
Disco Before Disco

Dancing and popular music in the 1960s and 1970s in England

ABSTRACT Dancing has been a central component of the experience of popular music, yet with the exceptions of disco and electronic dance music, it is rarely discussed in the academic literature. This article focuses on a pivotal moment in the transformation of dancing to popular music in England. The second half of the 1960s saw the gradual move from dancing to live groups to dancing to records in clubs. Just before this dancing itself had changed from something done by couples to something done by individuals albeit usually in pairs, though often girls might dance together in a group. Young people in England learned to dance to music with a strongly emphasized beat. This article traces this genre from its early manifestations in tracks by the Honeycombs and the Dave Clark Five in the first half of the 1960s to the early 1970s in tracks by Mud and Slade. The article ends by looking at how this musical genre morphed into Eurodisco in the production work of Giorgio Moroder.

KEYWORDS Dancing, England, 1960s/1970s, Dave Clark Five, clubs, Eurodisco, Giorgio Moroder

In discussions about popular music in the early 1970s in England groups like Slade, Sweet, and Chicory Tip are given short shrift. If they are discussed at all it is as the populist end of Glam Rock (see, for example, Hoskyns and Auslander). They are the fellow-travellers to the more intellectually interesting artists Marc Bolan, David Bowie and Roxy Music. These populist artists worked at the moment when club culture had become common across England and their music functioned as dance music. In their *History of Live Music in Britain*, Simon Frith and his colleagues make a point that is central to the argument in this article and explains the importance of those populist groups: “[What] we need to stress is that it was the long-established youth interest in dancing that drove the development of post-war popular music rather than vice versa” (Frith et al. 2013, pp. 134–35). These new clubs increasingly played records for young people to dance to rather than employing groups. This change gradually took place through the 1960s, As Sarah Thornton (1995, p. 28) writes: ‘The public acceptance of records for dancing was slow, selective and generational.’ It represented a cultural transformation of significant proportions. The late 1960s and early 1970s were a pivotal time.

It was in the context of the shift to dancing to records that individualized dancing, albeit usually in couples, as opposed to dancing where young females and males at least held each other’s hand, became the norm. It is important to understand that

these clubs that through the late 1960s and early 1970s came to be called discos did not play the music that from the mid-1970s began to be identified generically as disco. I am thinking here of the American-originated genre the popularity of which in the United States and elsewhere we can roughly date to Van McCoy's "The Hustle" in 1975. Rather, in England, a disco signalled a place where you could go and dance to recorded music.

The move from live music to recorded music in clubs was part of another transformation, the evolution of popular electronic music for dancing. This development is often identified with the rise of Eurodisco. At its forefront was the Italian producer Giorgio Moroder, who had his own recording studio in Munich and who developed a fascination with the possibilities of synthesizers. The same year, 1972, that Roxy Music released its first album, and the single "Virginia Plain," both with the synthesizer work of [Brian] Eno using the English-made VCS3 prominent on them, Chicory Tip released "Son Of My Father," a track that had been composed and recorded by Moroder with English lyrics by Pete Bellotte, and on which Moroder had played an American Moog synthesizer. Chicory Tip's version also included a Moog synthesizer, theirs played by the studio engineer Chris Thomas, who would later become a well-known producer working with John Cale and Pink Floyd, among others. Both "Virginia Plain" and "Son Of My Father" were played in discos as dance records. Signalling the popularity of the tracks, "Virginia Plain" reached number four on the UK chart and "Son Of My Father" reached number one.

GOING DANCING IN THE 1960S

The expansion of clubs where young people could gather to dance to groups playing the latest hits and, increasingly, dance to these played on record was the basis of a transformation in the dancing experience of young people. Simon Frith and his colleagues write that "in the late 1950s, dancing habits began to change," and they go on to explain that "in general it is clear that young people spent as much time dancing as had their parents in the 1930s, but they were dancing in a different way to different music in different sorts of venue—the ballroom had largely been replaced by the club" (Frith et al. 2013, pp. 132, 133). Commenting on the 1950s, Dave Haslam (2016, pp. 129–30; see also Nott 2015) explains:

The formula of a Saturday night—ballroom dancing to a jazz orchestra in the local dance hall—wasn't working in the way it had for thirty years. There were all the counter-attractions, the plethora of basement venues, self-organised events, coffee-bar dance clubs and new music choices. In addition, young people on a night out were beginning to accept and enjoy the idea of pre-recorded rather than live music.

Crucial here was the increasing acceptance of recorded music for dancing. In 1959 the Association of Ballrooms wanted to "probe the wave of disc hops which are springing up all over the country. . . . These record sessions, often run in village halls, teenage clubs and civic centers, have already put some dance proprietors out of business" (Haslam 2016, p.

96). This development required improvements in sound systems. Haslam writes about the importance of the cinema in the 1950s in Britain as a way of popularizing rock and roll because the BBC would not play it on the radio. He also remarks that “exposure to Rock & Roll at the cinema had a visceral impact, partly and thrillingly because cinemas had a far better PA than you’d get [in the clubs of the time]” (Haslam 2016, p. 78). The relative quality of cinema PAs was one reason for the unruly behavior, including dancing, of teddy boys and girls during the showing of rock and roll films, such as *Rock Around the Clock*, released in 1956 (Sampson 2012).

As sound systems improved so clubs playing records for dancing became more feasible. Generally speaking, however, young people continued to prefer dancing to live groups. In the early 1960s the evolution of beat groups was closely linked to their ability to provide music for dancing. As Haslam (2016, p. 105) remarks, “What was always of paramount importance was that the ‘beat groups’ played music you could dance to.” Writing in 1992 Dick Bradley (p. 73) comments:

To this day, hundreds of Beat groups, often now wearing evening dress and calling themselves ‘Cabaret’, but Beat groups in musical terms none the less, provide cheap live dance music at parties, dance halls, Christmas ‘dinner dances’, British Legions, working men’s clubs, etc., all over Britain, performing rock and Beat and soul-pop standards mixed perhaps with crooner-type ballads, Country songs and a smattering of whatever is in the pop charts this year.

