

19 SEPTEMBER 1987

MUSIC WEEK



**DANCE
SPECIAL**



No shortage of talent on UK dance scene

JUST BELOW the surface bubbles a mass of new dance music that the specialist labels are uncovering at a rate of knots. Barry Lazell takes a look at this accelerating industry.

THE UK dance music industry feeds from two basic sources of artists and repertoire: that which comes in from the US (and elsewhere around the world), and the music which is made in this country by UK artists. The chief difference between the two has nothing to do with musical styles, but lies in the fact that virtually all imported repertoire is obtained by the UK market 'off the peg', as either the work of an artist contracted to an overseas sister label or licensor, or a record licensed on one-off basis after proving its UK popularity through imports.

Many, many dance hits have started their life through the latter route during the last decade, and not a few subsequently solid careers have kicked off in this fashion, too.

Home-grown repertoire, however, depends now as it always has upon the emergence of UK talent good enough to stand up against its American counterparts, and the ability and willingness of British labels — both majors and dance-specialist independents — to find such talent, nurture, develop, market and promote its music, and eventually sell it back on equal terms into the international marketplace.

This was something with which the UK record industry singularly

failed to come to grips with the pop music of the 1950s, succeeded in doing beyond anyone's wildest dreams with rock and pop from the mid-60s onwards, and finally, in the 1980s, is now managing with indigenous dance and black music. The commercial successes in the US and elsewhere of Billy Ocean, Paul Hardcastle, Loose Ends, Level 42, Five Star and others has finally iced the cake of the continuing UK dance A&R quest: it is now clear to the world at large that this country does have the talent to play the international stage with what was once considered to be a wholly American musical form, with its roots firmly in the R&B/Motown/US urban tradition.

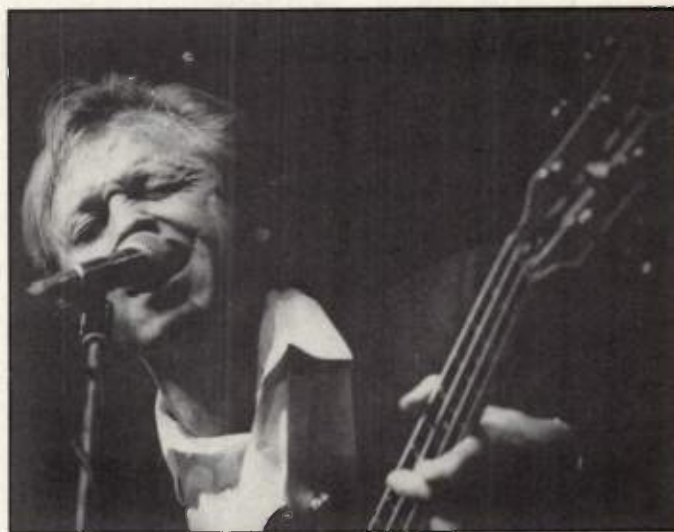
The proven possibility of cross-over and international success on top of 'making it' purely in the UK dance field has meant that there is no shortage of aspirants in this country for the next generation of stardom, and consequently the discovery of those future record sellers is something to which all UK labels with dance music credentials are seriously addressing themselves on a regular basis. In contrast to comparatively few years ago, there are not many companies (Champion perhaps being the successful exception of the moment) concentrating solely on marketing US acquisitions.

Labels like Jive, Citybeat, Se-

rious, CoolTempo, Rhythrr King and many more are uncovering UK dance talent at a rate of knots, as are the successful production teams within the field — Stock, Aitken and Waterman, for example, have rapidly made bona fide stars out of Mel & Kim and Rick Astley, with Paul Barry tipped to follow in their wake.

The dance specialist labels such as those just listed — and virtually every new label which comes under the regular spotlight of *MW's* dance page also includes a 'looking for fresh new UK talent' quote in its plans — beckon attractively to many unsigned acts because of their 'street credibility' and their implicit feel for what the dance audience wants. Most dance indies are run by DJs, producers, specialist shops or even fans of the music; their sense of involvement is almost palpable.

It is a fact which has not been lost on major companies in recent times, which has meant the setting up of subsidiary dance labels within the auspices of a major — CoolTempo, Breakout, Club, Syncopate, Fourth & Broadway, etc — staffed by essentially the same kind of involved professionals who were once the dance indies' prerogative. The clout of a major company in the areas of promotion and distribution obviously has its attractions too.



