. Indeed, Thomas' record label believed that the song's profound impact was precisely why none of his later work enjoyed comparable success.

I'll admit that I first became aware of it after Drake sampled the instrumental on "Hotline Bling". Thomas' call for global unity is more noble than Drake



admonishing his ex-girlfriend for going out too much, though both are perhaps heartfelt and vulnerable in their own way... Thomas was simply excited and grateful that Drake used the sample, emphasising that he was pleased it was all done the right way.

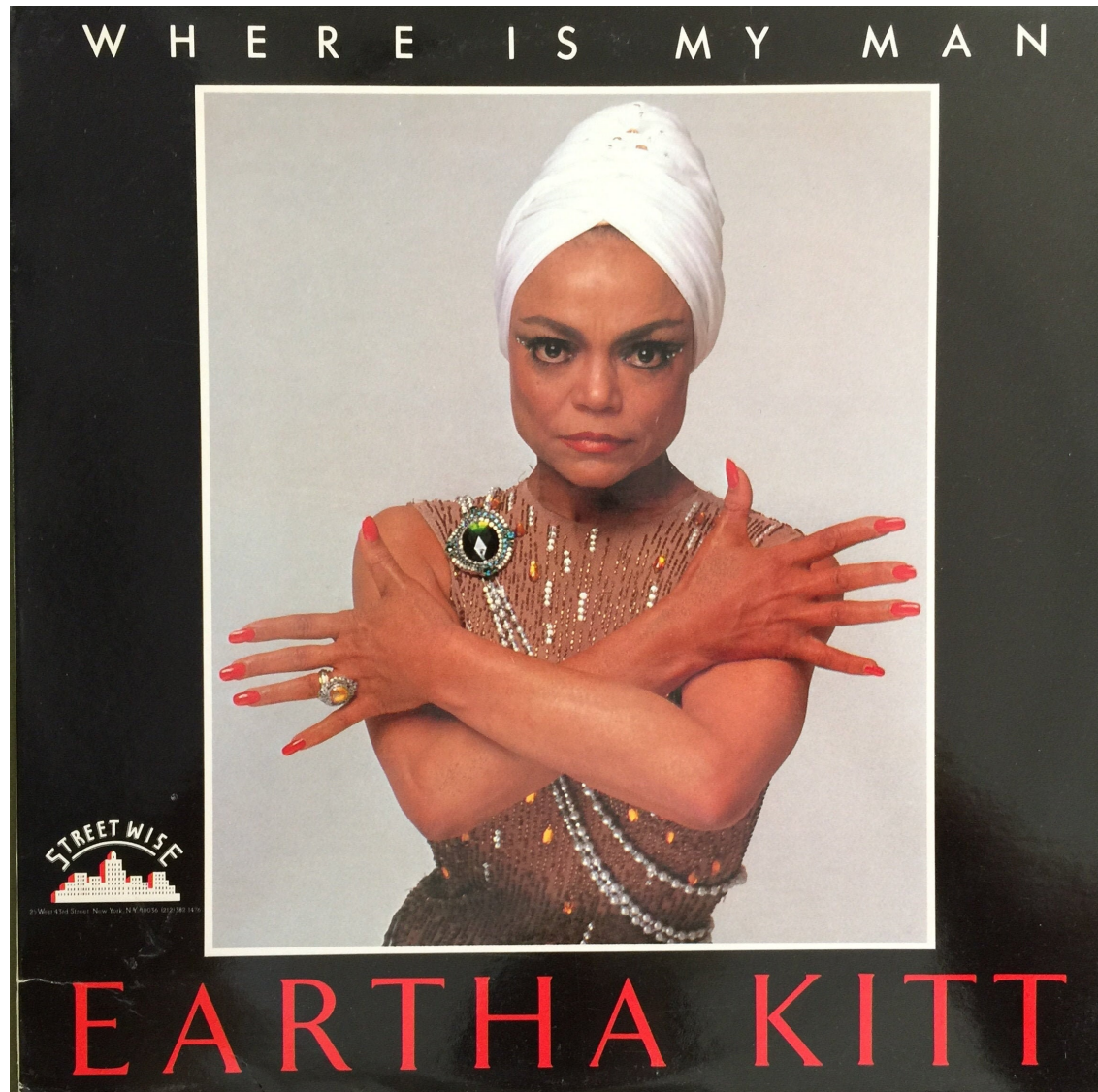
Of course, covers had existed for decades. Steve Winwood's beautiful version fills out the instrumentation slightly, Santana's performance unsurprisingly emphasises the lead guitar, whilst Sade's version emphasises... well... Sade. Even MC Hammer has put his own spin on it.

Australian disco maestro Late Nite Tuff Guy also produced an edit a few years ago following to the November 2015

Paris attacks. As he put it, this record has a simple, clear and beautiful message which is as relevant to the world today as it was back in 1972.

While I have you, New York-based producer Quantic's cumbia cover of "Hotline Bling" is not to be missed.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, July 1st 2019



Eartha Kitt - Where Is My Man. © 1983 Streetwise Records Ltd.



Eartha Kitt

Where Is My Man



Label: In The Mix (Scorpio)

Year: 1983

Discogs: Eartha Kitt – Where Is My Man

Listen:



Eartha Kitt - Where Is My Man. © 1983 Scorpio Music



A disco comeback hit from 'the most exciting woman on earth', best known for her 1953 Christmas classic "Santa Baby".

Too few are aware of the tumultuous rollercoaster that was Eartha Kitt's life story. Born on a South Carolina cotton plantation in 1927, Kitt only found out her birth date when she was 71. The identity of her father, speculated to be the white son of the plantation owner, was withheld from her until her death. Rejected by her black step-father for her pale complexion and raised by an abusive aunt, she certainly made something out of nothing.

Kitt's career began in 1943 as a dancer, but her unique voice and style quickly

stood out. She became fluent in English, French, German and Dutch from years performing cabaret in Europe, and even starred as Catwoman in the 1967 Batman TV show.

In 1968, Kitt famously made anti-war statements at a White House luncheon with Lyndon B Johnson. When asked by Lady Bird Johnson about the Vietnam War, she replied "You send the best of this country off to be shot and maimed ... There are so many things burning the people of this country, particularly mothers ... We raise children and send them to war."

Mrs. Johnson burst into tears. Kitt was branded a 'sadistic nymphomaniac' and blacklisted with a false defamatory



dossier. She had in fact been under surveillance since 1956.

The incident derailed her career in the US for over a decade until she returned in 1983 with "Where Is My Man", first released as a wildly successful single in France. Produced by Village People creators Fred Zarr and Jaques Morali, it was co-written by a comedy writer but is far more sultry than it is ridiculous.

It seems too easy to superimpose Kitt's difficult history onto the demands for a pampering and protective man. She was far too fiery for that.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, July 7th 2019**



Sylvester - I (Who Have Nothing). © 1979 Fantasy Records



Sylvester

I (Who Have Nothing)



Label: Fantasy

Year: 1979

Discogs: Sylvester – I (Who Have Nothing)

Listen:



Sylvester - I (Who Have Nothing). © 1979 Fantasy Records



Though I bought this record for the two beauties on the B-Side, Sylvester's phenomenal cover of Ben E King's "I (Who Have Nothing)", (itself a cover of Joe Sentieri's "Uno dei Tanti") is equally stunning. Just as King's performance in 1963 feels symbolic of a time and place, so does Sylvester's. Ten minutes long, it is a disco record, not a blues 45.

The dramatic strings and gospel chord changes make it dancefloor-ready while somehow maintaining the melancholy tone of unrequited love that dominated the original. Lyrics were written by Lieber and Stoller (most famous for Elvis' "Hound Dog"), so it is unsurprising that King's version is traditional and the partner of the singer's love interest is a "he". Sylvester's is not.

When writing about music, I have a habit of devaluing the word 'inimitable' by overusing it. But I'm struggling to find a better word to describe Sylvester.

The B-Side features two of my favourite Sylvester-Patrick Cowley collaborations (the third being "Do You Wanna Funk"). Cowley is ~~an~~ *the* unsung hero of dance music, and the profound influence of his six-year career - cut tragically short by AIDS in 1982 - cannot be overstated. Researching for my Disco Reflections piece on Cowley last year really changed my perspective on the origins of electronic music. Look him up!

"You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)" began as a mid-tempo piano-driven gospel song produced by Motown's Head



of Artist Development, Harvey Fuqua. After hearing a rehearsal at a San Francisco club, Cowley transformed it into a disco anthem.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, July 23rd 2019**

Also on the B-Side, I was surprised to find an instrumental of "I Need Somebody to Love Tonight", which Cowley first produced to soundtrack a *particular kind* of film (I won't provide a link...). Like Cowley himself, this song was ahead of its time, and certainly doesn't feel like it was produced almost forty years ago.

An all-killer-no-filler record, this is an aptly-selected showcase of Sylvester, Patrick Cowley, and the power of their collaboration.



Pigbag - Papa's Got A Brand New Pigbag. © 1981 Rough Trade



Pigbag

Papa's Got A Brand New Pigbag



Label: Y Records

Year: 1981

Discogs: Pigbag – Papa's Got A Brand New Pigbag

Listen:



Pigbag - Papa's Got A Brand New Pigbag. © 1981 Rough Trade



If you listen closely enough to this wild dance-punk jam, its influence on a *lot* of noughties indie starts to creep out.

Pigbag were formed in Cheltenham in late 1980 by fashion student Chris Hamlin through improv sessions at his student house. Rumour has it that the sleeve art is based on the graffiti that he drew on his bedroom walls.

"Papa's Got A Brand New Pigbag" was recorded in 1981. It's a real wild ride that captures the atmosphere in which the band came together. Bass, percussion and brass elements are constantly vying for the listener's attention, more like jazz than punk-rock. The record is considered an early example of dance-punk, a genre I hadn't really known by

name but captures the likes of Bloc Party, Franz Ferdinand, Klaxons, Digitalism, Yeah Yeah Yeahs and The Ting Tings... A real nostalgia trip.

BBC Music's David Stubbs wrote that "sometimes, in order to be taken seriously by posterity, it's better to have no hits than one hit." Does the commercial success and familiarity of this record wash away Pigbag's post-punk credentials and enviable blend of punk, avant-jazz, soul and ska? I don't think so.

The name is clearly a play on James Brown's "Papa's Got A Brand New Bag", though Pigbag's brass riff is probably now as deeply ingrained into popular



culture as Brown's original. Equally iconic is the bassline, which *Stylus Magazine* picked as the 40th greatest of all time.

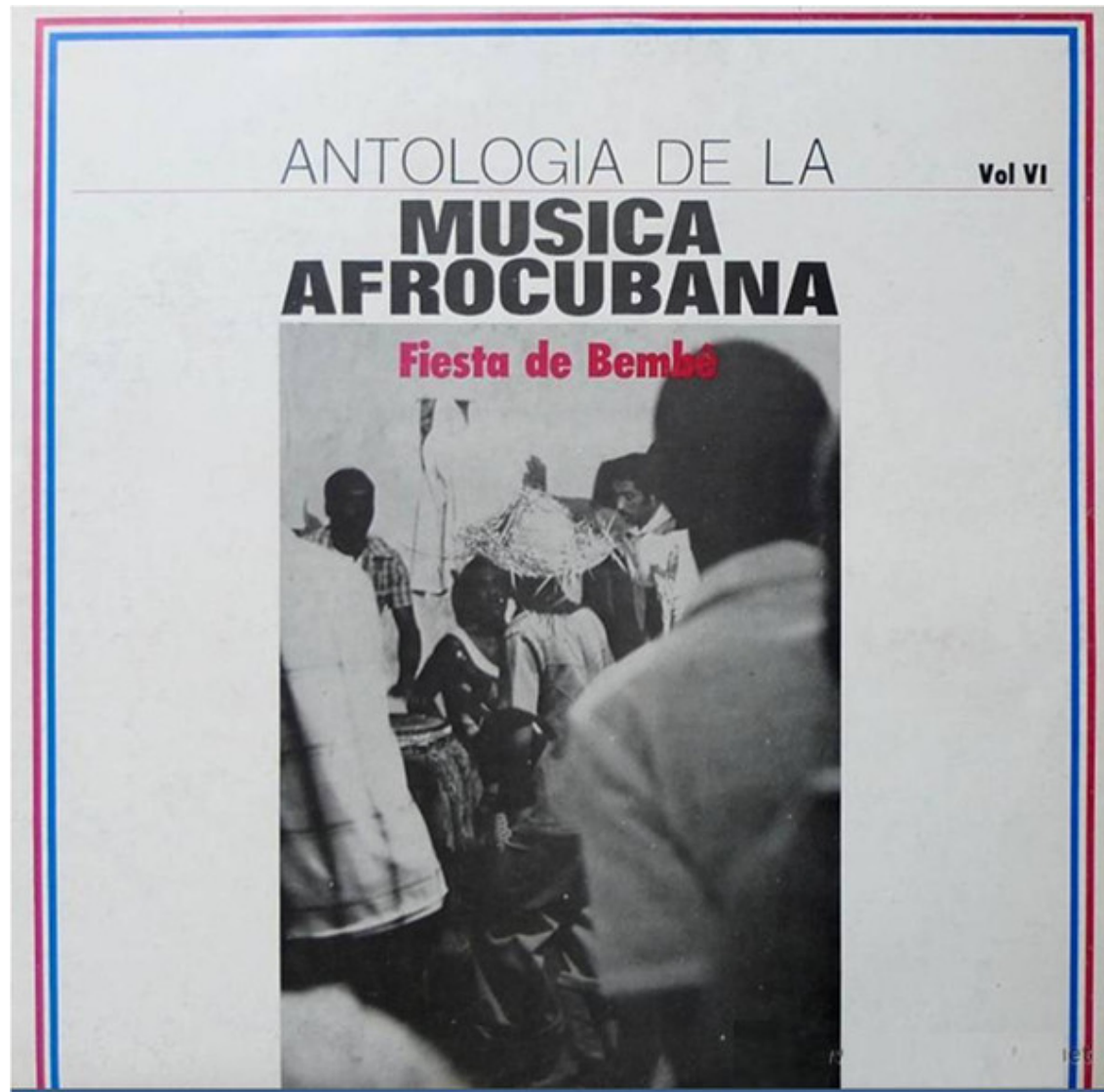
The distinctive riff has grown closely associated with football, used as the goal celebration for both Middlesbrough F.C. and Queen's Park Rangers, as well as Shunsuke Nakamura's unofficial theme while he played for Celtic.

The record did not initially make the UK mainstream charts until a 1982 re-release reached No.3. A slew of electro remixes followed. In 1995, a trance mix by British DJ Paul Oakenfold hit No.6 in the UK chart; DJ duo Thunderpuss scored a US dance No.1 with a hideous version in 2001; and Italian sample-

fiend Alex Gaudino (of "Destination Calabria" fame) added some awful lyrics to his own version in 2008.

Pigbag's wordplay continued beyond this record, with their debut album titled "Dr. Heckle and Mr. Jive". In stark contrast with this linguistic ingenuity, I was unamused to find that Thunderpuss released trashy early-naughties EDM under the alias "Pusaka", from which layered aubergine dishes have been trying to distance themselves ever since...

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, August 6th 2019



Grupo De Tambores Niloniyé - Fiesta De Bembé. © 1981 Areito



Grupo De Tambores Niloniyé

Fiesta De Bembé



Label: Areito

Year: 1981

Discogs: Grupo De Tambores Niloniyé–
Antologia De La Musica Afrocubana Vol
VI – Fiesta De Bembé

Listen:



Grupo De Tambores Niloniyé - Fiesta De Bembé. © 1981 Areito



I spent two weeks of last October exploring Cuba, from Havana and Trinidad to Cienfuegos and Viñales. It is an incredible country of deep contrasts and two constants: its proud, hospitable people and its omnipresent music.

On every corner, there is a guitar, a boombox, or a group improvising on wooden crates. Just like Cuba's cultural heritage, its music is wonderfully varied, from dance-orientated *salsa*, *bolero* and *danzyn* to lyrical *son*, ballad-like *trova* and even a burgeoning hip-hop scene.

When I learned of *Librería La Fernandina* in the coastal city of *Cienfuegos*, pearl of Cuba's south, I knew it would be my kind of place. Lonely Planet listed it as stocking books,

vintage magazines, collectibles and other pre- and post-revolutionary curiosities. What I found was a treasure trove of casino chips, badges, posters, propaganda and, of course, records.

On my first visit, I picked up an album by famous Cuban salsa troupe Los Van Van and had the pleasure of meeting Michel, La Fernandína's affable owner. He told me how he started his remarkable collection six years ago with just \$30 and a market stall. We spoke for some time about music, books and life, and I vowed to return for a poster.

The following evening, he recommended this Afro-Cuban gem, invited us back to his home for coffee, and took us up onto his roof to share his growing assembly of



pre-revolution American enamel advertisements - a true collector.

Like its previous owner, this record is fantastic. With no information online, I set about translating the Spanish liner notes and discovered that it is a field recording of a Yoruba-influenced bembé party, held for the Santeria saints. Everything about this record feels like a piece of musical anthropology, and it's exhilarating.

As lo-fi continuous recordings from the party hiss with life on each side, you can feel the energy build and the crowd become more animated. Instruments are occasionally out of time, but this does more to add to than subtract from the atmosphere. As a listener almost forty

years later, I felt privileged to experience the waves of layered percussion and chanted vocals again and again, from my living room on the other side of the world.

A phenomenal record (in the most literal sense) of Yoruba culture in Western Cuba.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, August 25th 2019**



The New York Community Choir - The New York Community Choir. © 1977 RCA Records



The New York Community Choir

Express Yourself



Label: RCA

Year: 1977

Discogs: The New York Community Choir – Express Yourself / Have A Good Time

Listen:



The New York Community Choir - Express Yourself. © 1977 RCA Records



There's an intense power and passion to the layered vocals of a gospel choir's call and response, and I've been digging for more and more of it lately. Flicking through crates at the fantastic Alan's Records in East Finchley, I came across what I expected (and perhaps hoped) to be a gospel version of Charles Wright's funk classic of the same name, famously sampled by N.W.A.. I dare say that what I got was even better.

With spiritual vocals over lively drums and a bouncing bassline, "Express Yourself" was a Bronx classic in the early 80s, played by Grand Master Flash amongst others. Clocking in at an impressive eleven minutes, the second half consists mostly of a whirlwind drum solo, ripe for the chopping by early hip-

hop DJs (I'm picturing purple crayon all over this record, á la Netflix's "The Get Down").

"Express Yourself" was produced by Warren Schatz, who worked on Evelyn 'Champagne' King's "Shame" the same year.

This record is surely a predecessor of the classic New York house later released on labels like Strictly Rhythm (take Ultra Naté's "Free", for example).

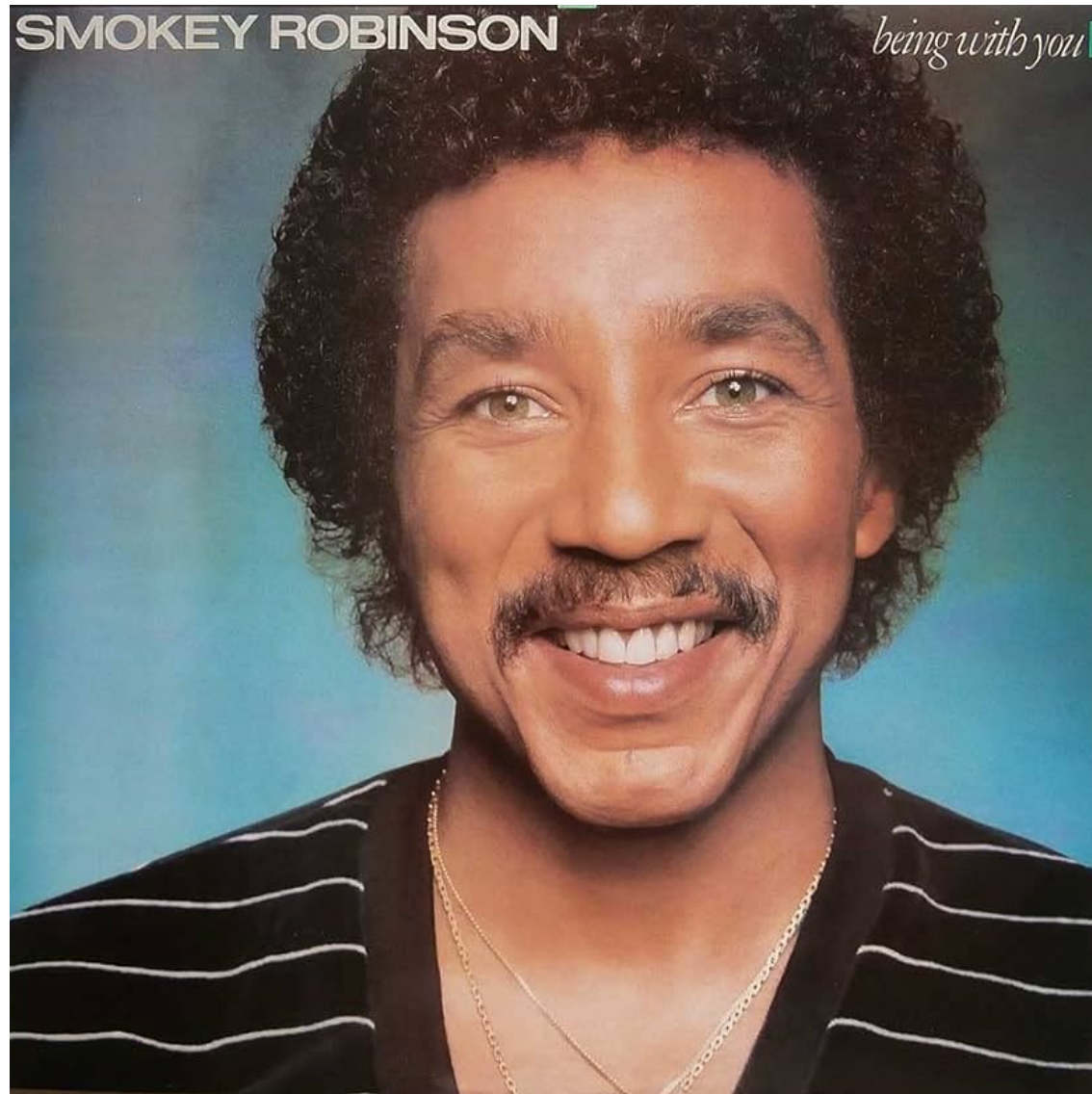
Unsurprisingly, the Choir's director, Benny Diggs, went on to compose and sing backing vocals for house legends including Roger Sanchez, Masters at Work and Erick Morillo.



The legacy lives on in other ways too: the daughter of NYCC's lead vocalist provided the R'n'B vocals on Will Smith's Men in Black theme some twenty years later.

If the stellar A-side wasn't enough, "Have A Good Time" on the flip leans further into the Choir's gospel roots, bringing a bit of Sunday morning to your Saturday night.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, September 8th 2019**



Smokey Robinson - Being With You. © 1981 Motown Record Corporation



Smokey Robinson

Being With You



Label: Motown

Year: 1981

Discogs: Smokey Robinson - Being With You

Listen:



Smokey Robinson - Being With You. © 1981 Motown Record Corporation



Most will have encountered this R&B anthem, or one of the iconic samples drawn from it, knowingly or otherwise.

When the weather on the first day of a spring escape to the south of France took a turn for the worse, I took cover in Nice's *Sonic Import*. With crates of 12"s up against both walls of the narrow space, unsorted stacks on the floor, and the owner's tiny dog running riot, digging here felt closer to an episode of *American Pickers*, but so did the excitement for what I might find.

As is often the case, the real treasures weren't neatly categorised on shelves. I must've bought about a quarter of the varied stack of 45s by the door, including this Smokey Robinson classic.

With twenty years already under his belt as a founding member of The Miracles, Robinson launched his solo career as a mature vocalist, combining conventional R&B falsetto with his unique smoky (!?) croon. Despite how well it fits his distinctive voice, he gained the nickname at the age of three: a cowboy identity given to him by his uncle Claude when watching Westerns together.

It is claimed that Smokey wrote around 4,000 songs over the course of his lengthy career, including soul classics like The Temptations' "My Girl" (featuring Eddie Kendricks, **p.249**) and Marvin Gaye's "Ain't That Peculiar".

As Les Back writes in an interesting piece on the feminism of Smokey's lyrics,



his songs are not tales of male bragging or synthetic romance. In Smokey Robinson songs, love is often vulnerability.

Contemporary reviews of "Being With You" separated Robinson's vocal idiosyncrasies from the song itself. Rolling Stone's Stephen Holden thought that "it's amazing what subtle vocal inflections can do for material that's less than terrific". I'm less critical, but the record would indeed have been less remarkable without Robinson.

Samplers too voted with their feet (or tape-clippers?), picking out Smokey's opening vocalisations more than any other part of the song.

His warm "Oooh" has inspired everyone from Cam'ron to Katy Perry just last year. The first verse captured the imagination of 2012's YouTube-deep-house-era producers AMTRAC and Dublin Aunts. Even a pre-"It's Only Real" Denis Sulta pairs reverb-heavy samples of Smokey's vocal with stripped-back percussion and dark synths on the haunting "A.A.S.".

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, September 22nd 2019



The Crusaders - Those Southern Knights. © 1976 The Verve Music Group



The Crusaders

Spiral



Label: MCA

Year: 1976

Discogs: The Crusaders - Those Southern Knights

Listen:



The Crusaders - Those Southern Knights. © 1976 MCA Records



Stood in the almost-empty upstairs room of Shoreditch's Old Blue Last one evening after dinner with friends, I heard the start of what I thought was Moodymann's classic "Don't You Want My Love". The vocals never materialised, and after unsubtly dropping my phone mid-Shazam, I discovered that this was "Spiral", a six-minute jazz masterpiece by The Crusaders.

Over a year later, nonchalantly thumbing through crates at Liverpool's Baltic Market, I stumbled upon "Those Southern Knights", the Crusaders' 21st studio album. I'd have bought it for the cover art, even before discovering that "Spiral" was the first track on the A-side.

The Jazz Crusaders came into being in

1952, founded by keyboardist Joe Sample (real name, sampled 310 times) and two high-school friends. Named in homage to Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, the group's unique take on jazz-soul drew a growing crowd after they moved to L.A. in 1960. Renamed The Crusaders in 1971, they found particular fame collaborating with Randy Crawford on 1979's "Street Life". You've definitely heard Street Life. When 2Pac heard Street Life, it became "Thug Life".

Sample wrote "Spiral" himself. By this point, he had worked as a session keyboardist for Joni Mitchell, Marvin Gaye, Tina Turner and others. AllMusic's Richard Ginell describes "Spiral" as "OK, yet just a bit too frantic for the groove to thrive".



Allmusic's Richard Ginell is wrong. It is the perfect blend of funk and jazz, with each Crusader's solo moment shining through over a thick, groovy bassline.

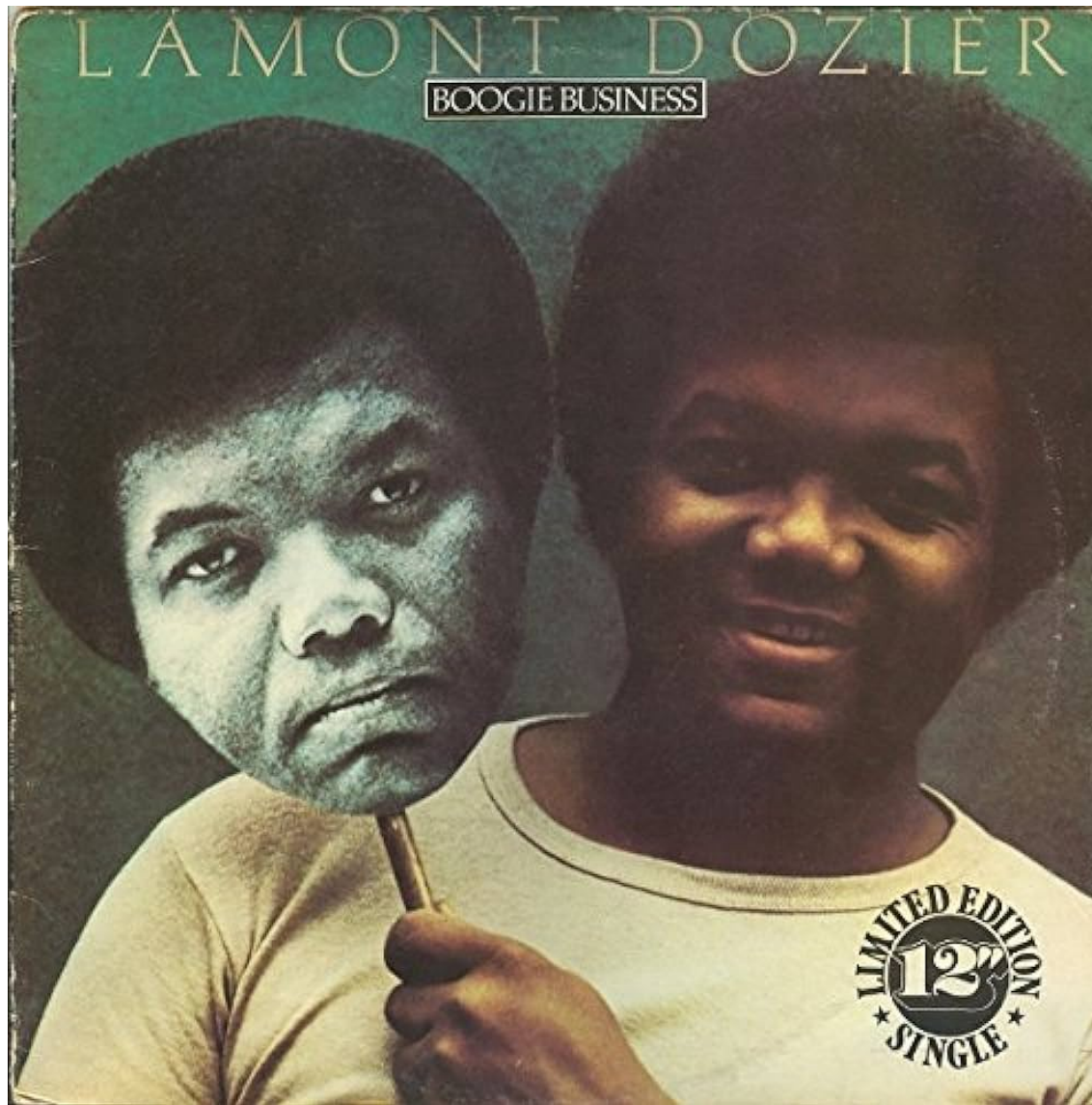
The album was produced by Stewart Levine, whose credits are astounding. Minnie Ripperton's "Adventures in Paradise", which profoundly influenced the neo-soul of D'Angelo and Jill Scott. Lamont Dozier's "Goin' Back to My Roots" (**p.67**), perhaps my favourite record ever. Six albums for B.B. King. Womack & Womack's debut (**p.121**). Simply Red's first two records, including his cover of The Valentine Brothers' "Money's Too Tight (To Mention)" (**p.189**). I'll stop...

These connections do make me wonder

how different "Spiral" could have turned out. Would the keys solo have sounded different if Sample hadn't played for Joni Mitchell? Would the arrangement have been different if Levine hadn't attended the Manhattan School of Music alongside Hugh Masekela, the father of South African jazz? Would Moodymann's "Don't You Want My Love" exist at all?

In some way, every single piece of music is the product of every interaction which every musician involved ever had. Let this record remind you of that.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, October 13th 2019



Lamont Dozier - Boogie Business. © 1979 Warner Brothers Records Inc.



Lamont Dozier

Going Back To My Roots



Label: Warner Bros.

Year: 1977

Discogs: Lamont Dozier – Boogie Business

Listen:



Lamont Dozier - Boogie Business. © 1977 Warner Brothers Records Inc.



In 1990, Lamont Dozier entered the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame for his part in Motown's Holland-Dozier-Holland production team, responsible for everything from The Supremes' "Baby Love" to The Four Tops' "Reach Out, I'll be There" and Marvin Gaye's "How Sweet it is to be Loved by You".

The first lines of The Isley Brothers' "This Old Heart of Mine" are from the 'theme song' with which Dozier sang himself out of bed each morning. The opening "Sugar Pie, Honey Bunch" in The Four Tops' "I Can't Help Myself" was his grandfather's catchphrase. The Bernadette that The Four Tops sang of was Dozier's childhood crush.

Many reviewers tie "Going Back To My Roots" to the 1977 TV mini-series "Roots", which showed a modern-day African American tracing his ancestry back through the slave trade. Nervous about viewership, ABC packed the cast with poet Maya Angelou, football star OJ Simpson and The Brady Bunch's Robert Reed.

Contrary to these expectations, the series finale was watched by 85% of US households with TVs, breaking all existing records and still the second-most watched series finale in US history. The series was based on a 1976 novel of the same name by Alex Haley, who based the central character (Kunta Kinte, the inspiration for Kendrick Lamar's "King Kunta") on one of his ancestors.



But the record's musical history is yet more complex. If you've heard "Don't Go Lose It Baby" by legendary South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, you'll notice similarities between the synth line and the rhythm guitar on "Going Back to My Roots". This could be explained by Masakela's role in producing Dozier's album, alongside Stewart Levine (who also produced The Crusaders, **p.63**).

In truth, however, "Going Back to My Roots" began with Nigerian singer and saxophonist Orlando Julius, who moved to the US in 1974 to work with the likes of Louis Armstrong, James Brown and Gil Scott-Heron. In a fascinating interview, he explains how Masakela used several key elements of his Yoruba composition "Ashiko" on the Dozier

track, without ever crediting his original. For more incredible Yoruba music, see "Fiesta de Bembé", which I picked up in Cuba last year (**p.51**).

Finding Dozier's "Going Back to My Roots" on the B-Side of "Boogie Business" in Reckless Records' bargain bin was a reminder of the joys of digging. Finding Odyssey's fantastic cover (**p.83**, now resurgent after Folamour's Boiler Room) at Liverpool's Baltic Market this summer was an unexpected surprise.

Most of all, hearing Colleen Murphy close her set at Boiler Room Festival with Dozier's version gave me chills.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, October 27th 2019



JOHN MORALES - THE M&M MIXES

PREVIOUSLY UN-RELEASED EXCLUSIVE SALSOUL MIXES + NYC UNDERGROUND DISCO ANTHEMS



John Morales - The M&M Mixes: NYC Underground Disco Anthems + Previously Un-Released Exclusive Salsoul Mixes. © 2009 BBE Records



Inner Life

Ain't No Mountain (JM 4AM Mix)



Label: Barely Breaking Even

Year: Unreleased until 2009

Discogs: John Morales - The M&M Mixes

Listen:



John Morales - The M&M Mixes. © 2009 BBE Records



What was the first remix you ever heard? When was the first time you realised that a song could be chopped up and put together in a completely new way? Was it better, worse, or just different?

The remix is now a ubiquitous part of dance music. In the 1970s, self-taught sound engineer John Morales was one of only a handful of producers perfecting this art after finding that most singles were too short for his club sets. By the end of the decade, the M&M Mixes he released with his partner Sergio Munzibai became a staple of the New York dancefloor.

At the height of the disco era, the duo played everywhere from Stardust Ballroom to the infamous Studio 54,

with over 650 remixes and edits to their name. M&M produced for everyone from Jocelyn Brown to Tina Turner; The Rolling Stones to Spandau Ballet; Candi Staton to Hall & Oates; Aretha Franklin (**p.31**) to a Temptations song - albeit one featuring neither Eddie Kendricks (**p.249**) nor Dennis Edwards (**p.363**).

Morales started working in his local record store at the age of twelve, paid not in dollars but in vinyl. His first DJ sets were in his father's bar in Jersey City, and his first edits were put together by cutting up pieces of tape in his bedroom. His first credit came in 1979, remixing Inner Life's "Caught Up (In A One Night Love Affair)". You can listen to the man himself recalling his musical journey in his RA Exchange interview.



With Morales from a Puerto-Rican family and Munzibai born in Cuba, the duo distinguished themselves by incorporating Latin percussion into many of their productions. Munzibai – the more sociable of the two – handled the politics and promotion, allowing Morales to focus on the music. Munzibai sadly passed away in 1991, but Morales is still producing and playing out today.

This previously unreleased *seventeen-minute* version of Inner Life's "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" was the first Morales production I ever came across. I bought it immediately.

Nowadays, too many remixes involve a tech-house producer adding little more than a heavier kick drum then watching

royalties roll in as their warehouse-ready version becomes DJs' go-to. This subtle re-orchestration was a reminder of what a remix can be, executed with the talent of a composer not a thirty-day free trial of Ableton Live and some pre-cooked loops. Sorry, I'll put my claws away now, I was never a very good producer.

But just listen to it, all the way through. I still get chills.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, November 11th 2019**



Brainstorm - Stormin'. © 1977 UMG Recordings Inc.



Brainstorm

Lovin' Is Really My Game



Label: Rated "X" Records (originally Tabu)

Year: Unknown (originally 1977)

Discogs: Brainstorm / Deodato / Shalamar - Lovin' Is Really My Game / Are You For Real / This Is For The Lover In You

Listen:



Rated "X" 0:05. © Rated "X" Records. Year of release unknown.



Barcelona's Discos Paradiso is one of my favourite record shops I've visited. It's just a nice place to be.

After a few hours browsing (I could've easily spent a few more), I came across a bright yellow label, (mis)printed with "Love is Really My Game". Already running late, I took my chances. One week and one cramped Ryanair flight home later (the least fun kind of knees-up), I found out I'd struck gold with this New York bootleg pressing.

Brainstorm formed in 1976 in Detroit from an all-star cast of musicians. Lead vocalist Belita Woods performed with George Clinton's Parliament-Funkadelic alongside Bootsy Collins, recently the host of GTA V's Space FM. I made my

love for the franchise's disco stations clear in my column on Fat Larry's Band (p.19).

Brainstorm trumpeter Jeryl Bright went on to perform with Cameo (of "Candy" fame) and also played on Outkast's "Ms. Jackson". Bassist Deon Estus played for Wham! and later George Michael, including on "Faith". Pianist Bob Ross (*much* to my disappointment, though not to my surprise, not *that* happy little clouds Bob Ross) went on to play for Huey Lewis and Tupac. As ever, I'm fascinated by the web of talent that goes into each and every record I buy.

Woods wrote "Lovin' Is Really My Game" in 1977 together with Trenita Womack (of no relation to Cecil and



Linda 'Womack & Womack' of "Teardrops" and "M.P.B." fame, **p.121**; or to Cecil's brother, the legendary singer / songwriter / producer Bobby Womack either, obviously).

Of course, covers followed. Sylvester (**p.43**) and the legendary Patrick Cowley put out a commendable Hi-NRG version. Betty Wright released an ever-so-slightly jazz version in 1978. Zino and Ann Nesby later released two quite laboured club versions. In this case, as in so many others, nothing compares to the original.