It could be argued that the instrumental structure of the normative beat group—two guitars, bass guitar, drums—facilitated the ability to meet the demands of these diverse audiences for music to which they could dance. A number of these groups, including the Beatles, had honed their skills in the clubs of Hamburg, where they were employed to play as background for drinkers and also for dancers.

Noting that “discos had only recently become a crucial component of the British pop infrastructure” Simon Reynolds (2016, p. 206) suggests that by the early 1970s there were around a thousand discos in the UK and that every large town had one. Through the 1960s clubs were venues where beat groups played and somebody played records during the times between the group’s sets. Gradually, from around the mid-1960s, teenagers began to accept dancing to records, and clubs would have evenings during the week when only records were played. The role of the disc jockey was becoming more important. No longer required to play music for dancing, the groups started playing more original material that was often harder to dance to. At this time clubs morphed into discos, which as discotheques had an elite history stretching back to the late 1940s.

FROM THE TWIST TO THE BEAT

The revolution in dancing came with the Twist. Like the earlier jive, the Twist was originally an African-American dance. Both were bowdlerized and reworked to make them more palatable to a white, middle-class morality that repressed any suggestion of sex in dancing and that focused bodily response to music on the feet. In 1963 John

Martin explained that ‘the deliberately maintained erectness of the European dancer’s spine is in marked contrast to the fluidity of the Negro dancer’s’ (Stearns and Stearns 1994, p. 15). Here we have a good description of the fundamental difference in the importance of the body in European, we might say white, dancing and African-American dancing, a difference reflected in the significance of rhythm in African-American music. Theresa Buckland (2011, p. 7) writes that in the 1870s: “The role of [upper class] Society’s dancing and deportment instructors was to fashion bodies that instantly stood out as belonging to a superior station in life, moving according to a genteel code, and dancing the latest dances.” What Buckland is describing for the English upper classes is the ideal of absolute self-control of one’s body. By the early twentieth century this idea had spread through English society and taken on a moral quality. Writing about dancing in the first half of the century, James Nott (2015, p. 227) tells us: “The English style of dancing was primarily concerned with the perfect execution of steps, rather than the expression of the dancers” This concentration on the feet and the limiting control of the body remained the dominant understanding of how to dance to popular music for white English people in the 1960s.

The Twist heralded a significant change in how white people danced. In its whitened version, which emphasized the hip swivel and the correlative movement of the legs and feet, it didn’t even require much sense of rhythm or understanding of the beat. Brewster and Broughton (2014, p. 68) add: “Now, released from the constraints of formal steps and partners, the dancer was free to build something completely new. . . . You could dance however your imagination suggested.” While this was not entirely true of the Twist, the dance did pave the way for dancing that required no complicated steps and allowed the dancer freedom to express themselves in relation to the music to which they were dancing. As Tim Wall (2008, p. 195) writes: “In the historical development of social dance the Twist seems to be a move towards the individualistic dancing of the later 1960s and the first move from couple-based dancing.” In England in the second half of the 1950s, prior to the popularity of the Twist such dancing had another origin. George Melly, the trad jazz singer, writing in his book on youth culture, *Revolt into Style*, recounts that “the accepted method of dancing to trad music is to jump heavily from foot to foot like a performing bear, preferably *out of time* to the beat” (quoted in Brewster and Broughton, p. 47, Melly’s italics), Trad jazz dancing, and subsequently the Twist, paved the way for dancing that continued to emphasize feet movement but in a minimal form that at its most basic could be found in the stomping encouraged in the tradition that culminated in the music of Slade and Sweet. As an aside, such stomping provides a history for the pogoing of the punks.

The Twist arrived in the UK in 1960; Chubby Checker’s version of the song reached number fourteen on the UK chart in late September. This was the same time that the beat groups were beginning to evolve out of skiffle groups. Indeed, 1960 was the year that the Quarrymen became the Beatles. The new beat groups offered a form of music that emphasized the beat and in this way enabled the new form of dancing. In 1963 the Beatles recorded “Twist and Shout.” Their version was based on the Isley Brothers version that had been produced by one of the writers, Bert Berns (under the name Bert

Russell). The Isley Brothers version rebooted the group's career as rhythm and blues artists. In the United States it reached number one on the R&B chart and number seventeen on the pop chart, signalling the song's crossover potential. Berns acknowledged that in his vision the song was heavily influenced by Richie Valens' recording of "La Bamba." The Latin rhythm gave the song a movement that enabled it to be easily twisted to if dancers wished that. The Beatles started covering the song when they were playing in Hamburg at the Star Club in 1962. Their recorded version appears on the group's first album, *Please Please Me*. The Beatles often concluded their concerts with "Twist and Shout," including their Royal Command Performance in November 1963. From a Latin-influenced twist song The Beatles turned it into a high-energy rock 'n' roll number. In one description, "all the band—not least Ringo with his power-house drumming—played with an intensity that still sounds remarkable" (BeatlesBible). It is the drumming that drives the Beatles' beat version of the song and, as we shall see, it was drumming that was central to the developing white dance culture in England, and indeed in America, where white teenage dancing was closely connected to the burgeoning garage band culture.

STOMPING BEATS

The second most popular group in America during the height of the British Invasion was not another beat group such as, for example, The Searchers, but a group from Tottenham in London, The Dave Clark Five. Their first number one in the UK, "Glad All Over," replaced The Beatles "I Want To Hold Your Hand," at the top of the chart. The single reached number six on the American chart. Between 1964 and 1967 the Dave Clark Five had twelve entries in the UK top forty, the Beatles had thirteen, and seventeen in the American top forty. During the same period the Beatles had nineteen entries in the American chart. The Dave Clark Five were not a beat group in the conventional sense. For one thing their line-up was completely different than the beat groups'. As Joe Queenan (2008) writes: "With an unusual lineup—drums out front and centre, piano and guitars off on the flanks, saxophone blaring—the Dave Clark 5 were musically equipped to do a lot of things that other bands couldn't." Dave Clark himself played the drums, and it was the drumming, a marching beat up front in the mix that was the group's most characteristic element. Queenan (2008) describes "Glad All Over" as the group's Ur single and adds:

It is loud. It is thumping. It does not allude to the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. It sounds like something written by someone who had listened to a lot of Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard records. It's the kind of song you can dance to.