MARK KING of Level 42 making the effort to get people out on the dancefloor.

But of course, it is the labels which sign up the talent, and not vice versa — although a particularly sought-after act might well have two or three deals from different quarters to choose between. The sending in of a demo or the fortuitous spotting at a gig by an A&R man are not yellow brick roads in themselves — the latter because it doesn't happen *that* often, and the former because the demo is up against every other demo of the moment. It is to be hoped that artists with real potential and labels which happen to be the ideal place for them don't forever pass each other by like ships in the night. Sooner or later, if an act really has it, it will come to the attention of somebody with an eye for that act's potential.

As already stated, virtually every dance label in the country is constantly, seriously, addressing the search for future stars, and by general consensus, what they are finding is that, quantitatively, the nation is awash with scratchers, beat box rappers, funk bands and even soul singers. This is not hard to fathom: nobody seems to have done any research on it, but the mere fact that dance music has been the consistent staple of UK singles sales for some years now was inevitably going to throw up at least a section of youth culture which was wholly dance-music-orientated.

And where have these kids found the time to hone their musical skills, and to become so effortlessly au fait with the musical climate? The economic and social

realities of the 80s shout the answer to that one — enforced, unfulfilled leisure is a teenage nor for far too many; music, at least, is an outlet. Would-be dance acts are falling out of the woodwork, and the dance industry's current job is not so much searching for them as picking the cream out of the crop.

One example of a newly inaugurated dance talent-gathering policy which is not quite unique, but is being given an extremely high profile, and could well be a pattern for more general industry practice in future, is that adopted by Morgan Khan's new Westside Records label, the A&R-based side of his Dance Music Group, which is solely dependent upon UK talent development for its repertoire.

Having built its own 16-track recording studio adjacent to the label's Ealing West London offices — a modest, unpretentious affair by today's professional studio standards, though as good as it ever need to be for cutting Hip-Hop records, and presumably a deal less daunting for absolute newcomers — Westside has inaugurated what Khan calls 'Instant A&R Access'. Potential acts can come in literally off the street on any Monday, Wednesday or Friday evening between 6 and 7pm, and either with or without a demo, make their pitch to the label. At the hint of something good, cost-price use of the rehearsal and/or recording studios is offered, and the major jackpot is the offer of a deal

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BOXING CLEVER

FROM PAGE 2

with Westside as a recording act, or a publishing deal with sister company Pisces Music.

There was some scepticism from without when this scene was announced, but Dance Music's Chris May says that the results to date have exceeded his wildest hopes:

"People suggested that the A&R project was a publicity stunt, to which my response would be that I can think of easier ways of getting publicity than spending up to two hours on three evenings a week after a normal hard day's work, listening to raw tapes off the street! No, we started this because we know that there is tough young talent out there, and this seemed to be the best way of reaching it."

"It has been extraordinarily successful. Naturally, most of the people who have come along — and we average half a dozen at each session — have fallen somewhere between dead losses and being potentially promising. We have, though, found six acts of quite phenomenal class and talent, and they're now taking it in turns to go into our studio and make their records."

The pick of the bunch, it seems, have also proved to be quite varied in the direction their particular styles took:

"Firstly, we found John Paul Barrett, a brilliant singer, dancer and songwriter from the Midlands who will make Terence Trent D'Arby look like small fry. He has a superb voice in the grand soul tradition, with a wide range and a multitude



FIVE STAR looking forward to adding to their first two platinum awards.

of textures. His dancing is outstanding, too — and his songwriting is better than anybody I've heard in dance music from the UK. He's currently finishing his first single, which we'll start to get buzzing on promo in just a couple of weeks."

"We've also found another extraordinarily talented singer/songwriter in the soul tradition, named Les Whittaker, plus two blinding funk bands named We and Klush, a girl duo whose per-

forming name is still to be chosen, and another super-tough rap crew, similarly as yet unnamed. I was hoping the A&R project would turn up some good people, but this half dozen's talents have exceeded our wildest hopes."