I recently came across more Brainstorm when "Home" by Hot Chip's Joe Goddard pushed me down the usual sample-hunting rabbit hole. The rest of the song grew on me with time, but the

opening sample had me immediately hooked. As it turns out, it was Brainstorm's "We're On Our Way Home", another huge disco-funk track off their 1978 album "Journey to the Light". Brainstorm released just one more LP the following year, but the legacy of the 24-track discography has more than outlasted the group itself.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, November 24th 2019**



The Isley Brothers - Get Into Something. © 1970 Sony Music Entertainment



The Isley Brothers

Keep On Doin'



Label: Buddah

Year: 1970

Discogs: Isley Brothers - Keep On Doin'

Listen:



The Isley Brothers - Keep On Doin'. © 1970 Buddah Records



A couple of weeks ago, I went along to the launch of Classic Album Sundays' fantastic new book, "Classic Albums by Women". Hosted at BBE Records, we listened through Nina Simone's "It Is Finished", Jamie XX and Raj Chaudhuri's pick for the book. Nina's album - and its story - is incredible.

Arriving early, I had some time to browse the shelves so went straight for the bargain bin. After just a few minutes of digging, I stumbled upon a slightly beat up original pressing of The Isley Brothers' "Keep On Doin'", for less than it had cost me to get to London Fields in the first place.

The brothers - initially Vernon, Ronald, O'Kelly and Rudolph - began performing

together in Cincinnati in 1954 but disbanded when Vernon was killed in a car accident aged thirteen. Eventually convinced to regroup with Ronnie taking over lead vocals, they moved to New York in 1957 and recorded their first composition, "Shout", in 1959.

The group went on to have one of the longest and most influential careers in popular music, spanning doo-wop, gospel, funk, soul, disco and more. Younger brothers Ernie and Marvin joined in 1973, alongside brother-in-law Chris Jasper, for the band's most successful period until the mid 1980's.

"Keep On Doin'" was recorded in 1969, just after the (then-)trio scored a smash hit with "It's Your Thing". At the time,



the Brothers were recording by day, touring by night, then recording again after shows. They produced three studio albums and a live album that year alone. The guitar licks, big brass and rolling drum fills on "Keep On Doin'" are dictionary-definition funk. Despite this, the single charted poorly when released in 1970, peaking at No.75.

Later that year, James Brown's backing band, the J.B.'s (which included Fred Wesley and Bootsy Collins), recorded an instrumental of "Keep On Doin'", adding their own arrangement and retitling it "The Grunt" to avoid a lawsuit. James Brown credited himself and the J.B.'s for composition, just as he had with 1974's "My Thang", which drew heavily on The Isleys' "It's Your Thing".

Like "Keep On Doin'", "The Grunt" got limited attention upon release. Decades later, however, it was picked up by several hip-hop producers. By several, I mean that snippets feature on Wu-Tang Clan's "Protect Ya Neck", Public Enemy's "Rebel Without A Pause" and over 200 other records by artists including Pete Rock, The Pharcyde and Erykah Badu.

On slight tangent, Kendrick Lamar's "i", which samples The Isley Brothers' "That Lady", is one of my favourite hip-hop tracks of recent years.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, December 8th 2019



Odyssey - Hang Together. © 1980 RCA Records



Odyssey

Hang Together



Label: Stylus Music

Year: 1987 (originally 1980)

Discogs: [Odyssey - The Greatest Hits](#)

Listen:



Odyssey - Hang Together. © 1987 Stylus Music



I have a very magpie-like approach to crate-digging and will happily buy an album for a single track on it. Whilst my wallet doesn't always thank me, one of the perks of collecting in this way is that I'll surprise myself by already owning tracks I didn't know I wanted at the time.

Six or seven years ago, naïve young me bought Earth, Wind & Fire's 1979 album "I Am" just for "Boogie Wonderland". Earlier this year, digging into Soul Sister's fantastic New Orleans Boiler Room set, I heard Earth Wind and Fire's "Let Your Feelings Show". Much to my surprise, it was and always had been on the A-side of "I Am". One less Discogs shipping fee, right?

Last weekend was a similar experience. I

had the privilege of helping set up a Lucky Cloud Loft Party. One of the many fantastic records played was Odyssey's "Hang Together". I was equally delighted to find it on a "Greatest Hits" I'd picked up in Liverpool's Baltic Market this summer.

Starting out as The Lopez Sisters, Lillian, Louise and Carmen brought together an ever-changing collection of musicians to score a string of hits including "Native New Yorker", "Inside Out", and their cover of Lamont Dozier's "Going Back To My Roots" (p.67), for which I bought the album.

Vocalist Romina Johnson, involved with Odyssey throughout the seventies and eighties, later featured on Chic's "My

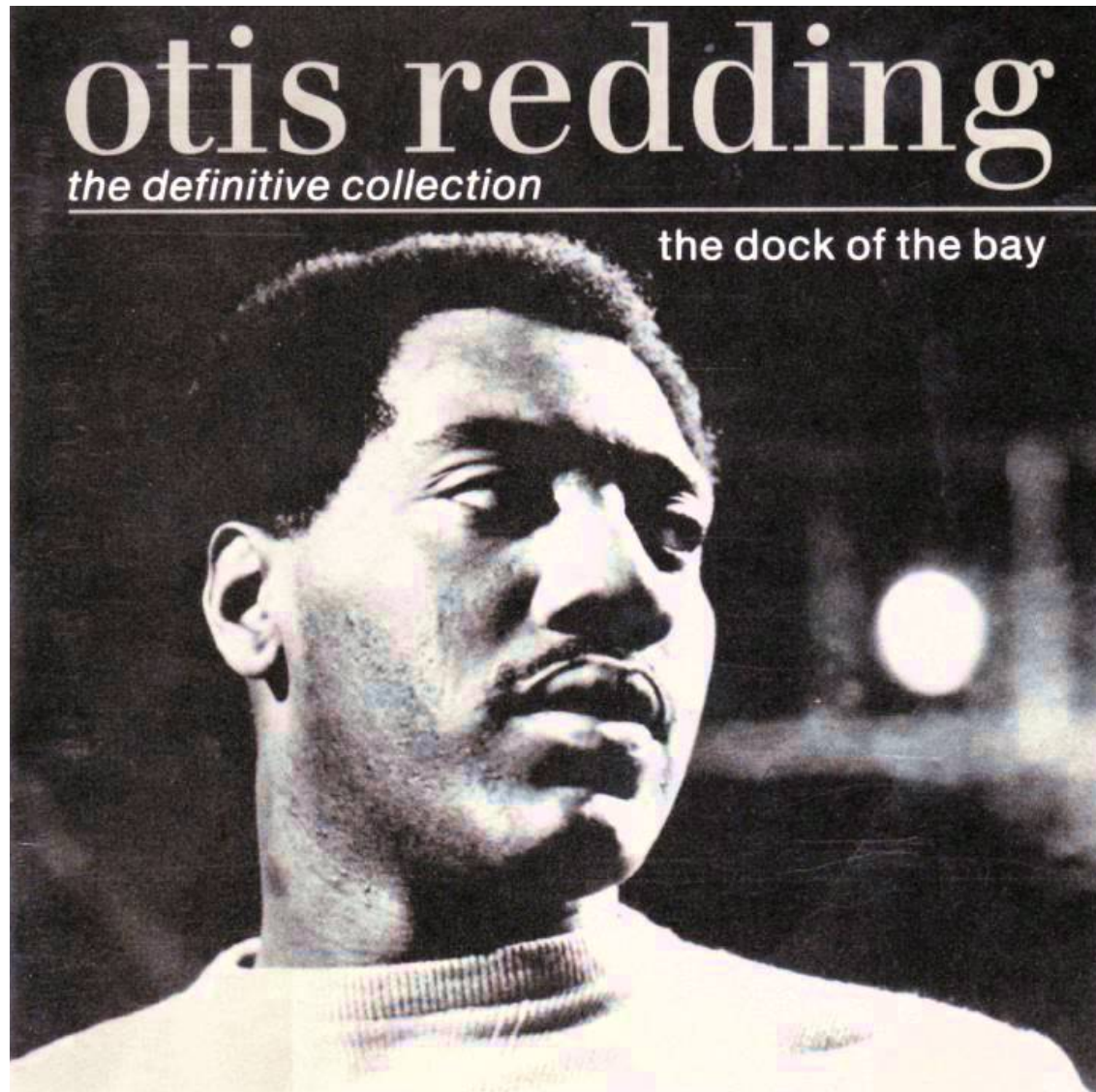


Forbidden Lover" and Artful Dodger's "Movin' Too Fast" in 2000. Now based in the UK, Odyssey are still going strong, led by Lillian's son Steven Collazo.

At a time when people seem more divided than ever, it felt right to wrap up Mates' Crates for the year with a simple reminder that we gotta hang together.

When writing these columns, the close ties between people and cultures over time never fail to make themselves known. Let's not forget that.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, December 19th 2019



Otis Redding - The Dock Of The Bay - The Definitive Collection. © 1987 WEA International Inc.



Otis Redding

A Change Is Gonna Come



Label: Atlantic

Year: 1966

Discogs: Otis Redding - Otis Blue

Listen:



Otis Redding - Otis Blue. © 1966 Atlantic Recording Corporation



I don't know what Otis Redding would think about me discovering his "Try A Little Tenderness", now one of my favourite soul tracks, through Kanye and Jay Z's "Otis". Hopefully he would cut me some slack for having been only 15 at the time. A couple of years later, I leapt on this slightly beat-up copy of "Otis Blue" in a local charity shop.

Just before Christmas, Pitchfork re-posted an article on Protest Soul, centred around Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come". It was saddening to realise that the list of relevant tragedies at the start of the article has only grown since its 2016 publication, making the message ever more relevant.

A true soul classic, it has been covered by

Redding, Aretha Franklin (**p.31**), Luther Vandross (**p.201**) and Baby Huey, amongst many others. Bettye LaVette sang it at President Obama's inauguration.

Cooke wrote "A Change is Gonna Come" after he, his wife, and his band were denied access to the motel rooms they had reserved. Clearly an act of racial discrimination, he was also arrested for disturbing the peace. Cooke worried that his lyrical references to Jim Crow segregation laws would be too obvious - indeed, these lines were cut for radio play.

The record was released just ten days before Cooke died. He was shot by a Los Angeles motel manager, allegedly in



self-defence.

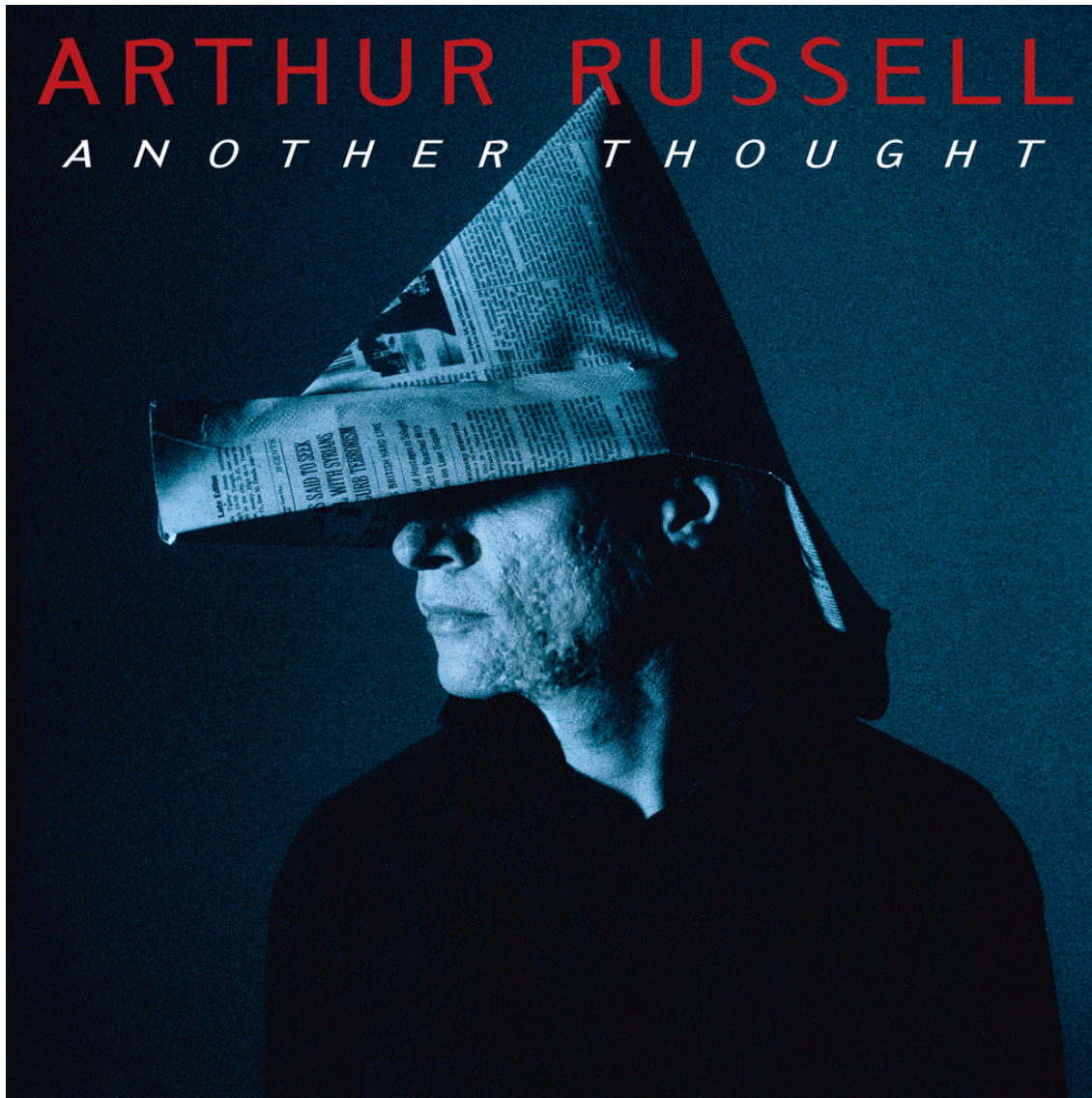
A key inspiration was Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind", which Cooke incorporated into his repertoire almost immediately after hearing it. Dylan had borrowed the melody from "No More Auction Block For Me", a marching song for black Civil War soldiers which in turn inspired the Civil Rights anthem "We Shall Overcome".

"A Change is Gonna Come" is a reminder of both the lineage of soul music, and of its power to capture the full range of human emotion - four tracks later on "Otis Blue", "My Girl" is three minutes of sheer joy.

When highlighting ongoing sociopolitical

struggles, I should also acknowledge several instances of progress. But for those ongoing issues, at the start of a new year, we must hope that a change is gonna come, and do what we can to bring it about sooner.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, January 5th 2020



Arthur Russell - Another Thought. © 1994 Point Music



Arthur Russell

This Is How We Walk On The Moon



Label: Be With Records (originally Point Music)

Year: 2021 (originally 1994)

Discogs: Arthur Russell - Another Thought

Listen:



Arthur Russell - Another Thought. © 2013 Universal International Music B.V.



Arthur Russell is one of the most eclectic musicians I've ever encountered. Trained in experimental composition and Indian classical music, his collaborators range from composers Steve Reich and Philip Glass to legendary DJs including Larry Levan and Nicky Siano. At the age of 18, Russell moved to San Francisco to live in a Buddhist commune before meeting Allen Ginsberg and accompanying his poetry readings on the cello. A musician this interesting deserves our time.

Under his Dinosaur L alias, Russell produced "Go Bang", a staple of David Mancuso's Loft parties which also birthed several musical partnerships. As Loose Joints, he released "Is It All Over My Face", soon remixed Larry Levan.

"This Is How We Walk On The Moon" is my favourite Arthur Russell song. There are different versions, including a more electronic adaptation from the 2015 reissue album "Corn", but all pale in comparison to the stripped back performance on 1994's "Another Thought", which puts Russell's cello and vocals front and centre. The way it builds from the string intro gives me chills, and I've always found solace in this record.

Indeed, congas are performed by Mustafa Ahmed, who has more recently written for Camila Cabello and The Weeknd.

Recorded in 1982, much of Russell's discography remained unreleased until after he tragically passed away from



AIDS-related illnesses in April 1992. In the years before his death, Russell had been working on a collection of voice-and-cello songs for release on Philip Glass' Point Music (some of which surfaced posthumously on "Another Thought") and an electronic pop album influenced by 808 State (most of which made it out on 2004's "Calling Out Of Context").

Whilst he did not achieve commercial success during his lifetime, Russell was later acknowledged as an overlooked genius, developing a cult following which encouraged the release of much material over the last thirty years. He was notorious for continually revising his work, seeking more to explore music than to create finished products. Russell

left behind more than 1,000 tapes, of which 40 were different mixes of the same one song.

Russell's influence is subtly prevalent. For example, his work with David Byrne's Talking Heads directly shaped a group which is much better known for its influence on popular music. James Blake named his club night after Russell's provisionally-titled album "1-800-Dinosaur". Least influentially of all, I also run an infrequent party in Deptford called Loose Joints.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, February 21st 2020



Yellow Magic Orchestra - Tighten Up. © 1981 A&M Records Inc.



Yellow Magic Orchestra

Tighten Up



Label: A&M

Year: 1980

Discogs: Yellow Magic Orchestra - Tighten Up

Listen:



Yellow Magic Orchestra - Tighten Up. © 1980 A&M Records Inc.



The first time I heard Yellow Magic Orchestra's "Tighten Up", I was a bit uncomfortable. You will be too.

Things start falling into place as you discover that YMO began as Japanese musician Haruomi Hosono's parody of orientalism and Western conceptions of Japan. This cover of Archie Bell and the Drells' classic "Tighten Up" captures that best, though I'd hesitate to play it without context.

Hosono, Yukihiro Takahashi and Ryuichi Sakamoto were music industry veterans even before they combined their individually-broad influences into an eclectic partnership. YMO's material draws on electronic pioneers like Kraftwerk, Japanese traditions, arcade

games, funk music and the early synthesised disco of Giorgio Moroder.

The band's music evolved at an astounding pace. Over the course of their relatively short initial collaboration from 1978 until a pause in 1984, it developed from exotica-disco spoofs to creating something both musically and technologically unique.

Tired of Japanese musicians imitating Western music through genres like city pop (**p.245, p.269**), producing something very original from Japan was a stated intention. Though heavily influenced by Kraftwerk, Sakamoto made a point of not imitating their "very German" approach and eschewed minimalism for breezy, melodic sounds.



YMO were amongst the earliest to incorporate sampling into their music. Their 1978 hit "Firecracker" sampled Martin Denny's 1959's exotica record of the same name alongside arcade game sounds from Space Invaders. The legacy of this approach continues to influence artists to this day, as both Dizzee Rascal and Four Tet nod to YMO's use of arcade game sounds in their own music.

In his 2001 Guide to Electronica, Jason Ankeny described YMO as "a seminal influence on contemporary electronic music [...] second only to Kraftwerk as innovators of today's electronic culture. Live performance centred around synthesisers and samplers rather than human movement began with YMO."

YMO are the pioneer's pioneers, cited as important influences by the originators of whole genres of music: from techno innovators Derrick May, Juan Atkins and Kevin Saunderson to synthpop icons Gary Numan and Depeche Mode.

Though I discovered them through this parody of orientalism, I quickly grew to appreciate the influence that YMO - very original from Japan - have had on so many spheres of modern popular music. Take an hour to listen this Essential YMO playlist, you won't regret it.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, February 21st 2020



Jean-Marie Bolangassa – Brazzaville Percussions. © 2015 Sofrito Sound



Jean-Marie Bolangassa

Rikikida



Label: Sofrito

Year: 2015, tracks from early 1980s

Discogs: Jean-Marie Bolangassa –
Brazzaville Percussions

Listen:



Jean-Marie Bolangassa – Brazzaville Percussions. © 2015 Sofrito Sound



I ordered a copy of this one *on the way home* from hearing it out. Spectacular.

There's not much online about Jean-Marie Bolangassa. The Congolese percussionist first came to Europe in 1967 as part of the Ballet Nationale du Congo, later joining with five other emigrants of The Congo, Benin and Cameroon to found an iconic Afrobeat outfit called M'Bamina in Milan in 1972.

The breadth of M'Bamina's material highlights everything from their West African influences to truly forward-thinking electronic funk.

After moving to France, M'Bamina opened for James Brown's 1977 concert at the Pavillon de Paris. They also

performed with African music legend Manu Dibango, whose "Soul Makossa" was one of the first records to gain popularity in clubs (most notably David Mancuso's Loft) before being picked up for radio play. Many covers followed (**p.137**), and it has since been sampled countless times.

"Rikikida" effortlessly layers Bolangassa's traditional Congolese percussion with drum machines and synthesisers, as do the other songs on the EP: "La Vie" and "Disna Ngai".

Ben UFO opened his 2015 Boiler Room at Barcelona's El Poble Español monastery with "Rikikida" and it set the internet alight, proof (not that we needed it) of how well these tracks work



on today's dancefloor.

When researching for this piece, I also discovered that Tim and Barry played "Rikikida" on NTS last year. The same Tim and Barry who directed the music video for Tempa T's "Next Hype". If that isn't wide appeal...

Though I bought the record for the stellar music on it, the cover art by Lewis Heriz (who also designed the beautiful cover for the Doing It In Lagos compilation of Nigerian boogie, pop and disco) was an added bonus.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, March 21st 2020**



Bande originale du film de YVES ROBERT

le retour du grand blond

musique de
Vladimir Cosma

Gheorghe Zamfir
à la flûte de pan



Vladimir Cosma and Gheorghe Zamfir - Le Retour Du Grand Blond. © 1974 Philips



Vladimir Cosma and Gheorghe Zamfir

Sapato Rosa



Year: 1974

Label: Philips

Discogs: Vladimir Cosma and Gheorghe Zamfir - Le Retour Du Grand Blond

Listen:



Vladimir Cosma and Gheorghe Zamfir - Le Retour Du Grand Blond. © 1974 Philips



Since the start of the year, I've had the pleasure of hosting a Mates' Crates radio show alongside the column. In the photo that I've used for it, I'm holding an LP I found in Berlin last summer.

I picked up Romanian pan flute maestro Gheorghe Zamfir's "La Doina Roumanie" because I was born in Bucharest and speak fluent Romanian.

I was reminded of this record when researching and digging (virtually, in the current circumstances) for this month's radio show. I have always been a big advocate for YouTube as a tool for discovering music; its recommendations have served me well on many occasions (and terribly on many, many others).

Last week, I was listening to "Lotus 72 D" by Zé Roberto (not any of the four footballers of the same name on Wikipedia, nor the frontman of Azymuth, a different Zé Roberto). As well as discovering that the song is about the car with which Brazilian driver Emerson Fittipaldi won the 1972 Formula 1 Austrian Grand Prix, the magic of the internet pointed me to "Sapato Rosa" by French-Romanian composer Vladimir Cosma.

"Sapato Rosa" (Red Shoe) is the theme from "The Return of the Tall Blonde Man With One Black Shoe", a 1974 French comedy about a spy who is called back into action after retiring to Brazil. Its soundtrack - featuring Gheorghe Zamfir - is an incredibly niche crossover of



Brazil and Romania-via-France which could only ever have materialised in circumstances this coincidental.

On this soundtrack album, traditional apitos (samba whistles) sit alongside Zamfir's piping in an intersection of global music which still doesn't feel real. Regular listeners will be familiar with my love for Brazilian music, and I never expected to hear some of its defining characteristics blended with sounds I remember from restaurant bands in the city of my birth.

Discovering that the film was directed by Yves Robert, whose credits also include Year 7 French class staple "Le château de ma mère", only deepened the nostalgia.

The track "Blackfinger", which surprisingly subtly combines elements of traditional Romanian music with the James Bond theme, also stuck out to me.

Zamfir came into the public eye after working with Swiss ethnomusicologist Marcel Cellier, who researched Romanian folk music in the 1960s. His music reached Western European audiences for the first time in 1972, performing on Vladimir Cosma's soundtrack to "The Tall Blond Man With One Black Shoe" (to which "The Return..." is the sequel).

Since then, he has played on soundtracks by several composers, including Ennio Morricone's theme for "Once Upon A Time In



America".

Perhaps most famously, Zamfir's performance of James Last's "The Lonely Shepherd" was used by Quentin Tarantino as the closing theme for "Kill Bill Volume 1" (alongside Santa Esmerelda's "Please Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood", **p.331**) . On the DVD release, Zamfir is mistakenly credited as the film's producer.

For more folk-influenced songs with reference to shepherds, see Fab Mayday's edit of "Garip Çoban" ('Strange Shepherd') by Turkish psychedelic rock group Moğollar (**p.25**).

Discovering all this reminded me how fortuitous our connections to music can

be. Zamfir is credited for reviving this folk instrument from obscurity after soundtracking a French film, the sequel of which is set in Brazil, leading to my discovery via a Música Popular Brasileira track on YouTube. Nice.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, April 19th 2020**



Gheorghe Zamfir. Photograph source unknown. Found on YouTube Music.



Hamilton Bohannon - Bohannon. © 1975 Brunswick Records



Hamilton Bohannon

Let's Start The Dance



Label: London Records

Year: 1981

Discogs: [Hamilton Bohannon - Let's Start To Dance Again](#)

Listen:



Hamilton Bohannon - Let's Start The Dance. © 1981 Friends Records



Legendary Motown drummer and disco producer Hamilton Bohannon passed away a few weeks ago. In January, on a trip to the North West for my first Mates' Crates radio show, I picked up Bohannon's classic "Let's Start The Dance" at Affleck's Palace, Manchester.

Affleck's began in the 1860s as Affleck & Brown, a drapery firm which grew into a department store. Business declined after WWII, leading to its eventual closure in 1973. Almost ten years later, Affleck's Palace opened as a safe, affordable and flexible incubator for entrepreneurs and alternative culture.

You might not know that you've heard this record, or indeed any of Bohannon's discography, but I'm sure you have.

Carolyn Crawford's iconic vocals on this record have been sampled countless times, and the self-referential style reminds me a bit of the legendary Marlena Shaw (**p.209**) introducing her musicians before performing "Woman Of The Ghetto" live at Montreux.

Bohannon is no stranger to being sampled, from "Me and The Gang" (sampled on J Dilla's "Love Movin") and Paul Johnson's house-music-hall-of-fame slammer "Get Get Down") to "Save Their Souls" (sampled on Jay Z's "Cashmere Thoughts"); "I Wonder Why" (sampled on Justin Timberlake's "Strawberry Bubblegum") to "Take The Country To NY City" (sampled on "Pacifics" by hip-hop trio Diggable Planets). Spookily,



Diggable Planets' "Cool Like That" was playing in Affleck's while I was *digging* for Bohannon.

Bohannon's career began as a drummer in local groups, including one with Jimi Hendrix. Recruited to tour with the then-thirteen-year-old Stevie Wonder in 1964, Bohannon was soon employed by Motown to lead and arrange for the label's in-house band. Over several years, he performed with the likes of Smokey Robinson (**p.59**), Marvin Gaye, The Temptations, Diana Ross and The Four Tops.

So, whether as a sample or behind the vocals of the soul elite, you've heard Bohannon. His role in music is captured on Tom Tom Club's "Genius of

Love" (which you've also probably heard, knowingly or otherwise), with the line: "Who needs to think when your feet just go Bohannon, Bohannon, Bohannon, Bohannon". Indeed, his birth-town of Newnan, Georgia named a street after him in 2017.

His recent passing reminded me of the small piece of (his) music history that I picked up earlier this year. A devout Christian, Bohannon dedicated his album "Dance Your Ass Off" to God, adding a disclaimer that the title is not used in the sense of profanity. Now is as good an opportunity as any to Dance Your Ass Off to Bohannon.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, May 7th 2020**



Gayle Adams - Gayle Adams. © 1980 Prelude Records



Gayle Adams

Your Love Is A Life Saver



Label: Prelude Records

Year: 1980

Discogs: [Gayle Adams - Gayle Adams](#)

Listen:



Gayle Adams - Gayle Adams. © 1980 Prelude Records



Let's not pretend. Lockdown is hard. So much of what makes me happy involves going out into the world to experience, discover and search for music. Not being able to do that has been challenging. I want to be diving into the bargain bin at a good record store.

That said, I'm grateful that technology makes the next best thing easier than ever. I struggle to imagine that just a few decades ago, your musical experience would have become totally limited to the records in your collection and whatever was played on the radio.

Over lockdown, many DJs have taken to live-streaming from their homes to keep sharing music. YouTube and Spotify are also truly invaluable, and both have

surprised me with some fantastic recommendations over the past few months. This [Pitchfork article](#) about how [Rupa's "Disco Jazz"](#) 'won' YouTube's algorithm is also worth a read.

One such gem (with credit to Spotify's Discover Weekly) is Gayle Adams' "Your Love Is A Lifesaver". On my fourth lap of the block for my daily walk, this song lit up my life.

I stopped in my tracks and nearly dropped my phone sending it to several people. "Mark my words", I typed in frenzied all-caps, "I'm buying this now before Motor City Drum Ensemble plays it at Dekmantel and it starts going for hundreds on Discogs" (I'm definitely not thinking of [Bileo's "You Can Win"](#)...).



This was only last week, but it felt like the first time in months that I'd discovered something *truly* fantastic. I bought it immediately. I missed this.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, May 29th 2020**

Born in Washington D.C., Adams put out two albums over the course of a fairly short career. You might have heard her excellent "Let's Go All The Way" or "I Loved Every Minute Of It". The first album also features Al Johnson, best known for "I've Got My Second Wind" (later covered by TÁta Vega, **p.339**).

That's about as much as I could find about Adams in general or "Your Love Is A Lifesaver" in particular, but I hope you enjoy it as much as I did. I loved every minute of it. All eight of them.



Carl Bean - I Was Born This Way. © 2012 BMG Rights Management (US) LLC



Carl Bean

I Was Born This Way



Label: West End Records (originally Motown)

Year: 2018 (originally 1977)

Discogs: [Carl Bean - I Was Born This Way](#)

Listen:



Carl Bean - I Was Born This Way. © 2018 BMG Rights Management (US) LLC



June is Pride month, so it felt right to pick this Pride anthem from my collection. "I Was Born This Way" was one of the first disco songs written specifically for the gay community; an instant hit predating the Village People or the rise of Sylvester (**p.43**). First released in 1975 by Charles "Valentino" Harris, it is Carl Bean's iconic 1977 version which I bought last summer.

Much to my delight, West End Records' repress features productions by the legendary Tom Moulton (**p.169**), Larry Levan and Shep Pettibone, including his standout "Better Days Mix".

Growing up in Baltimore, Bean was closely involved in social justice movements. After moving to New York

to form a gospel group with other gay singers, he was quickly drawn to "message music": less boy-meets-girl love song, more civil rights, sit ins and anti-war.

After eventually signing to Motown, "I Was Born This Way" gave Bean a long-awaited opportunity to be proud and open about his race and his sexuality. It was the first time that many heard music reflecting their own lives and the record found immediate success, though Bean is still surprised by its lasting impact.

By the time it had a renaissance in the 1980s, Bean was campaigning to support those living with AIDS and had joined the clergy to found a protestant denomination which welcomed gay,



lesbian and bisexual African Americans. Earning a thousand dollars per show, these performances funded his activism.

The record's message spread across communities as an encouragement to follow your dreams. It inspired Lady Gaga's 2011 chart-topper of the same name and has also become an iconic sample, including on Earth People's "Dance" in 1989 and on Ditongo's "Longo" in 2015.

Now in his seventies and retired from ministry, Bean is thinking about recording again, as driven by today's activist movements as he was by those of his youth.

Music is a powerful force for change, and past headway in the push for equality is an important reminder to keep pushing.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, June 28th 2020**



Womack & Womack - MPB (Missin' Persons Bureau). © 1989 Island Records



Womack & Womack

MPB (Frankie Knuckles Remix)



Label: Melodies International (originally Universal)

Year: 2018 (originally 1989)

Discogs: Womack & Womack - MPB (Missin' Persons Bureau)

Listen:



Womack & Womack - MPB (Missin' Persons Bureau). © 2018 Melodies International



Cecil and Linda Womack are legends of the game. It's in their blood.

Cecil's brother was famed singer, songwriter and producer Bobby Womack, responsible for The Rolling Stones' first UK number one and a host of other soul, rock and roll and gospel hits. Bobby and Cecil launched their careers as part of R&B quintet The Valentinos with their brothers Harry, Friendly Jr. and Curtis.

Sam Cooke was instrumental in promoting the group, and Bobby soon became Cooke's backing guitarist. Linda is Sam Cooke's daughter.

You'll most likely know Womack & Womack for their 1988 dancefloor silver

bullet "Teardrops" (I maintain that it works anywhere, any time). After "Teardrops", the duo are probably best known for their soulful "Missin' Persons Bureau".

The version of "MPB" I bought on sight in Manchester's Piccadilly Records brings yet more dance music royalty into the mix with two remixes by Frankie Knuckles, the godfather of house. Working with co-producer David Morales (responsible for over 500 remixes for the likes of Mariah, Madonna and Whitney), Knuckles rebuilt "MPB" into a conga-infused, synth-tastic "Paradise Ballroom Mix" and a spacious, echoey "Folk Version".

Just like the creation of the Powerpuff



Girls, there's more to this. Alongside Womack & Womack's sugar and Frankie Knuckles' spice, this record's 'everything nice' comes in the form of its re-release on Floating Points' Melodies

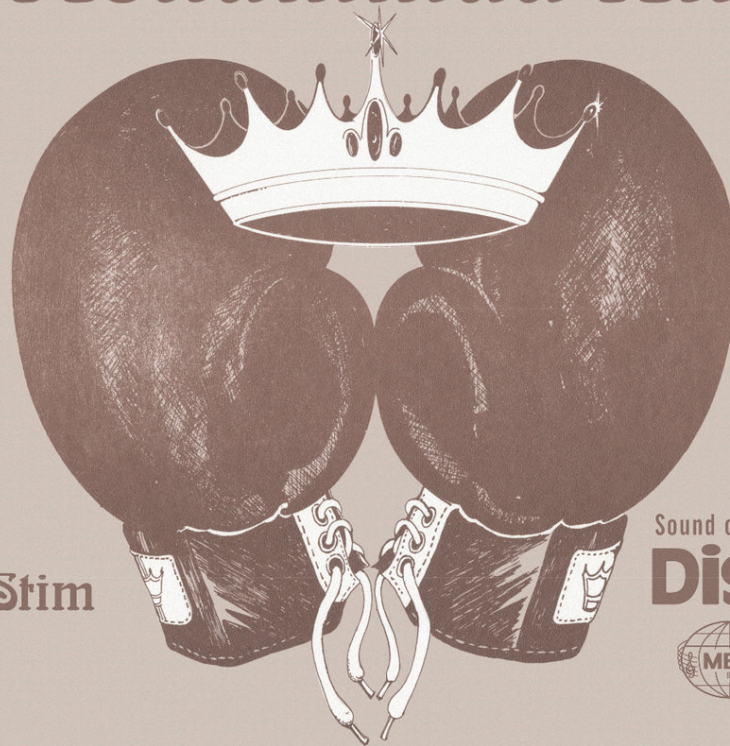
International label. I'm ever grateful to Melodies for letting me get hold of some fantastic music, including Le Stim's "A Tribute To Muhammad Ali" (**p.125**), without shelling out hundreds of pounds on Discogs.

Almost every time I dig into the story of how a record started as an idea and ended up in my hands, I'm amazed by - and deeply appreciative of - how many talented people were involved along the way.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, July 13th 2020**



A Tribute to Muhammad Ali



Le Stim

Sound of the 80's
Disco



"We Crown the King"

Dedicated to the King of the Champion Fighters

Le Stim - A Tribute To Muhammad Ali (We Crown The King). © 2018 Melodies International



Le Stim

A Tribute To Muhammad Ali



Label: Melodies International (originally Nacnudah International Records)

Year: 2018 (originally 1980)

Discogs: [Le Stim - A Tribute To Muhammad Ali \(We Crown The King\)](#)

Listen:



Le Stim - A Tribute To Muhammad Ali. © 1980 Nacnudah International Records



True to form, Melodies International fulfilled my dreams once again by repressing this funky anthem. The story goes that Ali himself heard and liked it.

Le Stim formed in Detroit in the late 1970s, fronted by gospel singer Donald Jennings. More used to performing songs by Nat King Cole and Sam Cooke, it took five years for songwriter Herbert Andrei Duncan (not a typo!) to convince them to perform this masterpiece, as Jennings feared it was out of his vocal range.

In 1980, Jennings gave in and an anthem was born. Duncan didn't have any money to record the song, so he struck a deal with a drummer to provide seventeen musicians in exchange for the

use of his PA system. The brass and keys melt into each other while Jennings and the backing singers praise the Champion of Fighters for nine minutes straight.

Ali himself was no stranger to the music world, in both the first and second person. He released a cover of Ben E. King's classic "Stand By Me" (**p.295**), and inspired a host of other music.

Don Covay's "Rumble In The Jungle" immortalises Ali's iconic 1974 bout with George Foreman. Miles Davis - a huge boxing fan - recorded "Ali" in 1970 (to some controversy). British dance duo Faithless (famous for "Insomnia") released "Muhammad Ali" in 2001, sampling "Strategy" by Archie Bell and The Drells (**p.95**).



Though it reached No.7 in the UK charts, Ali reportedly hated British reggae artist Jonny Wakelin's "Black Superman" - perhaps because it was first recorded as "Hungarian Superman" about rival boxer Joe Bugner. "The Greatest Love of All" - first written by George Benson (**p.11**) for a 1977 Ali biopic - later became a hit for Whitney Houston.

For me though, no tribute comes close to Le Stim's. Given its rarity, it's unsurprising that the original pressing of this lighthearted and uplifting masterpiece goes for over \$600, so I'm ever grateful to Melodies International.

Reissuing Le Stim was Melodies' biggest research project yet, tracking down Duncan's former house in Detroit only to

discover that it had burned down, then finding his family in Texas and securing the rights to remaster the record.

I picked up my copy at a record fair in Hackney Wick's now-closed Giant Steps (run by the crew behind Dalston's Brilliant Corners and named after the John Coltrane record). I bought this, Eric B. & Rakim's "Paid In Full", and a fantastic Japanese dub record before seeing Nu Genea and Donna Leake. A cracking afternoon.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, July 26th 2020



The Intruders - Energy Of Love. © 1975 Epic Records



The Intruders

Be Thankful For What You Got



Label: Philadelphia International
Records

Year: 1975

Discogs: The Intruders - Energy Of Love

Listen:



The Intruders - Energy Of Love. © 1975 Philadelphia international Records



This soul anthem has been performed so many times that it would be remiss of me not to run through my favourites. I first discovered this cover by Philadelphia four-piece The Intruders, and bought it immediately.

If you're into your soul music, you've heard at least one version of William DeVaughn's "Be Thankful For What You Got", written in 1972 from his earlier song "A Cadillac Don't Come Easy".

The first demo was recorded with members of Philadelphia's iconic MFSB (**p.281**). As a studio band, MFSB backed most of the label's roster. As recording artists in their own right, their 1974 single "The Sound Of Philadelphia" shaped the disco sound and later

reached millions of Americans as the theme for the Soul Train TV show.