The group wore Cuban heels and during performances would reinforce the drum sound by stamping their feet.

The Dave Clark Five's first single was a cover of the Contours' "Do You Love Me," recorded for Motown and written by Berry Gordy Jr. This is a song about dancing. It begins with a spoken introduction: "You broke my heart cause I couldn't dance. /You

didn't even want me around./ And now I'm back to let you know that I can really shake em down." The track then goes on to list the dances the singer has learned. In post-Twist England these African-American dances were not relevant. English teenagers were dancing in much more individualistic ways founded on the drum beat. It is clear that right from the start the Dave Clark Five understood their driving beat as the basis for dancing. Matt Hurwitz interviewed Dave Clark about "Glad All Over":

Key to a Dave Clark Five show at the Tottenham (sic) was a bit of audience participation, typically involving a Clark drum break, getting the audience stomping their feet in time to his playing. 'I'd actually pay somebody 5 pounds to go switch all the lights on and off in the ballroom, in time with the stomps,' he says. 'That's what gave Mike and I the idea for "Glad All Over,"' whose chorus features a can't-help-yourself 'bomp-bomp' "Glad All Over!" chorus'. (Hurwitz 2015)

While the Dave Clark Five were getting the audience at the Tottenham Royal to stomp along with the drumbeat, something very similar was happening in Hamburg. Alan Clayson (1997, p. 78) writes:

[A song] such as "Whole Lotta Shakin" could last a full hour during which all but the drummer might abandon instruments to appeal to dancers to clap along to what they recognised as the *mach schau*—later, corrupted to 'let's go'—beat: pounding hi-hat, snare and bass drum in the same lone four-in-a-bar rhythm for chorus after chorus amid yells of encouragement until the levelling guitars surged back in again and the snare reverted to its usual off-beat, and the hi-hat to eight quavers a bar while the bass drum continued to clump fours rather than the standard rock 'n' roll on-beat.

What the audience was learning in both Tottenham and Hamburg was how to dance founded on the drumbeat. What the groups were learning was how to play music the white English and German audience could dance to. The dance flowed from the feet upwards, as in ballroom dancing, rather than from the hips and pelvis as in African-American dancing.

A genre was developing among English groups which privileged the drum as the song's driving force. In 1964, the year after "Glad All Over" began a run of hits for the Dave Clark Five based on their drum sound, the Honeycombs had their first hit with "Have I The Right?" The Honeycombs are often remembered for having a female drummer, Honey Lantree, but significant for a different reason was her drumming and its importance in the song's musical structure. Lantree's drumming emphasized each word of the first line of the lyrics, which was also the title of the song, and then went on to pound behind the words of the chorus. "Have I The Right" was produced by Joe Meek. Meek was an independent producer, and the idea was to record the song and then persuade a major record company to release it. Meek, who was known for his idiosyncrasies, had a studio in the flat he rented on Holloway Road in north London. For "Have I The Right," Jan Reetze writes:

After the band recorded the playback and the vocals, Meek provided a post-processing as it could only have occurred to him: He asked the band members and some other

persons to trample the beat on the wooden stairs to the studio and recorded that noise with five microphones he had fixed to the bannisters with bicycle clips. In addition, a tambourine was beaten directly onto a microphone. (Reetze 2012)

Released on Pye, the track climbed to number one on the UK chart. The group subsequently recorded quite successfully for Pye but was never able to repeat the popularity of their first release. The drumming on “Have I The Right” made it a great track for dancing in the same feet-first manner as the Dave Clark Five hits. This doubtless contributed to the track’s success.

The Troggs’ “Wild Thing” was released in 1966, as was “Hold Tight” by Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Tich. In both drums are important. “Wild Thing” is often dismissed as being “primitive” and basic. In fact, like “Hold Tight,” it is a record made for dancing. Like “Have I The Right,” “Wild Thing” was an independent production. Independent producers had more freedom to innovate than the in-house producers of the major record companies. Much of the interest in “Wild Thing” has focused on its importance to American garage bands. The Troggs’ recording’s unusual sound is linked with Chris Britton’s use of a distortion pedal and “the fact that guitars were not tuned to middle C when recording, causing the simple A major chord progression to be slightly sharp” (Vincent 2013). What is really important about the recording is that the guitar strums are in sync with the drum beats. This produces a heavy, driving beat that is easy to move one’s feet to. “Hold Tight,” written by Ken Howard and Alan Blaikley who also wrote “Have I The Right,” is another track with a strong drumming sound up front augmented this time by a tambourine.

“Hold Tight” is often linked with terrace football chants, either it is based on one or, certainly, there are chants, such as that used by Chelsea fans, which make use of the song’s rhythm. An anthemic quality was typical in English tracks made for dancing between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. As Reynolds (2016, p. 207) remarks:

Before disco took on its mid-seventies enduring meaning, pundits used terms like ‘disco dance records’ to describe the singles of Mud, Slade, The Sweet, Quatro and their ilk. Disco meant loud guitar music with a foot-stomping beat and a yell-able chorus.

