

DISCO



The Queen

Donna Summer became the queen of the discos with her heavy breathing on "Love to Love You Baby," a song that spins moans, groans, cries and whispers into dance music. She keeps her crown by creating what she calls "fantasy": a surrealistic mixture of her hot-blooded vocals with the detached coolness of electronic music. Her latest album, *Once Upon a Time*, is a modern-day Cinderella fable done as "disco opera." Cinderella/Summer will take a stage version on the road in late spring.

Summer obviously has more ambition in life than being a stereophonic sex kitten. A Boston native, she went to Europe nine years ago to perform in the German cast of *Hair*, then joined the Vienna Folk Opera productions of *Porgy and Bess* and *Showboat*. She appears in a new disco flick, *Thank God It's Friday*, she co-wrote and sang the disco theme from *The Deep*, and her album material, especially on *I Remember Yesterday*, shows her considerable vocal skills with blues, gospel and soul.

Platinum Blue Eyes

Boz Scaggs' switch from folksy blue-eyed soul to slick dance tunes was perfect timing in 1976. The disco boom shot his *Silk Degrees* album to triple platinum (three million sales) and yielded four good disco/dance hits: "Low-down," "It's Over," "What Can I Say" and "Lido Shuffle."



Disco's driving "thump thump" beat is meant to knock you onto your feet and get you dancing. The lyrics? Short and sweet (or simple-minded, to disco detractors). "They're mantras for the dance floor," insists Grace Jones, a Jamaican-born disco star. On her hit single, "I Need a Man," Jones belts out the same four words (the song's title) a staggering 42 times. The hammering repetition of simple beat and simple lyric inspires a frenzied liberation, say disco fans.

The place to get caught up in this new excitement is the "disco" itself. These pleasure domes mix tightly packed dance floors with a heavy dose of Seventies technology: sophisticated sound systems deliver the beat with carefully crafted intensity and intricate lighting effects aim to suspend time. It's a high-energy, super-spacey environ that gives new meaning to "future shock."



Discomania: Catching the fever from light and sound

SOUND SAMPLER

Bee Gees: *Saturday Night Fever* • **The Commodores:** *Commodores* • **Earth, Wind and Fire:** *That's the Way of the World* • **Marvin Gaye:** *Let's Get It On* • **Gloria Gaynor:** *Never Can Say Goodbye* • **Grace Jones:** *Portfolio* • **K.C. & the Sunshine Band:** *K.C. & the Sunshine Band* • **MFSB:** *MFSB* • **Ohio Players:** *Honey* • **O'Jays:** *Back Stabbers* • **The Ritchie Family:** *Arabian Nights* • **Silver Convention:** *Save Me* • **Boz Scaggs:** *Silk Degrees* • **Donna Summer:** *Once Upon a Time* • **Barry White and Love Unlimited Orchestra:** *Under the Influence of Love*



The Big Comeback

Disco's biggest success is also the decade's big comeback story: the **Bee Gees**. The high British harmonies of the Brothers Gibb earned one gold album in the Beatles' Sixties, then fell from hit range. The Australian trio came back in the mid-Seventies with a new disco passion and a strong string of gold-selling dance tunes like "You Should Be Dancing," "Jive Talkin'" and "Nights on Broadway." Their superstar status was clinched by the highly successful, disco-inspired film, *Saturday Night Fever*. The Bee Gees wrote seven and perform six of the movie's hit songs. The soundtrack album broke the eight-month stranglehold that Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* had on the Number One spot.

Roots

The disco beat is an outgrowth of the rhythm and blues music of pop's past. In the smoky clubs of Chicago's black ghettos in the late Forties, men like the legendary **Muddy Waters**, "The Hoochie Coochie Man," hammered out a sensual beat on amplified guitars. By the Fifties, the sound was called "rhythm and blues": a hard city rhythm with softer blues roots of the rural South.

Groups like the Temptations and the Supremes brought a version of the beat to white audiences in the early and mid-Sixties. But Gladys Knight's hit in 1968, "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," was the classic preview of the

Seventies: simple beat, simple lyrics, simply frenzied.