With a sound influenced by (and often erroneously attributed to) Curtis Mayfield, DeVaughn's record sold two million copies on release in 1974.

The lyrics are full of references to 1970s luxury. "Gangsta whitewalls" are expensive, high-maintenance tyres made without black pigment. "TV antennas in the back" nods to the luxury car add-ons of the time including drinks tumblers, cigarette dispensers, and matching leather notebooks. The "diamond in the back" was a popular modification to sunroof upholstery, leaving only a diamond-shaped cut-out of the back window.



The line "Diamond in the back, sunroof top, diggin' the scene with a gangsta lean" has been particularly influential, drawn on by Parliament-Funkadelic, Ludacris, Rihanna, Outkast, Gábor Szabó (**p.323**) and others. If you've ever seen anyone nonchalantly drive with one hand on the wheel and the other on the passenger seat, you've seen a gangsta lean.

Nonetheless, the message - measuring self-worth on moral character and not material possessions - hit home for many, and even led to the record being played on gospel stations.

That message is likely also what inspired so many covers: Lee "Scratch" Perry produced a reggae version for Bunny

Clarke in 1975; a version by Portrait featured in an Addams Family film; Omar Lye-Fook released a cover featuring Erykah Badu in 2001; the list goes on. Massive Attack's 1993 cover became famous for its music video, which was banned from UK TV for featuring full-frontal nudity. The band stated that it sought to confront sexism in rock videos...

Unsurprisingly, it has been sampled just as many times by hip-hop royalty from Ice Cube to Ludacris, A Tribe Called Quest to De La Soul, A\$SAP Rocky to N.W.A. (who were admittedly less critical of materialism...).

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, August 8th 2020**



CERRONE IV



THE GOLDEN TOUCH

Cerrone - Cerrone IV - The Golden Touch. © 1978 CBS



Cerrone

Give Me Love



Label: Atlantic

Year: 1978

Discogs: Cerrone - Supernature / Give Me Love

Listen:



Cerrone - Supernature © 1978 Warner Communications



Probably my favourite hit from the French disco don.

The first disco producer that springs to mind for most people is probably Giorgio Moroder, best known for Donna Summer's iconic "I Feel Love". Amongst disco fans, the clued-up might name the often-overlooked synth pioneer Patrick Cowley, best known for his work with Sylvester (**p.43**). Several might also pick Marc Cerrone.

Perhaps Cerrone's best known records are "Love in C Minor" and the sci-fi themed "Supernature" (the A-side to my copy of "Give Me Love"), which was broadcast all over the UK as the theme for The Kenny Everett Video Show. It also featured on Grand Theft Auto IV's

K109 disco station (for more on the music of GTA, see **p.19**).

"Hooked On You" - with vocals by Jocelyn Brown (of "Somebody Else's Guy" fame) - is spectacular and "Give Me Love" has also been blessed with a futuristic remix by Frankie Knuckles (**p.121**), the godfather of house music.

Notably, Cerrone produced several hits for fellow French musician Don Ray, including "Got To Have Loving" and "Standing In The Rain" (**p.185**). Even more interestingly, he staged several musicals including a rock opera for 800,000 spectators at Tokyo harbour to celebrate the launch of Japan's first HD TV satellite in 1991. Yes really.



Specific memories spring to mind when I hear many of these Cerrone productions (less so the rock opera...), whether the role of "Supernature" in my early *discovery* of disco, playing "Hooked On You" at a boat party last summer, or spinning "Give Me Love" with the Melodic Distraction crew on a Saturday afternoon at Buyers' Club in Liverpool. *What a record.*

**Originally published in Melodic
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SOUL MAKOSSA

AFRIQUE



Afrique - Soul Makossa. © 1973 Mainstream Records



Afrique

Soul Makossa



Label: Pye International

Year: 1973

Discogs: [Afrique - Soul Makossa](#)

Listen:



Afrique - Soul Makossa. © 1973 Pye Records International



Afrique's version of Manu Dibango's "Soul Makossa" was a great find from my first post-lockdown dig in a real record shop.

Cameroonian saxophonist Manu Dibango released the original "Soul Makossa" in 1972 as the B-Side for "Hymne de la 8e Coupe d'Afrique des Nations", a song celebrating Cameroon's national football team making it to the quarter finals of the Africa Cup of Nations. Most of the track - including the now-famous chanted refrain - is in the local Cameroonian Duala dialect.

The few copies of the record in New York City were quickly bought up after David Mancuso discovered and played Dibango at his Loft parties. Capitalising on

booming demand for the rare track, more than twenty groups released versions over the next few years.

I found one of these - by Los Angeles 13-piece Afrique - a few weeks ago. Most of these covers probably fall under the umbrella term "exotica", white Western artists' not-always-welcome takes on sounds from far away lands. Japanese group Yellow Magic Orchestra's parody cover of "Tighten Up" by Archie Bell is an example of musicians turning this on its head (**p. 95**).

Following the success of "Soul Makossa" and its variants, Dibango's original was soon licensed by Atlantic Records, peaking at No.35 on the US Billboard Hot 100 the following year. It's



interesting to see how what used to take months and years is now often done in days.

Dibango's iconic chant began to resurface around a decade later, most famously on Michael Jackson's 1982 hit "Wanna Be Startin' Somthin'" and, in turn, Rihanna's 2007 song "Don't Stop The Music". Dibango filed a lawsuit against both Jackson and Rihanna in 2009, after which Jackson settled out of court and Rihanna added Dibango to the credits. I hope A Tribe Called Quest, Public Enemy, Kanye West, Will Smith, Childish Gambino, Beyoncé and the countless others asked for permission.

Covers of Dibango have been drawn on countless times too. Lafayette Afro Rock

Band's 1973 album "Soul Makossa" is heavily sampled in hip-hop, with "Darkest Light" used by Jay Z on "Show Me What You Got"; "Baba-Hya" used on Gorillaz's iconic "Dirty Harry"; and "Hihache" used on "Jingling Baby" by LL Cool J (which, if you didn't know, is short for Ladies Love Cool James...).

An initially obscure release brought to light by David Mancuso, covered by tens then sampled by hundreds, Soul Makossa is a piece of music history.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, September 6th 2020



Dee Dee Sharp Gamble - Dee Dee. © 1980 Sony Music Entertainment



Dee Dee Sharp Gamble

Breaking and Entering



Label: Philadelphia International Records

Year: 1980

Discogs: Dee Dee Sharp Gamble - Breaking and Entering

Listen:



Dee Dee Sharp Gamble - Breaking and Entering. © 1980 CBS Inc.



As the summer that never was draws to a close, the sun is setting ever-earlier and I'd really rather be playing disco in the hills of southern Italy. In a moderately successful attempt to live out that fantasy, I listened back to Rudan's set from VIVA! Festival in Puglia.

Dee Dee Sharp Gamble's 1980 track "Breaking and Entering" stands out every time. From the smashed-glass intro to the final kick drum seven minutes later, it's everything a disco record should be, and exactly what we all need at this time of year.

Born Dione LaRue in 1945, her career began at thirteen with singing jobs to support her family after her mother's car accident. Responding to a newspaper

advert for backing singers, she soon worked with Chubby Checker and Jackie Wilson.

In 1962 she began releasing R&B as Dee Dee Sharp, because she sang in D# and her brother called her Dee. The same year, she had her biggest chart success with "Mashed Potato Time".

The arrangement borrows heavily from The Marvelettes' "Please Mr. Postman", which is also mentioned in the lyrics. The "Mashed Potato" itself was a dance move, perhaps most memorably mentioned in The Contours' "Do You Love Me", which was written and produced by Motown CEO Berry Gordy.

Sharp later released several records on

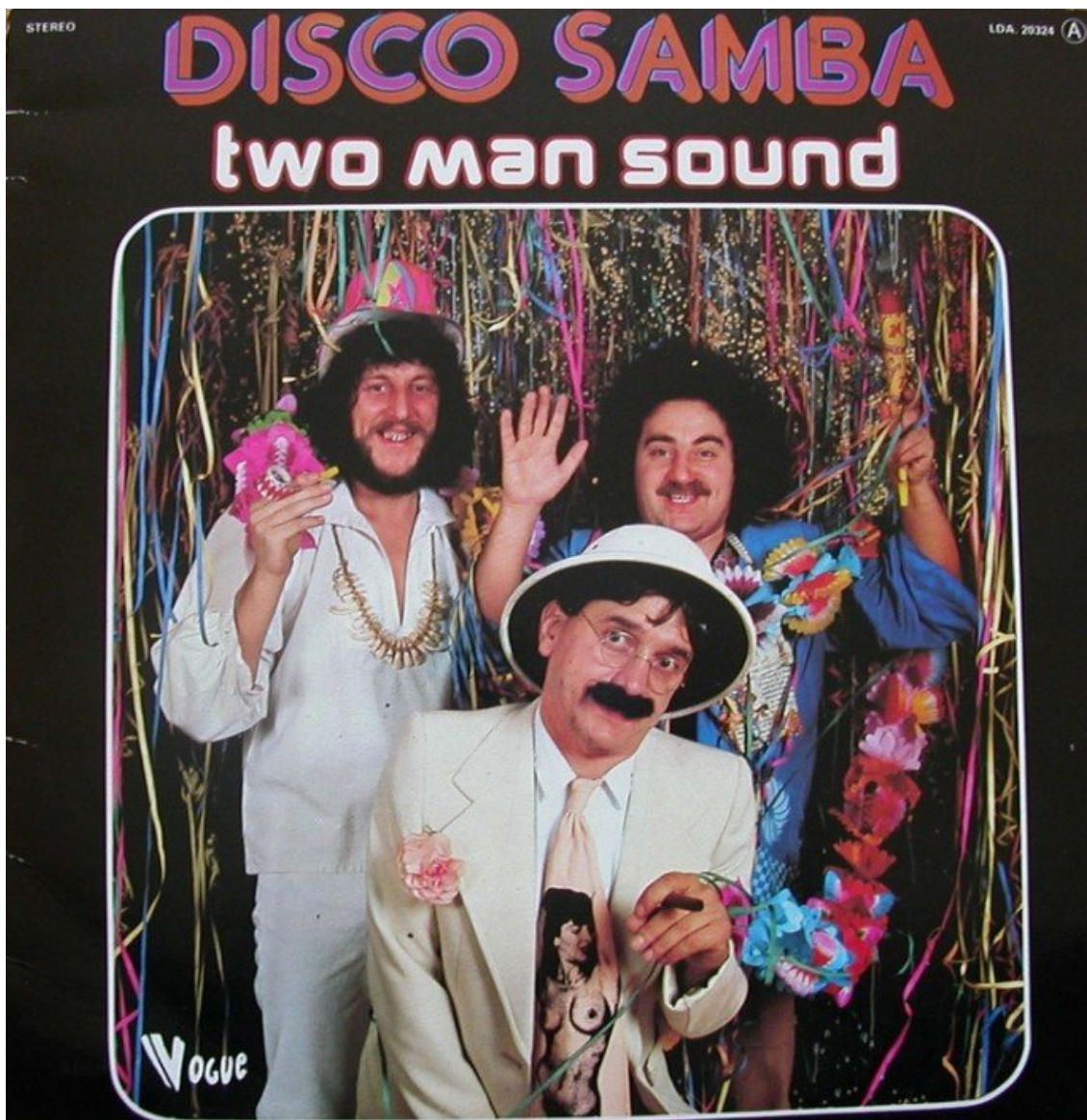


Philadelphia International Records, performing alongside Lou Rawls, Billy Paul, The O'Jays, Teddy Pendergrass (**p.153**) and Archie Bell (**p.95**) on the Philadelphia All Stars' 1977 hit "Let's Clean Up The Ghetto".

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, September 21st 2020**

Indeed, Sharp married PIR co-founder Kenny Gamble in 1967, whose name she hyphenated to her own until their divorce in 1980. Sharp later claimed that she'd planned to marry Muhammad Ali (**p.125**) before he converted to Islam.

Sharp is considered by some to be America's first black female teen idol, and her rise to fame despite the persistent racial injustice of the time is remarkable.



Two Man Sound - Disco Samba. © 1978 Vogue P.I.P.



Two Man Sound

Que Tal America



Label: Miracle Records

Year: 1978

Discogs: Two Man Sound - Que Tal America

Listen:



Two Man Sound - Que Tal America. © 1978 Miracle Records



When I think of the music of Belgium, I think of iconic crooner Jaques Brel, and saxophone inventor Adolphe Sax. When I think of the music of Belgium, I do not think of samba disco jams.

And yet, this classic track was recorded by a Belgian pop trio (it seems the "Two Man" bit wasn't true either...). Released a year after their signature "Disco Samba" medley of Brazilian pop, the riff on "Que Tal America" is easy to recognise and hard to forget.

Some know it best from Detroit DJ Terrence Parker's 1996 hit "Somethin' Here", which also samples the "aw shucks" from "Let No Man Put Asunder" by Philadelphia girl group First Choice (p.307) and the "get it up" from

Canadian disco producer Gino Soccio's "Dancer". When Two Man Sound asked "What's up, America?", it seems North America answered.

As an aside, Terrence Parker's DJ sets are quite something. Even ignoring the visual spectacle of his phone-shaped headphone, his use of scratching and hip-hop chops while mixing house music is like nothing I've ever heard.

But back on topic, "Que Tal America" isn't even the first Belgian latin record I'm aware of - take The Chakachas' "Stories" or Nico Gomez's "Lupita" (p.287). And just like the music of Two Man Sound, The Chakachas' records went places.



"Stories" featured on Grand Theft Auto V's funk/soul station The Lowdown (my love for GTA's radio is boundless, **p.19**). Their "Yo Soy Cubano" was sampled Fatboy Slim on "Magic Carpet Ride" and used as the intro to Kendrick Lamar's "Backseat Freestyle".

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, October 2nd 2020**

And just like Two Man Sound, although The Chakachas sound like Cubanos, they were all Belgas. Appreciation or appropriation? I'm not sure.

The same year, Two Man Sound's lead singer scored a minor ska hit, "Kingston, Kingston", with a different project called Lou And the Hollywood Bananas... Sigh.



Thelma Houston - If You Feel It. © 1981 RCA Records



Thelma Houston

If You Feel It



Label: RCA

Year: 1981

Discogs: Thelma Houston - If You Feel It

Listen:



Thelma Houston - If You Feel It. © 1981 RCA Records



With one of the most infectious basslines in disco, this is a classic you won't be forgetting in a hurry.

First, to set the *record* straight, Thelma Houston is not related to Whitney, though *that* Houston family had no shortage of talent.

Whitney's mother Cissy is a soul and gospel icon whose huge discography includes the original version of "Midnight Train to Georgia", later a hit for Gladys Knight and the Pips.

Whitney's cousin Dionne Warwick also released several successful soul records - of which "Walk On By" and "Walk The Way You Talk" (later covered by Sergio Mendes) are my favourites. Dionne was

also an ambassador to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation!

Dionne's younger sister Dee Dee scored R&B hits with "I'm Gonna Make You Love Me" - later a successful duet between The Supremes and The Temptations featuring both Eddie Kendricks (**p.249**) and Dennis Edwards (**p.363**) - and "I (Who Have Nothing)" - later performed by Sylvester (**p.43**). Dee Dee was also regarded as one of the first openly lesbian performers in the music industry.

But Thelma is not on the same family tree.

You've likely heard Thelma's 1977 chat-topper "Don't Leave Me This Way",



covering Harold Melvin and The Blue Notes (**p.153**). Motown had initially assigned the song as Diana Ross' follow up to "Love Hangover", but it was eventually given to Houston instead. In the 1980s, it became an unofficial theme song for the AIDS epidemic in Western gay communities.

Thelma Houston scored other hits with "You Used To Hold Me So Tight" and the fantastic "Don't Know Why I Love You", which brings back euphoric memories of student DJing via the sample on Denis Sulta's "D.K.Y.". As part of Sisters of Glory alongside CeCe Peniston (of "Finally" fame), Thelma also performed for Pope John Paul II at the Vatican.

I've characteristically spent the entire column appreciating every Houston (and Warwick) without saying much about "If You Feel It" itself. But all of this music is excellent, and I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, October 16th 2020**



Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes - Bad Luck (Part 1 and 2). © 1975 CBS Inc.



Harold Melvin and The Blue Notes

Bad Luck



Label: Philadelphia International Records

Year: 1975

Discogs: Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes - To Be True

Listen:



Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes - To Be True. © 1975 CBS Inc.



A few weeks ago at St. Nicholas Market in Bristol, I picked up the sleeve of Harold Melvin and The Blue Notes' "Wake Up Everybody". I love that song and closed my first radio show with it. The same album also features "Don't Leave Me This Way", later covered by Thelma Houston (**p.149**).

But inside that sleeve - as I discovered two days later - was the group's earlier album "To Be True". I was gutted and annoyed with myself in equal measure. Then I found "Bad Luck" and everything was fine.

In 1954, an R&B group called The Charlemagnes - led by Harold Melvin - renamed itself The Blue Notes. Its lineup changed frequently, and Teddy

Pendergrass was recruited as its backing drummer in 1970.

Soon promoted to lead singer after further departures, the band became known as Harold Melvin & The Blue Notes featuring Theodore Pendergrass - try fitting that on a postcard. On their 1973 hit "The Love I Lost", drummer Earl Young (of MFSB, **p.281**) set the blueprint for the 4/4 disco beat.

Throughout this period, The Blue Notes released on Kenneth Gamble and Leon Huff's Philadelphia International Records. Many of their songs were written and produced by McFadden and Whitehead (most famous for their own soul chart-topper "Ain't No Stopping Us Now").



After his time with the group. Pendergrass went on to have a successful solo career. My favourites of his are "You Can't Hide from Yourself" (written by Gamble and Huff) and "The More I Get, The More I Want" (also written by McFadden and Whitehead).

Pendergrass' time was almost cut short by a paralysing car accident in 1982, but he continued to perform until a few years before his death in 2010.

A reminder of the realities of digging, I picked up this record through a stroke of (bad?) luck, but Teddy P. delivered the goods and those signature Philly strings, brass and vocals cheered me up in thirty seconds.

If you have a spare copy of "Wake Up Everybody" though, do hit me up.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, November 2nd 2020**



MONO STEREO

6371 112

HENRI SALVADOR

Quand je monte chez toi . Le loup la biche et le chevalier
Clopin clopant . Parce que ça me donne du courage
Maman la plus belle du monde . Maladie d'amour . Etc...



impact

Henri Salvador - Henri Salvador. © 1956 Impact



Henri Salvador

Quand Je Monte Chez Toi



Label: Impact

Year: 1956

Discogs: Henri Salvador - Henri Salvador

Listen:



Henri Salvador - Henri Salvador. © 1956 Impact



This November is not good. Cold and wet is not the climate of choice when you're only allowed to meet people outside. On a particularly gloomy evening, when sifting through my collection was the only thing for it, I rediscovered this gem. It made me feel a bit better, and I hope it does the same for you too.

Even the story of how I found this record lifts my mood. On a mission to recover a lost coat from Peckham's Bussey Building the morning after the night before, options for passing the time until security staff arrived were few and far between. Killing two hours watching John Wick 3 at the Peckhamplex (as nonchalantly as Keanu Reeves kills everything that moves in the film) was average at best.

Sniffing out a second-hand sale was much more my speed. As one of the sellers struck up conversation, I was immediately warmed by how music brings together complete strangers. After glancing at the records I'd already picked up, he pointed to an old Henri Salvador compilation and suggested that I might like it. I got home several hours later with one coat and one excellent record more than I had that morning.

Salvador was born in French Guiana in 1917 in the town of Cayenne (home of the pepper) to Guadeloupean parents. After teaching himself to play the guitar by copying recordings of Django Reinhardt, he recorded the first French Rock and Roll song - "Rock'n Roll Mops" - in 1957 and also had a successful career as a



television host and actor.

Some claim that Salvador's 1957 song "Dans mon île" influenced Brazilian composer Antônio Carlos Jobim and shaped the Bossa Nova genre. Indeed, Salvador also worked with Brazilian singer Caetano Veloso.

Perhaps most unusually, Salvador voiced the crab Sebastian in the 1989 French dubbing of Disney's The Little Mermaid.

I enjoyed the whole compilation, but I've returned to "Quand Je Monte Chez Toi" (When I Go Up To Yours) over and over again. Hopefully you can see why. It is classy and it is life-affirming.

Whichever home you're looking forward

to visiting again once it is allowed, Henri will see you through the meantime.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, November 15th 2020**



Rabo De Saia - Ripa Na Xulipa. © 1979 Polygram Discos Ltda.



Rabo de Saia

Ripa Na Xulipa



Label: Favorite (originally Polydor)

Year: 2015 (originally 1979)

Discogs: Various - Brazilian Disco Boogie Sounds

Listen:



Various - Brazilian Disco Boogie Sounds. © 2015 Favourite Recordings



Part of the draw of vinyl is getting to hold a real piece of musical history. In that vein, reissues feel a bit like cheating. But when some originals are going for over £100 a pop (or £286.61 in the case of Fronzena Harris' "Lovetime Guarantee", of which I bought a repress recently) my wallet is happy to cheat.

This isn't the first reissue by French label Favourite Recordings in my collection either - The Joubert Singers' "Stand On The Word" (**p.15**) was amongst my first Mates' Crates columns. This time, Favourite combine three bits of fantastic Brazilian disco on a single 12" - how could I say no?

The A-side - "Relax" by Painel De Controle ("Control Panel") - is written by

Brazilian songwriting legends Lincoln Olivetti and Robson Jorge (of "Aleluia" fame), and you can tell. Whilst the band's name brings back a few too many childhood memories of pressing Ctrl+Alt+Del to un-crash Windows XP, "Relax" strikes the perfect balance between upbeat and mellow to start any day right. But only one track on this record truly has my heart.

"Ripa Na Xulipa" is perfection. It only takes the two-second intro to get me fired up.

Rabo De Saia (which Google reliably informs me is Portuguese for "skirt tail") was an all-female Brazilian disco group in the 1970s, formed by the actor Carlos Imperial. In their two years, they



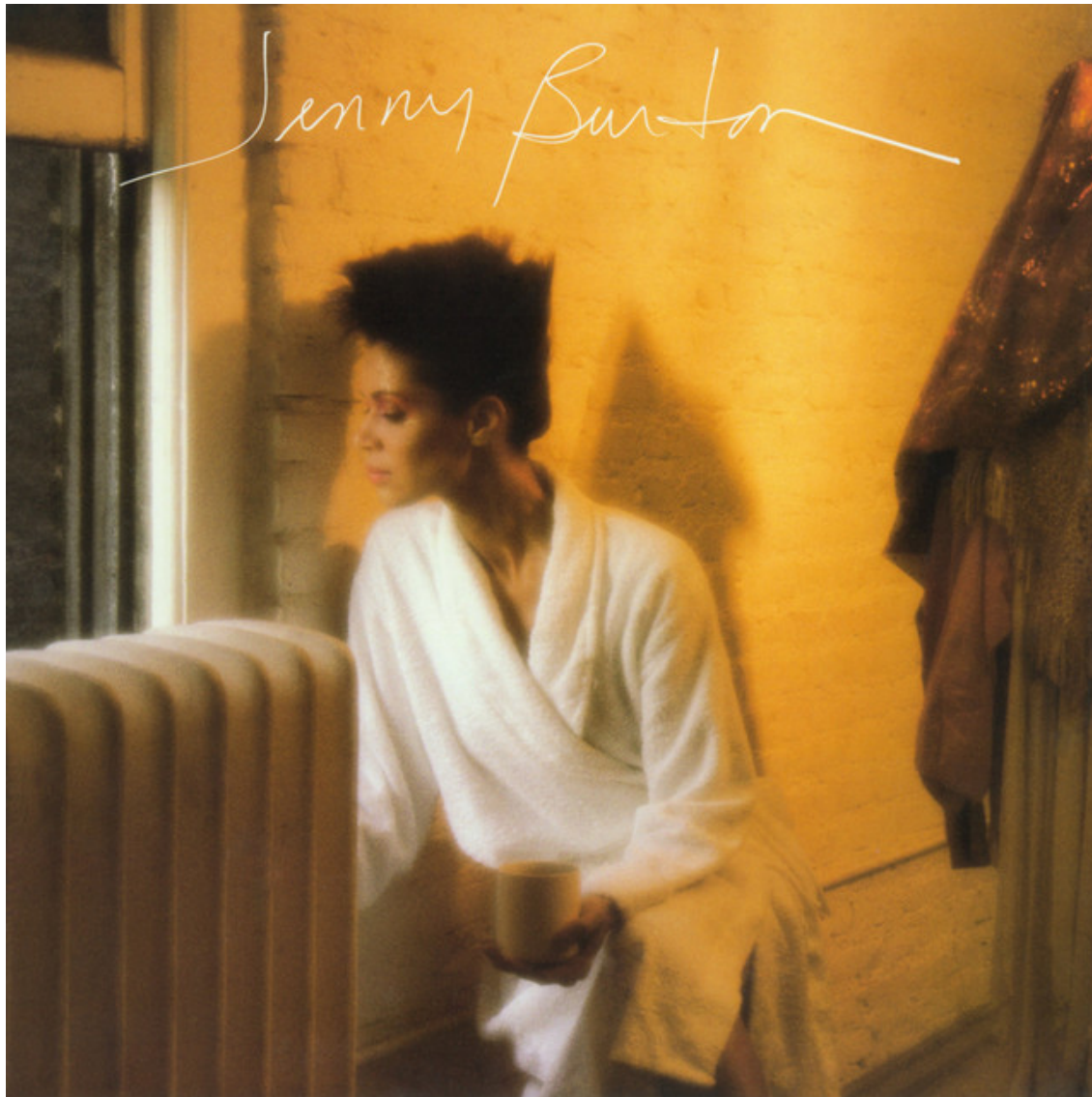
recorded just four songs, all composed by Imperial.

With a band name as inappropriately seventies as "skirt tail", I had to ask myself what "Ripa Na Xulipa" actually means. Reddit came to the rescue, explaining that it is a slang compliment in many Brazilian states, popularised by football commentator Osmar Santos as an encouragement for players. Other translations include "throw the wooden slab at the lazy people"...

The rest of the lyrics are mostly nonsensical rhymes. In the line "tatu saci-pererê", for example, "tatu" is an armadillo and "saci-pererê" is a one-legged prankster in Brazilian folklore.

Fortunately, I don't care. This tune is an absolute dancefloor weapon and I'm delighted to own it. If buying a repress makes me a lazy person, I'll dodge the wooden slab on this one.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, November 29th 2020**



Jenny Burton - Jenny Burton. © 1985 Atlantic Recording Corp.



Jenny Burton

Bad Habits



Label: Atlantic

Year: 1985

Discogs: Jenny Burton - Bad Habits

Listen:



Jenny Burton - Bad Habits. © 1985 Atlantic Recording Corp.



I know very little about Jenny Burton. As the lead singer of dance group C-Bank, she scored a Billboard top-five with "One More Shot" in 1983, which I'd never heard.

C-Bank's producer John Robie later reworked it into New Order's "Shellshock", which I'd also never heard. Robie has worked with everyone from Chaka Khan to UB40 and Boy George to Freeez (**p.335**). He launched his career as the "synthesiser wizard" on Soulsonic Force's "Planet Rock", which hip-hop executive Rick Rubin (credited by MTV as the most important producer of the last 20 years) cites as "one of the most influential songs of everything, [which] changed the world".

What I do know about Jenny Burton, though, is that it's her iconic voice on the incredible "Bad Habits". This track is just so good. When you realise how impeccably crafted this record is, it comes as no surprise that it was produced by Fred McFarlane, the man behind Jocelyn Brown's classic "Somebody Else's Guy" and Robin S' "Show Me Love".

But although I play "Bad Habits" at almost every available opportunity, I first discovered that vocal from a rather different corner of the music world. In the heyday of the first wave of wonky UK bass music, dubstep pioneer Loefah sampled Burton on "Veal".

According to Paul C. Jasen's "Low End



Theory: Bass, Bodies and the Materiality of Sonic Experience", Lofeah was known for his dark and minimal style that used powerful basslines and menacing vocal samples in order to create a sense of dread. Whilst you've read the last 42 words just to set me up for a Peep Show reference (the longer the note, the more dread, right?), he really does make Burton sound menacing.

Listening back now to the Boiler Room set in which I first heard "Veal" was a strange experience. Whatever you call the genre, I haven't really listened to it in years. And yet, within three minutes I could almost smell the sixth-form common room and had to remind myself that I'm 25 and don't need to worry about revising for my A-Levels any more.

Stress is a bad habit too. Let's leave it in 2020.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, December 13th 2020**



B.T. Express - Do It ('Til You're Satisfied). © 1974 Roadshow Records



B.T. Express

Do It ('Til You're Satisfied)



Label: Pye International

Year: 1974

Discogs: B.T. Express - Do It ('Til You're Satisfied)

Listen:



B.T. Express - Do It ('Til You're Satisfied). © 1974 Metronome Records GmbH



I came across this B.T. Express record the long way...

In the halcyon days of my student DJing, one track which never failed me was Antoine Clamaran's "Do The Funk", an effective if formulaic slice of French house which always turned up the heat with the university crowd.

As with many such records, it revolves around applying a filter to a funk, soul or disco sample. In this case, that sample was B.T. Express's "Does It Feel Good To You" (also sampled by Phats and Small, best know for "Turn Around").

So B.T. Express rang a bell when I saw their 1976 album "Energy To Burn" in Nice's Sonic Import a few years ago. That

same visit, I picked up Smokey Robinson's "Being With You" (**p.59**) and Timmy Thomas' "Why Can't We Live Together" (**p.35**).

Even without the weird description of each band-member's horoscope on the gatefold sleeve, "Energy To Burn" had me hooked. The title track is great, as is their cover of The O'Jays' "Now That We Found Love". (later covered by disco-reggae group Third World).

I bought B.T. Express' debut, "Do It 'Til You're Satisfied", soon after. Formed in the early seventies from three members of The King Davis House Rockers, the group's early work is a great example of the classic Brooklyn sound.



Perhaps even more importantly, legendary disco producer Tom Moulton - pioneer of the remix and the 12" single - cites his version of "Do It 'Til You're Satisfied" as his first successful remix.

Moulton's Red Bull Music Academy lecture is mandatory viewing for disco enthusiasts. He speaks about the remix 27 minutes in. B.T. Express hated it, but later claimed this was all part of the plan when Moulton's version topped the charts.

On an interesting tangent, B.T. Express' keyboardist Michael Jones changed his name to Kashif after joining the Nation of Islam and left the band in 1978 to pursue a solo career. As well as releasing his own music, he played on records by

the likes of George Benson (**p.11**) and Whitney Houston, wrote Evelyn "Champagne" King's 1982 hit "Love Comedown", and produced the theme for the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games.

I'm ever-amazed by where these columns end up. I hope you enjoyed the journey too.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, January 10th 2021



Harry Thumann - Underwater. © 1979 Baby Records International



Harry Thumann

Underwater



Label: Decca

Year: 1979

Discogs: Harry Thumann - Underwater

Listen:



Harry Thumann - Underwater. © 1979 Baby Records International



"What's that song you played me a while ago which was like the perfect soundtrack to riding your horse off into the sunset, but your horse is a spaceship?", I asked...

I'd heard Harry Thumann's 1979 "Underwater" several times in several places, but only pinned it down last week. The perfect blend of the orchestral and the electronic by a synth pioneer, I haven't been able to get it out of my head.

As I reflected on the familiarity of "Underwater", I realised that like so much (too much?) of the music I've circled back to (**p.19**), I first heard it driving Niko Bellic to go bowling with his cousin Roman in Grand Theft Auto IV.

Harald Thumann was born in Germany in 1952 and entered the music world as a drummer and audio engineer for radio before experimenting in the makeshift studio he set up in his bedroom. From the 1960s, he designed and built groundbreaking equipment, including early use of MIDI to control modular synths from a Commodore 64 computer.

As is evident on "Underwater" and several albums he produced for Italian orchestra Rondò Veneziano, Thumann's combination of acoustic and synthesised instruments set him apart.

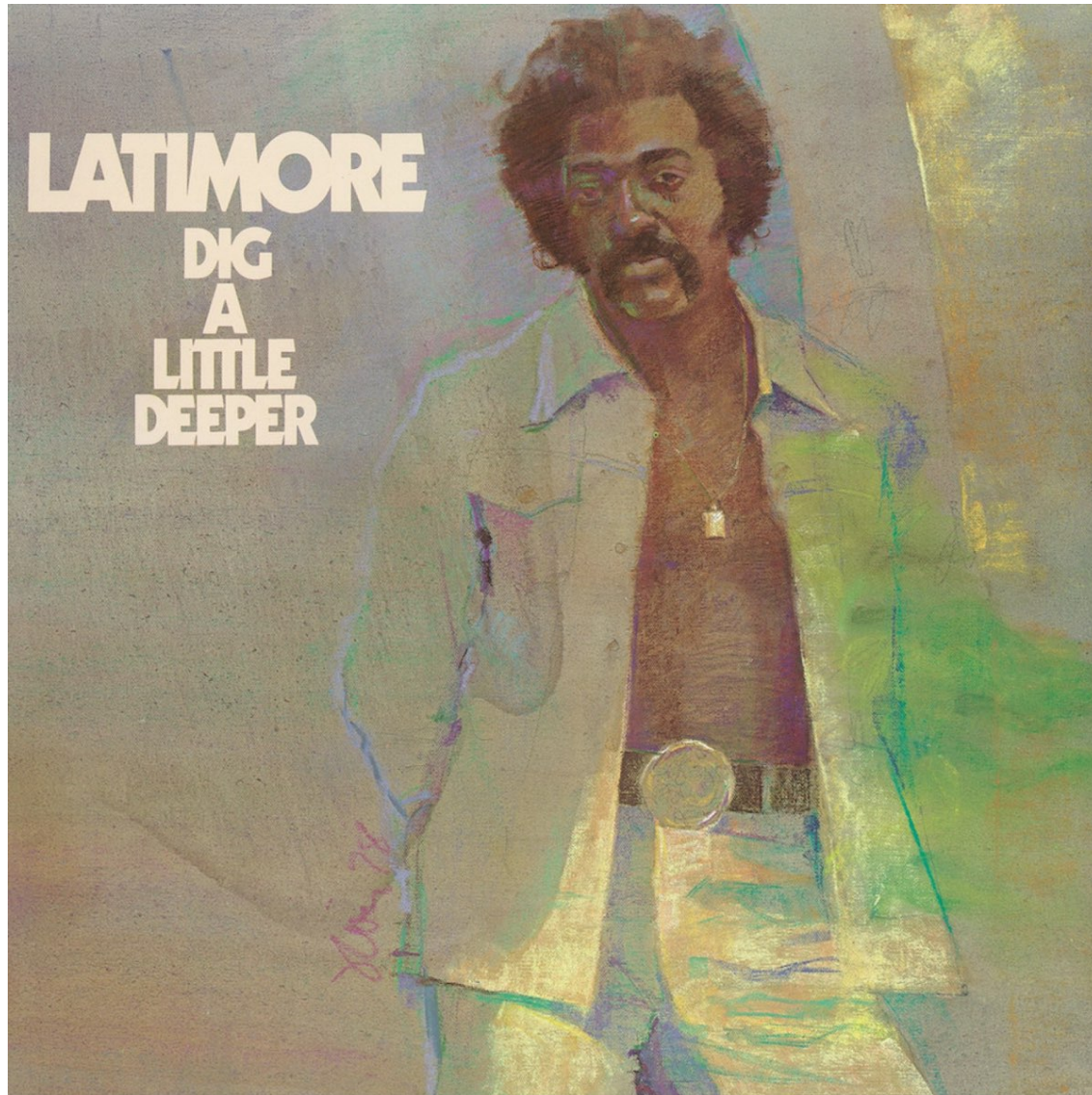
For this, I think Thumann deserves a place alongside Giorgio Moroder, Cerrone (**p.133**) and Patrick Cowley in the disco producers' hall of fame.



His relatively limited discography
(thirteen tracks across two albums)
encouraged a generation to harness the
infinite potential of new electronic tools.
Picking just one example, Thumann's
"Sphinx" inspired the theme to Knight
Rider.

So the next time you ride your horse off
into the sunset, but your horse is actually
a spaceship (or an artificially-intelligent
car), stick Harry on.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, January 24th 2021**



Latimore - Dig A Little Deeper. © 1978 T.K. Productions Inc.



Latimore

Out To Get'cha



Label: Glades

Year: 1978

Discogs: [Latimore - Dig A Little Deeper](#)

Listen:



Latimore - Dig A Little Deeper. © 1978 T.K. Productions Inc.



This is not the first time I've been drawn to the sound of Benny Latimore. I initially discovered his 1975 single "Somethin' 'Bout 'Cha", then his 1977 cover of "I Get Lifted" by Gwen's husband George McRae.

But it was only last month that I found "Out To Get'cha". Nothing compares. There's no intro, Benny just grabs hold and doesn't let go for the next five minutes. If your feet aren't tapping, get help. I love all the music I write about, and I'm definitely one to overuse superlatives, but this one is truly incredible.

I was doubly pleased to find Latimore's version of "We Got To Hit It Off" - later covered by Millie Jackson (**p.303**), and

recently sampled by Tom Trago - on the same album. Jackson had also covered Latimore's "Somethin' 'Bout 'Cha" two years earlier.

Born in Tennessee, it is perhaps unsurprising that country, blues and gospel were key influences on Latimore's music. Starting out as a session pianist in Florida, he soon began releasing solo records on various labels run by Miami music entrepreneur Henry Stone. It was at Stone's T.K. Records that warehouse temp Harry Wayne Casey founded KC and The Sunshine Band (**p.379**).

With the funk of Little Beaver (**p.253**) and (some of - let's be real) the smoothness of Barry White, Latimore has spent almost half a century in the



industry for good reason.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, February 14th 2021**

As well as putting out a record every few years, he has continued to work as a session pianist, including for Betty Wright, Timmy Thomas (**p.35**) and even Joss Stone.

Over that time, Latimore released almost thirty albums. His biggest commercial success - "Let's Straighten It Out", which topped the R&B chart in 1975 - just doesn't stand out to me. So if that's all you've heard from him, look again, you're missing out.

As bedroom boogies continue to fill in for the 'real' dancefloor as best they can, I hope Benny brings you as much joy as he brought me.



Trussel - Love Injection. © 1980 Elektra Entertainment Group



Trussel

Love Injection



Label: Elektra Records

Year: 1980

Discogs: Trussel - Love Injection

Listen:



Trussel - Love Injection. © 1980 Elektra Entertainment Group



From Jayda G to Sadar Bahar to Colleen Murphy, I've heard so many of my favourite DJs play Trussel, just as Larry Levan and others did before them. For such a short-lived band, their lasting influence is a testament to the quality of their music.

Formed in 1973 of students from Virginia State University, the band gained regional attention through their debut single "The Bicentennial Boogie", which they self-released in 1975. Its B-Side, "How Many Tricks in 1976" expressed frustration with American politicians in the aftermath of Watergate and the Vietnam War.

Trussel's profile grew further after performing with Evelyn "Champagne"

King just before "Shame" propelled her to international fame in 1977. The band recall the president of RCA offering them a record deal in their dressing room on that tour, but nothing came of it.