Evidence, then, that the leaders of the next UK dance music wave are indeed being found and signed. It will perhaps be interesting to check back to May's list in a couple of years' time to report on

'British Hip-Hop has now reached a stage where it is developing an identity of its own'

the status then of these first Westside signings.

Talent contests are an age-old way of making the vital breakthrough to professional success, even if one might not immediately associate them with the UK dance scene. Underway at the moment, however, is another venture in which Morgan Khan's labels have a stake, along with BBC Radio London and particularly *Fresh Start To The Week* DJ Dave Pearce. This is the National Rap Contest, designed to turn up the UK's most promising young rappers and award them their first record release, which will be a spot on the next *Street Sounds* Hip-Hop compilation set (Edition 19, a double LP due in late October). The competition winners' tracks will fill the

second disc, for which they will receive the standard advance/royalty package as paid to the US artists on the first two sides.

Pearce says: "British Hip-Hop has now reached a stage where it is developing an identity of its own, and this process will be accelerated by a major album showcasing the best young up-and-coming talent. As both Radio London's *Fresh Start To The Week* and *Street Sounds* are committed to developing British Hip-Hop, our partnership on this project makes a lot of sense."

Entries are being solicited nationwide at Hip-Hop jams, through magazines, on BBC 2's *Ebony* edition focusing on the UK Hip-Hop scene, and also on *Street Sounds* LP sleeves and the Dance Music Group's subscriber-only Hip-Hop newsletter. Entries close on October 9, after which judging will be done and the album line-up organised within a couple of weeks, re-recording where necessary with winners whose demo entries are not of masterable standard at the same Westside studio referred to earlier. As Chris May at Dance Music again comments: "Partly we're just soliciting strong tracks for two sides of an album project, but also we're again looking for the real cream of this talent with a view to further long-term signings for Westside."

Dance music is being created afresh across the country right now, and it does seem that the dance side of the UK record industry is indeed there, ear to the ground, to keep selling it to the world at large.

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Dancing to a new label

Small independent labels specialising in disco/dance music are springing up again and proving that they are far from dead. Barry Lazell checks out what's happening.

BACK DURING the post *Saturday Night Fever* disco music explosion, a fair number of established record labels in the UK opened up new labels or special generic series specifically for their disco product. Partly this was in response to the emergence of a plethora of independent dance-oriented labels which sprang from the grassroots (specialist shops, clubs, DJs) at around the same time — Groove, Elite, Record Shack, Bluebird and the like — and partly in an effort to channel what was perceived as a hip musical craze into hip-type compartments which stood aside from mainstream pop labels.

EMI had the notoriously out-of-touch Sidewalk, Pye/PRT came up with Calibre and Calibre Plus (whoever understood the distinction?), Polydor had the generic Steppin' Out series, and WEA for a while the similar LV series — LV standing for 'long version', which basically meant extended disco mixes on 12-inch. CBS at the time had two licensed labels, Tabu and Prelude, whose output was almost completely disco-oriented, thereby effectively gaining a couple of successful specialist labels by default, as it were.

As that particular boom faded, and the mannered trappings of commercial disco rapidly became a stigma, the disco labels and series passed into oblivion. Conversely, their indie competitors, always at one with change and growth in the music, adapted and generally prospered. There are far, far more dance-oriented small labels in the UK market today than

there ever were during the boom of seven or eight years ago.

Interestingly, dance-oriented subsidiaries of major (and major-minor) labels have made a comeback too, in an accelerating process which has largely occurred since the middle of the decade. The difference this time around is that they are proving markedly successful — responsible in fact not only for a large proportion of the records which fill the dance chart, but a goodly chunk of the pop chart too. In an every-shrinking singles market where the 12-inch now very much calls the shots, and a dance track is the most likely thing to be heard upon it, today's dance labels thrive at the very heart of the marketplace.