Like the first, this second characteristic goes back well before the groups Reynolds mentions. The choruses of the Dave Clark Five hits could all be yelled along with the group’s singing, so could the chorus of “Have I The Right,” which, reinforced with Lantree’s drum beat for each word, stood out as chantable: “Come right back, I just can’t bear it / I’ve got this love and I want to share it.” By the late 1960s the sing-along, anthemic chorus included, in addition to the songs of the groups mentioned by Reynolds, Jeff Beck’s “Hi Ho Silver Lining,” which got to number fourteen in March 1967.ⁱ With its highly singable chorus the track became a perennial in the discos of the

i. In Nick Hornby’s novel *High Fidelity* (Penguin; London 2000) Hornby has his protagonist Rob Fleming expressing his dislike for ‘singing along to the chorus of “Hi Ho Silver Lining”, at the top of your voice’ at parties (p. 159).

late 1960s and early 1970s. The same is true of Rod Stewart's 1971 hit "Maggie May." Taken off the *Every Picture Tells a Story* album, the track was originally the B-side to "Reason To Believe." The record company, Mercury, must not have recognized it as a dance track. The track's popularity in the discos, and then on radio, made the label change the A-side. It reached number one on the UK chart. In the discos the DJ would often turn the sound down during the chorus so that the dancers could hear themselves sing/shout the lyrics to these tracks. The English, especially, have a long tradition of communal singing in pubs and on football terraces. In the years before specialized tracks were made for dancing in discos this tradition was transferred into these new venues.

AFRICAN DRUMS AND ENGLISH FEET

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the drum sound as the basis for dancing was transformed by the impact of sub-Saharan African drumming. In 1967 Ginger Johnson and his African Messengers released *African Party* on the small Masquerade label. Johnson's father was a Nigerian Yoruba man. His mother was from Brazil. Johnson had arrived in the UK in 1943 and became a merchant seaman. After the war he stayed and worked as an African percussionist for artists as diverse as Edmundo Ros and Ronnie Scott. Johnson was at the center of the diaspora of African musicians in London and even mentored a young Fela Kuti. On the album cover of *African Party* his group is described as Afro-Cuban. This is likely a British code signalling rhythmic complexity. Johnson himself is quoted in the liner notes as saying: "All the music that we do is based firmly in African traditions. So is rhythm and blues—but we try to get nearer the source, right down to the grass roots of the jungle—the sun, the heat, the insects, the abundance of life." Johnson offers those white purchasers of his album connections they might understand by relating the music to two African-American genres, rhythm & blues and jazz which he also identified as having an African origin.

Johnson's breakthrough into the mainstream of British popular music came on 5 July 1969, when he and his group played with the Rolling Stones during their Hyde Park concert, providing the rhythm for an extended version of "Sympathy For The Devil." In an interview with Jann Wenner in 1995, Mick Jagger describes the song: "It has a very hypnotic groove, a samba, which has tremendous hypnotic power, rather like good dance music it doesn't speed up or slow down. It keeps a constant groove" (Wenner 1995). Jagger adds that it has "an undercurrent of being primitive" (Wenner 1995). Johnson didn't play on the recorded version. That was Kwazi Dzidzornu, known as Rocky Dijon, who was a conga player from Ghana. On the recorded version, the congas provide a rhythmic, percussive backing supplementing Charlie Watts' drumming. At the Hyde Park concert, however, as can be heard in the recording, the rhythmic drumming of Johnson's group overlays Watts' drums during the instrumental break and provides a bed for the guitar work of Keith Richards and Mick Taylor. Estimates vary, but there were at least 250,000 people at this free concert. It was the moment when African-style drumming first reached a white, English, teenage audience.

In 1971 African drumming entered the discos. Mike Stephenson's track "Burundi Black" was released in the UK at almost the same time as John Kongos' "He's Gonna Step On You Again" was released. Stephenson was a pseudonym for the French classically trained composer Michel Bernholc, who had worked with French pop artists such as France Gall and Françoise Hardy. The record sampled a field recording of 25 Burundi drummers made in 1967 and released on an album of field recordings *Musique du Burundi* in 1968. Bernholc placed some fairly anodyne, but very European in style, piano and guitar work over the sample. This novel use of African drumming made the track very popular in the UK discos, and it charted at number thirty one.

In 1981 Rusty Egan released a remix of "Burundi Black." By the late 1970s, thanks to the influence of cultural entrepreneur Malcolm McLaren, the Burundi beat had become central to the recordings of both Adam and the Ants and Bow Wow Wow. McLaren gave Adam Ant a mix-tape of 17 tracks in late 1979 that included both "Burundi Black" and Gary Glitter's "Hello Hello, I'm Back Again." The drumming on this track, which was the work of producer Mike Leander who developed the instrumental backing for all Gary Glitter's hits, sounds very influenced by "Burundi Black." The Burundi sound became a key facet of Adam's tribal image. When McLaren persuaded the Ants to leave Adam and form the nucleus of Bow Wow Wow, they took the sound with them. Adam retained the sound when he put together a new Ants, and so the Burundi beat became a characteristic of both successful groups in the early 1980s.

McLaren had also given Adam a copy of John Kongos' "He's Gonna Step On You Again." The drum sound shows up on Adam and the Ants "Dog Eat Dog" single in 1980, which reached number four on the UK single chart and was the first track on their *Kings of the Wild Frontier* album, which topped the album chart. The second single off the album *Antmusic*, actually an EP, got to number two on the chart. The video for it, directed by Steve Barron, one of the most influential music video directors of his time who went on to a film career that started with *Electric Dreams*, showed Adam and the Ants invading a disco where they play live, bemusing the patrons who have been dancing to records on a jukebox. By the end of the song they are dancing to "Antmusic." The premise is that "Antmusic," with its Burundi-influenced beat is more enjoyable to dance to than whatever was being offered on the jukebox. The success of the single bears this out. The conceit is that the video would be shown as a recording of the song, and it was the record to which young people would dance. The Burundi beat was clearly much more than a fad. For more than a decade, in many forms, it powered British dance music.

After hearing Adam and the Ants "Kings Of The Wild Frontier" single, Egan, through the good offices of Jean-Philippe Iliesco, managed to obtain from the French label Barclay the original multi-tracks of "Burundi Black": "I just wanted the drums on their own with the tribe and no music, then I added a drum machine and some playing. I wanted this tribal feel and the future together" (Ming Lai 2019). Egan mixed up the beat of the drums in the sample and synchronized the additional drum machine, synthesizer and piano to the, using Jagger's word, hypnotic beat. Egan's version was a dance floor hit in both London and New York. The drum machine gave a repetitive

regularity to the beat, which helped dancers with little sense of rhythm. Kraftwerk, whom Egan played at Blitz, used a Farfisa Rhythm 10R and a Vox Percussion King on their hugely influential *Autobahn* album. As Egan rightly said, the drum machine was the sound of the future.