Their 1980 album is a spectacular masterclass in funk - perhaps unsurprising, as it was produced by Fred Wesley who led James Brown's band in the early 70s. Its lead single, "Love Injection", is eight minutes of heat which just keeps getting hotter, sustained by an irresistible bassline, impeccably placed claps and uplifting key changes. "I Love It" is just as good.

Listening to the lyrics, I noticed that - much like like Carl Carlton's "This Feeling's Rated Xtra" - "Love Injection"



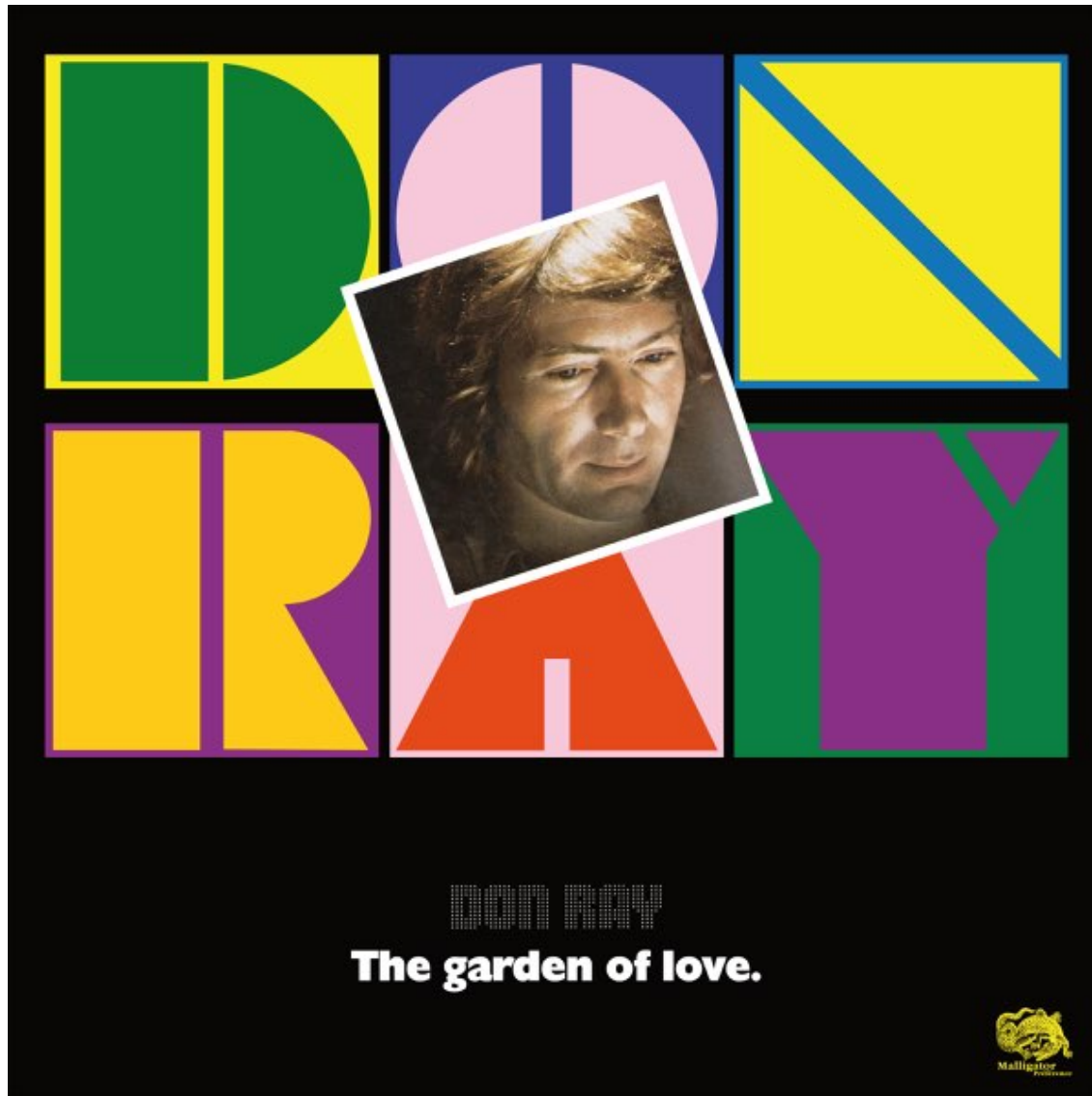
uses the word "jonesing" to mean craving. The phrase originated as a name for heroin, with 1950s Beatnicks "looking for Mr. Jones" when searching for a dealer. The term evolved to refer to the addiction, before expanding to mean any deep longing by the early 1970s.

Such a fantastic album begs the question of why there wasn't more. Trussel fell out with Elektra Records after management refused to put the band's photo on album cover. Assumed to be a racially-motivated aversion to featuring black faces on the sleeve, Trussel turned down the offer of a second album and broke up in the early 1980s.

Though we will never know quite how much more funk the world missed out on

as a result, I'm certainly glad of what we do have on "Love Injection". Luckily for us, the flame of Trussel's legacy also burns strong in New York through the magnificent fanzine, radio show and record label of the same name.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, February 22nd 2021**



Don Ray - The Garden of Love. © 1978 Malligator Records



Don Ray

Standing In The Rain



Label: Polydor

Year: 1978

Discogs: Don Ray - The Garden of Love

Listen:



Don Ray - The Garden of Love. © 1978 Malligator Records



Two years ago today, the world lost one of its most under-appreciated producers. Whether working with other musicians (notably Cerrone, **p.133**) or on his own releases, Raymond Donnez (often credited under his pseudonym, Don Ray) is a cult hero of Euro disco.

Whilst "Standing in the Rain" is my favourite Don Ray track, even his biggest crossover hit, "Got To Have Loving", only peaked at #44 in the Billboard Hot 100 in October 1978 despite widespread pop airplay. In fact, the whole album - his only solo release - is fantastic.

And Don Ray's talents were not restricted to disco, having also conducted Eurovision performances for Monaco (1974 and 1976) and France

(1977's winner), then worked with worked with jazz-funk composer Alec Constandinos on a musical retelling of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet.

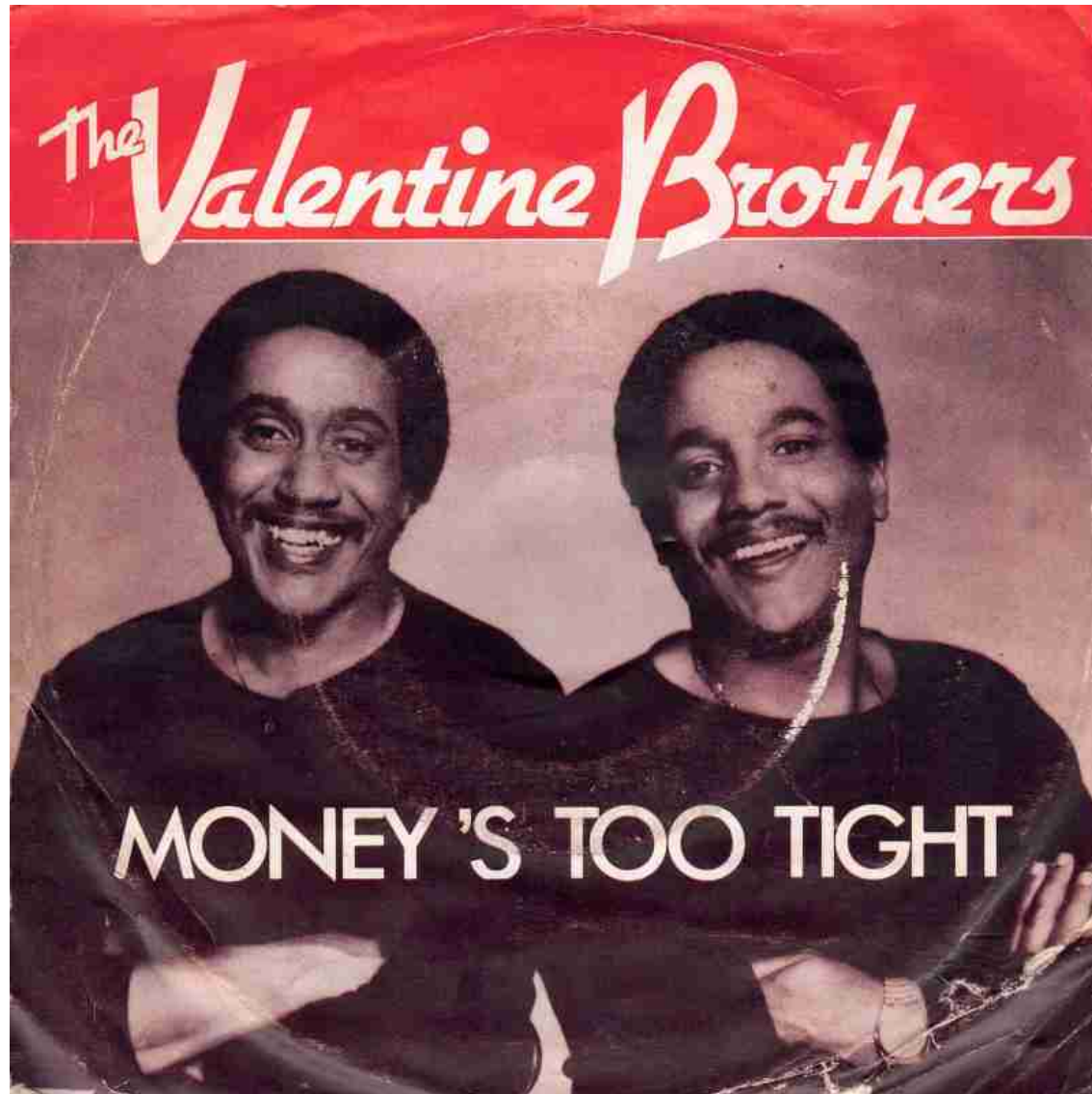
Donnez also produced Santa Esmeralda's cover of "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" (**p.331**) by Nina Simone. Like "The Lonely Shepherd" by Gheorghe Zamfir (**p.103**) it features on the soundtrack for Quentin Tarantino's 2003 film "Kill Bill".

Unfortunately, that's all I could find on Donnez, which leaves you even more time to listen through his music.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, March 7th 2021



Don Ray. Photograph source unknown. Found on metason.net.



The Valentine Brothers - Money's Too Tight (To Mention). © 1982 Energy Records



The Valentine Brothers

Money's Too Tight (To Mention)



Label: Bridge Records

Year: 1982

Discogs: The Valentine Brothers -
Money's Too Tight (To Mention)

Listen:



The Valentine Brothers - Money's Too Tight (To Mention). © 1982 Bridge Records Inc.



You've heard Simply Red's version, but for me, this is the real deal.

In 2019, I packed into Phonica Records to celebrate the launch of Canadian DJ Jayda G's debut album. Such memories of cramming ten-to-a-metre into tiny venues feel alien amongst the recent need to stay six feet apart. Indeed, I think Jayda's recent Grammy-nominated single "Both of Us" was the festival anthem for the year that festivals weren't.

With auto-Shazam in overdrive, I discovered heaps of great music that night, including this one by the Valentine Brothers. Born in Columbus, Ohio, Billy and John Valentine started performing together in 1975. Before that,

Billy had sung with soul and jazz duo Young-Holt Unlimited (best known for "Soulful Strut").

From 1977, the brothers spent three years touring with The Wiz, a musical which told the story of The Wizard of Oz in a contemporary African-American context. Motown soon acquired film rights, resulting in a 1978 movie with Diana Ross as Dorothy, Michael Jackson as The Scarecrow and stand-up comedian Richard Pryor as the Wizard. Despite box office failure, it has since become a cult hit.

The Valentines released their first album in 1979, but it was their second which brought us "Money's Too Tight (To Mention)", lamenting President



Reagan's spending cuts. Despite three months in the Billboard R&B chart, it was British pop group Simply Red who found global success with the song, entering Top Tens across the world in 1985.

For me though, nothing beats the drive and squelchy bassline of the original. Enjoy.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, March 17th 2021**



Airto Moreira - I'm Fine. How Are You?. © 1977 Warner Bros. Records Inc.



Airto Moreira

Celebration Suite



Label: Warner Bros. Records

Year: 1977

Discogs: Airto Moreira - I'm Fine. How Are You?

Listen:



Airto Moreira - I'm Fine. How Are You?. © 1977 Warner Bros. Records Inc.



You might not have heard of Airtó Moreira. But I'll bet you've heard Airtó Moreira.

Born into a family of folk healers in 1941, Moreira has been making music for almost seventy years. He's played on everything from the pioneering jazz fusion album "Bitches Brew" with Miles Davis and Chick Corea to the soundtrack for Francis Ford Coppola's epic "Apocalypse Now".

He can play more instruments than you can count on about ten hands, and his boundless discography spans collaborations with everyone from George Duke to George Benson (**p.11**); Dizzy Gillespie to Depeche Mode; Chaka

Khan to Paul Simon. I could go on and on...

I'd encourage you to explore his full body of work, but I'll try to stay focused on the winding story of "Celebration Suite".

If you watched any of the 2014 World Cup, you've heard Bellini's "Samba De Janeiro". Maybe you've heard The Heartists' "Belo Horizonti". Chances are, you've heard the infectious hook of Moreira's "Celebration Suite" somewhere.

But all is not as it seems. "Celebration Suite" was released in 1977 but interpolates that hook from Moreira's 1973 track "Tombo in 7/4". "Tombo" was written with Uruguayan composer



Hugo Fattoruso, but both musicians agreed that the song should be registered to Moreira.

Clearly, neither was aware of the international hit that it would become a quarter of a century later at the hands of German pop producers The Bellini Brothers (incidentally named after Brazilian football legend Hilderaldo Bellini).

This Uruguayan newspaper alleges that Fattoruso later requested 25% of the royalties, but Moreira sent him \$5,000 and asked to be left alone. As the iconic hook emerged once more for the 2014 World Cup, Fattoruso reportedly considered legal action.

I love that Melodic Distraction gives me a platform for sentences beginning "This Uruguayan newspaper alleges...". Enjoy the music and the sunshine.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, April 4th 2021



Creative Source - Creative Source. © 1973 Sussex Records Inc.



Creative Source

You Can't Hide Love



Label: Mellow Mellow Right On
(originally Sussex)

Year: 2015 (originally 1973)

Discogs: Creative Source / New Holidays
- You Can't Hide Love / Maybe So Maybe
No

Listen:



Mellow Mellow Right On 008. © 2015 Mellow Mellow Right On



Queueing for the till at a brick and mortar record shop a while ago (remember them?), a bright green 7" with the Northern Soul fist on the label caught my eye. To my delight, it was Creative Source's "You Can't Hide Love".

If you're a soul enthusiast, I know you know this one. If you were out in clubs that play house music in 2016 (brick and mortar venues - remember them?), you'll probably have heard it heavily sampled on Qubiko's "Disco Connection". But if this is the first time your ears have been graced by this slice of soulful R&B, enjoy.

As ever, I'm not the only one to recognise the song's brilliance, with Dionne Warwick, D'Angelo and most famously Earth, Wind and Fire all

recording covers. Earth, Wind and Fire's version peaked 38 chart places higher than the original and has often been sampled. Rick Ross used a snippet for 2018's remake of the 1972 blaxploitation film "Superfly", originally soundtracked by Curtis Mayfield.

Formed in 1972 in L.A., Creative Source put out an impressive four albums in three years before disbanding in 1977. Their work includes an incredibly psychedelic twelve minute cover of Bill Withers' "Who Is He, And What Is He To You". My love for Withers (**p.391**), his original (and Henrik Schwarz's remix) knows no bounds, so Creative Source's twist was welcome.

That cover isn't the band's only



connection to Withers. Five years after penning "You Can't Hide Love", songwriter Skip Scarborough wrote Withers' classic "Lovely Day", featuring one of the longest sustained vocal notes ever recorded.

And after that whole web of music, we haven't even talked about the B-Side of this repress, "Maybe So, Maybe No" by The Holidays. The group was best known for their 1966 song "I'll Love You Forever" featuring Edwin Starr (himself best known for "War").

When The Holidays' vocal harmonies kick in, you can hear why this lovely sixties soul track has been paired with "You Can't Hide Love".

Mellow Mellow Right On have released ten colourful Northern Soul 7"s, including Otis Clay's "The Only Way Is Up" and Garfield Fleming's "Please Don't Send Me Away". I'll never tire of sharing this video of Fleming hearing his music being played at a Paris flea market.

All in all, a wonderful collection of beautiful music. Mellow Mellow, Right On.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, April 18th 2021**



Various - For The Love Of You (Volume 2). © 2021 Athens Of The North Records Ltd.



Derrick Cross

Never Too Much



Label: Athens Of The North (originally Denmark)

Year: 2021 (originally early 1980s)

Discogs: [Derrick Cross - Never Too Much](#)

Listen:



Derrick Cross - Never Too Much. © 2021 Athens Of The North Records Ltd.



You don't need me to tell you that this is a cover. You don't need me to tell you who the original is by. You don't need me to vouch for the original. So I just need you to trust me that this cover is also exceptional.

Last week was the 70th anniversary of Luther Vandross' birth, though he sadly passed away after a heart attack in 2005.

Entering the music industry as a highly sought-after backing singer, Vandross worked with everyone from Diana Ross (on "So Close", alongside Cissy Houston) to Chaka Khan (on "Our Love's In Danger", alongside Whitney Houston!).

In 1974, David Bowie told him that the next year would be his year, and Roberta

Flack (of "Killing Me Softly" fame) pushed him towards becoming lead vocalist of the Italian-American band Change, best known for "The Glow of Love" and "Hold Tight". Solo success soon followed.

As you can probably notice if you listen closely, Vandross was also a prolific producer, masterminding Aretha Franklin's hit single "Jump To It" and the follow-up "Get It Right" (**p.31**).

You could write a book about Vandross' expansive discography. Someone has. But for this short read, it's all about his biggest hit: "Never Too Much".



Some time in the early 1980s, Hackney-based vocalist Derrick Cross recorded a cover of Vandross' masterpiece and released a few copies on an elusive label called Denmark Records. With the original rare enough to go for hundreds of pounds, in swooped Edinburgh-based repress label Athens of The North to bring this beautiful lovers rock version to the masses.

And that's about as much as is known about Derrick, save two other records. The one called "You Stepped Into My Life" is (unfortunately) not a Bee Gees cover.

I've had good luck with reggae covers lately; a fellow digger at Alan's Records in Finchley pointed me to JJ Sparks'

excellent version of Randy Brown's "I Wanna Make Love To You".

But I've pulled you on enough tangents for one column. As the evenings get longer, stick on some lovers rock and watch the sunset.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, May 2nd 2021



Ivan - Baila. © 1985 Sony Music Entertainment España S.L.



Ivan

Sueños De Papel



Label: CBS

Year: 1985

Discogs: Ivan - Baila

Listen:



Ivan - Baila. © 1985 CBS Discos SA



The music on Ivan's 1985 album "Baila" is almost as cool as the jacket he's wearing on the cover. Almost.

If you've ever heard Swedish DJ Kornél Kovács' 2015 hit "Pantalón" (read, if you set foot in a club playing house music that year), you'll recognise why I bought this album. You won't catch me writing a bad word about Kornél, but he did just put a kick drum on Ivan's "Sueños de Papel". The label translates the song's title as "Sunday Afternoon", despite it actually being Spanish for "Paper Dreams".

Born Juan Carlos Ramos Vaquero in Madrid in 1962, Ivan was discovered by a producer for CBS and had hits in Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador and Chile

before his career was interrupted by compulsory military service. His daughter also starred in the Hollywood film "Bratz" (yes, the dolls).

"Sueños de Papel" makes me daydream about cruising down the South American coast in a convertible with the roof down. And I can't even drive.

I was happy enough when the LP arrived in the post, but nothing could prepare me for the pure elation of hearing "Fotonovela" for the first time. What starts with a fairly generic eighties beat and an accordion grows into my favourite find of the month. Cue the xylophone. Cue the silky smooth vocals. Cue the soaring strings.



I ran round the room with my arms out like I was an aeroplane, because this song makes me feel like I can fly.

"I felt like I'd discovered a Palms Trax classic before Palms Trax himself", I wrote arrogantly before spotting "Fotonovela" on a YouTube playlist of tracks played by Hunee, Antal and Palms Trax. Disappointed sigh. Backspace. Backspace. Backspace. There goes my set at Dekmantel Selectors.

But really, it doesn't matter who found it first. This is beautiful music, enjoy it.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, May 16th 2021**



MARLENA SHAW

MUSIC IS A
FEAST...
SO SIT AT
MY TABLE
AND...

TAKE A BITE



Marlena Shaw - Take A Bite. © 1979 CBS Inc.



Marlena Shaw

Touch Me In The Morning



Label: Columbia

Year: 1979

Discogs: Marlena Shaw - Take A Bite

Listen:



Marlena Shaw - Take A Bite. © 1979 CBS Inc.



Combining the musical prowess of Diana Ross and Marlena Shaw was only going to end one way. This record is heart-wrenching and high-energy all at once.

In 1973, jazz, blues and soul singer Marlena Shaw sang at the Montreux Jazz Festival, on the shore of Lake Geneva. The recording of her performance, released on Blue Note Records, is iconic.

She opened the show with her 1969 track "Woman of the Ghetto", but this was not like the studio recording. Her electrifying live version addresses gender and race discrimination in America like almost nothing that came before, as Tim Lawrence writes in Colleen Murphy's "Classic Albums by Women".

It has been covered several times, and I particularly like Phyllis Dillon's (**p.257**).

The same year that Shaw performed at Montreaux, Diana Ross secured her second solo No.1 with "Touch Me In The Morning", three years after leaving The Supremes. Recorded in the early hours (as became usual after Ross began raising her children), songwriter Michael Masser said that she pushed particularly hard to get the vocals right.

Then in 1979, these two worlds collided. Just like her performance of "Woman of the Ghetto", Shaw's cover of "Touch Me In The Morning" took things to another level.

Laughter or tears, joy or dejection,



it's not clear how to feel. Capturing raw emotion, fierce strength and dancefloor energy, this track is everything at the same time. With that lineage, you could say it isn't surprising, but this record is truly spectacular.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, May 31st 2021**



Melba Moore - Melba. © 1978 CBS Inc.



Melba Moore

Pick Me Up, I'll Dance



Label: Epic

Year: 1978

Discogs: [Melba Moore - Melba](#)

Listen:



Melba Moore - Melba. © 1978 CBS Inc.



Disco legend Melba Moore has been sampled over a hundred times, but one snippet stands out.

I've always been fascinated by the Hollywood concept of twin films: two near-identical movies released the same year. "Antz" vs. "A Bug's Life", "The Prestige" vs. "The Illusionist", "Olympus Has Fallen" vs. "White House Down", the list goes on. Sometimes due to studios investing in similar scripts at the same time, sometimes due to staff moves and industrial espionage, it happens more often than you think.

Midland's "Final Credits" and DJ Koze's "Pick Up" are not twin films, but it did surprise me that two house tracks with the same sample got *quite* so big at

pretty much the same time. Each grew successful on its own merits, but the shared Gladys Knight and The Pips vocal is certainly notable. Manchester-based DJ Hidden Spheres also drew on it for his 2015 track "Goodbye".

Where am I going with this? To be honest, I had to remind myself too. Whilst Midland combined Knight's vocal with the riff from Lee Alfred's rare 1980 funk track "Rockin', Poppin', Full Tilting", DJ Koze's paired Knight with Melba Moore's 1978 disco hit "Pick Me Up, I'll Dance". While we're here, Doc Daneeka's "Magnolia" samples Moore too.

Born in 1945 in Harlem, New York, Moore's career began in theatre, starring



in various musicals alongside Hollywood legend Diane Keaton and singer Eartha Kitt (**p.39**). Moore's first song, "The Magic Touch", was recorded in 1967 and became a huge hit on the Northern Soul scene when finally released in 1986.

In the late 1970s, Moore teamed up with production duo McFadden and Whitehead on her album "Melba", which I *picked up* last week. Alongside "Pick Me Up, I'll Dance", it features her excellent cover of the Bee Gees' "You Stepped Into My Life".

Alongside their R&B chart-topper "Ain't No Stopping Us Now", McFadden and Whitehead worked with everyone from The O'Jays and The Intruders (**p.129**) to Archie Bell and The Drells (**p.95**) and

Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes (**p.153**).

In 1986, Moore led the cast of the sitcom "Melba", which was created to boost her career. Perhaps because it premiered the same day as the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster, viewership was very poor and CBS immediately pulled the show from its schedule, airing the remaining episodes six months later.

Moore continues to perform to this day, notably starring in the Broadway production of "Les Miserables" in 1995. She most recently took to the stage in 2018 for the musical "After Midnight".

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, June 13th 2021**



Blacksmoke - Blacksmoke. © 1976 Chocolate City Records Inc.



Blacksmoke

What Goes Around Comes Around



Label: Chocolate City

Year: 1976

Discogs: [Smoke - Smoke](#)

Listen:



Smoke - Smoke. © 1976 Chocolate City Records Inc.



I'm always pleasantly surprised by the tenuous links between all the music that I love, and even more surprised that anyone wants to read about them. What goes around, comes around?

My music consumption is a finely-poised balance between relentlessly seeking things I haven't heard before and listening to my favourites over and over. GE-OLOGY and Red Greg's set at Dekmantel 2017 has been played on Soundcloud over 62,000 times, and I might be responsible for about 60,000 of those. It's just spectacular.

I won't spend any more time fawning over my favourite selectors, but I'm forever grateful for all the music that they've introduced me to, in this case

California funk group Blacksmoke and the standout track from their only album.

Formed in 1972 as Smoke, the album was briefly pulled when their label (Chocolate City Records, a subsidiary of Casablanca) discovered another band using the same name. Whether your copy is by Smoke or Blacksmoke is something of a lucky dip.

Blacksmoke's biggest hits were "Your Love Has Got Me Screaming" and "There It Is" (which reminds me a bit of Trussel, **p.181**). I like both, but "What Goes Around" is something else. The groove kept up by their vocal layering is beyond compare, and will stick with you for days too. Reminders to take responsibility for



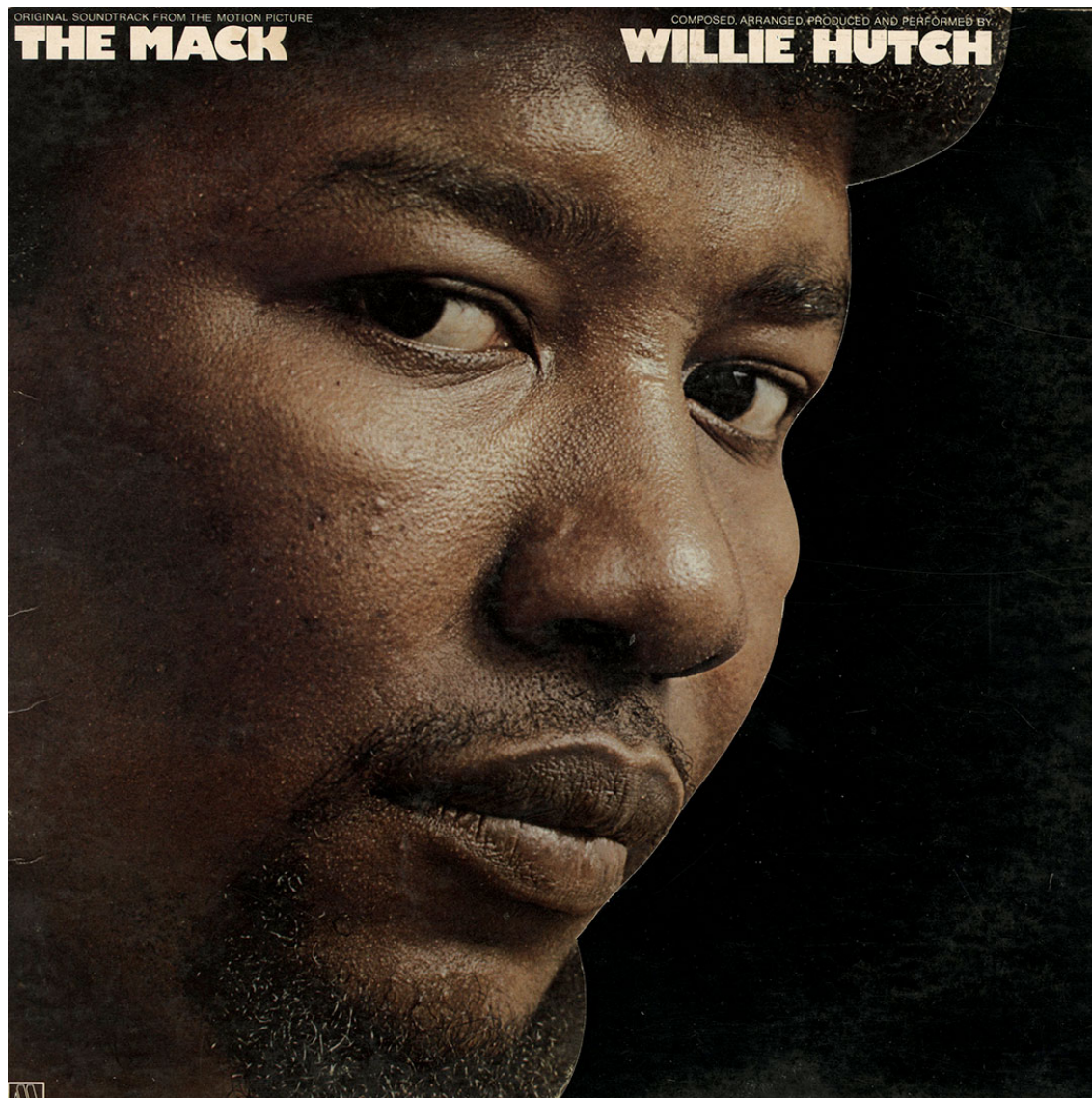
our actions are never unhelpful either.

Small world. What goes around comes around.

There's also a blissful club-ready extended version, produced by prolific Chicago-based remixer Underdog. That's the same Underdog whose remix of James Brown's "I'm Satisfied" featured in Motor City Drum Ensemble's classic set at Dekmantel 2014. That's the same set which launched the Discogs price of Bileo's "You Can Win" into the stratosphere - thank the stars for Athens of The North (**p.201**).

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, June 27th 2021**

Not much more is known about Smoke. They purportedly toured with both Donna Summer and The Isley Brothers (**p.79**) and later signed to At-Home Productions, a label set up by the former trombonist of The Crusaders (**p.63**).



Willie Hutch - The Mack. © 1973 Motown Record Corporation



Willie Hutch

Love Power



Label: Tamla Motown

Year: 1975

Discogs: [Willie Hutch - Love Power](#)

Listen:



Willie Hutch - Love Power. © 1975 Tamla Motown



There's almost ten years between when I heard Willie Hutch and when I knew I'd heard Willie Hutch.

If you've heard Dr. Dre's "The Chronic" - his solo debut after splitting from N.W.A. - you've heard Willie Hutch too. The opening moments of "Rat Tat Tat Tat" sample Hutch's "Brother's Gonna Work It Out", which was recorded to soundtrack the 1973 blaxploitation film "The Mack".

The story of the blaxploitation genre itself is an interesting one that I've mentioned before on the radio show, given its ties to iconic music including Curtis Mayfield's "Superfly", James Brown's "The Boss" and Isaac Hayes' "Hung Up On My Baby". Emerging in

the 1970s as a transparent effort to attract black audiences, these films were among the first to feature black characters in major roles as protagonists, though these often played on negative stereotypes including criminality.

Alongside Dre, rappers from 2Pac and Daz Dillinger to Chief Keef and Kanye West have drawn on "Brother's Gonna Work It Out". It is the opening track and namesake of The Chemical Brothers' 1998 mixtape, and the likely inspiration for a 1990 song by Public Enemy.

In short, Willie Hutch's music has been all over the place. I've played both "Brothers Gonna Work It Out" and his (even) more soulful "A Love That's Worth Having" on the radio show.



So when I spotted one of his singles for a fiver in Alan's Records, it came straight home with me. I hadn't heard "Love Power" before owning it, but it turns out it was Hutch's biggest chart hit. The B-Side, "Get Ready For The Get Down" has a really nice groove too.

Born in L.A. in 1944 then raised in Dallas, Hutch signed his first record deal at the age of 20 then moved back to Los Angeles. He was soon writing and producing for soul group The 5th Dimension - best known for their 1970 Grammy Record of the Year, "Age of Aquarius".

Over his career, Hutch also wrote and produced for Motown legends including The Jackson 5, Smokey

Robinson (p.59) and Marvin Gaye.

You'd already heard Willie Hutch. And now you know it.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, June 27th 2021



Ornella Vanoni - Io Fuori. © 1977 Nar International Srl



Ornella Vanoni

Ti Voglio



Label: Vanilla

Year: 1977

Discogs: [Ornella Vanoni - Domani No](#)

Listen:



Ornella Vanoni - Domani No. © 1977 Vanilla Records



An icon of Italian pop, Ornella Vanoni's career spans over sixty years and is still going strong. My first and favourite encounter was "Ti Voglio".

Born to a Milanese family in 1934, Vanoni debuted as a theatre actress in the late 1950s and began singing soon after, quickly earning the nickname "cantante della mala" ("Singer of the Underworld") for her records about criminals.

In the early 1960s, she met songwriter Gino Paoli and scored her first national pop hits with "Che cosa c'e" ("What's Up") and "Senza fine" ("Endless", later covered by Dean Martin and Wes Montgomery).

Vanoni then moved to Rome and set up a record label in 1974, establishing her place amongst Italian music greats. With national fame and a fashion sense admired by Gianni Versace, Vanoni also became a symbol of the new Italian woman just as feminism began to grow in the country.

Her 1970 hit "L'appuntamento" ("The Appointment", used on the soundtrack of Ocean's Twelve) is a cover of "Sentado a Beira do Caminho" ("Sitting by the Roadside") by Erasmo Carlos and Roberto Carlos (no relation!).

Indeed, in 1976 Vanoni collaborated with Bossa Nova pioneers Vinícius de Moraes and Toquinho on "La voglia, la pazzia, l'incoscienza e l'allegria" ("The Desire,



The Madness, The Unconsciousness and The Joy”) - all particularly exciting given my well-documented love for Brazilian music (**p.161, p.277, p.411**).

Then, in 1977, came "Ti Voglio" ("I Want You"). From the strings to the groove, from the melody to the backing vocals, I love everything about it. Released on the B-Side of quintessential Euro-ballad "Domani No" ("Not Tomorrow"), I was delighted when the copy I ordered from Greece finally arrived.

Remixers including Italy's elusive Fresco Edits and Brazil's Rafael Cancian have taken on Vanoni's original. Whilst I'm a firm believer in the power of a 4/4 kick drum, nothing touches her original.

What a record. "Tu mi fai volare", you make me fly.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, July 25th 2021**



Michel Star - Rétrospective. © 2006 Disques Mérite



Michel Stax

Aucun Coeur



Label: Les Disques Oui

Year: 1976

Discogs: Michel Stax - Aucun Coeur

Listen:



Michel Stax - Aucun Coeur. © 1976 Les Disques Oui



Bought on my first trip to a record shop since restrictions lifted and played at my first gig in over a year, this record has come to represent a return to normality.

Buying stuff on Discogs is fun. Finding a reasonably-priced copy of a record you've wanted for years on this side of the world is a thrill, and waiting for the post fills me with childish delight

But you don't know what you don't know, and there's nothing like spending hours in a dusty bargain bin to discover a gem you'd never heard of. So after a year of shipping fees and search terms, I've loved returning real life digging.

One such find was this single by Michel Stax. I'd never heard of him, or the

chicly-named "Les Disques Oui" label, but I saw the Quebec address. "C'est Toutjours Comme ça L'Amour" by Montreal-based trio Toulouse is one of my favourite disco records, so I decided Michel was worth a shot.

Foreign and familiar in equal measure, I soon recognised the melody from pop and jazz standard "Sway", made famous by Dean Martin in 1954. Stax's lyrics translate to "You knew how to upset my heart and create my happiness", but the theme is similar, and the melody undeniable. I bought it immediately.

Looking into his discography, this wasn't the first time Stax (real name Léger Michaud) had covered a popular English song. He released "Caroline Cherie", a



version of The Foundations' "Build Me Up Buttercup", in 1969.

Unlike "Build Me Up Buttercup", though, "Sway" was not originally composed for English lyrics. Versions have been recorded by everyone from Michael Bublé to The Pussycat Dolls to Cliff Richard. Even George Clooney's aunt Rosemary worked with Perez Prado, the original composer of "Mambo No.5", on a version.

But the melody was first written as "Quién Será" (What Will Be) by Luis Demetrio, and first performed by Mexican bandleader Pablo Beltrán Ruiz. As well as the 1953 cha-cha-chá original, cumbia and boogaloo versions were released in 1966 and 1968 respectively.

It would, of course, be remiss of me not to mention the 1999 version by British duo Shaft, which initially drew on Clooney's vocals but eventually re-recorded them after a copyright dispute. What primary school disco was complete without this *heater*? Shaft looked to Clooney again the following year with their remix of her "Mambo Italiano".

Two weeks ago I had the pleasure of playing back to back with the delightful Hamish OOX at Fambula Garden in Belsize Park. Of everything I played, "Aucun Coeur" had people grooving like no other. Who'd have thought?

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, August 8th 2021



Made In U.S.A - Made In U.S.A.. © 1977 De-Lite Records Inc.



Made In U.S.A.

Never Gonna Let You Go



Label: De-Lite Records

Year: 1977

Discogs: Made in U.S.A. - Made in U.S.A.

Listen:



Made In U.S.A - Made In U.S.A.. © 1977 De-Lite Records Inc.



I've written about the musical equivalent of twin films before (**p.213**). In this case, both Theo Parrish and DJ Harvey spotted the impeccable groove of Made in U.S.A.'s "Never Gonna Let You Go" and realised that the world would be a better place if that groove were extended for as long as possible.

Parrish's 2002 edit, clocking in at ten minutes, wins in that respect, though it took until 2019 to get the sample cleared for an official vinyl release. Harvey, on the other hand, released his unlicensed version in 1994 on his own Black Cock Records label.

I've sung the line "Never Gonna Let You Go" to myself countless times on countless dancefloors before both these

remixes launched into their kick drums and saxophone stabs.

So I was surprised that Made In U.S.A.'s original melted into laid back, heartfelt vocals every time I expected more. Which I think makes it all the more beautiful.

As the opening track of the band's eponymous (and only) album, I consider myself lucky to have found a *sealed* copy for just a tenner. Pristine and unopened since it was pressed almost 50 years ago, part of me didn't want to open it.

The rest did, so I tore off the packaging and listened many times, very loud. The whole album is full of gems, from the lead single "Melodies" to the sweeping



"Sexy Lady".

Made in U.S.A. (Unity, Strength, Ambition) formed in 1975, hand-picked from a host of Brooklyn musicians who had already worked with the likes of Ben E. King, Joe Bataan and Ecstasy, Passion and Pain.