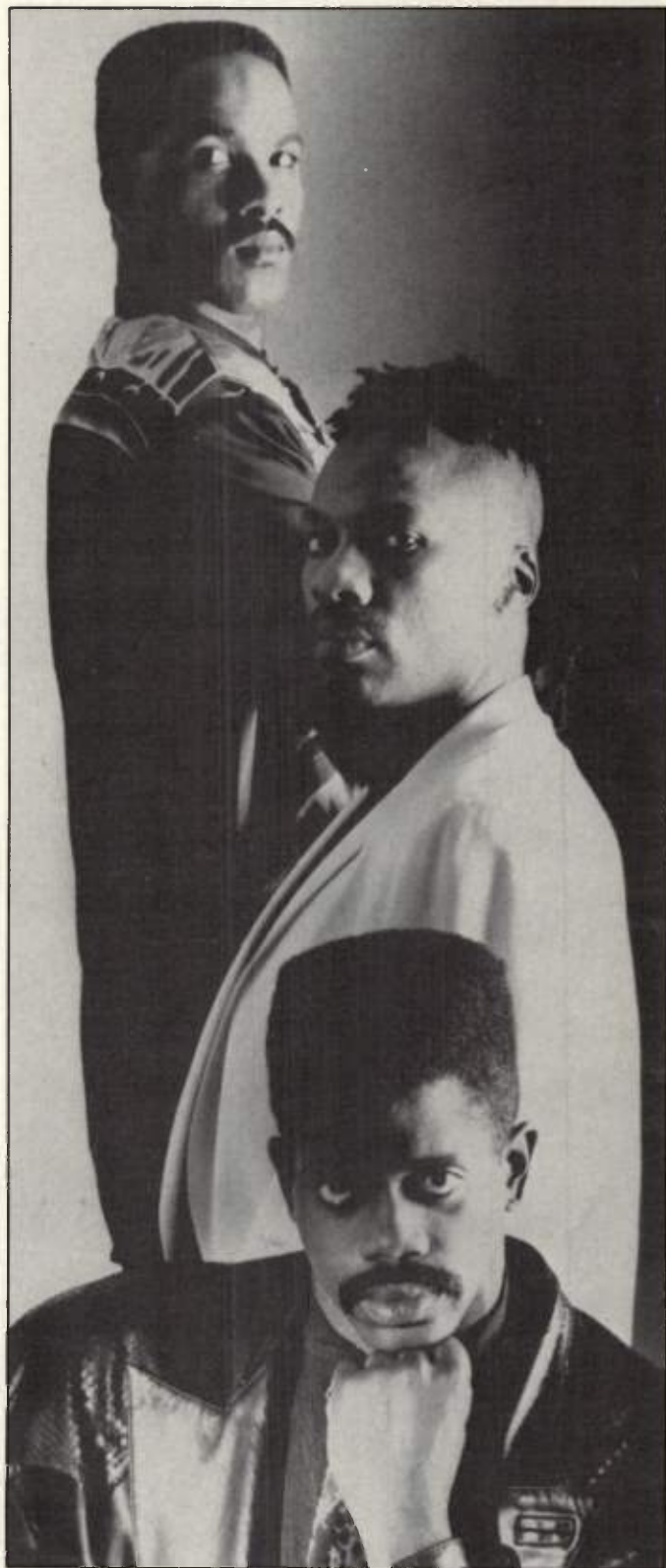
The record industry is, to its credit, generally one which learns and subsequently prospers from its fail-

ures — or perhaps more accurately, prospers from reference to others' successes. The majors' dance labels of today are very much a product of the collective growth experience of dance music in the UK since the disco years. Their predecessors by comparison were merely cosmetic sidelines for uptempo product, with no internal life of their own.

Today, the marketing game is a more cleverly played one, and the particular rules which apply to this making and marketing of dance music — plus the various forms of black music which are closely tangential to it and tend to sell in the same places to the same people — are well understood. 'Street Cred', for all the corny implications of the phrase, can nonetheless be a vital ingredient in buyer persuasion, and indeed the perceived need for it was pivotal to the decision to launch many dance subsidiaries in the first place.

Pete Waterman and A&M's Mike Sefton between them have just proved beyond argument just how important the perceived nature of a marketed product can be, with the apparent conjuring up of the earliest copies of Roadblock on 'American' while label promos apparently from the record's obscure 1970s 'source'. The buzz created by — in this case, completely spurious — 'street cred' was the equal of anything that money could have bought, in promotional terms. When all was revealed, the record's own intrinsic worth had taken over, and Breakout scored another massive crossover hit.