Autobahn was Kraftwerk's breakthrough album. It was released in 1974. In the UK, the album's popularity on the dance floor was pioneered by Egan who DJ'd at Blitz nightclub on Tuesdays in Covent Garden. This club was the early home of the New Romantics. The patrons were first called the Blitz Kids. Blitz flourished between 1979 and 1981. Egan's music of choice was synth-driven electronic dance music. *Autobahn* was a foundational work in the development of Eurodisco. It was made using a Moog mini-moog which provided the hypnotic, repetitive pulsing beat that powered the track's almost twenty-three minutes.

Gus Dudgeon produced the John Kongos single McLaren gave Adam Ant. Dudgeon had worked his way up from being a recordist and engineer at Decca to producer. In her account of his career with a special focus on his Glam Rock work with David Bowie on "Space Oddity" and Elton John on "Rocket Man," Samantha Bennett (2016, p. 59) describes him as an English eccentric. He was certainly innovative though he was perhaps not as eccentric as Joe Meek. Kongos' "He's Gonna Step On You Again" was released in May 1971 on the independent Fly label, and "Burundi Black" the following month. John Kongos was from South Africa, where he had been a member of Johnny and the G Men. Kongos' later work in England was mostly psychedelically influenced. In 1969 he released an album titled *Confusions About a Goldfish*. It may have been the African connection that gave Dudgeon the idea of using African drumming as a basis for "Step On You." In addition, the song's lyrics suggest a protest against the oppression of the black African population of South Africa under apartheid. At the same time sub-Saharan rhythms were becoming accepted in the UK. Both Osibisa and Assagai released their first albums in 1971.

Robert Webb (2013, p. 184) writes about "He's Gonna Step On You Again," quoting Dudgeon:

The whole record is built on a loop, lifted from an African tribal dance recorded in some jungle somewhere, he told *Sound on Sound* magazine. Dudgeon ran the two-and-a-half bar loop through the mixing desk and instructed his studio musicians to play over it. 'The drummer was, like, "What? It's got drums on it already!' All the time they were doing it I was terrified. No one had ever done it before, I was thinking I was going to get my arse sued off, but the point was you could never have faked it. Dudgeon dubbed on the rest of the musicians and Kongos' vocals.

It is likely that Dudgeon knew of the Rolling Stones' use of Ginger Johnson and His Messengers in Hyde Park almost two years earlier. The Kongos track similarly uses a drummer whose beat emerges from the African drumming, which provides a bed for the guitar work. Dudgeon nowhere identifies where the African drumming is from, and his reference to a jungle, which is also present in the liner notes for Johnson's album, and his fear of legal action, suggests he may well have sampled Johnson's *African Party* album.

Dudgeon is often cited, for instance by *The Guinness Book of Records*, as the first person to use a tape loop in popular music. Tape loops had been used in avant-garde classical music as far back as the late 1950s by, for example, Terry Riley. “He’s Gonna Step On You Again,” with its use of a repeated sample, was the beginning of the technologization of dance music in Britain. We might describe it as a beginning of the Eurodisco sound. It is not surprising that this started with the beat because for dancers who had difficulty finding and keeping the beat, even with the heavy emphasis on the drumming that we have traced to the Dave Clark Five, among others, an exactly repeated beat was precisely what they needed.

In America in the same year of 1971, Sly and the Family Stone used a drum machine on their dance-friendly funk track “Family Affair”: “Family Affair” featured a primitive drum machine that played a bouncy, featherweight rhythm that was echoed in two early disco hits, George McCrae’s “Rock Your Baby” and the Hues Corporation’s “Rock the Boat” (Echols 2011, p. 21). This is possibly the first use of a drum machine in popular music. Sly and the Family Stone infused funk with rock and found a white audience or, as Rickey Vincent (1996, p. 89) puts it: “For mainstream America the ambassador of funk was Sylvester Stewart, also known as Sly Stone.” The concern was to find a straightforward beat for those mainstream dancers. In the UK, “Family Affair” climbed to number fifteen on the chart. The only single of Sly and the Family Stone to get higher was “Dance To The Music,” which got to number seven in 1968. As its title signifies, this was also a track for dancing to. Like Dudgeon’s use of a tape loop of African drumming, the drum machine provided a guaranteed beat unlike a human drummer, who would always be infinitesimally in front or behind the beat no matter how good a timekeeper they were. It would be the use of drum machines that made beat-mixing possible. As Brewster and Broughton (2014, p. 145) note: “Nowadays, [beat-mixing] is fairly easy since most dance songs, thanks to drum machines, have an unwavering tempo, and modern turntables have sophisticated pitch control, allowing the DJ to bring one record’s speed up or down to match the other.” The more regular the tempo, the easier it is to dance to. “He’s Gonna Step On You Again” spent fourteen weeks in the UK top forty getting as high as number four.

In 1990 “He’s Gonna Step On You Again” was covered by the Manchester group, the Happy Mondays as “Step On.” The group dispensed with the African drumming tape loop but, in the time of rave when dance music had become a genre in its own right, focused on the song as specifically a dance track, Steve Osborne, who coproduced the track with the DJ and producer Paul Okenfold, has explained:

We approached the track from very much a ‘dance music producer’ mindset. Did the drums, looped them and bounced them down to stereo before putting them in the Akai sampler, stuck a 909 with it and that was the beat, then we recorded the bassline . . . Tony Wilson [one of the cofounders of Factory Records] came down when we just had the drums and the bass and he said, ‘This is going to be massive.’ (Price 2019)

Wilson was right. The track was a huge hit on the dance floor and reached number five on the chart. “Step On” kept the driving rhythm of the Kongos original from twenty

years earlier, while the electronic manipulation of the drums generated a complex, repeated pattern that substituted for the African drum loop and was ideal for a dance floor that privileged the beat.