Everything on their recordings was performed by band-members themselves so it could be replicated live. Their first single fared well, but was hampered by distribution issues at the record label. Their second - "Shake Your Body" - didn't chart, and without gigs or hit records, they disbanded in 1977.

Whether we call them hidden gems or

rare grooves, I always wonder about the circumstances which lead music (or literature, or paintings, or any art) to be more celebrated decades later.

Whatever happened in the mid-nineties that hadn't happened in the mid-seventies, let's be glad we've found it.

And now that we have it, I'm never gonna let it go.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, August 22nd 2021



Chanson - Together We Stand. © 1979 Ariola America, Inc.



Chanson

Magic Carpet Ride



Label: Ariola

Year: 1979

Discogs: Chanson - Jack Be Nimble

Listen:



Chanson - Magic Carpet. © 1979 Ariola America, Inc.



When I found this 7" in a bargain bucket, I picked it up without even knowing the legacy carried by its musicians.

If you're into soul, and even if you're not, you've heard James Jamerson's music. Uncredited by Motown and receiving little formal recognition, he remained anonymous even to most of the bassists who emulated his style in the early 1970s - Paul McCartney amongst them.

As is unfortunately far too often the case, the appreciation came posthumously. Jamerson was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame seventeen years after his death, and listed as the most influential bass guitarist of all time seventeen years after that.

Pick a famous soul hit. There's a good chance Jamerson played on it and, as a prolific improviser, even wrote part of it. The Supremes' "You Can't Hurry Love"; The Temptations' "My Girl" (featuring Eddie Kendricks, **p.249**); Marvin Gaye's "I Heard It Through The Grapevine"; The Four Tops' "I'll Be There" (co-written by Lamont Dozier, **p.67**); Jackie Wilson's "Higher and Higher"; Gladys Knight's "Neither One of Us" (sampled by DJ Koze alongside Melba Moore, **p.213**); I could go on for hours.

Playing on nearly every Motown recording between 1963 and 1968, Jamerson performed on 23 pop chart-toppers, a record narrowly surpassed only - as it happens - by Paul McCartney.



Long troubled by alcoholism, Jamerson allegedly played the iconic bassline of Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" while lying flat on his back, as he was too intoxicated to stand upright. He sadly died of cirrhosis in 1983, aged 47.

So unrecognised was Jamerson during his lifetime that his resting place was only given a proper headstone *last month*, following a crowdfunding project by his family.

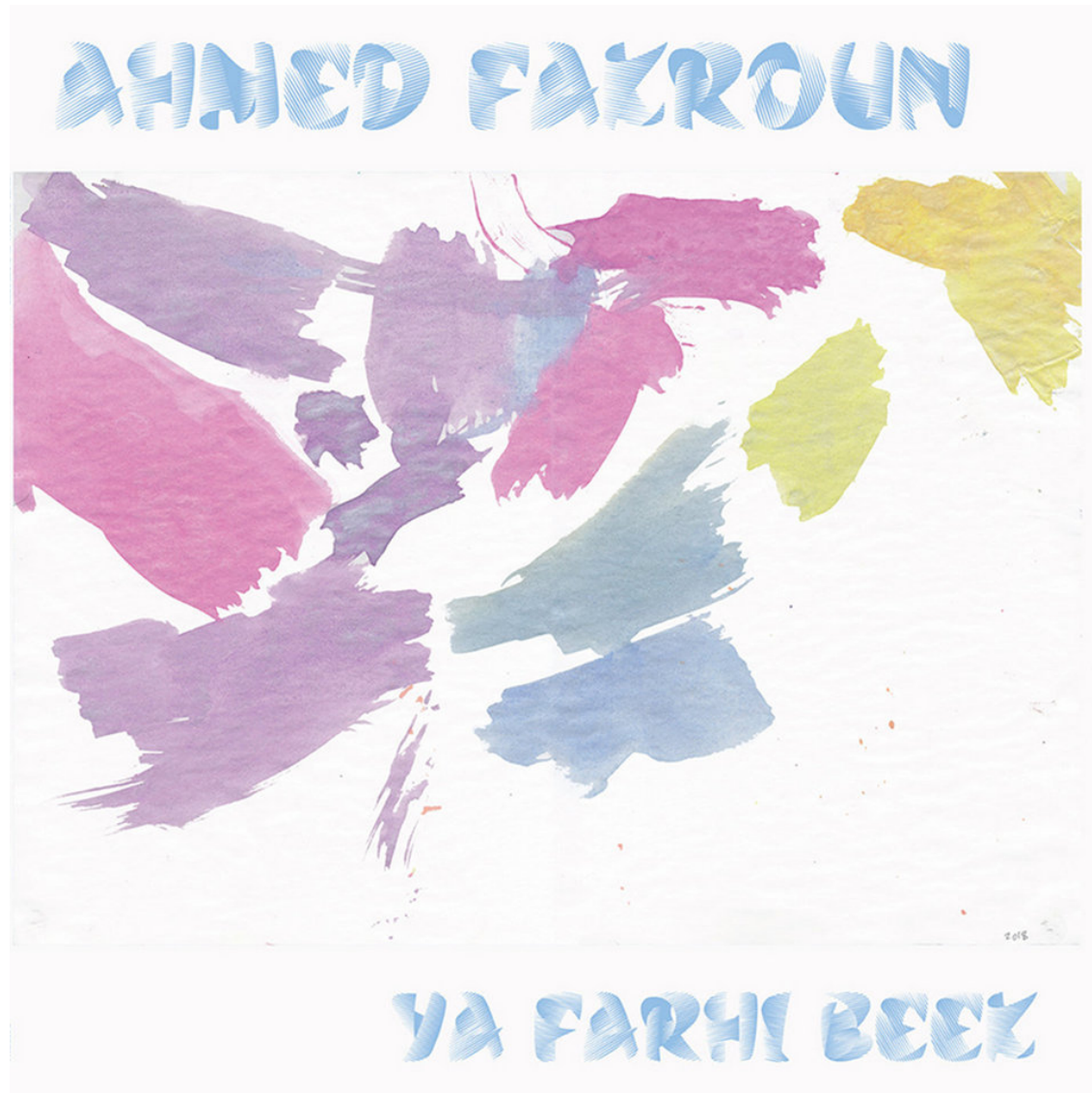
He was survived by four children, amongst them James Jamerson Jr. who became a celebrated session musician in his own right, playing with Marlena Shaw (p.209), Sylvester (p.43), Aretha Franklin (p.31), The Crusaders (p.63), The Pointer Sisters (p.395) and The

Mighty Clouds of Joy (p.265).

In the late 1970s, James Jr. formed disco group Chanson with guitarist David Williams, who later played the solo on Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean". Chanson's only hit, "Don't Hold Back", peaked at number 21 in 1979. "Magic Carpet Ride" somehow slipped under the radar. The basslines on both are tight, and now I know why.

As soon as I picked it up, I felt I'd unearthed an under-appreciated gem. Little did I know how much under-appreciated talent was hidden in the story behind this record.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, September 19th 2021



Ahmed Fakroun - Ya Fahri Beek. © 2020 Do You Records



Ahmed Fakroun

Ya Farhi Beek



Label: Do You Records (originally Celluloid)

Year: 2020 (originally 1987)

Discogs: Ahmed Fakroun - Ya Farhi Beek

Listen:



Ahmed Fakroun - Ya Farhi Beek. © 2020 Do You Records



Writing about this beautiful piece of music felt timely for three reasons.

Firstly, I had been due to see Ahmed Fakroun perform at London's Jazz Café this month, but the show was unfortunately delayed. Secondly, I finally got my hands on a copy of the repress on Charlie Bones' "Do You Records" last week. And third, Charlie Bones announced about a month ago that he was leaving NTS, after ten years of brightening up everyone's mornings.

I first found Ahmed Fakroun after hearing "Gelty" in a club. Instant Shazam. A journey of discovery soon followed, via "Love Words" and "Nisyan".

Born in Benghazi, Libya, Fakroun is a pioneer of modern Arabic music. Influenced by sounds from all over the world, he formed his first band in 1970 to perform at local events. A talented multi-linguist and multi-instrumentalist (from guitar, bass and keyboard to saz, mandol and darbouka), his work spans both styles and cultures.

After moving to England to study, he made his first recordings with BBC and Capital FM producer Tommy Vance (better known for his heavy metal radio shows), then performed across the UK with British musicians. Returning to Libya to release "Awedny" and "Njoom Al Leyel", fame across the Maghreb region quickly followed.



International sanctions on Libya impeded citizens' freedom of movement, so Fakroun spent much of the 1970s and 1980s abroad. During a lengthy stay in Paris, his international career was accelerated by "Soleil Soleil", which seamlessly blends electronic-pop styles with Arabic influences. Fakroun counts Talking Heads' David Byrne amongst his fans, and the similarity in their art-rock styles is noticeable.

Fakroun continues to produce and release music from his home studio. "Salam" with Dr. Lonnie Smith (not the Lonnie Liston Smith behind "Expansions") came out just a few years ago. Despite being almost seventy, he is also still performing, and I hope to finally see him play next year.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, October 3rd 2021**



Masayoshi Takanaka - Brazilian Skies. © 1978 Kitty Records



Masayoshi Takanaka

Brasilian Skies



Label: Kitty Records

Year: 1978

Discogs: Masayoshi Takanaka -
Brasilian Skies

Listen:



Masayoshi Takanaka - Brasilian Skies. © 1978 Kitty Records



On a trip to Columbia Road Flower Market, I discovered Idle Moments. Run by the team behind the Giant Steps sound system and Dalston's Brilliant Corners restaurant/venue, Idle Moments is part wine shop, part record store specialising in Japanese imports.

In a place which embraces such a wonderful but unexpected combo, I was perhaps destined to find the wonderful but unexpected combo of city pop guitarist Masayoshi Takanaka's latin jazz album "Brazilian Skies".

I was sold as soon as I heard "pa-pa-paya" on the title track, in keeping with my love of Polish jazz singer Ursula Dudziak's "Papaya" and similar sounds on Gilberto Gil's "Palco".

I couldn't find much on what brought Takanaka to release a whole album of latin jazz, but I'm glad he did. The rhythm on "Disco B" reminded me of "You Got The Stuff" by Bill Withers (**p.391**), "Star Wars Samba" is a city-pop infused latin jazz version of John Williams' Star Wars theme(!), and "Beleza Pula" is a vibe.

Listen to the album, and see if you also feel like you're cruising along in an open-topped Ferrari in an old SEGA OutRun arcade game.

Born in 1968 in Tokyo and still performing today after fifty years, Takanaka's musical career began in various prog-rock groups including one called "Sadistic Mika Band", a play on



John Lennon and Yoko Ono's "Plastic Ono Band". Yellow Magic Orchestra weren't the only satirists (**p.95**)...

The title of Sadistic Mika Band's 1974 album "Black Ship" likely refers to the Western vessels arriving in Japan in the 16th and 19th centuries. From one such ship, US Navy commodore Matthew C. Perry's gunboat diplomacy led to the 1854 Convention of Kanagawa. Signed under threat of force, the treaty opened Japanese ports to American vessels and ended 220 years of national seclusion.

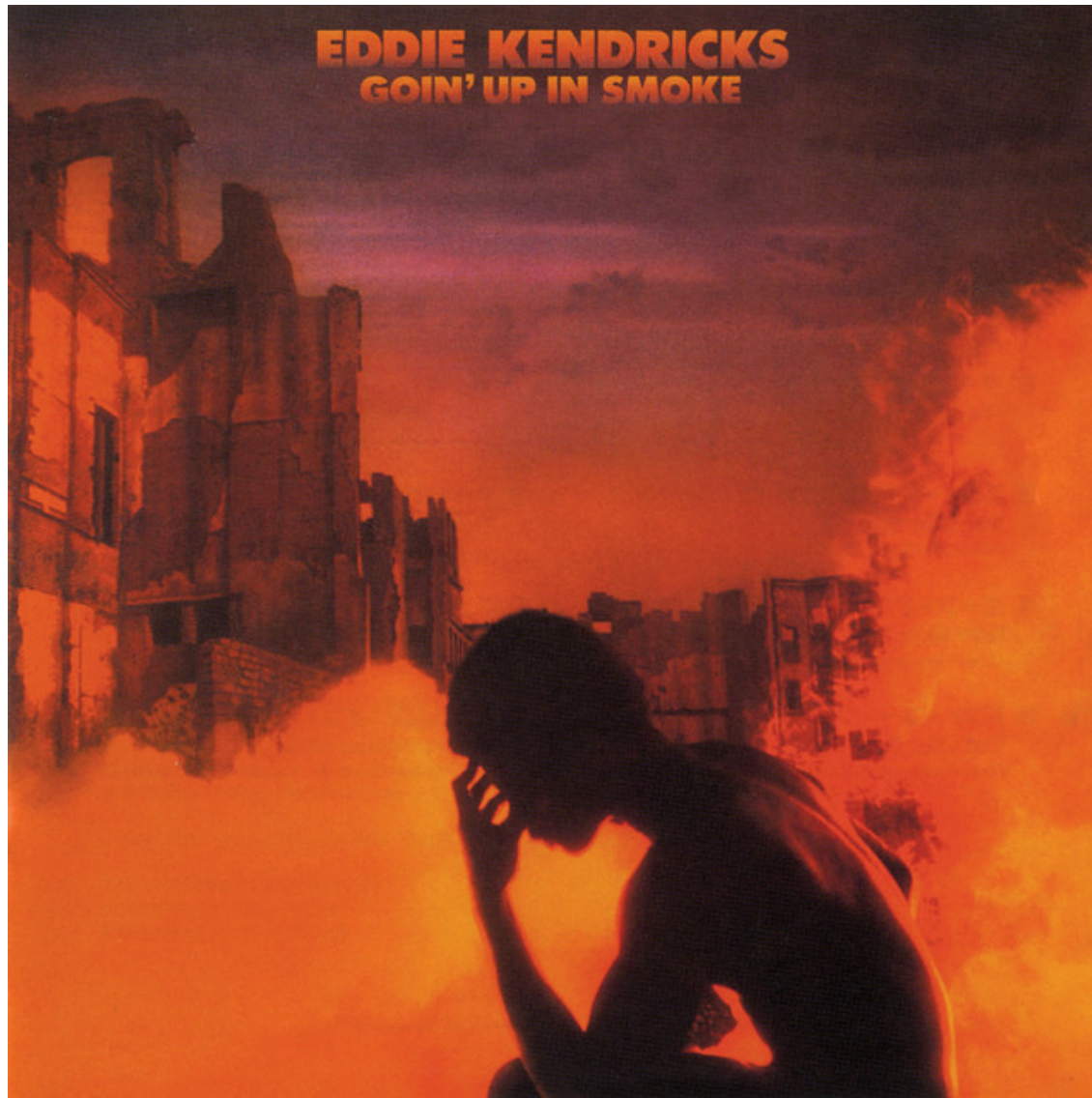
Takanaka released his first solo album in 1976, then put out almost one a year for about four decades. Often performing with his signature lagoon-blue Yamaha SG, his 1979 track "Blue Lagoon" also

became the namesake of the label he founded in 2000.

But bespoke colours are amongst the least unique features of Takanaka's collection: he often tours with a guitar make from a surfboard. One of his guitars even features a fully-functioning model train set, which does laps around the instrument's body while he plays it (horizontally, of course).

Suddenly a latin jazz album doesn't seem so unusual. Everything's relative.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, October 17th 2021



Eddie Kendricks - Goin' Up In Smoke. © 1976 Motown Record Corp.



Eddie Kendricks

Goin' Up In Smoke



Label: Motown

Year: 1976

Discogs: Eddie Kendricks - Goin' Up In Smoke

Listen:



Eddie Kendricks - Goin' Up In Smoke. © 1976 Motown Record Corp.



Over his four decades in music, Eddie Kendricks has shaped the paths of countless performers and genres. This one is a particular favourite.

Starting at the start, Kendricks was a founding member of The Temptations in 1960, when they were Mary Wells' backing group. Wells (best known for "My Guy") was also the first wife of Cecil Womack, before he married Sam Cooke's daughter Linda to form Womack & Womack (**p.121**).

The Temptations quickly became the most successful male vocal group of the decade, with hits including "My Girl", "Ain't Too Proud To Beg" and "I Wish It Would Rain". A pivotal part of early Motown, rumour had it that Kendricks

romantically pursued Diana Ross and briefly dated fellow Supremes singer Mary Wilson.

Many of the Temptations' earlier hits were co-written by Kendricks and produced by Smokey Robinson (**p.59**). When the band started working with 'psychedelic soul' pioneer Norman Whitfield, Kendricks grew uncomfortable with the new musical direction.

He left in 1971, persuaded by former band-member David Ruffin who had himself been fired for demanding increasingly special treatment.

Many of Kendricks' solo records became staples of New York's burgeoning disco



scene - none more so than "Girl You Need A Change of Mind", a favourite at David Mancuso's Loft.

In 1976, Kendricks recorded his eighth album, "Goin' Up In Smoke", with Philly soul legend Norman Harris of MFSB (p.281). That Philadelphia sound really shines here.

It took a few listens for me to realise that, for all their dancefloor groove, the lyrics' warning about the Christian Judgement Day are everything but dancefloor. I was reminded of French duo DjeuDjoah & Lieutenant Nicholson's equally groovy "El Niño" and its warning about the climate crisis.

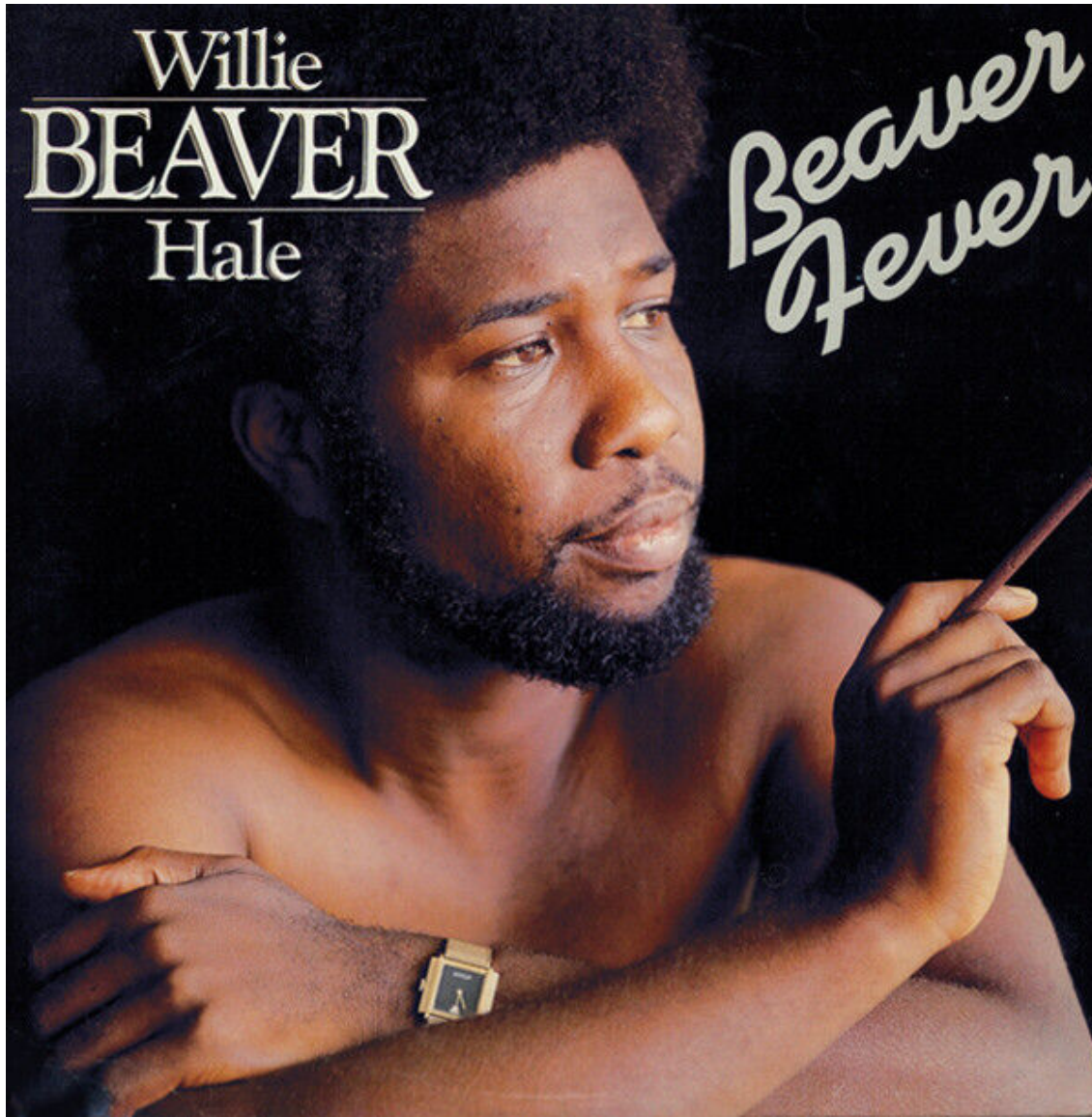
Unsurprisingly, "Goin' Up In Smoke" has

been sampled plenty, from Mariah Carey's "Meteorite" to Byron Stingly's "Light My Fire". Stingly's band, Ten City, also covered Kendricks' original.

You might know Ten City for their 1989 hit "That's The Way Love Is", produced by legendary Chicago house pioneer Marshall Jefferson.

This piece has been a particularly meandering adventure, but it's difficult to stay in one place for an artist as influential as Eddie Kendricks. Who else did you think Kendrick Lamar was named after (for real!)?

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, October 30th 2021



Willie "Beaver" Hale - Beaver Fever. © 1980 T.K. Productions, Inc.



Willie "Little Beaver" Hale

Groove On



Label: Cat

Year: 1980

Discogs: Willie "Beaver" Hale - Beaver Fever

Listen:



Willie "Beaver" Hale - Beaver Fever. © 1980 T.K. Productions, Inc.



French DJ Folamour has experienced a meteoric rise over the last few years - and it's not surprising.

Alongside recent poppy crossovers with SG Lewis and Liv East, he digs deep. His Tapes for The PPL mix series is beautiful, and many of his productions adeptly sample from funk and soul greats.

The lead track on his debut album draws on the smooth groove of Earth, Wind and Fire's "Devotion", whilst "Petit Prince Du Macadam" chops up "Get Into The Party Life" by Willie "Little Beaver" Hale. So does Jay Z's "Party Life".

Born in Arkansas in 1945 and nicknamed "Little Beaver" for his prominent teeth,

Hale quickly became a virtuoso guitarist.

In 1969, he signed to Cat, one of the many labels founded by T.K. Records president Henry Stone.

Hale played on many T.K. hits including Betty Wright's "Clean Up Woman", before launching his solo career in 1972. Label-mates Timmy Thomas (**p.35**) and Benny Latimore (**p.177**) often played the piano and keyboard on Hale's songs.

Hale's biggest hit, "Party Down", came in 1974 on the same album that brought us "Get Into The Party Life" and "Let The Good Times Roll".

On his fifth album, "Beaver Fever", the melancholy "I Feel Like Crying" was



produced by New York jazz musician Bobby Caldwell. You might know Caldwell for "What You Wouldn't Do For Love", which has been covered and sampled by everyone from Roy Ayers to 2Pac.

Distraction, November 13th 2021

Without a doubt though, my favourite track on "Beaver Fever" is "Groove On".

It is almost eight minutes of bliss, and I couldn't disagree more with music critic Robert Christagu, who once wrote that "the great T.K. guitarist ... has a problem when he sings, which is that he can't." Nonsense.

Groove on, Little Beaver, groove on.

Originally published in Melodic

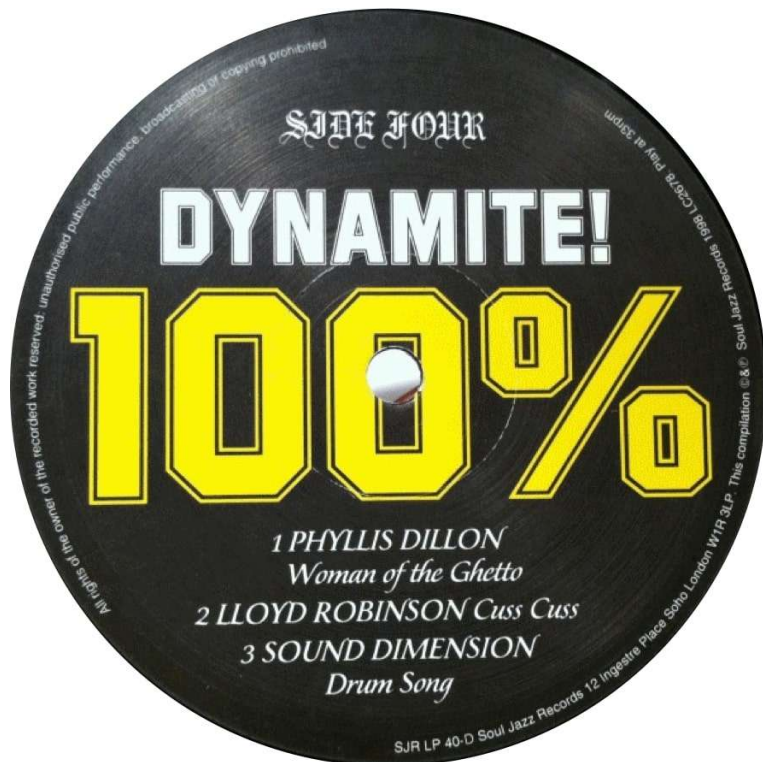


Phyllis Dillon - One Life To Live. © 1972 Treasure Isle



Phyllis Dillon

Woman of The Ghetto



Various Artists - 100% Dynamite. © 1998 Soul Jazz Records

Mates' Crates

Label: Soul Jazz Records (originally Treasure Isle)

Year: 1998 (originally 1969)

Discogs: [Various Artists - 100% Dynamite](#)

Listen:





I could write about so many of the tracks on Soul Jazz Records' iconic 1998 compilation of ska, soul, rocksteady and funk from Jamaica, aptly titled "100% Dynamite". But I didn't have to think twice about which to pick.

I *could* have written about The Marvels' cover of "Rock Steady" by Aretha Franklin (p.31). That song is not the inspiration for the genre's name, which is generally considered to be Alton Ellis' "Rocksteady". I *could* have written about The Maytals' "Night and Day", The Upsetters' "Popcorn", or Sound Dimension's "Granny Scratch Scratch".

But I was always going to write about Phyllis Dillon's cover of "Woman of the Ghetto" by Marlena Shaw (p.209),

amongst the first records to directly address gender and race discrimination in America. Unsurprisingly, it has been covered by many, but Dillon's has always stood out. Prolific Jamaican DJ I-Roy also drew on Dillon's instrumental for his 1973 track "Dr. Phibbs".

Meanwhile, I think the world has lost count of how many producers have sampled Shaw's live vocals. My favourites include French musician St. Germain's "Rose Rouge" (recently covered by British singer-songwriter Jorja Smith) and Blue Boy's instantly-recognisable crossover hit "Remember Me", which loops Shaw's line about black women often raising the children of wealthy white families.



Born in 1944 in St. Catherine, Jamaica, Phyllis Dillon recorded her first song in 1966. "Don't Stay Away" was described as "perhaps the finest female performance in Jamaican music", launching a career which spanned almost four decades.

Many of her subsequent recordings - including "Woman of the Ghetto" - were covers (see also her beautiful version of Alberto Dominguez's "Perfidia"). But turning the tables, it was her 1967 original "It's Rocking Time" that Alton Ellis drew on for his genre-defining hit "Rocksteady"!

In late 1967, Dillon moved to the US and spent the next year juggling a family and a banking job in New York with frequent

flights back to Kingston to record.

She stopped making music in 1971, and only eventually agreed to perform again at the Kingston Hotel twenty years later. Tours of the UK, Germany and Japan followed, before a return to the studio in 1998.

I'm fascinated by music which sits at cultural intersections, so hearing Dillon cover Shaw is truly special.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, December 5th 2021**



Augie Rios - Dónde Está Santa Claus?. Photograph source unknown. Found on 45cat.com



Augie Rios

Dónde Está Santa Claus?



Label: Metro Records

Year: 1958

Discogs: Augie Rios - Dónde Está Santa Claus?

Listen:



Augie Rios - Dónde Está Santa Claus?. © 1958 Metro Records



As anyone around me at this time of year can confirm, December can be relied on to bring three things: cold, rain, and my annual obsession with Augie Rios' "Dónde Está Santa Claus?".

This has held true since 2016, when I Shazamed the Christmas scene in Season 2 of *Narcos* to receive this invaluable gift. This year is no different. In such uncertain times, Augie's guaranteed resurgence might even be somewhat comforting.

Relatively little is known about Rios. Born in New York City in 1946 to Puerto Rican parents, he first found fame as a child actor in Broadway musicals from 1957, before recording "Dónde Está Santa Claus?" at the age of 12.

In an interview with The New Yorker, ten year old Augie talked about his love of pizza, spaghetti, watermelon and jigsaw puzzles. My guy. The B-Side of "Dónde Está Santa Claus?" opens with the line "Don't care who you are, Ol' Fatso, get those reindeer off my roof!". The kid knew what he wanted.

"Dónde Está Santa Claus?" wasn't even his only Christmas record. His single "Feliz Navidades (Merry Christmas To All)" was released in 1960, a full decade before José Feliciano's iconic "Feliz Navidad".

In an interview for "Decoding Despacito: An Oral History of Latin Music", Feliciano acknowledges that Rios' were the only Latin Christmas song around at



the time.

Merry Christmas.

On the theme of "onlys", Boney M's cover of "Feliz Navidad" might be the only good Christmas disco record ever. Spanish-American actress Charo worked with Tom Moulton on a disappointing version of "Dónde Está Santa Claus?" in 1978 for classic disco label Salsoul. *The* Tom Moulton, the legendary disco producer who pioneered the remix (**p.169**) and the 12" single.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, December 24th 2021**

Nothing beats Rios, who for me reignites childish festive joy in a way that the supermarket Christmas hits playlists just can't. And as one of the three wise men of the nativity once said, where there is joy, there is a UK Garage remix. So silly.



Mighty Clouds of Joy - Cloudburst. © 1980 CBS Inc.



Mighty Clouds of Joy

Glow Love



Label: Myrrh

Year: 1980

Discogs: Mighty Clouds of Joy -
Cloudburst

Listen:



Mighty Clouds of Joy - Cloudburst. © 1980 CBS Inc.



January in the UK is notorious for its Mighty Clouds of Rain, so I think we're overdue some Mighty Clouds of Joy.

Formed in 1959 in Los Angeles, The Mighty Clouds of Joy began as a traditional gospel quartet but found fame in the 1960s for incorporating elements of funk and soul. Alongside their explicitly religious material - which kept its Christian essence regardless of musical style - the group also covered popular hits including The O'Jays' "Love Train" and "Shout" by The Isley Brothers (p.79).

I can't remember the first time I heard The Mighty Clouds of Joy (or indeed, the first time I heard gospel), but "Glow Love" has always been a favourite.

Released on a label called Myrrh (of "Gold, Frankincense and ..." fame), it felt right to finally buy the record last Christmas. It now sits alongside New York Community Choir's "Express Yourself" (p.55) and (of course) The Joubert Singers' "Stand On The Word" (p.15) in the small but growing gospel section of my collection.

It turns out that both NYCC and The Mighty Clouds of Joy have covered gospel-disco staple "I'll Keep A Light In My Window", which resurfaced on Netflix's "The Get Down".

Looking into "Glow Love" on Discogs, my eyes lit up when I saw that it was arranged by Gene *Dozier*. But whilst he has produced for Minnie Riperton,



Wilson Pickett and many, many others, Gene is no relation to the legendary Lamont Dozier (**p.67**).

After going down that rabbit hole, I did find that Lamont Dozier's son Beau has produced songs for Beyonce, Ariana Grande and Jennifer Lopez - though I couldn't pin down which. More definitively, I discovered that he worked on the theme song for the Fantastic 4 film, written by Pink and performed by his then-girlfriend Joss Stone. The internet also alleges that he co-wrote a song for Ben E. King at the age of seven, but I dare say I'm sceptical.

While it has no ties to Lamont Dozier, "Glow Love" *does* feature several other music legends: guitar is played by Al

McKay of Earth, Wind and Fire, and James Jamerson Jr. of Chanson (**p.237**) plays bass across the album. With musical DNA like that, it's no surprise it's is such a mighty cloud of joy.

In 2022, as the Mighty Clouds tell us, you must try to be about the love!

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, January 9th 2022



Kay Ishiguro - Yokohama Ragtime. © 1982 Victor Musical Industries



Kay Ishiguro

Rain



Label: Invitation

Year: 1982

Discogs: [Kay Ishiguro - Yokohama Ragtime](#)

Listen:



Kay Ishiguro - Yokohama Ragtime. © 1982 Victor Musical Industries



I love Kay Ishiguro's "Rain" (雨, pronounced "Ame"). I could spend the rest of this piece expressing appreciation for the logographic Kanji alphabet, in which the characters represent concepts visually.

But having now established that "雨" looks like rainfall, I'll move on. I've wanted this record for ages, so receiving it for Christmas was magical.

"Rain" sounds like the glass-half-full optimism I wish I had. Other highlights on the album include the tragically-short "Driving Crazy" and the potassium-infused "BANANA", which features on recent a recent Nippon Funk compilation alongside Masayoshi Takanaka (p.245).

I was disappointed by how little I could find about Ishiguro online. Whilst her distinctly Windows 98-looking website is a thrillingly nostalgic reminder of how far the internet has come, it shed very little light on her career.

City pop emerged in Japan during the economic boom of the late 1970s, aimed at the growing class of well-off, city-dwelling listeners with Walkmans and cassette decks in their cars. For more, see Felix Thomson's excellent radio show on the subject.

The music was often Western-influenced: tracks like Ishiguro's "Yokohama Honky Tonk Blues" are a Japanese vision of what the US is "supposed to" sound like. Incidentally,



Yellow Magic Orchestra's "Tighten Up" (**p.95**) is essentially Japanese musicians mocking an American vision of what Japan is "supposed to" sound like.

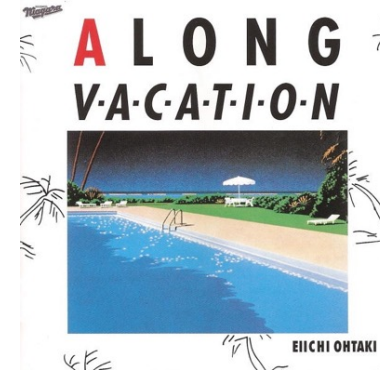
Regular readers will know that I'm fascinated by cultural crossovers, so was immediately drawn to hearing distinctly African-American genres like Jazz and Funk performed in Japanese.

Coupled with beautiful art which I can only describe as feeling distinctly *Japanese* (some favourites on the right), city pop albums like "Yokohama Ragtime" are simply wonderful.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, January 23rd 2022



Oppachi - Lonesome Beach Boy. © 1982 Disco Co., Ltd.



Eiichi Ohtaki - A Long Vacation. © 1981 Niagara Enterprises



Tatsuro Yamashita - For You. © 1982 RVC Corporation



Elkie Brooks - Shooting Star. © 1978 A&M Records Ltd.



Elkie Brooks

As



Label: A&M Records

Year: 1978

Discogs: [Elkie Brooks - Shooting Star](#)

Listen:



Elkie Brooks - Shooting Star. © 1978 A&M Records Ltd.



Digging in charity shops is always fun. Discovering new music that I'm really into is particularly unlikely, making it all the more exciting when it does happen. Elkie Brooks' "Shooting Star" was one such joy.

Like so many of the pieces I write for this column, I first encountered Brooks the long way round. I am a longtime fan of Cut Glass' "The Rising Cost of Love", originally by Jean Terrell who took over as lead vocalist of The Supremes after Diana Ross. Brooks released her own version of the song in 1979, which I discovered via a recent remix by Percolate resident DJs Krywald and Farrer.

I first encountered Krywald and Farrer

at a festival which bundled attendees into blacked-out coaches and drove us out to an unidentified woodland with no phones allowed, but that's a story for another time...

By some margin, the standout track on "Shooting Star" is Brooks' cover of Stevie Wonder's "As". Just like George Michael and Mary J. Blige, Brooks really made it her own. Indeed, she is no stranger to a cover. Her first record was a version of Etta James' "Something's Got A Hold On Me" in 1964.

I was surprised to learn that Brooks is British, born in Salford in 1945 where she won her first singing contest at the age of 15. By the mid-sixties, she was supporting The Beatles at their



Christmas show in London, and her solo career gained momentum after a stint in blues-rock band Vinegar Joe alongside Robert Palmer (best known for "Addicted to Love").

Her first promoter was Sharon Osbourne's father Don Arden, who managed the likes of Little Richard, Black Sabbath and Electric Light Orchestra. Still performing today after sixty years, Brooks is regarded by many to be the queen of British blues.

As I go on to mention her 2010 cover of "Purple Rain" (of which only a live version is available online), I'm keen to emphasise that Brooks has also written her own music. Her self-penned "Just An Excuse", also on "Shooting Star", has

been sampled by Moodymann and Bonobo.

I've said very little about "As" because I think this record speaks for itself. Totally unafraid of long pauses, it begins as airy jazz before building into surprisingly high-energy funk. The perfect set opener, I can't wait to play this one out.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, February 5th 2022**



Jorge Ben - Samba Esquema Novo. © 1963 Philips



Jorge Ben

Chove Chuva



Label: Polysom (originally Phillips)

Year: 2012 (originally 1963)

Discogs: [Jorge Ben - Samba Esquema](#)

[Novo](#)

Listen:



Jorge Ben - Samba Esquema Novo. © 2012 Polysom



When a friend travelled to São Paulo, I naively expected her to bring back dozens of iconic original pressings at unbelievably low prices. Perhaps I've been watching too many crate-digging documentaries, but it has probably been decades since this was realistic in Brazil's most populous city.

With most copies of Jorge Ben's pioneering 1963 album "Samba Esquema Novo" going for at least £100 on Discogs, a wallet-friendly repress as part of Polysom's "Clássicos Em Vinil" series was a delight nonetheless.

Born in Rio in 1942, Billboard describes Ben as the "father of samba rock", fusing funk and Bossa Nova into an influential signature sound. After a few years in his

local church choir, he started performing in clubs and was eventually introduced to established musicians like Tim Maia and Erasmus Carlos.

At 21, Ben performed "Mas Que Nada" to a small crowd which happened to include a record label executive. It was released as his first single a week later. Though it found fame through Sergio Mendes' cover, "Mas Que Nada" is Ben's original composition. Chosen as Rolling Stone's fifth-greatest Brazilian record, it is also likely the most played Portuguese-language song in the US.

I've regularly played Ben's music on the radio show, including "O Telefone Tocou Novamente" ("The Phone Rang Again") and "Comanche" (about the Native



American tribe), but I think "Chove Chuva" ("Constant Rain") captures Ben's sound best. As one of his greatest commercial successes, I'm clearly not alone. After his stellar debut, Phillips Records pushed Ben to release another two albums in the next year and a half.

I've recently discovered the wonderful Turkish singer Şenay, whose "Kent Yaşamı" surprisingly features the same melody as Rod Stewart's "Do You Think I'm Sexy". I was equally surprised to discover that Stewart took said melody from Ben's 1972 single "Taj Mahal". Soon enough, Ben sued. Stewart admitted "unconscious plagiarism", as the tune got stuck in his head after seeing Ben perform at Rio's Carnival in 1978.

To Stewart's credit, he settled the lawsuit and donated the royalties to UNICEF. He did *consciously* plagiarise "Do You Think I'm Sexy"'s synth riff from Bobby Womack's "If You Want My Love" though...

Speaking of royalties, Jorge Ben changed his name to Jorge Ben *Jor* in the late 1980s, apparently because some of his royalties were accidentally paid to US guitarist George Benson (**p.11**)!

Whichever version of "Chove Chuva" does it for you - whether Ben's, Miriam Makeba's, or Sergio Mendes' (yes, he covered this one too!) - enjoy.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, February 20th 2022**



MFSB - Love Is The Message. © 1973 CBS Inc.



MFSB

Love Is The Message



Label: Philadelphia International Records

Year: 1973

Discogs: MFSB – Love Is The Message

Listen:



MFSB - Love Is The Message. © 1973 CBS Inc.



I mention MFSB *often* - whether Earl Young's drums (**p.153**), Norman Harris' productions (**p.249**), or the group as a whole (**p.129**). So it's about time they got a column of their own.

Assembled as the studio band for Gamble and Huff's Philadelphia International Records, they played on hits by The O'Jays, Billy Paul and The Three Degrees (performed at Prince Charles' 30th Birthday party) to name but a few.

Depending on who you ask, MFSB stood for Mother, Father, Sister, Brother (identifying them as a spiritual family of musicians), or for Mother-Fuckin' Son of a Bitch (a compliment the musicians gave each other).

Instrumental (pun intended) in shaping the "Philly sound", their 1973 single "TSOP (The Sound Of Philadelphia)" defined early disco and became the theme for the Soul Train TV show. Their debut album "Love Is The Message" soon followed.

Released in the final year of America's involvement in the Vietnam War, the title and cover art are no accident. Early disco was still closer to "message music" like gospel than to synthesisers and drum machines.

But the song took a step closer to the dancefloor with a 12" version that became a staple of New York's vogue and ballroom scene. Whilst mainstream awareness of the movement grew in the



1980s, I was surprised to learn that the first drag balls took place as early as the 1880s in Washington D.C.

It was almost twenty years before MFSB's grip on *the* ballroom anthem was loosened by Masters At Work's "The Ha Dance", on which producers Kenny Dope and Little Louie sampled a controversial soundbite from Dan Ackroyd and Eddie Murphy's film "Trading Places". Whilst different in so many ways, the choppy energy running through both tracks is made for voguing.

We can't talk about the ballroom scene without mentioning Madonna, whose 1990 single propelled the dance into the public consciousness. A few years prior, Madonna's producer, Shep Pettibone

had remixed another gay anthem: Carl Bean's "I Was Born This Way" (**p.117**).

Interestingly, "Vogue" samples The Salsoul Orchestra's 1983 "Love Break", which itself draws on "Love Is The Message". Indeed, many MFSB members actually moved to Salsoul after financial disagreements with Philadelphia International's management.

Madonna and Pettibone were sued for sampling "Love Break" without permission. They won the case by arguing that the 0.2-second horn stab they'd used was short enough to be considered "trivial". This case set an interesting precedent, as rap group N.W.A. had been successfully sued for using two seconds of a Funkadelic



guitar riff on their track "100 Miles and Runnin".

Leon Vynehall's "It's Just (House of Dupree)" is amongst several other records to use "Love Break"'s iconic chops. Its title also name-checks one of the most famous ballroom "houses", which emerged as alternative families for the black and latino LGBT community.

We've strayed far from where we started precisely because MFSB's influence is so hard to contain. The band was made up of more than 30 musicians, many of whom worked on several projects at once. Several were also members of The Trammps (of "Disco Inferno" fame), for example.

Three MFSB mainstays became a legendary production trio at Salsoul. From behind the mixing desk, guitarist Norman Harris, bassist Ronnie Baker and drummer Earl Young created First Choice's "Doctor Love" (p.307), Double Exposure's "Ten Per Cent" and Loleatta Holloway's "Hit and Run", amongst countless other hits.

So as one the first songs to be inducted into the Dance Music Hall of Fame, "Love Is the Message" is the best that I could find to encapsulate the group's immeasurable impact.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, March 6th 2022



MFSB . Photograph source unknown. Found on discogs.com.



Nico Gomez And His Afro Percussion Inc. © 1971 Omega International



Nico Gomez and His Afro Percussion Inc.

Lupita



Label: Mr. Bongo (originally Omega International)

Year: 2000 (originally 1971)

Discogs: Mr. Bongo - Brazilian Beats

Listen:



Mr. Bongo - Brazilian Beats. © 2000 Mr. Bongo



Digging in Love Vinyl Hoxton last week, I found a compilation that seemed too good to be true.

As a collection of so much of my favourite music, it felt like Mr. Bongo's Brazilian Beats should have been right in front of me all along. I'll stick to just one here, but do listen through all eighteen beautiful tracks on this double LP.

Performed by Nico Gomez and His Afro Percussion Inc., "Lupita" is a high-energy heater that'll get you dancing in every kind of way.

When you heard the name Nico Gomez, I suspect you weren't picturing a Dutch-Belgian man named Joseph van het Groenwoud. You weren't picturing a

Dutch man called Bastian Bron when you first heard Fatima Yamaha's "What's A Girl To Do" either, but let's save that for another time...

Born in 1925 in Amsterdam to a Dutch Father and a South American mother, van het Groenwoud spent his youth in Cuba and the Caribbean. After briefly returning to the Netherlands, he fled to Belgium in 1946 to escape Dutch military service, which would likely have sent him to Indonesia.

After years as a violinist in a Brussels orchestra, his love of Cuban music led him to start performing under the name "Nico Gomez". He recorded his first Latin-inspired music in 1959 with Belgian group The Chakachas.



By the time that band scored their biggest hits - 1971's "Jungle Fever" (banned in the UK for its sexual breathing sounds) and "Yo Soy Cubano" (later sampled for the intro of Kendrick Lamar's "Backseat Freestyle") - Gomez had long since left to set up his own Afro Percussion Inc..

"Lupita" is a cover of a 1954 song by legendary Cuban bandleader Perez Prado. Widely considered the King of Mambo, he released "Mambo No. 5" the same year (Lou Bega will have to settle for the title of "prince", at best). Not to be 'that guy', but I prefer Prado's "Mambo No. 8"...

I couldn't find any information on whether Gomez's musicians were all

Dutch and Belgian, but the group wouldn't be unique in that regard. Samba-disco trio "Two Man Sound" (best known for "Que Tal America", **p.145**) were also Belgian. As it happens, Gomez's son Raymond is also now one of Belgium's most popular singers.

It hurts my head a bit to realise that I came across this Afro-Cuban track performed by a Dutch-Belgian musician on a Brazilian compilation by an English record label. But I think that's OK.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, March 20th 2022



Very Nice - Discretamente. © 1977 Imavox, Som E Imagem, S.A.R.L.



Very Nice

Cadunta



Label: Imavox

Year: 1977

Discogs: [Very Nice - Discretamente](#)

Listen:



Very Nice - Discretamente. © 1977 Imavox, Som E Imagem, S.A.R.L.



I've wanted this record from the moment I first heard it. I opened my first ever Mates' Crates radio show with it. After finally ordering it from Portugal, I'm delighted to write about it here. I'll let the song speak for itself, and share instead what I learned about its enigmatic performer.

For a start, "Very Nice" is hardly an easy alias to look up. I guess search engine optimisation wasn't as big a deal in 1977... The man behind the adjective is Fernando António Girão de Freitas, born in São Paulo to Brazilian singer Maria Girão and Portuguese guitarist Fernando de Freitas.

After learning to play guitar from his father, Fernando Jr. fronted several rock

bands in Rio de Janeiro. At the age of 17, he moved to Portugal and formed the band Pentagono at the core of the country's rock scene.

In Portugal, his mixed heritage led to the nickname "O Índio", "The Indian", and this cross-cultural theme runs through his story.

From 1971, Girão spent two years in Angola as part of "The Heavy Band". In that time, the group released two singles on the local subsidiary of a Portuguese label - Angola was a Portuguese colony until 1975.

His first solo single, "Engrenagem", was released in 1972. After that came "Brothers Of The Sun", then his album



"Discretamente", on which I found "Cadunta".

much this man has done. So don't sweat it - hit replay on "Cadunta" instead.

Bouncing from band to band, country to country, and genre to genre, Girão has since lived in Paris and Madrid. Over his career, he has worked with the likes of Gilberto Gil, Flora Purim, Hermeto Pascoal, and Aírto Moreira (**p.193**).

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, April 3rd 2022

In the 1980s, he sang the jingle for a Portuguese office machinery company. As recently as 2018, aged nearly 70, he sang on a heavy metal album. Yet more incredibly, he has played semi-professional football on both sides of the Atlantic and is now a coach.

It's hard to get your head around how



Average White Band & Ben E. King - Benny And Us. © 1977 Atlantic Recording Corporation



Average White Band & Ben E. King

Get It Up For Love



Label: Atlantic

Year: 1977

Discogs: Average White Band & Ben E. King - Benny And Us

Listen:



Average White Band & Ben E. King - Benny And Us. © 1977 Atlantic Recording Corporation



Regular readers will be very aware of my fascination with samples, crossovers, collaborations and covers.

As a fan of both soul legend Ben E. King and funk group Average White Band, discovering that they'd recorded an album together piqued my interest. After spotting that the opening track is a cover of Ned Doheny's "Get It Up For Love", I was sold. It isn't the only cover on the album (see also John Lennon's "Imagine" and Donny Hathaway's "Someday We'll All Be Free"), but it's certainly my favourite.

Malibu-born singer-songwriter Ned Doheny wrote "Get It Up For Love" himself, but five versions - including one by teen idol David Cassidy and a

spectacular disco heater by Táta Vega (p.339) - were released before Doheny's own.

Finding out how closely AWB worked with Doheny was almost as surprising as finding out that AWB are Scottish. Two years before the Ben E. King collab, AWB's Hamish Stuart co-wrote Doheny's "A Love of Your Own". A few years later, they co-wrote "What Cha' Gonna Do for Me", performed first by AWB, then by Chaka Khan, then by Doheny in 1988.

Intrigued by how AWB and Chaka Khan might have crossed paths (and then collaborated), I was truly shocked to discover that Hamish Stuart performed backing vocals on "I'm Every Woman", alongside Cissy and Whitney Houston!



Despite my best efforts, I struggled to unearth how Ben E. King entered the picture. Best known for "Stand By Me" alongside my own favourites "Supernatural Thing" and "Music Trance", King has also been covered and sampled extensively, but doesn't seem to have worked with AWB (or Doheny) before or since.

Nicely closing the loop though, Chaka Khan did sample AWB and Ben E. King's "A Star In The Ghetto" on her "Life Is A Dance". What a ride.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, April 17th 2022**



Asha Puthli - The Devil Is Loose. © 1976 CBS Inc.



Asha Puthli

Space Talk



Label: CBS

Year: 1976

Discogs: Asha Puthli - The Devil Is Loose

Listen:



Asha Puthli - The Devil Is Loose. © 1976 CBS Inc.



Few records can claim to have been beamed into outer space.

In 2009, Asha Puthli's 1976 genre-bending hit "Space Talk" was transmitted beyond our planet by the Goonhilly Satellite Station in Cornwall to mark the 40th anniversary of Apollo 11. Of all the tracks we could have chosen to represent our civilisation to alien life forms, it's not a bad pick.

Puthli's story is a fascinating one, and her Red Bull Music Academy lecture is definitely worth a listen in full.

Born into a Hindu family in Bombay in 1945, she attended an English-speaking Catholic school. Listening to jazz and pop on the radio while training in Indian

classical music and opera sowed the seeds for a boundary-defying career.

After a stint as a British Airways flight attendant, Puthli moved to New York on a scholarship from Martha Graham, TIME magazine's dancer of the century. But Asha soon stepped back from dance to focus on music.

After well-received vocals on records by Peter Ivers' Blues Band and avant-garde saxophonist Ornette Coleman, Puthli released her eclectic self-titled debut album in 1973. Her mellow cover of "Let Me In Your Life" (originally by Bill Withers, **p.391**) is a particular favourite.

Puthli had already built popularity in Europe and began to rub shoulders with



British stars of the era. The album's producer, Del Newman, had regularly collaborated with Elton John, and the sleeve art was shot by Mick Rock, "The Man Who Shot The Seventies" in his capacity as David Bowie's official photographer.

It wasn't long before Puthli became a familiar face at Studio 54, where she later headlined a fundraiser for a ballet company. Alongside her talent for music and dance, Puthli starred in several films and was known for her fashion sense. The New York Times recognised her as a 'fusion pioneer' in every sense.

Unsurprisingly, "Space Talk" quickly became popular at David Mancuso's Loft and was later sampled by The Notorious

B.I.G. and Pharrell's The Pharcyde.

Puthli isn't the only example of fantastic cross-cultural disco from India. The story behind Rupa's "Aaj Shanibar" is worth a read. I'm also a big fan of several tracks by Asha Bhosle, including "Udi Baba" and "Main Akeli Raat Jawan". But perhaps that's statistically inevitable, as Bhosle holds the world record for the most studio recordings - around 11,000. Cornershop's "Brimful of Asha" is also a tribute to Bhosle.

None of them have been beamed into space though.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, May 8th 2022



Millie Jackson - A Moment's Pleasure. © 1979 Polydor Incorporated



Millie Jackson

We Got To Hit It Off



Label: Spring

Year: 1979

Discogs: Millie Jackson - A Moment's Pleasure

Listen:



Millie Jackson - A Moment's Pleasure. © 1979 Polydor Incorporated



If you've been to a nightclub playing house music in the last decade, you'll have heard Millie Jackson. Tom Trago's "Use Me Again" took the 2010s by storm, partly because it is a really good house record, but mostly because Jackson is a diva.

I've owned Benny Latimore's version of "We Got To Hit It Off" for ages (p.177), but I only got my hands on Jackson's a few weeks ago. It was produced by Brad Shapiro, who had collaborated with Latimore in the 1960s, and also worked on Wilson Pickett's Loft classic "Don't Knock My Love".

For me, Jackson's energy and empowerment is unmatched. That's why I chose to write about "We Got To Hit It

Off" rather than Gene Dunlap's "Party In Me" today, though I was surprised by the coincidence that both feature backing vocals by soul trio Brandye!

Born in Georgia, Millie Jackson moved to New York after the death of her mother. She began performing in clubs in the mid-sixties, where her conversations with the audience (later attributed to nerves) became a key part of her stage act.

Many of her songs also have spoken-word sections, leading some to call Jackson the mother of hip-hop. Building on her love of poetry, she began writing proto-rap R&B in the early seventies, most notably "A Child Of God" and her raunchy 1974 album "Caught Up".



In 2001, Jackson returned from a long hiatus to release "Not For Church Folk", capturing the sound of contemporary R&B.

Her daughter Keisha is also a singer, and has performed backing vocals for the likes of Whitney Houston, Erykah Badu and OutKast.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, May 22nd 2022**



First Choice - Armed and Extremely Dangerous. © 1973 Bell Records



First Choice

Love and Happiness



Label: Philly Groove Records Inc.

Year: 1973

Discogs: First Choice - Armed and Extremely Dangerous

Listen:



First Choice - Armed and Extremely Dangerous. © 1973 Bell Records



As a true disco lover , I'm ashamed that I haven't yet written about First Choice. From "Doctor Love" to "Love Thang" and "Double Cross" to "Let No Man Put Asunder", they're as disco as it gets.

Starting as "The Debonettes", the group performed in Philly clubs after school before being introduced to producer Norman Harris of MFSB (**p.281**). Over a career sadly cut short by cardiovascular disease at the age of 39, Harris produced for the likes of Loleatta Holloway, Double Exposure and Eddie Kendricks (**p.249**). To amend my earlier statement, Norman Harris is as disco as it gets.

Though First Choice's first single with Harris failed to chart, their second -

"Armed and Extremely Dangerous" - was the a huge crossover success. For all their dancefloor classics, I was surprised that this one did best.

Many of First Choice's disco hits came after moving to Harris' Goldmind subsidiary of the prolific Salsoul Records. Surprisingly, their iconic "Let No Man Put Asunder" was released as a single three years after the group disbanded in 1980. Speaking of things taking longer than they should, it was a while before I realised that "asunder" (archaic English for "apart") wasn't "us under"...

As house music began to take over America's dancefloors, First Choice's vocals began to filter into club-ready DJ



mixes. Since then, the group has been sampled almost 500 times.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, June 5th 2022**

Whilst their songs have also been covered many times, most of First Choice's releases were original compositions. Perhaps the most notable exception (I got there eventually!) is their version of Al Green's "Love and Happiness".

I picked this one up in Liverpool's excellent Dig Vinyl on a trip up north two weeks ago for eight hours of love and happiness on Melodic's station and in Melodic's bar. So First Choice felt like the right choice for my first column since getting back.



Tantra - Tantra II. © 1982 La Drogueria Di Drugolo S.r.l.



Tantra

Macumba



Label: Importe/12

Year: 1982

Discogs: Tantra - Ma-Cum-Ba

Listen:



Tantra - Ma-Cum-Ba. © 1982 Importe/12 Records



When Pitchfork described Italo Disco as "the most amazingly uncool genre ever created", I tried not to take it as a personal attack. There's no denying that Italo is back, and I love it. Sure, you could call it kitschy low-budget Euro-pop, but where's the fun in that?

I'm glad that world class selectors from Skatebård to Hunee have been giving it a new lease of life. Sound & Motion's "Shipwrecked" is a case in point: \$15 on Discogs before Palms Trax's iconic 2019 Dekmantel set, \$100 after.

I just got back from two weeks in Amsterdam, Porto and Lisbon, where I've been thumbing through even more Italo than usual. Portugal especially had tonnes of the stuff. I picked up several

nice records, including Thaï Break's "Flowers In The Rain", but it was in Amsterdam that I found a copy of Tantra's 1982 single "Macumba".

Despite releasing five albums, not much is known about the band beyond their ties to Italian producer Celso Valli.

Born in Bologna in 1950, Valli also assembled and wrote for Azoto, best known for "San Salvador" and "Anytime Or Place". From there, he went on to collaborate with some of Italy's most successful musicians, including Mina, Andrea Bocelli and Eros Ramazzotti.

It has often been suggested that European (and especially Italian) producers created Italo to fill the gap left



by the US' falling disco output. The American music industry's hyper-commercialisation of (and saturation with) disco could only last so long...

Many cite the Disco Demolition night in 1979 as a key turning point, where Chicago radio DJ Steve Dahl led tens of thousands of disgruntled rock fans to blow up a pile of disco records before a baseball game. Admission was reduced to 98¢ for anyone who brought a record to burn. Some stadium-goers were undoubtedly motivated by racism and homophobia.

The extent of disco's decline (as well as the Demolition's role in precipitating that decline) is sometimes overstated. The commercial fortunes of many artists

and labels definitely peaked, but disco's influence on popular music and nightlife was truly irreversible.

Regardless of their reasons, European producers' early-eighties take on disco spawned a genre in its own right. Whilst most Italo records fared much better in mainland Europe than in the UK, the synths, drum machines and vocoders clearly left a mark on acts like New Order and The Pet Shop Boys.

So as you soak in all fourteen minutes of Tantra's Italo rollercoaster, ask yourself: could the most amazingly uncool genre ever created do *this*? Let fun be fun.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, July 3rd 2022



Venus Dodson - Night Rider. © 1979 Warner Bros. Records Inc.



Venus Dodson

Shining



Label: Warner Bros.

Year: 1979

Discogs: Venus Dodson - Night Rider

Listen:



Venus Dodson - Night Rider. © 1979 Warner Bros. Records Inc.



Despite only releasing one album and three singles in her two year career, Venus Dodson's place in the disco archives is indisputable.

A lot of that owes to her self-described "versatility of Ella Fitzgerald and styling of Sarah Vaughan". But much also owes to legendary producer Patrick Adams, the man behind Inner Life (p.71), Musique, Cloud One, Phreek (p.387), and The Universal Robot Band.

Dodson started as a backing singer for Herbie Mann and The Delfonics in the mid-seventies before the vocalist from Musquie introduced her to Adams.

Written and recorded while Dodson was still performing with a jazz band,

"Shining" soon found its way onto Larry Levan's turntables at New York's iconic Paradise Garage.

Born in Harlem in 1950, Patrick Adams founded countless disco groups and produced for the likes of Sister Sledge, Candi Staton and Eddie Kendricks (p.249). He sadly passed away in late June.

Adams worked particularly closely with singer Leroy Burgess, a prolific disco mainstay in his own right. He too fronted several bands, starting with R&B trio Black Ivory.

In the early 1980s, Burgess formed disco-funk group Logg, a favourite of Larry Levan for songs like "Dancing Into



The Stars" and "I Know You Will". Logg's keyboardist, Fred McFarlane, produced "Somebody Else's Guy" for Jocelyn Brown and "Show Me Love" for Robin S.

A few years after that, as part of dance trio Aleem, Burgess scored another hit with "Release Yourself". Did I mention that he's also related to Betty Wright, Archie Bell and several members of Kool and the Gang? Or that he *wrote* Venus Dodson's "Shining"?

Everything I read about New York in the seventies gives me the impression that everyone knew everyone. What an era.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, August 1st 2022**

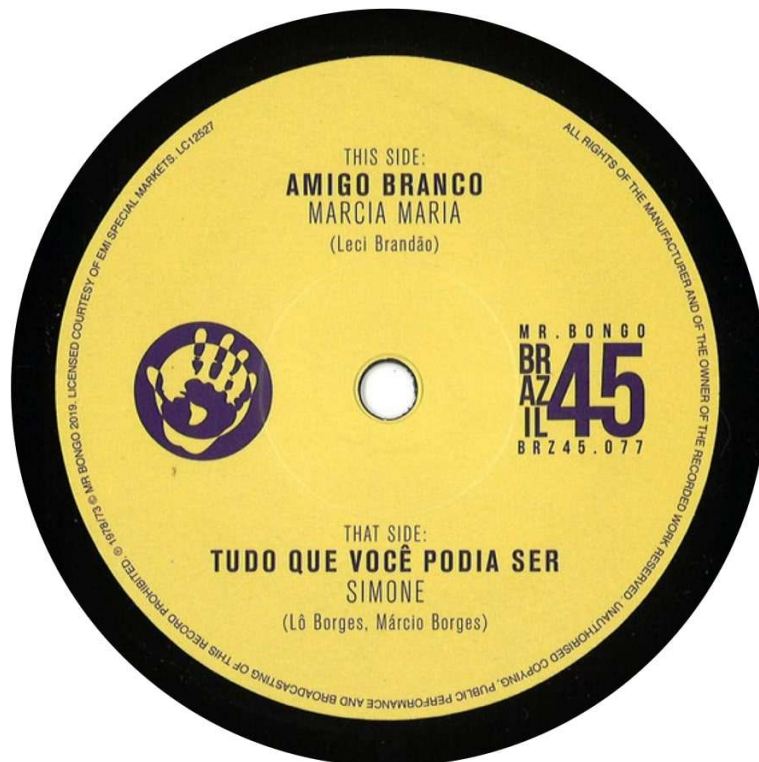


Marcia Maria - Marcia Maria. © 1978 Capitol Do Brasil



Marcia Maria

Amigo Branco



Label: Mr Bongo (originally Capitol)

Year: 2019 (originally 1978)

Discogs: Marcia Maria / Simone - Amigo Branco / Tudo Que Você Podia Ser

Listen:



Marcia Maria / Simone - Amigo Branco / Tudo Que Você Podia Ser. © 2019 Mr. Bongo



One of my favourite house tracks of 2017 was COEO's "Cabrio Mango". Freshly graduated, it was pure sunshine which I still associate with my first few months of being a grown-up. Years later, I traced it back to Marcia Maria's "Amigo Branco" ("White Friend"), itself almost certainly a cover of Djalma Dias' "Nada Sei de Preconceito" ("I Don't Know About Prejudice").

The song was written by African-Brazilian samba musician Leci Brandão. Currently representing the Communist Party in São Paulo's Legislative Assembly, she has actively opposed discrimination and regularly performed at LGBT events against homophobia.

As a non-Portuguese speaker who first

encountered the song via an upbeat remix, I'd had no idea that it was addressing race issues. Listening to my reissued copy of "Amigo Branco", my thoughts turn to our responsibility as consumers to understand and appreciate the decades-old artistry from around the globe that we can now access so easily.

On that topic, my dear friend Felix Thomson has written an excellent piece interrogating the resurgent Western fascination with "world music".

As is so often the case when researching for the column, I stumbled upon some fortuitous connections to other musicians I've written about.

Two years after "Cabrio Mango", COEO



released "Don't Oho", which found fame through that Folamour Boiler Room. Like Disclosure's "Tondo", "Don't Oho" samples "Tondoho Mba" by Cameroonian singer Eko Roosevelt.

That Folamour Boiler Room begins with a song by Odyssey (**p.83**), namely their cover of Lamont Dozier's "Going Back To My Roots" (**p.67**).

On the same EP as their edit of "Amigo Branco", COEO also produced a remix of Dozier's "Shout About It".

Dozier sadly passed away last week, but the music lives on forever.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, August 14th 2022**



Gábor Szabó - Nightflight. © 1976 Phonogram, Inc.



Gábor Szabó

Keep Smilin'



Label: Mercury

Year: 1976

Discogs: Gábor Szabó - Nightflight

Listen:



Gábor Szabó - Nightflight. © 1976 Phonogram, Inc.



As one of my favourite guitarists, a column on Szabó is long overdue.

Born in Budapest in 1936, Gábor Szabó moved to the US after the 1956 Hungarian Uprising. Starting as a student protest against Soviet influence, the Red Army's response killed almost 3,000 and compelled over 200,000 to seek political refuge abroad.

Having played the guitar since the age of 14, Szabó later attended the Berklee College of Music in Boston and performed in several groups.

His first solo album featured "Gypsy Queen", which later became a hit for Carlos Santana, who spoke extensively about Szabó in interviews.

Not dissimilarly, Szabó wrote and recorded the soul jazz classic "Breezin" in 1970 with Bobby Womack (brother of Cecil, **p.121**), but the 1976 version by George Benson (**p.11**) performed much better commercially.

It seems the relationship got a little "Stormy", as Szabó complained about Benson's success whilst Benson accused Szabó of failing to appreciate the song.

The year 1976 also brought the release of Szabó's "Nightflight". Much of the album was written and arranged by Bunny Sigler, who also worked with Double Exposure and First Choice (**p.307**). In the liner notes, he's credited as "Bundion Siggallucci", just for fun.



Sigler had released a version of "Keep Smilin'" a few years earlier but - despite being produced by the legendary Norman Harris of MFSB (**p.281**) and co-written by Eddie Kendricks' backing vocalist Alan Felder (**p.249**) - it only peaked at No.46 in the R&B chart.

In contrast, "Keep Smilin'" became the biggest hit of Szabó's career - finally his turn to get big with a cover. His version also interpolated lyrics from William DeVaughn's "Be Thankful For What You Got" (itself covered countless times, **p.129**).

Despite scoring his greatest commercial success with a cover, Szabó is rightly considered one of the era's most original guitarists, blending jazz, rock,

Hungarian and later Indian influences into his unique work. We're incredibly fortunate for the pace at which he released music, as he passed away in 1982 aged just 45.

Keep smilin'. Or as Google Translate tells me that they say in Hungary, *mosolyogj*.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, August 28th 2022**

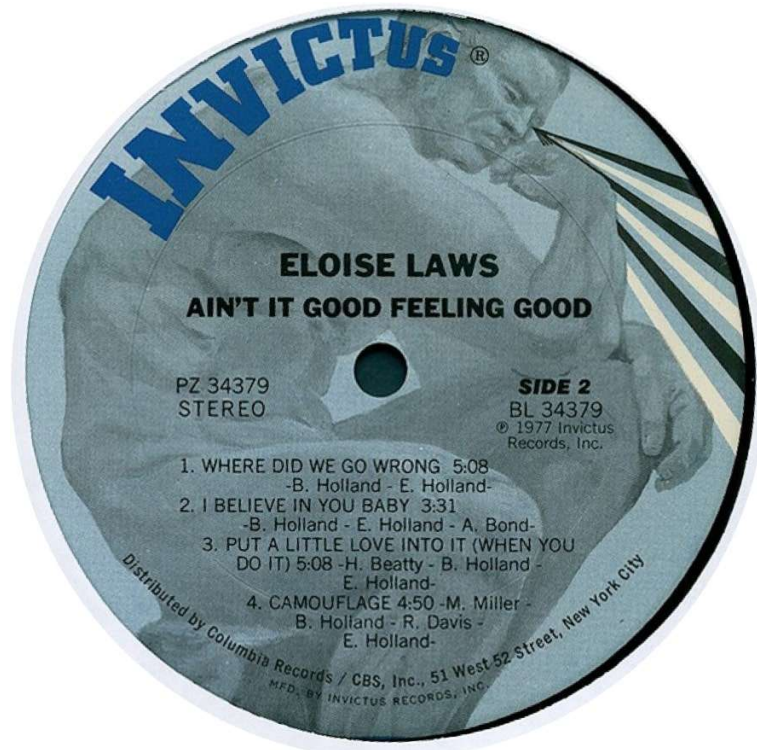


Eloise Laws - Ain't It Good Feeling Good. © 1977 Invictus Records Inc.



Eloise Laws

Put A Little Love Into It (When You Do It)



Label: Invictus

Year: 1977

Discogs: Eloise Laws - Ain't It Good
Feeling Good

Listen:



Eloise Laws - Ain't It Good Feeling Good. © 1977 Invictus Records Inc.



As one of several musically gifted siblings, I expected this piece on Eloise Laws to be full of musical connections. But even I was surprised by the web of talent around "Put A Little Love Into It".

Eloise was born in Texas in 1943 and began recording with the iconic Holland-Dozier-Holland production trio in the 1970s, of which Lamont Dozier (p.67) sadly passed away at the start of August. Later in her career, Laws also worked with the likes of Harvey Mason and Aquarian Dream.

"Put A Little Love Into It" was arranged by Dale Warren, nephew of Motown founder Berry Gordy's second wife Raymona. As well as producing for Isaac Hayes and the Staple Singers, Warren

performed in the funk group 24 Carat Black and worked with Japanese jazz singer Kimiko Kasai (p.407) on her cover of Herbie Hancock's "Chameleon".

Kasai is now married to Minnie Ripperton's ex-husband Richard Rudolph. Ripperton and Rudolph's daughter Maya (herself an actor) is married to director Paul Thomas Anderson. I really enjoyed his film "Liquorice Pizza", starring Alana Haim and her sisters. But back to the musical family that I'm *supposed* to be writing about...

Perhaps the best-known Laws sibling is flautist and saxophonist Hubert, whose career spans genres and decades. He worked with everyone from Aretha



Franklin (**p.31**) and Ella Fitzgerald to Quincy Jones and Stevie Wonder, and was also an early member of The Crusaders (**p.63**).

In 1971, Hubert released a critically-acclaimed jazz fusion album covering the likes of Bach and Debussy with an all-star cast including Brazilian percussionist Airta Moreira (**p.193**). The same year, he played flute on Gil Scott-Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised".

My first encounter with the Laws was Hubert's 1980 hit "Family", aptly named as vocals are by his sister Debra. In 2003, she unsuccessfully sued J.Lo for sampling her 1981 single "Very Special". "Very Special" was produced by her

(other) brother, saxophonist Ronnie Laws.

Ronnie's career began alongside South African trumpeter Hugh Masakela, before joining Earth, Wind and Fire. He is best known for "Always There", which has since been covered by Side Effect, Willie Bobo, and Incognito ft. Jocelyn Brown.

And just as you reach for the handbrake, we've finished our race through (and around) the Laws. There's some motion sickness tablets in the glove compartment, I'll drive more carefully next time.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, September 15th 2022



Santa Esmerelda Starring Leroy Gomez - Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood. © 1977 Philips



Santa Esmerelda

Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood



Label: Philips

Year: 1977

Discogs: Santa Esmerelda Starring
Leroy Gomez - Don't Let Me Be
Misunderstood

Listen:



Santa Esmerelda Starring Leroy Gomez - Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood. © 1977 Philips



Just like Romanian pan-flautist Gheorghe Zamfir's "The Lonely Shepherd" (**p.103**), Santa Esmerelda's "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" was thrust into the public consciousness by Tarantino's "Kill Bill" films.

Shockingly, Nina Simone's 1964 original failed to chart, but a 1965 cover by Newcastle-based rock group The Animals reached No.15 in the Billboard Hot 100.

Twelve years later, two French singer-songwriters created Santa Esmerelda to perform their compositions, and Massachusetts-born and Paris-based musician Leroy Gómez was recruited as lead vocalist. Gómez's career began playing alongside five Cape-Verdean

brothers in soul group Tavares, best known for "Heaven Must Be Missing An Angel".

After playing saxophone on Elton John's "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road", Gómez was tempted by success outside Tavares. His solo hit "Here We Go Around" led to a chance encounter with Santa Esmerelda's producers, and "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" was recorded just a few months later.

I was surprised to discover that the record was written and partially arranged by legendary French disco producer Don Ray (**p.185**), famous for both his solo work and collaborations with Cerrone (**p.133**).



Like The Animals, Santa Esmerelda peaked at No.15 in the charts, but Gómez was soon replaced by vocalist Jimmy Goings. The same year, the group scored their second hit with "The House of the Rising Sun" - another song made famous by The Animals.

Santa Esmerelda never enjoyed major chart success again, but their "Sevillia Nights" featured in Motown and Casablanca's disco comedy "Thank God It's Friday". Alongside Donna Summer and The Commodores, the film starred Terri Nunn, later lead vocalist on "Take My Breath Away" from the Top Gun soundtrack.

Leroy Gómez later re-joined Santa Esmerelda, and continues to tour with

them to this day. He remains active as a session saxophonist and was the first foreign musician to receive the Venice Music Festival's Gondola d'ora.

As "Feliz Navidad" season swings back around frighteningly quickly, I saw that Gómez has also performed with José Feliciano.

And I'll leave you with another Euro-disco cover of an American classic: Italian group Colorado's version of "California Dreaming".

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, October 2nd 2022**



Freeez - Southern Freeez. © 1981 Beggars Banquet



Freeez

Southern Freeez



Label: Beggars Banquet

Year: 1981

Discogs: [Freeez - Southern Freeez](#)

Listen:



Freeez - Southern Freeez. © 1981 Beggars Banquet



Sometimes you didn't know you wanted something until after you've got it. I'd heard "Southern Freeez" countless times, but only after picking it up in a charity shop did I appreciate it for the UK jazz-funk classic that it is.

Formed in 1978 in North London by producer John Rocca, I was surprised to discover that "Southern Freeez" was named after a dance move popular at Southgate's "Royalty" club, not far from where I grew up. Whenever Rodney Franklin's "The Groove" was played, the crowd would freeze at particular moments.

As with every clip of long-running music show Top of the Pops, I found it surreal to watch Freeez lip-syncing to "Southern

Freeez" on the program. The BBC deliberately avoided live performances so that audiences could hear exactly what the records would sound like before buying them. Which sort of makes sense?

Freeez later had an international hit with "I.O.U.", remixed by iconic New York DJ John "Jellybean" Benitez (producer of Madonna's "Holiday" and Whitney's "Love Will Save The Day"). But their success spans far beyond these two records, as members disbanded and regrouped in several combinations over the course of more than twenty years.

Rocca and keyboardist Andy Stennett recorded as Pink Rhythm in 1985. Guitarist Jean-Paul Maunick played



with Light of the World before forming Incognito. On Giles Peterson's advice, the band scored their biggest hit by teaming up with Jocelyn Brown to cover "Always There" by Ronnie Laws (**p.327**).

Perhaps most surprising, Rocca later worked with trance DJ Paul Oakenfold as part of the balearic beat group Electra, best known for their 1988 cover of Elkin & Nelson's "Jibaro".

"Southern Freeez" has also been covered several times, including by Beverly Knight and by Giles Peterson's band, Sonzeira. It seems no good story about the UK scene is complete without several mentions of Peterson, who has also recently released an album with Jean-Paul Maunick as STR4TA.

I've only explored a small part of the rabbit hole around this group of musicians, but I'll leave it there for now. As the days get colder, grab a hot drink and warm up with Freeez.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, October 16th 2022**



Táta Vega - Givin' All My Love. © 1980 Motown Record Corporation



Táta Vega

(I've Got My) Second Wind



Label: Melodies International (originally Motown)

Year: 2022 (originally 1980)

Discogs: Tata Vega - (I've Got My)
Second Wind

Listen:



Táta Vega - (I've Got My) Second Wind. © 2022 Melodies International Limited



The first time I heard this track thanks to YouTube's algorithm, I don't think I listened to all five minutes. The second time, hearing Palms Trax close at Barbarella's in Croatia, I was bopping. The third time, towards the end of My Analog Journal's first party at The Jazz Cafe in Camden, I bought it on my walk home. This one *grows*.

Born Carmen Rosa Vega in Mexico City then raised between New York, Panama and Puerto Rico as her father travelled in the Air Force, Vega's professional career began at the age of just 12. At 17, she legally adopted her childhood nickname, "Táta".

Motown founder Berry Gordy signed Vega's band, Earthqure, in the early

1970s. They were dropped from the label when their debut album failed to chart, but Vega stayed on under the wing of Gordy's niece, Iris.

From the four solo albums that followed, two tracks stand out. Her cover of Ned Doheny's "Get It Up For Love" (also performed by Average White Band, **p.295**) became hugely popular on the UK disco scene. It's not hard to see why this certified dancefloor heater was remixed by Dimitri from Paris and John Morales (**p.71**).

But this time, the spotlight is on her cover of Al Johnson's "I've Got My Second Wind". Both versions were released on albums by Vega and Johnson in the same year, and their stars aligned



once again on opposite sides of Melodies International's 2022 repress.

Vega's version features G.C. Cameron, who sang lead vocals on The Spinners' 1970 hit "It's A Shame", co-written and produced by Stevie Wonder.

Bringing things full circle, Vega also performed backing vocals for the likes of Wonder, Chaka Khan and Madonna. Even better, she recorded two Spanish versions of "Circle of Life" from Disney's "The Lion King", one for Latin America and one for Spain. Spot the difference?

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, November 6th 2022**



Gloria Ann Taylor - Love Is A Hurtin' Thing. © 2015 Gloria Taylor Whisenhunt



Gloria Ann Taylor

Love Is A Hurtin' Thing



Label: Music Gallery (originally Selector Sound)

Year: 2014 (originally 1972)

Discogs: Gloria Ann Taylor - Deep Inside You

Listen:



Gloria Ann Taylor - Deep Inside You. © 2014 Music Gallery Recordings



Gloria Ann Taylor's "Love Is A Hurtin' Thing" is one of the most memorable pieces of music I've ever heard. Every second of its seven and a half minutes is hauntingly beautiful.