'ROCK AND ROLL' AND MIKE LEANDER

At the time, Dudgeon's production of "He's Gonna Step On You Again" was unique, a sui generis pop track that was ideal for dancing. But it couldn't be played live in the form it existed on the record. It was released at the start of the Glam Rock era, when teenagers still predominantly danced to live music. Between 1971 and 1977 Slade had nineteen entries in the UK top forty. From 1971 to 1974, twelve of these were consecutive top ten entries. Sweet scored thirteen top forty entries between 1971 and 1975. The specificity of this music can be suggested by the fact that Slade had no singles in the American top forty, and Sweet had four between 1971 and 1975. Through the 1960s Mary Regan and her husband ran a chain of dancehalls in the Black Country around Birmingham and Wolverhampton. Many groups started their careers playing there. The members of Slade had played in various groups who had performed at Ma Regan's dancehalls as well as the clubs of Hamburg. Gradually, the groups were replaced by DJs. Nevertheless:

The [Old Hill] Plaza remained the centre of the social scene in the area into the early 1970s. The venue benefited from the unshakable local demand for somewhere half decent and local where you could get a drink or two, a dance, and turn some heads. (Haslam 2016, pp. 124–5)

In 1972 Ma Regan closed the Plaza and turned it into a bingo hall. The age of the dancehalls was ending. The groups like Slade and Sweet continued to make records people danced to and continued as touring acts, but by the late-1970s they were mostly replaced in the discos by records increasingly constructed specially for dancing. The new groups, such as Visage, Duran Duran and Spandau Ballet, included synthesizers and, increasingly, drum machines. From a different perspective, this is the moment of the consolidation of the trend for rock music to become something you listened to rather than danced to.

The pivotal record in the development of a disco sound founded in a driving drum beat and a sing-along chorus is one usually thought of as a key moment in Glam Rock, Gary Glitter's "Rock and Roll, Part 2." Since 1997 Glitter has been excoriated as a notorious paedophile, but during the Glam Rock era in the early 1970s he was celebrated as the most visually extreme and most popular performer of the artists in the genre "Rock And Roll" parts 1 and 2, the two sides of the single, were the joint creation of Gary Glitter and Mike Leander. Leander supplied the musical backing, while Gary Glitter, brought up as Paul Gadd, provided the words, and the performance. Glitter was signed to Bell Records. Dick Leahy had taken over as general manager of Bell UK in 1970. He told *Melody Maker*, "I felt there was no glamour or fun. The music industry was grinding to a halt with needless guitar solos" (Reynolds 2016, p.

205). The reference to needless guitar solos is a code for records to which people could not dance. By the late 1960s there was a demand for singles that could be easily danced to. Bell and RAK, Mickie Most's label, aimed to fill this new market. Referring to Bell, Reynolds (2016, p. 205) tells us that "by 1973 one in three of the sixty-four singles Leahy put out made the charts; six of the year's top-selling singles bore the Bell logo. It was the UK's leading company for singles."

By this time the singles market was closely associated with discos, and Leahy's focus was on the discos that had spread across the UK:

Bell's innovation was to develop a comprehensive list of discotheques across the country with information about the size of the club, the type of audience that attended, the genres of music favoured, even the time when particular records got played during the night. Bell would then mail out new releases to as many as six hundred of the thousand or so discos in the UK. (Reynolds 2016, p. 206)

The records sold because they were being played, and danced to, in the discos.

We should note here that Glam Rock was a youth culture focused in the discos. Bowie, always in tune with the times, made a series of dance tracks starting with "John I'm Only Dancing" in 1972, followed by "Jean Genie" in 1973 and "Rebel Rebel" in 1974, culminating in the *Let's Dance* album in 1983. *Let's Dance* was produced by the African American leader of the disco-funk group Chic, Nile Rodgers. Rodgers had been heavily influenced by another Glam Rock group, Roxy Music. Tim de Lisle (2005) notes: "By 1975, Roxy's influence was already fanning out. They inspired Nile Rodgers to form Chic and see if a disco group could be that urbane as well as avant garde." The "Let's Dance" single topped the UK chart for three weeks. It is another song about dancing made for dancing.

When "Rock And Roll" was released it was part 1, with the vocals that was the A-side. The vocals made the track sound like a conventional single; however:

Bell noticed that the stripped-down, near-instrumental flip was getting all the disco action, "Rock and Roll Part 2" was built around an astonishingly punishing and dead-eyed drum sound, ominous swoops of treated guitar, gang chants and empty space. The minimalism and the dub-like use of space looked ahead to the synthetic disco of the late seventies and to electro and early rap in the eighties. (Reynolds 2016, p. 208)

It was Leander that had created this sound. The novelty of Leander's production was that he put together a backing track for Glitter that was almost entirely artificial. John Rossall, who played trombone, explains:

Harvey Ellison and myself were the only guys to play on Gary's records. And if Mike Leander could have played brass, we wouldn't have been on them either. And I can't be fairer than that. He did all the drums in a loop, then added bass, then added guitar bits, then him and Gary did some of the backing vocals, and me and Harvey came along, did the brass bits, did some handclaps with them and beefed up the backing vocals with them. (Dorset et al.)

Leander was influenced by Dudgeon's work with John Kongos and also the track "Neanderthal Man" by Hotlegs.

The Hotlegs track had reached number two in the UK singles chart in 1970. Hotlegs were never really a group. They were the nucleus of what later became 10cc familiarizing themselves with their new studio. "Neanderthal Man" places the vocal far back in the mix and the multi-tracked drums up front. The drum sound is full with a regular stomp. Leahy, who at that time was working for Phillips, happened by the studio, heard the track and wanted to release it. Leahy would later release Gary Glitter's "Rock And Roll" single on Bell. He had a good sense of what the teenagers in the discos wanted to dance to. Phillips complained that the vocals were so far back in the mix they could hardly be heard. Eric Stewart, who played acoustic guitar on the track, explained that this was deliberate. The track is often described as a novelty hit, but it was very popular in the discos. The pounding beat enabled dancers to be certain when moving their feet. As a dance track the vocal was less important, indeed it could get in the way of dancers' concentration on the beat, something Leander, who had visited Hamburg during the heyday of the beat groups when Paul Gadd was working there under the name Paul Raven, understood when he made "Rock And Roll, Part 2" (Clayson 1998, p. 115). This was put out as the B-side.