Writers at Pitchfork, Bandcamp and Wax Poetics have penciled their thoughts on the music itself, so I'll stick to the story.

Taylor is by no means the only soul singer for whom commercial success came decades late, fuelled by rare groove diggers and the vinyl revival. But her brief career is particularly unique.

Born in West Virginia but raised in Ohio, Taylor suffered from rheumatic fever as a child and was not expected to live to adulthood. Although she did, she lost her

mother as a teen and began singing in clubs to support her own young children. In one of these clubs, she was discovered by James Brown's promoter, Walter Whisenhunt. He soon became her manager, producer and husband.

Taylor's debut single proved to be her biggest contemporary hit. "You Got To Pay The Price" was even nominated for the Female R&B Performance Grammy in 1970, but lost out to Aretha Franklin's "Share Your Love With Me". Indeed, Franklin (**p.31**) won that category every year between its creation in 1968 and Natalie Cole's 1976 victory with "This Will Be (An Everlasting Love)".

Owing to her exceptional talent and Whisenhunt's distinctive production,



Taylor's discography is impressively broad and eclectic. But none of her subsequent releases - not even her funk cover of Dolly Parton's "Jolene" - performed well in the charts

On the subject of "Jolene", take a few minutes to watch a pair teenage twins hearing Dolly's original for the first time. Their reaction to Phill Collins is equally heartwarming.

By 1977, both Taylor's career and her marriage stalled. She returned to Ohio, found other work, and sang only in church. She didn't return to the studio until her earlier music began to be reissued almost forty years later.

In 2016, she recorded three new songs

with Estonian multi-instrumentalist Misha Panfilov. Of these, "Be Worthy" is my favourite. Taylor sadly passed away the following year, aged 73.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, November 19th 2022**



Locksmith - Unlock The Funk. © 1980 Arista Records, Inc.



Locksmith

Far Beyond



Label: Arista

Year: 1980

Discogs: [Locksmith - Unlock The Funk](#)

Listen:



Locksmith - Unlock The Funk. © 1980 Arista Records, Inc.



As I've often written in these columns, you've already heard Locksmith's "Unlock The Funk", even if you don't know it. "Red Alert" by iconic British big-beat duo Basement Jaxx has remained inescapable for over twenty years, and at least some of that success owes to its Locksmith sample.

Our story begins with saxophonist Grover Washington Jr. - best known for "Mister Magic", "Just The Two Of Us", and his covers of "Inner City Blues", "Take Five" and "Soul Strut". Grover Sr. was also a saxophonist and collector of jazz records, who encouraged his son to play from the age of eight.

Grover Jr. was drafted into the US Army alongside drummer Billy Cobham, who

later introduced him to many New York jazz musicians.

Locksmith formed in the late seventies from members of Grover Jr.'s backing band and released only one album before disbanding in 1980. Few had solo success outside the group, though percussionist Leonard William Gibbs Jr. later toured with the likes of Whitney Houston, Erykah Badu and Wyclef Jean.

That one album was produced by drummer Harvey Mason, best known for "Groovin' You" and "On and On". To mention yet another "Jr.", Mason's son Harvey Mason Jr. is an accomplished producer in his own right, with credits on releases by Justin Timberlake, Mariah Carey and Luther Vandross.



Perhaps most surprisingly, he stepped out from behind the mixing desk to provide backing vocals on the soundtrack of the 2016 film "Sing".

So, just as they intended, sit back, hit play, and "Unlock The Funk" with Locksmith. For more familial funk, see "Magic Carpet Ride" by James Jamerson Jr.'s band Chanson (**p.237**).

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, December 4th 2022**



The Billy Taylor Trio with Candido - The Billy Taylor Trio with Candido. © 1956 Prestige Records Inc.



The Billy Taylor Trio with Candido

Mambo Inn



Label: Prestige

Year: 1982 (originally 1956)

Discogs: The Billy Taylor Trio with Candido - The Billy Taylor Trio with Candido

Listen:



The Billy Taylor Trio with Candido - The Billy Taylor Trio with Candido. © 1982 Prestige Records Inc.



It's rare that music catches me totally off guard. But Billy Taylor and Candido's "Mambo Inn" is quite something. I had no idea how wide its web spread, so let's start at the beginning.

Born in North Carolina in 1921, Billy Taylor is described as the world's foremost spokesman for jazz. A pianist, composer, activist and educator, his piano teacher Henry Grant had taught the iconic Duke Ellington a generation earlier. Taylor was best known for his civil rights anthem "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free", though he also founded the Jazz Foundation of America to support elderly musicians.

His trio evolved over the decades, but at points included the likes of Grady Tate

(percussionist for Simon and Garfunkel), Ben Tucker (composer of "Comin' Home Baby") and renowned improviser Charles Mingus, who pioneered the use of tape editing and overdubbing techniques to perfect his recordings.

When this version of "Mambo Inn" was recorded, Taylor was working with drummer Percy Brice and bassist Earl May, who initially juggled late night performances alongside Miles Davis with his day-job in insurance.

Most important on this album, though, is legendary Afro-Cuban jazz pioneer Candido, who sadly passed away in 2020 at the age of 99. After moving from Havana to New York in 1946, he played alongside Dizzy Gillespie and Frank



"Machito" Grillo, who many credit as a creator of the salsa genre. Whilst I knew Candido's many disco hits (see "Jingo", "Dancin' and Prancin'" and "Thousand Finger Man"), I'd never heard him play with a jazz group in this way before.

One of "Mambo Inn"'s writers, Mario Bauzá, is widely recognised for introducing Cuban music to the US. A clarinet child-prodigy who joined the Havana Symphony Orchestra at the age of 11, his "Tangó Suite" is considered the first true Afro-Cuban record. The concentration of talent in record's orbit is astounding, tied together by the fact that Bauzá married Frank "Machito" Grillo's sister!

The original "Mambo Inn" is a nice little

jazz tune, and Billy Taylor's take is just as pleasant. Then, after one minute and forty five seconds of toe-tapping, Candido dives in and things get special.

It is fitting that such a staggering performance was supervised by Prelude Records founder Bob Weinstock and recorded by Blue Note engineer Rudy Van Gelder. Before opening his own studio in 1959, Van Gelder recorded the likes of Miles Davis and Cannonball Adderley in his parents' living room.

So as you hit play on Mambo Inn in *your* living room, I hope you're ready.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, December 18th 2022**



Carly Simon - Tranquillo (Melt My Heart). © 1978 Elektra / Asylum Records



Carly Simon

Tranquilo (Melt My Heart)



Label: Elektra

Year: 1978

Discogs: Carly Simon - Tranquillo (Melt My Heart)

Listen:



Carly Simon - Tranquillo (Melt My Heart). © 1978 Elektra Records



Last summer, some friends and I started a new party called "Melt My Heart", so it felt right to dig into the story behind its name, Carly Simon's "Tranquillo".

Born in 1943, Simon began performing at the age of 20 with her sister Lucy before pursuing a solo career in the early seventies. Her debut won the Best New Artist Grammy, and she went on to produce at least an album every two years for the next two decades.

Surprisingly, her only No.1 single was "You're So Vain", which she later donated to an anti-Trump campaign.

The year of its release, Simon married best-selling singer-songwriter James Taylor, known for his covers of Carole

King's "You've Got A Friend" and Marvin Gaye's "How Sweet It Is To Be Loved By You". The pair wrote and sang together until their divorce in 1983.

Simon's 1977 single "Nobody Does It Better" is ranked amongst the greatest Bond themes, and her 1982 hit "Why" was also recorded for a film. Written by Chic's Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards, the whole soundtrack of the 1982 comedy "Soup for One" is excellent. Fonzi Thornton's "I Work For A Livin'" is great, and Modjo sampled Chic's title track on their 2000 hit "Lady".

"Tranquillo (Melt My Heart)" was released in 1978 on Simon's album "Boys In The Trees" (also the title of her memoir). Its cover art - a topless photo



expertly airbrushed to paint on clothes - won a Grammy for Best Album Package.

Alongside Simon and James Taylor, "Tranquillo" was written by prolific Turkish-American producer Arif Mardin.

Born in Istanbul into a renowned family of statesmen and diplomats, Mardin grew up listening to the likes of Bing Crosby and Glenn Miller but studied at the London School of Economics and never intended to pursue a career in music.

After meeting American jazz icons Dizzy Gillespie and Quincy Jones at a concert in Ankara in 1956, Mardin shared demo compositions which earned him the first Quincy Jones Scholarship to the Berklee

College of Music. He went on to write and produce for an awe-inspiring list of musicians, most notably shaping the falsetto sound that rejuvenated the Bee Gees' careers.

Like most of Simon's discography, "Tranquillo" is a truly fantastic record. Whilst she may not be experiencing the same revival as the likes of Kate Bush, her influence on contemporary pop cannot be underestimated: Carly Rae Jepsen and Taylor Swift cite Simon as a key inspiration.

Let's make "Tranquillo" the new "Running Up That Hill". Get streaming.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, January 1st 2023



TU ÉS A QUE EU QUERO (TU NÃO PRENDAS O CABELO) / COVARDE
PODEMOUS / JUNTANDO O AMOR / JUNTANDO O AMOR
EL AMOR EL AMOR / UM ESTRANHO NA MULTIDÃO

VOLVERÉ / MAGIA (BOLA DE CRISTAL MENTIA)
QUISERAM SER / QUISERAM SER / JOZINHO
ANDA-ME / FINHAS QUE SER TU

JOSÉ PINHAL

VOL.1



José Pinhal - Vol. 1. © 2022 Lusofonia Record Club



José Pinhal

Tu És A Que Eu Quero



Label: Lusofonia Record Club (originally Nova Força)

Year: 2022 (originally 1984)

Discogs: [José Pinhal - Vol. 1](#)

Listen:



José Pinhal - Vol. 1. © 2022 Lusofonia Record Club



There are lots of reasons why you might buy a record, but there's always a *real* reason. More than why you might add a song to a playlist. You wouldn't spend the time or money without a real reason. Maybe my love of vinyl is really a love of *real* reasons, and where they can lead.

Our story begins mid-lockdown, when most mornings started with a long walk listening to the inimitable Charlie Bones on NTS. I discovered many a curveball, but this one was different.

José Pinhal had my attention from the opening note, and with that first woodblock began a love story beyond my wildest dreams. I never thought I would be so captivated by a sound I could recreate with a pen against my desk. I

had to own the record immediately. Is that a real reason? It was real to me.

But I could not own the record, and nor could anyone else. Released exclusively on cassette in 1984, Pinhal's "Volume 1" had never seen a pressing plant. Almost every week, I checked if someone out there had plans to bring Pinhal to the turntable, but as weeks turned to months, turned to seasons, hope faded.

And then, last year, it appeared. Lusofonia Record Club. A new label dedicated to preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of the lusophone (Portuguese-speaking) world. Their first release, Pinhal's "Volume 1". Out of stock and €300 on Discogs. Had I really missed it? I got in touch immediately.



Radio silence for weeks. Or so I thought, until I discovered a reply, buried in my Spam folder, offering me the final copy. Robbed of the e-mail I'd long pin(h)ed for, it was amongst the angriest I've ever been. If it wasn't gone then, surely it was gone now. Had I really missed it?

Much to my surprise, it was still available and, a few weeks later, it was in my hands. Label founders Léo and Tomas were amongst the friendliest people I've ever encountered. We kept in touch, and even met for a drink in Porto. That's a *real* reason. I love every Lusofonia Record Club release and have played several on the radio show.

Whilst *my* Pinhal story began in 2020, he was discovered as a solo artist in 1978

and grew in popularity through his nightclub performances, local radio presence and cassette releases. As the beautifully-written liner notes put it, Pinhal then "flirted with oblivion" until the early 2000s, when a copy of his tapes were found in the trash at a house in his coastal hometown in northern Portugal.

Soon shared online, the rebirth began as his music spread to parties all over the country. Eventually, Pinhal became one of the great myths of Portuguese popular music, now with his own tribute band and documentary. Check out Lusofonia Record Club.

**Originally published in Melodic
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Dennis Edwards Featuring Siedah Garrett - Don't Look Any Further. © 1984 Motown Record Corp.



Dennis Edwards

Don't Look Any Further



Label: Gordy

Year: 1984

Discogs: Dennis Edwards Featuring Siedah Garrett - Don't Look Any Further

Listen:



Dennis Edwards Featuring Siedah Garrett - Don't Look Any Further. © 1984 Motown Record Corp.



The last few columns focused on my personal connection to a couple of records, and I've missed nerding out samples and family ties. That opportunity presented itself after picking up a copy of Dennis Edwards' "Don't Look Any Further" while in Liverpool for a Melt My Heart show last week.

Born near Birmingham, Alabama, Edwards started singing in his father's church as a toddler and became its Choir Director when the family moved to Detroit. He joined a gospel group called The Mighty Clouds of Joy (not that one! **p.265**), then successfully auditioned for Motown despite his family disapproving of secular music. There, he was assigned to The Contours, who regularly opened for The Temptations.

At this time, Temptations members Otis Williams and Eddie Kendricks (**p.249**) were thinking about replacing lead singer David Ruffin. A couple of months of firing, hiring, stage-crashing, and no-showing later, Edwards joined the band. He led the group through its psychedelic, funk and disco period, with Grammy-winning hits including "Cloud Nine" and "Papa Was a Rolling Stone".

Edwards himself was fired from The Temptations in 1977, by which point Kendricks had been pursuing a solo career for several years. In 1984, Edwards launched his own with "Don't Look Any Further", a solid nineties jam released on Motown founder Berry Gordy's side-label six years before anyone knew what solid nineties jams



sounded like. The song is a collaboration with singer Siedah Garrett, who toured with Madonna, worked extensively with Quincy Jones and collaborated with Sergio Mendes to co-write the soundtrack of the 2011 animated film "Rio".

In the decade that followed, Edwards re-joined the Temptations, toured with Ruffin and Kendricks, and was later barred from using the band's name.

As well as a relationship with Aretha Franklin (**p.31**, who cites him as the inspiration behind her 1972 song "Day Dreaming"), Edwards was briefly married to Ruth Pointer. Their daughter Issa later joined her mother in The Pointer Sisters (**p.395**). Connections for

days, but there's more.

Whilst the music video for "Don't Look Any Further" was once described as "the worst ever", the song itself has been remixed by John Morales (**p.71**) and sampled over a hundred times. The list feels almost endless: Eric B. and Rakim's "Paid In Full", Tupac, Snoop Dogg, Nate Dogg, Mary J. Blige, TLC, even Yorkshire deep house producer Hot Since 82 and a SoundCloud rapper called Yung Gravy.

If you were after lots of musical connections, don't look any further.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, February 12th 2023



CLARK SISTERS

AND ELBERNITA "TWINKIE" CLARK

YOU BROUGHT THE SUNSHINE

THE SOUND OF GOSPEL RECORDINGS 1976-1981



The Clark Sisters and Elbernita "Twinkie" Clark – You Brought The Sunshine. © 2020 Ace Records Ltd.



The Clark Sisters

Everything's Gonna Be Alright



Label: BGP (originally Sound of Gospel)

Year: 2019 (originally 1979)

Discogs: The Clark Sisters - Everything Is Gonna Be Alright

Listen:



The Clark Sisters - Everything Is Gonna Be Alright. © 2019 BGP Records



As part of the musical DNA of everything from soul to disco and country to rock and roll, I really do believe that anyone can enjoy gospel. Some listeners are motivated by religion, but I'm open about not falling into that category.

The Clark Sisters are the daughters of gospel pioneer Dr. Mattie Moss Clark. Born in Selma, Alabama, Dr. Clark began playing piano at six years old and performed as the musician for her mother's services from the age of twelve. As the longest serving International Minister of Music for the Church of God In Christ, her arrangements shaped gospel music for decades.

Her daughters also sang from an early age, often performing songs she had

written herself. Shortly after divorcing her second husband, Dr. Clark formally created The Clark Sisters, who released their first album in 1973. They cite fellow Detroiter Aretha Franklin (**p.31**) as a particular influence, and performed at her funeral in 2018.

Whilst their most successful crossover hit was 1981's "You Brought The Sunshine" (slightly reminiscent of Stevie Wonder's "Master Blaster (Jammin')"), my standout favourite has always been "Everything Is Gonna Be Alright".

The song was written by Twinkie Clark, who became known as the mother of contemporary gospel for her countless solo hits.



Artists from Beyonce to Missy Elliott consider The Clark Sisters amongst their inspirations. The Sisters' records have been sampled countless times by the likes of Mary J. Blige, Jay-Z and Aaliyah. Their' seventeenth studio album - released in 2020 - even features Snoop Dogg.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, February 26th 2023**



Delegation - Delegation. © 1980 CBS Records



Delegation

Heartache No. 9



Label: Mercury

Year: 1980

Discogs: Delegation - Delegation

Listen:



Delegation - Delegation. © 1980 Phonogram, Inc.



I think this is the song that pointed me to disco all those years ago.

I was drawn into dance music by Romanian radio stations playing a mix of Europop and minimal techno. Next came tech house, including Ministry of Sound resident Richard Dinsdale (now releasing music as Weiss). Of all places, the "Back to Studio 54" segments of his radio shows were my first foray into disco. And of these, Delegation's "Heartache No.9" stood out.

It took me over twelve years to discover that Delegation were British. Formed in Birmingham in 1976, their career was launched by songwriter Ken Gold, who first topped the charts with The Real Thing's "You To Me Are Everything",

then worked with the likes of Aretha Franklin (**p.31**) and Billy Ocean.

Much like Gold himself, Delegation enjoyed more success in the US than at home, with several singles including "Oh Honey" entering Billboard's R&B chart. The song has since been sampled over a hundred times, most notably on Dizzee Rascal's "Chillin' Wiv Da Man Dem"!

Falsetto lead singer Len Coley left the band shortly after "Oh Honey" was released, and their advert in Melody Maker Magazine was answered by Bruce Dunbar, who was visiting from the US at the time. It is Dunbar's voice you hear on "Heartache No.9" and "You And I", from the band's second album.



They continued to perform until the end of the eighties, but as commercial fortune left the group, members followed. As of 2020, Rick Bailey was still performing under the Delegation banner as a solo artist.

Having now spent more than a decade digging as deep as I can into disco from all around the world, I'd be lying if I said I still count "Heartache No.9" amongst my favourite records. But back then, something about it made me pause and look again, leading me to funk, soul, jazz and so much more.

For that, I owe this band an awful lot.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, March 12th 2023**



Bob Sinclar - Paradise. © 1998 Mighty Bop Sessions



Bob Sinclar

Gym Tonic



Label: Yellow Productions

Year: 1998

Discogs: Bob Sinclar - Paradise

Listen:



Bob Sinclar - Paradise. © 1998 Mighty Bop Sessions



I've really enjoyed getting back to DJing in clubs recently and exploring the higher-energy side of my collection as well as the mellow brunch-time bits I play on the radio show. Of all the records that I've consistently brought to these gigs lately, one stands out.

Born in Paris in 1969, Christophe Le Friant performed under various aliases before settling in 1998 on Bob Sinclar (Jean-Paul Belmondo's character in the 1973 film "Le Manifique"). Before international chart-toppers like "World Hold On" and "Love Generation" came his debut album, "Paradise".

Most of the record is textbook French house - disco string samples and high-pass filters galore. But "Gym Tonic" is

different. Sampling a Paradise Garage classic like Motown Sounds' "Bad Mouthin'" was always going to end well, but I dare say that the star of the show here is Jane Fonda's Workout Record. Nothing goes off quite like it. Tragically, Fonda didn't feel the same and refused to allow the official release of the song.

With Sinclar's single delayed, opportunistic British production duo Spacedust released a 'cover' titled "Gym and Tonic", on which vocals were re-recorded by a session artist to avoid a dispute with Fonda. Despite conquering the UK chart in October 1998, it was the lowest-selling chart-topper that year...

Sinclar produced "Gym Tonic" alongside



Daft Punk's Thomas Bangalter. Interestingly, Bangalter was also part of French house trio Stardust, whose "Music Sounds Better With You" peaked at No.2 just a few weeks before Spacedust's "Gym Tonic" ripoff clinched the top spot. Dust, everywhere.

Bangalter's father Daniel wrote Ottawan's "D.I.S.C.O." and The Gibson Brothers' "Cuba". Meanwhile, Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo (the other half of Daft Punk) is the great-great-grandson of a Portuguese military leader who was exiled to France in 1910. History, everywhere.

Whereas I've only recently bought "Gym Tonic" and "Bad Mouthin'", Jane Fonda's Workout Record had been in my

collection for years. I'm not sure what to make of that.

Two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, and back.

For more superb Sinclar, check out "The Ghetto", which samples and interpolates from George Benson's "The World Is A Ghetto" (p.11).

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, April 14th 2023



KC and The Sunshine Band - Part 3. © 1976 T.K. Productions Inc.



KC and The Sunshine Band

I'm Your Boogie Man



Label: T.K. Records

Year: 1976

Discogs: KC and The Sunshine Band - Part 3

Listen:



KC and The Sunshine Band - Part 3. © 1976 T.K. Productions Inc.



More so than elsewhere, I think there is a fair bit of snobbery in disco. I know I'm sometimes guilty of it.

Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive"? Cheese. Bileo's "You Can Win"? Gold. ABBA's "Dancing Queen"? Hmm. Mary Gold's "Dancing"? Winner! You'd hope so, an original pressing is £5550 on Discogs.

I doubt anything by KC and The Sunshine Band has sold for £550 - though their 1975 chart-topper "That's The Way (I Like It)" is certified gold for selling 500,000 units. That doesn't make "I'm Your Boogie Man" any less good.

The band's history is tightly woven into that of T.K. Records, founded by Miami entrepreneur Henry Stone and teen idol

Steve Alaimo in 1972 and named in honour of their sound engineer, Terry Kane.

Of Stone's 100+ labels, T.K. and its subsidiaries were the most successful, signing everyone from Bobby Caldwell to Benny Latimore (**p.177**); George McCrae to Gwen McCrae; and bargain-bucket staple T-Connection to Timmy Thomas (**p.35**, later sampled by Drake).

In 1973, singer and T.K. warehouse temp Harry Wayne Casey (KC) joined forces with bassist Richard Finch. Soon, they also enlisted a group of T.K. studio musicians known as Oceanliners, who had played on Ronnie Keaton's "Going Down For The Last Time" (which *does* now sell for hundreds on Discogs).



Brought together in Florida - the Sunshine State - KC and The Sunshine Band was born. Released in 1977 on their third album, "I'm Your Boogie Man" is just very good.

But the sunshine only lasted until 1979, two years before T.K. itself became a bankrupt casualty of the backlash against disco. Experimentation with other styles produced limited results, though KC himself climbed the adult contemporary charts with a cover of Barbara Mason's "Yes I'm Ready".

Following a brief retirement, KC returned in the early nineties, re-forming the band with mostly new members to seize on renewed public interest in disco.

Various combinations have been touring ever since.

Throughout the original Sunshine period, Casey and Finch also wrote and produced for other artists. Their work on George McCrae's international hit "Rock Your Baby" was one of the first commercially-successful uses of a drum machine. John Lennon cited its chord progression as an inspiration for "Whatever Gets You Through The Night" and ABBA acknowledged its influence on "Dancing Queen".

Dance music is for dancing. To quote T-Connection: do what you wanna do.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, May 14th 2023



Janice McClain - Janice McClain. © 1986 MCA Records Inc.



Janice McClain

Smack Dab In The Middle



Label: Warner Bros

Year: 1979

Discogs: Janice McClain - Smack Dab In The Middle

Listen:



Janice McClain - Smack Dab In The Middle. © 1979 Warner Bros Records Inc.



A few weeks ago I headed down to Soho's Phonica Records for the launch of Leon Vynehall's "Rosebud / Black Dove" EP. Alongside a surprise appearance from Midland (and his surprise play of UK garage anthem "Closer Than Close"), my highlight was definitely hearing Janice McClain's "Smack Dab In The Middle" for the first time.

Born and raised in Philadelphia to parents who had both released records as teenagers, McCain soon began singing in church. Channeling early idols like Freda Payne and Diana Ross, she debuted with local jazz ensemble Pieces of a Dream at the age of 14 and recorded "Smack Dab in the Middle" - written and produced by two of her uncles - shortly after her fifteenth birthday.

After graduating high school, McClain frequently performed alongside local stars McFadden & Whitehead, Harold Melvin (**p.153**), and Billy Paul, and warmed up for the likes of James Brown, The Commodores and The O'Jays. It was another Philadelphia icon - "godmother of soul" Patti LaBelle - who pointed MCA Records in McClain's direction.

But perhaps most notably, "Smack Dab In The Middle" was mixed by legendary New York DJ Larry Levan.

Born in 1954, Levan inherited his love of music from his mother and allegedly knew how to use a turntable at the age of three. Levan excelled at maths and physics, leaving his teachers thinking he would become an inventor one day. As



an early experimenter with synths and drum machines, they weren't entirely wrong.

After dropping out of high school, Levan became involved in Harlem's ballroom culture, where he first met his lifelong best friend (and godfather of house music) Frankie Knuckles (p.121). But it was David Mancuso of The Loft who introduced him to Manhattan's underground dance culture. Soon enough, Levan and Knuckles started DJing together at the Continental Baths, filling in for The Gallery's Nicky Siano.

After securing his residency at the iconic Paradise Garage, Levan also became a prolific producer, best known for his remixes of Inner Life's "Ain't No

Mountain High Enough" (p.71) and Gwen Guthrie's "Ain't Nothin' Goin' On But The Rent" (as well as The Joubert Singers' "Stand On The Word" (p.15), which he didn't actually produce!).

"Smack Dab In The Middle" also became a Garage staple. Whilst it was widely played in discotheques in early 1980, it didn't do well in the mainstream charts.

Disco's commercial fortunes may have declined in the late 1970s, but McClain's dancefloor heater was smack dab in the middle of a vibrant nightlife scene that still exists today. The Garage stayed open until 1987; its legacy is still open now.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, June 4th 2023

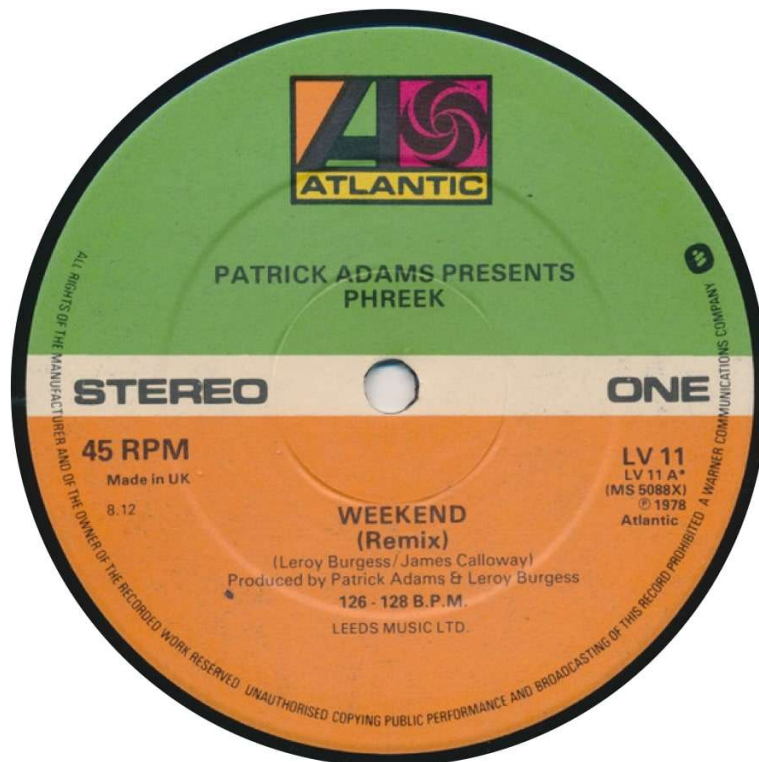


Patrick Adams Presents Phreek - Patrick Adams Presents Phreek. © 1978 Atlantic Recording Corporation



Phreek

Weekend



Label: Atlantic

Year: 1978

Discogs: Patrick Adams Presents Phreek
- Weekend / Have A Good Day (Remix)

Listen:



Patrick Adams Presents Phreek - Weekend / Have A Good Day (Remix). © 1978 Atlantic Recording Corporation



This time last week, I was carrying Klipschorn speakers around Hackney to set up for the London descendant of David Mancuso's New York Loft parties. Given its ties to Larry Levan, Arthur Russell and others, it felt like a good time to write about Phreek's "Weekend".

Phreek was formed as a studio project by legendary disco producer Patrick Adams. Best known for his work with Salsoul, Prelude and P&P Records, he spent his childhood singing in choirs before learning to write music for the trumpet and guitar.

Adams honed his skills by dissecting the structure and arrangement of songs he heard on the radio. It worked, leading to credits on 32 gold and platinum records.

Alongside his own projects - including Inner Life (p.71), Cloud One and Musique - he worked with the likes of Candi Staton, Sister Sledge and The Main Ingredient (featuring actor Cuba Gooding Jr.'s dad), to mention a few. See also Venus Dodson's fantastic "Shining" (p.315).

As A&R for Perception Records, Adams discovered Harlem trio Black Ivory and his longtime collaborator Leroy Burgess. Adams formed Phreek with Burgess, vocalist Christine Wiltshire and others in the late 1970s.

Like so many of Adams' productions, Larry Levan regularly played "Weekend" at the Paradise Garage. Indeed, Levan was asked by Sleeping Bag Records co-



owner Will Socolov to make a new (and subsequently more successful) version with the studio group Class Action, still involving Burgess and Adams.

Just as Levan was introduced to New York's underground dance music scene by David Mancuso, Sleeping Bag Records was created after a conversation between Socolov and visionary cellist Arthur Russell (**p.91**) on the dancefloor at Mancuso's Loft.

So on the 20th anniversary of the Loft in London and the first anniversary of Patrick Adams' passing, how better to celebrate their legacy this weekend?

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, June 18th 2023



Bill Withers - 'Bout Love. © 1978 CBS Inc.



Bill Withers

Don't It Make It Better



Label: CBS

Year: 1978

Discogs: Bill Withers - 'Bout Love

Listen:



Bill Withers - 'Bout Love. © 1978 CBS Inc.



In our world of Spotify and Apple Music, there's a lot to be said for taking time out to listen to albums again. But I'd be lying if I said every track on every album was solid gold. Most on "'Bout Love" are though. "Don't It Make It Better" is uplifting perfection, and "You Got The Stuff" joins the likes of William Onyeabor's "Fantastic Man" on my morning motivation playlist.

Withers was born in 1938 in the small mining town of Slab Fork, West Virginia, serving in the Navy for nine years before relocating to L.A. to start a music career. For a man who set the record for the longest sustained note on a chart hit (holding a high E for 18 seconds on "Lovely Day"), I was surprised to read that he had a stammer as a child.

While recording self-funded demo tapes and performing them in local clubs, Withers worked as a mechanic for several companies including IBM and Ford. His debut single, "Three Nights and a Morning" (produced by early Moog synth adopter Mort Garson) went unnoticed at the time, but was later reworked into the iconic "Harlem".

Withers' debut album - produced by Booker T. of "Green Onions" fame - scored hits with "Ain't No Sunshine" and "Grandma's Hands". Aware of how fickle the music industry can be, he was initially reluctant to quit his day job. He began touring with members of The Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band and producing for other artists including Gladys Knight. In 1974 - alongside



James Brown, Etta James and B.B. King - Withers performed in Zaire ahead of the historic "Rumble in the Jungle" boxing match between George Foreman and Muhammad Ali (p.125).

When Columbia Records' executives repeatedly refused to approve songs for his album (while approving an educational record by The A-Team's Mr. T.?!), Withers spent the early eighties on joint projects like "Just The Two Of Us" with Grover Washington Jr. and "Soul Shadows" with The Crusaders (p.63).

These disagreements with label bosses over his sound ultimately led to Withers' retirement in 1985, though versions of his music (including Ben Liebrand's unforgettable "Sunshine Mix" of "Lovely

Day" - the antidote to "Ain't No Sunshine"?) continued to be released. Alongside the three Grammys and six nominations amassed during his performing career, Withers joined the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2005 and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2015.

Musicians from Sade to Justin Timberlake and John Legend to Ed Sheeran cite Withers as an inspiration, while his songs have been sampled by Kendrick Lamar, DMX, Eminem, Blackstreet and many others.

In the week of what would have been his 85th birthday, Bill will make it better.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, July 9th 2023



Pointer Sisters - Energy. © 1978 Planet Records



Pointer Sisters

Happiness



Label: Planet

Year: 1978

Discogs: Pointer Sisters - Pointer Sisters' Greatest Hits

Listen:



Pointer Sisters - Pointer Sisters' Greatest Hits. © 1982 Planet Records



Music makes me happy. I find some records, including Lamont Dozier's "Going Back To My Roots" (p.67), particularly life-affirming, and I genuinely reconsider my pessimist-leaning worldview every time I hear The Pointer Sisters' "Happiness".

Starting as a duo of June and Bonnie Pointer in 1969 and soon joined by their sister Anita, the group began performing backing vocals for the likes of Sylvester (p.43) and Boz Scraggs.

Though their 1972 single "Send Him Back" became a Northern Soul classic in the UK, commercial success was limited until they became a quartet with their sister Ruth, winning a Best Country Vocal Grammy (?) for "Fairytale" before

Bonnie left to pursue a solo career.

The height of their fame came in the mid-1980s, scoring four consecutive Billboard top-tens with "Automatic", "Jump (For My Love)", "I'm So Excited" and "Neutron Dance", used on the Beverly Hills Cop soundtrack (though nothing to do with with Krystal Klear's 2018 banger). "Jump" and "Automatic" both won Grammys in 1985.

Surprisingly, "Dare Me" peaked at No.11 and "Don't It Drive You Crazy" was never released as a single. But most surprisingly of all, "Happiness" peaked at No.30 in the US and didn't chart in the UK.

"Happiness" was written by Allen



Toussaint (whose credits include Otis Redding (**p.87**), Betty Wright and Candi Staton) and produced by Richard Perry (who had also worked with the likes of Barbra Streisand, Diana Ross and Art Garfunkel).

In 2002, Issa Pointer (Ruth's daughter with former Temptations singer Dennis Edwards, **p.363**) replaced June, who was sadly struggling with drug addiction. In 2005, they scored another hit with a remake of "Sisters Are Doin' It For Themselves" by The Eurythmics and Aretha Franklin (**p.31**). Ruth's granddaughter Sadako also joined the group in 2009.

Since Anita's health forced her to retire in 2015, Ruth has been the band's last

original member.

The Sisters' music has been covered and sampled countless times, most notably Girls Aloud's version of "Jump", Le Tigre's version of "I'm So Excited", Ultra Naté's version of "Automatic" and Junior Jack's "Stupidisco", which drew on "Dare Me".

Enjoy your Sunday - I hope it brings you Happiness.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, July 16th 2023



Don Beto - Bossa Imaginação. © 1978 Som Livre



Don Beto

Não Quero Mais



Label: Mr. Bongo (originally Som Livre)

Year: 2017 (originally 1978)

Discogs: Marcos Valle / Don Beto – A Paraiba Não É Chicago / Não Quero Mais

Listen:



Marcos Valle / Don Beto – A Paraiba Não É Chicago / Não Quero Mais. © 2017 Mr. Bongo



From the same Mr. Bongo Brazil 45s series as Marcia Maria's "Amigo Branco" (p.319), this week I picked up legendary singer-songwriter Marcos Valle's "A Paraiba Não É Chicago" ("Paraiba Is Not Chicago"). The B-Side: Don Beto's "Não Quero Mais" ("I Don't Want Any More") is just as good.

Born in Uruguay, Don Beto became a pivotal force in Brazilian soul music, with his only album earning a Golden Globe in 1979.

Of all the characters in today's story, I know the least about Beto, but I wanted to lead with his track because it's spectacular. Fans of the Doobie Brothers (or any of the thirty seven covers by the likes of Bananarama and Richie Havens)

will notice that the intro has a strong "Long Train Runnin" vibe.

Like so many of Brazil's funkier, this one was produced by the iconic Lincoln Olivetti. After dropping out of both music and electronic engineering courses at college, he combined the two to become a synth pioneer. One of his earliest productions was "Black Coco" by Brazilian Connection, with a strong George McCrae "Rock Your Baby" vibe.

Marcos Valle deserves a dedicated column, but this time I want to lean in to his US collaborations.

At the bleakest point of Brazil's military dictatorship, Valle travelled to the US and settled in Los Angeles, where he



worked with the likes of Chicago (the band, of "Street Player" fame) and Detroit-born Leon Ware.

Indeed, "A Paraiba Não É Chicago" is a cover of Ware's "Baby Don't Stop Me", just as Valle's "Bicho No Cio" ("Bug in Heat") is a cover of Ware's brilliant "Got To Be Loved". These funk, soul and boogie influences laid the foundations for Valle's incredible "Estrellar".

If international commercial success wasn't enough, Valle also provided the music for Brazil's version of Sesame Street in the early seventies.

His first composition may have been released in 1963, but Valle is still going strong. Indeed, he's playing at We Out

Here festival next week. Just before he takes to the main stage, I'll be playing in the Love Dancin' tent with Melt My Heart!

Until then, stick on Don Beto's "Não Quero Mais", enjoy, and I'll see you front left.

**Originally published in Melodic
Distraction, August 6th 2023**



Michael Wycoff - Love Conquers All. © 1982 RCA Records



Michael Wycoff

Diamond Real



Label: RCA Victor

Year: 1982

Discogs: Michael Wycoff - Love Conquers All

Listen:



Michael Wycoff - Love Conquers All. © 1982 RCA Records



For a guy who tends not to buy expensive records, I'd never stretched to the Discogs price of Michael Wycoff's stellar album "Love Conquers All".

But a few weeks ago, I wandered into the on-site record store at We Out Here Festival and there it was. Right at the front of the first crate I saw, one of my grail records. A steal too - shoutout to Rook Records.

The album is perhaps best known for "Looking Up To You", which has since been sampled countless times by Zhané, Faith Evans, Blue Boy (of "Remember Me" fame) and others.

"Looking Up To You" was written by Leon Ware. As a teen, Ware sang

alongside the iconic Lamont Dozier (**p.67**), and - like Dozier - started his songwriting career at Motown. Ware wrote for the likes of The Isley Brothers (**p.79**) and Jackson 5, then produced for Quincy Jones, Minnie Riperton, Marvin Gaye and more. As I wrote about last time, Ware also collaborated with Marcos Valle (**p.399**).

But my favourite track - shoutout to Felix - is definitely "Diamond Real", written by former Earth, Wind and Fire guitarist Al McKay. And that's just a taste of the talent on this album.

Producer Webster Lewis toured with Herbie Hancock and Barry White. "Love Come Down" star Evelyn "Champagne" King features on a duet. Bassist



Nathaniel Watts has toured with Stevie Wonder for almost fifty years.

Trombonist Fred Wesley famously worked with James Brown and Parliament-Funkadelic.

Trumpeter Nolan Smith was Marvin Gaye's Musical Director. Guitarist David T. Walker played on Gaye's "Let's Get It On". The list goes on.

And that's without talking about Wycoff himself. Born in Los Angeles, he started playing the keyboard and singing in school talent shows. Before releasing three solo albums, he performed backing vocals on Stevie Wonder's "Songs in The Key of Life".

Sadly, Wycoff later struggled with drug

and alcohol addictions, but found faith and ultimately became Minister of Music at many Los Angeles churches.

This record is a real diamond.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, September 3rd 2023



Kimiko Kasai - Tokyo Special. © 1977 CBS / Sony Inc.



Kimiko Kasai

Vibration (Love Celebration)



Label: CBS / Sony

Year: 1977

Discogs: Kimiko Kasai - Tokyo Special

Listen:



Kimiko Kasai - Tokyo Special. © 1977 CBS / Sony Inc.



As if immediately finding Michael Wycoff's "Love Conquers All" (**p.403**) at We Out Here wasn't enough, it only took a quick browse of Kay Suzuki's Time Capsule stall to spot Kimiko Kasai's "Tokyo Special". "Vibration (Love Celebration)" is simply beautiful, owing in no small part to songwriter Tatsuro Yamashita. The King of City Pop, Yamashita's "Sparkle" is a grail record, and his wife Mariya Takeuchi probably introduced you to the genre through her algorithm-winning hit "Plastic Love".

I've been hooked on "Vibration" since I heard it sampled on Jimmy Rouge's "Dorian". Given eye-watering Japanese shipping costs, holding a copy on that Friday afternoon was already exciting. Then I heard the rest of the album.

"A Life Worth Living" was written by bassist Isao Suzuki, who learned to play on US military bases before moving to New York and performing with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. I'd heard the better-known cover version with English lyrics by Noriko Miyamoto on one of Guts and Mambo's compilations. "Very Special Moment" is also a heater featuring Japanese jazz trumpeter Terumasa Hino, whose "City Connection" is another must-have.

"Take Me" was written by pianist Hiromasa Suzuki, who played with Akira Ishikawa & His Count Buffaloes (a stellar name behind a stellar 1975 jazz funk album). The closing track, "Laid Back, Mad, Or Mellow" (stellar names everywhere) was written by Akiko Yano,



wife of Yellow Magic Orchestra's Ryuichi Sakamoto (**p.95**). Talent overload.

Born in Kyoto in 1945, Kasai's interest in jazz was sparked at 13 when she heard Chris Connor's "All About Ronnie". Aged just 16, she moved to Tokyo to perform in jazz clubs. After releasing her first solo album in 1970, Kasai sang the advertising jingle for the world's first instant ramen in 1971, then signed to CBS Records in 1972 - correlation not causation, I assume...

Over her long career, Kasai worked with countless jazz stars including Stan Getz and Herbie Hancock. With Hancock, she recorded "Butterfly" in 1979, featuring fantastic versions of Hancock's "I Thought It Was You" and Stevie

Wonder's "As". She was no stranger to a cover - see "Use Me", originally by Bill Withers (**p.391**).

Kasai quit music in the late 1980s to design jewellery, then married producer Richard Rudolph, who had previously worked with everyone from 2Pac to Teena Marie. Rudolph was first married to Minnie Ripperton and co-wrote many of her hits including "Lovin' You" and "Inside My Love".

So as you soak in the web of talent associated with this record, lean back and enjoy the Love Celebration.

Originally published in Melodic Distraction, September 24th 2023



Gal Costa - Aquarela Do Brasil. © 1980 Philips



Gal Costa

Aquarela Do Brasil



Label: Philips

Year: 1985 (originally 1980)

Discogs: Gal Costa - Aquarela Do Brasil

Listen:



Gal Costa - Aquarela Do Brasil. © 1985 Philips



Gal Costa's entire discography deserves your full attention, including her 1980 album "Aquarela Do Brasil". I picked the titular track because it's an unrivalled party-starter, totally unaware of the complex story beneath.

"Aquarela Do Brasil" ("Brazil Watercolour") was written in 1939 by Ary Barroso, a composer, pianist, soccer commentator and talent show host who also trained as a lawyer (just in case you were proud of *your* CV). The lyrics were inspired by a rainstorm which prevented him from leaving the house. It was not initially successful, and failed to qualify as a top song at Rio's Carnival in 1940 - an injustice which froze Barroso's friendship with the head of the carnival's jury for fifteen years.

It only found fame after featuring in Walt Disney's 1942 animation "Saludos Amigos" ("Hello Friends"), commissioned by the US State Department (yes, really) to promote President Roosevelt's Good Neighbour policy: a commitment not to interfere in the domestic affairs of Latin America. As well as launching the international popularity of Donald Duck, the film led "Aquarela Do Brasil" to become the first Brazilian record played over a million times on American radio. It is now one of the twenty most recorded songs of all time.

Born in Bahia in 1945, it seems almost every step of Maria da Costa's life pushed her towards music, starting when a childhood interest in Bossa Nova led



her to work in a record store. Costa's childhood friends married legendary singer-songwriters Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, paving the way for an early introduction to the industry. It was Gil and Veloso that nicknamed her "Gau", later spelled "Gal" (allegedly an acronym of "Guilherme Araújo Limited", suggested as a joke by her producer, Guilherme Araújo).

Not long after her debut album (a 1967 Bossa Nova duet with Caetano Veloso called "Domingo"), Costa was at the cutting edge of the emerging tropicália scene, combining traditional Brazilian and African rhythms with British and American influences like psychedelia and pop-rock. The movement was as political as it was artistic, rejecting the

nationalism of Brazil's military dictatorship while equally disenchanted with the left-wing alternative. Her 1969 single "Baby" is a tropicália anthem.

Costa deservedly received a Latin Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011 and was ranked as Rolling Stone's 90th Greatest Singer of All Time. Her mark on Brazilian popular music is indelible, and she's been sampled countless times by the likes of Madlib, Kaytranada and Frank Ocean.

I love writing about songs and stories,
you never know what you might find.

**Written for this book, November
28th 2023**



Jean-Luc Ponty - Individual Choice. © 1983 Polydor



Jean-Luc Ponty

Computer Incantations For World Peace



Label: Polydor

Year: 1983

Discogs: Jean-Luc Ponty - Individual Choice

Listen:



Jean-Luc Ponty - Individual Choice. © 1983 Polydor International GmbH



This piece is about a pioneer of violin jazz-rock. Am I a real music writer yet?

Jean-Luc Ponty was born in Normandy in 1945. His father taught violin and his mother taught piano, so it is perhaps unsurprising that he graduated from the prestigious Conservatoire de Paris with the college's highest honour.

A talented multi-instrumentalist, he spent years juggling orchestral and jazz performances. His journey towards jazz-violin stardom began by accident when he found himself at a jazz club after an orchestra show. Few saw a role for the violin in jazz music, and Ponty pioneered a unique style influenced more by horn players than traditional string techniques.

He released his first album, "Jazz Long Playing" at just 22, and within a few years was sharing stages with B.B. King, Dizzy Gillespie and Gábor Szabó (**p.323**). Music for Ponty's 1970 album "King Kong" was composed by the inimitable Frank Zappa, and features a twenty-minute song called "Music for Electric Violin And Low Budget Orchestra". Indeed, Ponty moved his young family from France to L.A. to tour with Zappa.

It goes without saying that Ponty was not the only musician influenced by Zappa. His nonconformist, improvisational style and satire of American culture is cited as an inspiration by everyone from Kraftwerk and Brian Eno to The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix and George Clinton of



Parliament-Funkadelic. Zappa is the influencer's influencer, and there is a bust of Zappa in the self-proclaimed Užupis Republic (in truth the bohemian quarter of Vilnius, Lithuania, which also has its own constitution and president).

Zappa's 1971 performance at Montreux Casino on the shore of Lake Geneva was cut short when an audience member's flare burned the building down. English rock band Deep Purple were in town to record an album, and the incident was the inspiration for "Smoke On The Water", one for the most iconic guitar riffs in rock history.

The same year, Ponty featured on a "New Jazz Summit" album with Polish musician Michał Urbaniak, who also

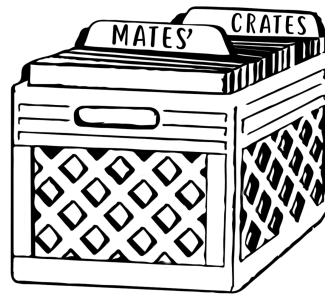
played the violin. I knew Urbaniak for writing Ursula Dudziak's "Papaya". One of the strangest but most beloved records in my collection, it found new fame in 2007 via a Filipino game show.

After more than 65 years in music, Ponty has played on over seventy albums, performed with everyone from Elton John to Chick Corea, and explored a range of styles including polyrhythmic sounds from West Africa. While researching for this piece, I read an interview with Ponty by Anil Prasad, who founded the internet's first music magazine. A fitting end for my book of contributions to online music writing.

Written for this book, November 30th 2023



Mates' Crates Radio







February 2020



Listen:



Stan Getz – Saudade Vem Correndo
Gloria Ann Taylor – Love Is A Hurtin' Thing
Ann Peebles – I Can't Stand The Rain
Aretha Franklin – One Step Ahead
Arthur Russell – This Is How We Walk On The Moon
Johnny Guitar Watson – Superman Lover
Queen – Cool Cat
Papa Bear & His Cubs – You're So Fine
Honeyfeet – Clap Hands
Neno Exporta Som – Deixa a Tristeza
Arnie Love – We've Had Enough
Gilberto Gil – Palco
Free Youth – We Can Move
Nehruviandoom – Means The Most



March 2020



Listen:



Caetano Veloso – Olha O Menino
Little Beaver – Groove On
New Holidays - Maybe So Maybe No
Carl Carlton – This Feeling's Rated XTra
Lemuria – Hunk Of Heaven
Steve Watson – Born to Boogie
Isley Brothers – That Lady (Part 1)
Junie Morrison – Suzie Thundertussy
Khruangbin – People Everywhere
Oro – Sasà
Homegrown Syndrome – Confrontation
Booker T. Jones – Don't Stop Your Love
Fat Larry's Band – Act Like You Know
Young-Holt Unlimited – Young & Holtful
Isaac Hayes – Hung Up On My Baby



April 2020



Listen:



Sergio Mendes & Pelé – Cidade Grande
Henri Texier – Les "Là-bas"
Chakachas – Stories
Antônio Adolfo – Cascavel
The Flying Stars of Brooklyn NY – My God Has A Telephone
Arnold Blair – Trying To Get Next To You
Willie Wright – Right On For the Darkness
Zé Roberto – Lotus 72D
Painel De Controle – Relax
George McRae – I Get Lifted
Ahmed Fakroun – Nisyan
Bill Withers – Harlem
Mighty Ryeders – Evil Vibrations
The Spinners – It's A Shame
Ted Taylor – Ghetto Disco
Ornella Vanoni – Ti Voglio
Billy Ocean – Stay The Night
Vladimir Cosma – Sapato Rosa



May 2020



Listen:



The Supreme Jubilees – Do You Believe
Claudia – Com Mais De 30
Nina Simone – Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood
Jorge Ben – Chove Chuva
Max Pope – Didn't I
Brothers Gonna Work it Out – Willie Hutch
Kelly Finnigan – I Don't Wanna Wait
Usje Sukatma – Waiting For Your Love
Aretha Franklin – Don't Go Breaking My Heart
Michael Boothman – What You Won't Do For Love
Uptown Funk Empire – Celestial Blues
Patti Labelle – When Am I Gonna Find True Love
Marlena Shaw – Touch Me In The Morning
Lyn Collins – Think (About It)
Bohannon – Let's Start The Dance



June 2020



Listen:



Mulatu Astatke – Tezeta
Otis Redding – Try A Little Tenderness
Marvin Gaye – Inner City Blues
Lonnie Liston Smith – Expansions
Gil Scott-Heron – The Revolution Will Not Be Televised
Cymande – Brothers On The Slide
Phyllis Dillon – Woman Of The Ghetto
Baby Huey – Hard Times
James Brown – The Boss
Billy Paul – Let The Dollar Circulate
Odyssey – Hang Together
Loleatta Holloway – Mama Don't Pappa Won't
Guru – No Time To Play
NYCC – Keep A Light In My Window



July 2020



Listen:



Stephen Encinas - Lypso Illusion

Asha Puthli - Space Talk

Seu Jorge - Space Oddity

Ron - Hai Capito O No?

Edwin Starr - Easin' In

Djeudjoah - Mbappé

Oscar D'Leon - Detalles

Terumasa Hino - Samba De La Cruz

Grup Stereo - Plopi Impari

Trio Express - Ploaia Nu E In Zadar

Arian - Lutas Velikim Gradom

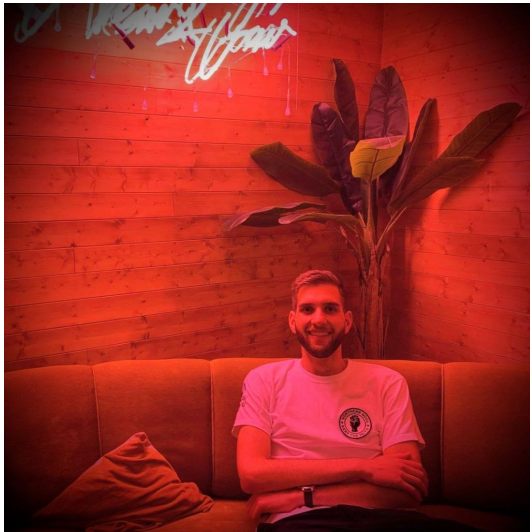
Halina Żytkowiak - Chwila chwilę trwa

Pete Brandt's Method - What You Are

Sweet Cream - Do A Dance For Love



August 2020



Listen:



José Pinhal – Tu Es A Que Quero (Tu Nao Prendas O Cabelo)
William De Vaughan – Be Thankful For What You Got
Pharaoh Sanders – Love Is Everywhere
Prince – 17 Days (Piano and Mic Vers.)
Johnny Hammond Smith – Los Conquistadores Chocolates
Rupa – Aaj Shanibar
Pointer Sisters – Don't It Drive You Crazy
Whole Truth – Can You Lose By Following God
The Persuations – Good Times
Wings – Goodnight Tonight
Womack and Womack – MPB
Le Stim – We Crown The King (A Tribute to Muhammad Ali)
Idris Muhammad – Tasty Cakes



September 2020



Listen:



Al Green – Full Of Fire
Gábor Szabó – Breezin'
Odyssey – Our Lives Are Shaped By What We Love
Jorge Ben – O Telefone Tocou Novamente
Djavan – Nereci
Alessi Brothers – Oh Lori
Erasmoo Carlos – Mane Joao
Marvin Gaye – Where Are We Going
Ned Doheny – Labor Of Love
Rufus & Chaka Khan – Body Heat
Afterbach – Wanna Fill You Up
King Tutt – You've Got Me Hung Up
Rahmlee – Heartbreaker
Trussel – Love Injection



October 2020



Listen:



Barrington Levy – The Vibes Is Right
Milton Wright – Keep It Up
Arthur Russell – Keeping Up
The Crusaders – My Lady
Little Beaver – Get into the Party Life
Truth & Devotion – Bless My Soul
Emílio Santiago – O Amigo De Nova York
Steely Dan – Peg
Ennio Morricone – Dance On
Ernesto Djedje – Zadie Bobo
Vicki Sue Robinson – Common Thief
Jewel – Paradise



November 2020



Listen:



Aretha Franklin – You Send Me
Sandra de Sá – Olhos Coloridos
Willie Hutch – A Love That's Worth Having
Alice Clark – Never Did I Stop Loving You
The O'Jays – Darlin' Darlin' Baby
Fern Kinney – Love Me Tonight
Barbara Mason – Darling Come Back Home
JJ Sparks – Wanna Make Love
Ahmed Fakroun – Love Words
The Undisputed Truth – Sandman
Ghetto Brothers – Got This Happy Feeling
Christy Essien - You Can't Change A Man
Sylvia Striplin – Give Me Your Love
Candido – Thousand Finger Man



December 2020



Listen:



Amnesty – We Have Love
Mark Capanni – I Believe In Miracles
Main Ingredient – Summer Breeze
Dennis Brown – Get High On Your Love
The Gap Band – Outstanding
Billy Paul – How Good Is Your Game
Skyy – Here's To You
Kid Creole – I'm A Wonderful Thing
Aquarian Dream – Phoenix
Love Committee – Just As Long As I Got You
Fat Larry's Band – Hey Pancho It's Disco
O'Donel Levy – We've Only Just Begun



January 2021



Listen:



Leon Ware – Got To Be Loved
BT Express – Do It Till You're Satisfied
Detroit Emeralds – You're Getting A Little Too Smart
Alice Smith – Love Endeavour
Benny Latimore – Out to Get'cha
Fantastic Four – I Got To Have Your Love
Mixed Company – Let's Go Disco
Tenderness – Gotta Keep On Trying
Teena Marie – I Need Your Lovin'
Trussel – I Love It
Lee McDonald – I'll Do Anything for You
Ondeno – Mayolye
Ron Richardson – Ooh Wee Babe



February 2021



Listen:



The Police - Voices In My Head
Twinkie Clark - Awake O Zion
Garfield Fleming - Don't Send Me Away
Monophonics - Say You Love Me
The Meditation Singers - Trouble's Brewin'
Dorothy Morrison - Rain
The Voices of East Harlem - Take a Stand
Mystic Merlin - Mr Magician
Viola Wills - I've Got News For You
Ike Strong - Your Love Keeps Me Dancing
Family Tree - Family Tree
Charles Hayes & Cosmopolitan Choir - Jesus Can Work It Out
Mighty Clouds of Joy - Glow Love
Harry Thumann - Underwater



March 2021



Listen:



The Ethics - Lost In A Lonely World
Jorge Ben - Comanche
Helio Matheus - Eu, Réu, Me Condono
Neil Francis - Teardrops
Bobby Womack - California Dreaming
Everything But The Girl - Night and Day
Noriko Miyamoto - My Life
Kay Ishiguro - Rain
Gwen McRae - Let's Straighten It Out
Creative Source - Who Is He And What Is He To You
Ray Barretto - Pastime Paradise
James Brown - There Was A Time
Yta Jourias - Adome Nyueto
Mass Production - Welcome To Our World Of Merry Music
Columbus Circle - If You Read My Mind



April 2021



Listen:



Piero Umiliani- Nostalgia
Antonio Adolfo - Aonde Voce Vai
Luiz Bonfá - Jacarandá
Lo Borges - Eu Sou Como Voce E
Dom Salvador e Abolição - Hei! Você
Cassiano - Onda
Emilio Santiago - Brother
Arthur Verocai ft. Azymuth - Bis
Kansas City Express - This Is The Place
John Makin & Friends - No Lie
Stranger Cole - Crying Every Night
Willie Wright - I'm So Happy Now
Maya - Lait De Coco
Shuggie Otis - Strawberry Letter 23
Gil Scott-Heron - Legend In His Own Mind
Lemonade Market - Supermarket Woman



May 2021



Listen:



Martin L Dumas Jr. – Attitude, Belief and Determination
Voices of East Harlem – Wanted, Dead or Alive
Ben E King – Supernatural
Sly and the Family Stone – Everyday People
Pierre Didy Tchakounte – Yak'nou
Fadoul – Sid Redad
Mukhtar Ramadan Idii – Check Up Your Head
Ahmed Fakroun – Ya Farhi Beek
Yumi Arai – Anata Dake No Mono
Al Charles – Outstanding
Derrick Cross – Never Too Much
Shitân – Disco Shitân
Ivan – Fotonovela
Paradise – Sizzlin' Hot
Mary Gold – Dancing



June 2021



Listen:



Elkin & Nelson – Jibaro (Enrolle)
Joao Donato – Cala Boca Menino
Quinteto Ternura – Lero De Bronze
Donald Byrd – Dominoes
Anita Ward – Spoiled By Your Love
Al Green – I Wish You Were Here
First Choice – Love and Happiness
Little Beaver – Let The Good Times Roll
The Dramatics – Whatcha See Is Whatcha Get
Pure Pleasure – By My Side
Lafayette – Sol De Verao
Chanson – Magic Carpet Ride
Mac Gregor – Nan Ye Likan
20th Century Steel Band – Heaven and Hell Is On Earth
Cloud One – Don't Let My Rainbow Pass Me By
Fronzena Harris – Lovetime Guarantee



July 2021



Listen:



Paddy McAloon - I Trawl the Megahertz
Haruomi Hosono - Silk Road
Camille Yarbrough - Take Yo' Praise
Johnnie Taylor - What About My Love
Made in USA - Never Gonna Let You Go
The Chi-Lites - Are You My Woman?
Armando Cuspopoli - Non C'e Sole
Michel Stax - Acun Coeur
The Detroit Emeralds - Feel The Need In Me
Sandra De Sa - Negra Flor
Yambu - Sunny
Robson Jorge and Lincoln Olivetti - Aleluia
Loose Joints - Is It All Over My Face
Dee Dee Sharp Gamble - Breaking and Entering
Rae & Christian - Spellbound



August 2021



Listen:



Boogie Heights - Super Mario Bros. Theme (Bossa '66 Mix)

MFSB - Summertime

Hubert Laws - Family

Terumasa Hino - City Connection

24 Carat Black - 24 Carat Black Theme

DC LaRue - Cathedrals

Carthago - Hanen

Jimmy James and the Vagabonds - I Want You So Much

Brylho - Se Você For A Salvador

Universal Togetherness Band - More Than Enough

Deodato - Also Sprach Zarathustra

James Brown - Make It Good To Yourself

Alla Pugacheva - Tri Zhelaniya

Buckshot LeFonque - I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings



September 2021



Listen:



C. Tangana & Niño de Elche - Un Veneno
Quarteto Em Cy - Tudo Que Voce Podia Ser
Donovan Carless - Be Thankful
Marvin Gaye - Heavy Love Affair
Bill Withers - You Got The Stuff
Arthur Adams - You Got The Floor
People's Choice - Movin' in All Directions
ORS - Body To Body Boogie
Jerome Prister - Say You'll Be
Colonel Abrams - I'm Not Gonna Let
Willie Bobo - Always There
Oro - Stop The War
ABBA - If It Wasn't For The Nights
Frankie Valli - The Night



October 2021



Listen:



Rare Silk - Storm
Gloria Jay - Know What You Want
Edu Lobo - Zum Zum
Prince - I Feel For You (Acoustic Demo)
Fatback Band - Going To See My Baby
Dee Dee Sharp - Comin' Home Baby
Jackie Shane - Comin' Down
Ann Robinson and Freedom Now Brothers - You Did It
Dee Edwards - Why Can't There Be Love
Babe Ruth - The Mexican
Vania Bastos - Tabu
Teaspoon Ndelu - Oh Yeh Soweto
Ajit Singh and Asha Bhosle - Main Akeli Raat Jawan
Eddie Kendricks - Goin' Up In Smoke
Masayoshi Takanaka - Brazilian Skies



November 2021



Listen:



Tenorio Jr – Nebulosa
Ronnie Keaton – Going Down For The Last Time
Ana Mazzotti – Feel Like Making Love
Tommy McGee – Now That I Have You
Shintaro Sakamoto – Extremely Bad Man
The Sylvers – Only Once Can Win
Hamid Al Shaeri – Ayonha
Orlandivo – Ondo Anda a Meu Amor
Gboyega Adelaja – Colourful Environment
Bappi Lahiri – Come Closer
Marta Acuna – Dance, Dance, Dance
Senay – Kent Yasami
Mogollar – Garip Cioban
Jhelisa – Friendly Pressure



December 2021



Listen:



Gloria Barnes – Home
Jaye P Morgan – Can't Hide Love
George Jackson – Aretha, Sing One for Me
Charlie Mitchell – After Hours
LaShun Pace – I Know I've Been Changed
Horace Family – God Will Dry My Weeping Eyes
A Brief Encounter – Human
Four Tops – Ain't No Woman
Kamal Keila – Agricultural Revolution
William Onyeabor – Body and Soul
Stargard – Wear It Out
Black Ivory – Get Down
Ben E King – Music Trance
Kay Ishiguro – Driving Crazy
MFSB – Love Is The Message



January 2022



Listen:



Leo's Sunshipp - I'm Back For More
Gentle Persuasion - A Little Bit Of Love
Sonya Spence - Let Love Flow On
Di Melo - A Vida Em Seus Metodos Diz Calma
Shahid Wheeler - Just One Dance Before You Go
Eloise Laws - Put A Little Love Into It
Dee Edwards - Put Your Love On The Line
Natalie Cole - Can We Get Together Again
Isaac Hayes - I Can't Turn Around
Toulouse- C'est Toutjours Comme Ca L'Amour
Benita - Time For A Change
Colorado - California Dreaming
Direct Current - Nothing Can Stop Us
Prince - Chelsea Rogers



February 2022



Listen:



Erasmus Carlos - Gente Aberta

Azymuth - Morning

Dalton - Soul Brother

Trio Mocoto - Nao Adianta

Serginho Meriti - Bons Momentos

Masayoshi Takanaka - RAINBOW PARADISE

Gilberto Gil - Maracatu Atomico

Sivuca - Ain't No Sunshine

Elizio De Buzios - Tamanqueiro

Marcos Valle - Pecados De Amor

Jorge Ben - Taj Mahal

Airto Moreira - The Happy People

Dodo Da Bahia & As Virgens De Porto Seguro - Africamerica

Najib Al Housh - Ya Aen Daly

Bennis Cletin - Jungle Magic



March 2022



Listen:



Archie Whitewater - Cross Country
Willie Lindo - Breezin
Trevor Dandy - Is There Any Love
Monty Alexander - Love and Happiness
Gábor Szabó - Keep Smilin'
Mendes & Mendes - Mitamiyo
Michael Henderson - Let Love Enter
Michael Wycoff - Looking Up To You
Abel Lima - Corre Riba, Corre Baixo
Moments Of Faith Singers - Look Up
Clark Sisters - Everything Is Gonna Be Alright
The Truthettes - Who Can I Turn To?
Alec Mansion - Dans L'Eau De Nice
Donnell Pitman - Love Explosion



April 2022



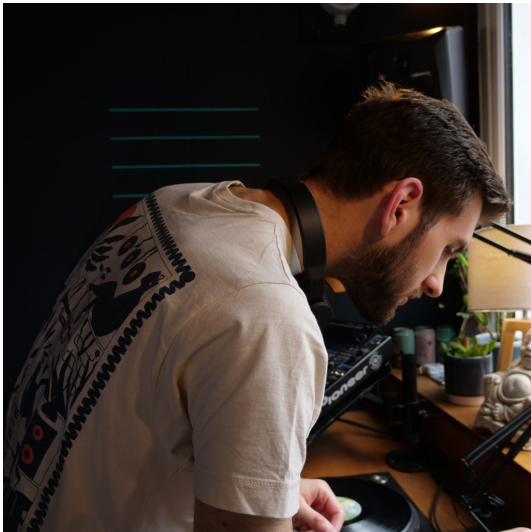
Listen:



Rosinha De Valenza – Summertime
Milton Nascimento – Tudo O Que Voce Podia Ser
Lyn Christopher – Take Me With You
Freddie Waters – Groovin' On My Baby's Love
Leroy Hutson – I Think I'm Falling In Love
Fallon Jennings – All Night Long
Average White Band & Ben E. King – Get It Up For Love
Fred Aucagos – Pagua Zo Pile Moin
Bill Withers – Don't It Make it Better
Chaka Khan – What Cha' Gonna Do For Me
Diva – La Nuit
Jackie Stoudemire – Don't Stop Dancin'
Love Company – Love Tempo
Nico Gomez – Lupita
Pure Energy – Party On



May 2022



Listen:



Seu Jorge – Carolina
Shirley Caesar – Heavenly Father
Millie Jackson – We Got To Hit It Off
Brooklyn Dreams – Street Dance
Slim Young – Otan Hunu
Jackson Five – I Am Love
Locksmith – Far Beyond
Sarah Vaughan – Inner City Blues
Seatbelts – Tank!
Chic – Soup For One
Roberta Kelly – Aie
Sharon Prabhakar – Halchal



June 2022



Listen:



David & Miguel - Momento Marquito
João Cunha - Essa Eu Fiz Pra Ela
Luiz Bonfá - Malaguena Salerosa
Gilberto Gil - Toda Menina Baiana
Frei Hermano da Camara - Tunica Negra
Salada De Frutas - Bolonha
Marcos Valle - A Paraíba Não É Chicago
Elba Ramalho - No Caminho De Cuba
Eri Ohno - Skyfire
Tantra - Macumba
Thai Break - Flowers In The Rain
Café Society - Somebody To Love
Patrick Cowley - Primitive World
Sylvester - I Need You



July 2022



Listen:



Pedro Santos - Água Viva
Bola Sete - Bettina
Pastor T L Barrett - Like a Ship
Cargo - Holding On For Love
Yasuko Agawa - L.A. Nights
Bebe Manga - Lokognolo
Magalhães e sua Guitarra- Xangô
Célia - A Hora É Essa
Twinkie Clark - Jesus I'll Never Forget
Pockets - Come Go With Me
Donell Jones - I'll Go
Lucy Pearl - Don't Mess With My Man
Pointer Sisters - Happiness
Venus Dodson - Shining
Michel Laurent - A Ka Titine



August 2022



Listen:



Silk - I Can't Stop
Jorge Ben - Olha A Pipa
Donatella Viggiano - Napule Canta E More
Special Occasion - Flying To Santa Barbara
Marcia Maria - Amigo Branco
Carly Simon - Tranquillo (Melt My Heart)
Trio Ternura - Filhos De Zambi
Tobias - Coisa Sentimental
Pino Daniele - Yes I Know My Way
Sammy Maassamba - Propriété Privée
The Second Resurrection - Keep On Keeping On
Yasuha - Sepia Photography
Tatsuro Yamashita - Sparkle
Lamont Dozier - Going Back To My Roots



September 2022



Listen:



Jiro Inagaki & Soul Media – Breeze
Mark Barrott – Baby Come Home
Doris Monteiro – Maita
Velly Joonas – Kaes On Aeg
Flamingo – Chain Of Fools
Djavan – Maria das Mercedes
Shuggie Otis – Inspiration Information
Darrell Johnson – Days Gone Past
Bread and Butter – Summer Blue
Junko Ohashi – Telephone Number
Masayoshi Takanaka – Finger Dancin'
Reiko Takahashi – Sunset Road
Yukihiro Takahashi – Present
Sanulim – Don't Go
Naoya Matsuoka – The Latin Man



October 2022



Listen:



Brenda Russell - A Little Bit of Love
Solange - Quero Um Baby Seu
Junko Yagami - Bay City
Kimiko Kasai - Vibration (Love Celebration)
Banda Black Rio - Vidigal
Kingo Hamada - Dolphin In The City
Marcos Valle - Bicicleta
Freeez - Southern Freeez
Tata Vega - (I've Got My) Second Wind
Donatella Rettore - Splendid Splendente
Eliana Pittman - Quem Vai Querer
Khaled - Didi
Grace Jones - La Vie En Rose



November 2022



Listen:



João Bosco - A Nível De
The Futures - Ain't No Time Fa Nothin'
Latimore - Sweet Vibrations
Chocolate Milk - Time Machine
Little Beaver - Party Down
Chuck Mangione - Love The Feelin'
Charles Aznavour - Parce Que Tu Crois
Leroy Hutson - All Because of You
Gloria Jay - I'm Gonna Make It
Banda Monte Cara - Dia Já Manche
Lovelites - Love So Strong
Wizdom - I'm So In Love With You
Voices of East Harlem - Can You Feel It
Creative Source - You Can't Hide Love
Candido - Jingo



December 2022



Listen:



Augie Rios - Donde Esta Santa Claus
Khruangbin - Christmas Time Is Here
Lou Rawls - Christmas Will Really Be Christmas
Otis Redding - Merry Christmas Baby
Billy May - Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer Mambo
The Enchanters - Mambo Santa Mambo
Lionel Hampton - Swingle Jingle
Chet Baker - Winter Wonderland
Ray Brown Trio - Christmas Rap
Soul Saints Orchestra - Santa's Got A Bag Of Soul
Gary Walker & The Boogie Kings - Santa's Got A Brand New Bag
James Brown - Soulful Christmas
The Jive Turkeys - Get Down Santa
Detroit Junior - Christmas Day
Lord Nelson - Party For Santa Claus
Electric Jungle - Funky Funky Christmas
Jose Feliciano - Feliz Navidad
Al Green - Feels Like Christmas
The Salsoul Orchestra - The Little Drummer Boy



January 2023



Listen:



Mina - Conversazione
Fred Bongusto - Amore Fermati
Bruno Lauzi - 'A bertoela
Pino D'Angio - Un po d'uval e un liquore
Giuliano Sorgini - Curiosità
Capinera - Il Volo
Enzo Carella - Barbara
Tonica & Dominante - Gennarino 'O Sioux
Lucio Battisti - Il Veliero
The Funkin' Machine - Allerta Meteo
Nu Genea - Tienate
Franco Califano - Balla Ba
Piero Umiliani - Discomania
Flavia Fortunato - Se Tu Vuoi
Azoto - Anytime or Place
Massara - Margarita



February 2023



Listen:



Sly & The Family Stone - Mother Beautiful
Blossom Dearie - Somebody New
Delegation - It Only Happens
Supreme Jubilees - You Don't Know
The Millennium - 5am
Som Tres - Take It Easy My Brother Charles
Sweet Thunder - Honey Bee
Family Circle - I Hope You Really Love Me
Bango - Geninha
Archie Bell & The Drells - Don't Let Love Get You Down
Mariya Takeuchi - Plastic Love
George McCrae - You Can Have It All
Alicia Myers - I Want To Thank You
Harvey Mason - Till You Take My Love
Michael Wycoff - Diamond Real
Archie James Cavanaugh - Take It Easy
Marti Caine - Love The Way You Love Me



March 2023



Listen:



Tim Bernardes - Nascir, Viver, Morrer
Bobby Caldwell - Down for the Third Time
Ann Peebles - I'm Gonna Tear Your Playhouse Down
Leo Middea - Lisbon Lisbon
Di Melo - Pernalonga
Toco - Meu Rio
Mave & Dave - You Are Delicious
Melody Beecher - Careless Whisper
Yellowman - Strong Me Strong
Lou Rawls - You'll Never Find Another Love Like Mine
Free Life - There's Something Better
Osmar Milito - Maracatu Atomico
Jorge Ben - Waimea 55.000
A Patotinha - Let's Groove
Messenjah - Crazy
Taxi - Melo da Garrafa



April 2023



Listen:



Triste Janero - Rene De Marie
Eddie Kendricks - Date with the Rain
Minnie Riperton - Adventures in Paradise
Yellow Magic Orchestra - Tighten Up
Leroy Hutson - Don't It Make You Feel Good
KC and The Sunshine Band - I'm Your Boogie Man
Carlos Dafe - Escorpiao
James Brown - I'm Satisfied
Gal Costa - Aquarela De Brasil
Os Originais Do Samba - La Vem Salgueiro
Perez Prado - Mambo No.5
Alfredo Linares - El Pito
Totó La Momposina - El Pescador



May 2023



Listen:



Sierra Maestra – Marieta
Ahmed Malek - Bossa
David Bowie - Volare
Nohelani Cypriano - Lihue
José Pinhal – A Vida Dura Muito Pouco
Pino Presti – Funky Bump
Ramona Brooks – I Don't Want You Back
Janice McClain – Smack Dab In The Middle
Lole Y Manuel – Tu Mira
Mon Rivera – Lluvia Con Nieve
Nico Gomez – Baila Chibiquiban
Francoise Hardy – Le Temps de l'Amour
Maryse Bonnet – Au Soleil
Bibi Flash – Histoire d'1 Soir
Patti Labelle – Music Is My Way Of Life
Rupa – East West Shuffle



June 2023



Listen:



Derrick Cross - Never Too Much
JJ Sparks - I Wanna Make Love To You
Cut Glass - Rising Cost of Love
Prince - Dear Mr. Man
The Supreme Jubilees - Do You Believe
Kevin Moore - Speak Your Mind
Marvin Gaye - Where Are We Going?
Asha Puthli - Space Talk
Yasuko Agawa - L.A. Night
Dexter Wansel - The Sweetest Pain
Elizio de Búzios - Tamanqueiro
Luedji Luna - Banho de Folhas
Oscar D'León - Detalles
Joe Arroyo - La Noche



July 2023



Listen:



The Clark Sisters – You Brought The Sunshine
Jorge Ben Jor – Xica Da Silva
Oz Brazoes – Carolina, Carol Bela
Rogê – Existe Uma Voz
Evinha – Que Bandeira
Baden Powell – Rosa Flor
Joao Selva – Navegar
Kimiko Kasai – Barren
Mai Yamane – Tasogare
Tomoko Aran – Midnight Pretenders
Anri – Fly by Day
Tatsuro Yamashita – Sparkle
Ricchi e Poveri – Malinteso
Jerry Butler – I'm Just Thinking About Cooling Out



August 2023



Listen:



Superior Elevation – It Was September
Dennis Brown – Love Has Found Its Way
Jimmy Cliff – Treat the Youths Right
Emilio Santiago – Dentro de Voce
Mario Castro Neves & Samba S.A. – Candomblé
Los Bukis – Si Te Pasa Lo Que Me Paso
Mongo Santamaria – Watermelon Man
Luchito & Nestor – Tighten Up
Ajda Pekkan – Yeniden Başlasın
Simone – Mabsouta
The Scorpions – Mashena
DjeuhDjoah & Lieutenant Nicholson – Caipirinha
Richie Havens – Going Back To My Roots
Ten City – That's The Way Love Is
Kimiko Kasai – Yarikeke No Jinsei



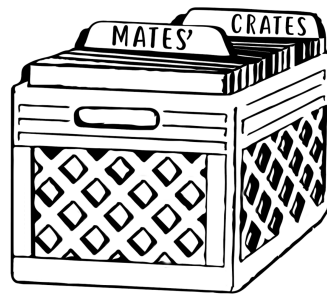
September 2023



Listen:



João Gilberto - Bim Bom
Djavan - Para Raio
Arc De Soleil - Got Caught In Amsterdam
Benny Sings - Young Hearts
Khruangbin - Time
Wild Fire - Sexy Lady You
Girma Beyene - Enken Yelelebesh
Milton Wright - Brothers and Sisters
Robson Jorge and Lincoln Olivetti - Ginga
Cheb Nasro - Meli Cheftek
Zohra - Badala Zamana
The Duncans - Too Damn Hot
Grupo Algo Nuevo - Cacao
Stevie Wonder - Another Star
Bananarama - Long Train Running
Jean Luc Ponty — Computer Incantations For World Peace





Mates' Crates is my digger's diary, my opportunity to share the stories behind my favourite records - whether the story of how the music came about or how we came to love it.

Born out of an infectious curiosity about the who and the why, it's a journey through funk, soul, disco and beyond from which you might even come away with something new.

This book is a collection of the columns published on Liverpool's Melodic Distraction from early 2019 to late 2023.

I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

With love,

Andrei