The A-side, "Rock and Roll, Part 1" was aimed at radio. In the quote above, Reynolds mentions dub. The double-sided nature of the single was influenced by the Jamaican recordings that had a vocal on one side and a dub version with minimal vocals and the beat up front that could be used by the sound systems for the dance floor on the other side. As the Wikipedia (2019) page explains:

By 1971, most reggae singles issued in Jamaica included on their B-side a dub remix of the A-side, many of them first tested as exclusive 'dub plates' on dances. Those dubs basically included drum and bass-oriented remixes used by sound system selectors.

They were for dancing. Leander had done something very similar. The key development by Leander was to use a tape loop for the drums, as Dudgeon had, to even up the beat. Rossall explains how Leander constructed the drum sound:

Mike used to get in the studio on his own with the engineer and play the drums for 20 minutes trying out different drum things and then say: 'Right, Roll the tape,' to the engineer and then record a section that he would make a loop out of and copy it onto the 24 track. He would then go and overdub the bass and the guitar. (Dorset et al.)

In Gary Glitter's tracks the beat is regular outside of the tape loop Leander had constructed because of the repetition of the loop. It is constant. It is even with no diversion and no changes in emphasis. This, again, makes it easier to dance to. When Gary Glitter was asked to perform "Rock And Roll, part 2" on *Top of the Pops* he had no backing group. One had to be rapidly put together. When he started to play live the sound that Leander had created could only be approximated by the use of two drummers. In this development we can see the early privileging of the sound, the record, over the group.

Leander's work on "Rock And Roll," and especially on part 2, marks the transformative moment in the technologizing of the big beat. In being so it also marks the true beginning of Eurodisco in the UK. Writing from an American perspective, Peter Shapiro (2007, p. 42) suggests:

With its streamlining of black music's funkier excesses in order to make it palatable for people raised on *schlager* and Vera Lynn, Europop's convergence of African-American rhythms and blue notes with European melodic sensibilities would have enormous implications for disco.

Shapiro is right to recognize the simpler, more direct beat in Eurodisco though it does not come from a simplification of funk rhythms but rather a lack of African American input combined with what we can now understand as a tradition of emphasis on the beat in English dance music that helped English dancers whose primary dance movement, as I have argued, comes from their feet to find the beat. It is no coincidence that the most significant producer of Eurodisco, Giorgio Moroder, started his career making bubblegum pop songs. We have already met him as the composer of Chicory Tip's first hit, "Son Of My Father," and it is important to note that Chicory Tip went to release five more Moroder songs to varying success. Chicory Tip were a pop group, but they also made tracks that were played in the clubs for dancing. Their final entry into the UK top forty, "Good Grief Christina," which reached number seventeen in 1973, was about a girl who couldn't dance: "I see you stand round when the music's so hot/ With a beat like that of guitar rock." This is a Moroder and Bellotte, who was the lyricist, composition clearly intended for the clubs.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Three years later Moroder and Bellotte had stopped trying to have hits with an English guitar group, albeit one prepared to include a synthesizer in their arrangements, and recorded "Love To Love You, Baby" with Donna Summer. They were looking for something with the suggestiveness of the Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin 1969 hit "Je T'aime . . . Moi Non plus." Echols (2011, p. 107) tells us: "Moroder has said that he and his crew knew precisely the sound they were aiming for—a very catchy bass line, a very emphatic bass drum part and a funky guitar, sort of Philadelphia feel." We need to note here the concern with having a strong drum sound, not a stomp, of course, given the nature of the song, but a steady up-front beat that would ground and organize the song. Central to the success of "Love To Love You, Baby" was a drum machine. Moroder has explained how the drummer who had been used noticeably slowed down in the breakdown:

I'd gone to a lot of clubs where these peculiar Italian bands played a schmalzty kind of music and they used to have this little drum machine where, if you pressed a button, it would play a samba, or if you pressed another button it would play a waltz. It was very basic and it had a horrible sound, but of course it played in time, so we sent out for one and we laid that down as a track. This then provided us with a four-minute,

metronomic beat that had a kind of groove going on, and that really was the origin of drum machines. (Buskin 2009)

Moroder got the drum sound he wanted, and it was provided by a machine that gave a beat so regular it was hypnotic.

When Moroder sent the track to Neil Bogart at Casablanca Records, so a version of the story goes, Bogart loved it but wanted it to run for twenty minutes so that it could be used as background for couples making love. It was the drum machine which, Moroder explained, “enabled us to stretch it to a 16-minute version, kept in perfect time, when Neil Bogart requested it” (Buskin 2009). Where Leander, like Dudgeon, had used a tape loop to create a background for the vocals on the tracks they created, Moroder was able to use a drum machine to create from scratch a fully artificial, utterly repetitive beat on which Summer’s orgasms could be overlaid. Robert Fink discusses “Love To Love You, Baby” as an example of minimalist repetition. He compares it to Steve Reich’s *Music for Eighteen Musicians* arguing that repetition is fundamental to both disco and avant garde minimalism (Fink 2005, p. 34). The story about Bogart detracts from the significance of “Love To Love You, Baby” as a club dance floor hit. In the UK the track reached number two on the singles chart in spite of being banned by the BBC from radio broadcast, suggesting its success was, again, due to its popularity in discos. In early 1976 the track topped Billboard’s Disco Action chart and was number two on the US pop chart. The long version took up one side of the *Love To Love You, Baby* album and was released as a twelve-inch for club use in 1982 signalling its enduring popularity.ⁱⁱ

In 1977 Bellotte, Moroder and Summer recorded what was to be the final track for a concept album titled *I Remember Yesterday* based on songs exemplifying different decades. “I Feel Love” was intended to be futuristic. For this reason Moroder borrowed the Moog synthesizer again and used a sequencer. All the music except the drums was generated using the Moog. Robby Wedel, Schoener’s technical assistant, showed Moroder how to sync each track they recorded on the Moog, which ensured a perfect beat. Ironically, on “I Feel Love” Keith Forsey, the drummer who had been replaced by a machine on “Love To Love You, Baby,” contributed the only human musical input; he “provided seven minutes of four-to-the-floor thump” (Brewster 2017). This thump should remind us of the UK dance tracks going back through Slade to the Dave Clark Five. Brewster and Broughton (2014, pp. 200–201) write that “black music purists accused Moroder of chlorinating the black sound.” American writer Nelson George said it was “perfect for folks with no sense of rhythm.” Yet somehow, like Kraftwerk, it was still funky. It was indeed perfect for white English, and European, dance floors.

Perhaps the epitome of the English contribution to Eurodisco was Maxine Nightingale’s 1975 hit “Right Back Where We Started From.” This is driven by a huge

ii. There is a myth perpetrated on the web that “Love To Love You, Baby” was the first twelve-inch single. Twelve inchers were being pressed for club use in 1975, and the first twelve inch for sale to the public was Double Exposure’s “Ten Percent,” released in 1976.

stomping beat made up of drum and keyboards. Pierre Tubbs, one of the song's writers, played an Elka synthesizer. In the musical background of the musicians who played on the track we can see the crossover from the pop and rock dance music of the 1960s and early 1970s with the developing recorded disco sound. They included Mike de Albuquerque on bass and Wilf Gibson on violin, both of whom had played with the Electric Light Orchestra; Peter Kirchier, who had played with Status Quo, played drums, and the keyboards were played by Dave Rowberry of the Animals. It is no wonder that the track has a white rock feel. Nightingale, who was black British, did not like the arrangement. She told *Rolling Stone*: "I disliked Tubbs' utilization of both a crashing keyboard arrangement and heavy handclaps and I also wasn't comfortable singing in a higher key than I was accustomed to" (Kutner 2012). What Nightingale is describing here is the disco reworking of the stomp that characterized earlier English dance music.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Sheffield synthesizer scene evolved during the mid-1970s. Cabaret Voltaire formed there in 1973. Kraftwerk played Sheffield University in 1976. The first iteration of what would become the Human League, called the Future, came together there in 1977. Why Sheffield? One argument connects the development of electronic music in the city to its industrial heritage:

"You'd go to sleep at night," says Martyn Ware [one of the founders of the Human League] "and hear the drop forges hammering away like a metronome. It was like a heartbeat for a whole city." A causal connection between the rhythms of heavy industry and brutalist/minimalist music is an interesting theory (and one that Iggy Pop has made about the motor works in Detroit. (Price 2004)

We should be reminded here of Moroder's use of the metronome metaphor when describing the drum machine beat used for Donna Summer's "Love To Love You, Baby." Ware's remark points to the link between the synthesizer pulse and the dance beat. In 1980, eight years after the release of Gary Glitter's "Rock And Roll," the Human League using synthesizers and drum machine revisited the track on their *Holiday* EP and segued it into a version of Iggy Pop's "Nightclubbing." Jonathan Dean (2003) refers to this as a "roboticized glam-rock medley." The song did not need Gary Glitter's spectacle. Pounding behind Philip Oakey's vocal it was a dance floor filler now that in England dancing to recorded music was fully accepted. In 1981 Grace Jones would subsequently remake "Nightclubbing" as a more obviously American-style disco track with her voice backed by the funk-reggae groove of Sly Dunbar's drums and Robbie Shakespeare's bass. The Human League's linking of "Rock And Roll" with "Nightclubbing," which have similar riffs, emphasized the rhythmic similarities between the two songs while also transforming

iii. It is instructive to compare the production of "Right Back Where We Started From" with "Goodbye, Nothing To Say" by the Javells (1974). The Javells, a white man and two black Charlton sisters, were also English, but the track was made as if it was African American in the Motown genre. It became a cult favorite on the Northern Soul circuit but elsewhere remained entirely unknown. This is not the place to go into the background of the two songs, suffice to say that the writers of "Right Back Where We Started From" were sued for plagiarism, and the matter was settled out of court. Much of the success of "Right Back Where We Started From" came from the very English arrangement.

them into electronic Eurodisco dance floor tracks, signalling the possibility that Jones fulfilled the following year. One of the things that the Human League retained of Gary Glitter's version was the pounding stomp sound but now no longer coming from tape-looped drums, it is an effect of heavily processed handclaps—we should remember here what Maxine Nightingale said about the handclaps in “Right Back Where We Started From”—coupled with a drum machine.

We've come a long way. In England dancing since the nineteenth century, but for our purposes here since the early 1960s, since the Twist, has always been focused on the feet. The consequence is that the most popular tracks to dance to have been those that have a clear and unequivocal beat. The most obvious of these can be agglomerated into the genre of stomp songs that has been traced in this article picking out key tracks. Central to the popularity of these songs has been the spread of venues for dancing. These have transformed from dance halls, where groups played to clubs where groups played and sometimes young people danced to records, to discos, also confusingly continuing to be called clubs, where young people danced to records that at first were a kind of substitute for the group's live performance but which increasingly were made specifically for dancing with any live performance a pale imitation. These records were increasingly made using electronics; synthesizers, drum machines, sequencers, and other technology. Gary Glitter's “Rock And Roll, part 2” was the most important track in this transformation, but in the early 1970s it was surrounded by other tracks by groups as diverse as Roxy Music and Chicory Tip also including new technology. As electronics became normalized as fundamental to dance music, the emphasis on the stomp did not disappear; the use of drums was simply replaced by the beat of a drum machine or the pulse of a synthesizer. It is here that we find the importance of the career of Giorgio Moroder and the rise of Eurodisco. This new way of forming the beat using electronics regularized it and made it even easier to dance to. This shift is epitomized in Rusty Egan's remake of “Burundi Black” and, later, the Human League's remake of “Rock And Roll.” Next stop, rave. ■

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