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CAMEO: Major star status in the UK

'There are far, far more dance-oriented labels in the UK market today than there ever were during the boom of seven or eight years ago'



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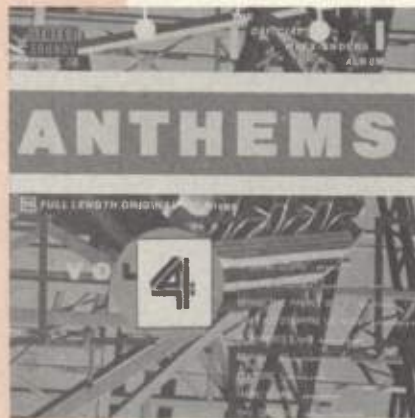
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FROM PAGE 6

It is worth reminding ourselves just who and what is around nowadays in terms of dance music subsidiaries. Phonogram's Club label was probably the one which set the whole UK ball rolling, largely because it was rapidly successful — and seen to be so — in what it did: essentially, gather the most dance-oriented product from each of the Phonogram labels and produce sources, and market it generically with promotion to the nation's DJs and dancefloors through a closely-aligned in-house club promotions department.

Major hits by the likes of Shannon, the Gap Band and Cameo popped up, it seemed to some, as if by magic. In fact, certain broadcasting elements seemed to eye Club's success as the vanguard of some sort of insidious dancefloor intrusion into the realms of 'proper' music — remember Richard Skinner's infamous *Whistle Test* crack about keeping Rene And Angela in the disco's where they belonged. The brains and collective driving force behind the Club concept and its continuing execution — long-time Phonogram marketing man John Waller, his original 'street cred' input, Club DJ and broadcaster Jeff Young, and their consistently award-winning promotion man Mike Sefton (now replaced by Johnny Walker since his departure to A&M), can take much of the credit for showing the industry as a whole the way forward. The major star status of Cameo in this country — a band which had been selling records to just a specialist minority

for years until the Club concept got behind them: is a concrete testimony to vision of Waller and Co.

Island, which had long had a good flow of dance product without a tangible focus, pulled it all rapidly together with the launch of Fourth & Broadway, whose architects Ashley Newton and Julian Palmer added a sharp street-boy flash to the music's visual packaging and advertising. Fourth & Broadway brought the hip fashion element to the major dance label mixture — a marketing angle very rapidly taken up by Morgan Khan at Streetwave, and at least alluded to in the presentation of almost every dance label which has come along since.

F.A.B. (the name was created to be abbreviated thus) picked up more key personnel like club promoters Adrian Sykes and Tim Rudling, while also building itself a clutch of hits from the likes of Jocelyn Brown, Skipworth And Turner, Eugene Wilde and Wally Badarou. The original personnel were to move elsewhere as their expertise became valued, and more recently F.A.B. has sailed under the pennants of Ian Dewhurst and Jon Williams, but the latest development has Julian Palmer back at the helm after a stint in A&R at CBS (where he found Paul Johnson, among others), so new impetus from the Island corner looks imminent.

Chrysalis, hugely successful as a rock and pop label, but always a sufferer in the credibility stakes with black and dance product, did the smart thing and launched Cool-Tempo under Pete Edge. Amongst



PAUL HARDCASTLE: One of Cool-Tempo's first signings

the first signings was Paul Hardcastle, although the parent label craftily snuck him back in time for his world-beating 1985 smash with 19. Cool-Tempo has proved an astute player the US 'buzz' acquisitions market, and has scored some notable biggies with records by the Real Roxanne, Thomas & Taylor, the Timex Social Club, and even old soul favourites like Betty Wright. On the staffing side, Dan-

Sync•pate



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cin' Danny D emerged from under Erskine Thompson's wing to lend CoolTempo a range of diverse talents from club promotion to sharp remixing.

Other majors have followed the successful leads. Arista now has DMC Records, in partnership with Tony Prince's Disco Mix Club, which gives it access to the considerable production/remix talents of Les Adams, Alan Coulthard, Paul Dakeyne, and the World Mixing Champion Chad Jackson.

EMI already had Steve Walsh's Total Control label under its wing, but perhaps encouraged by the clear success of its dance promotion department inaugurated by Ian Dewhirst (and now in the capable hands of ex-F.A.B. man Tim Rudling), and a solid round of successes from both its Capital/EMI America US input and the UK-originated Tavares and Hot Chocolate remix revivals by Dutch DJ Ben Liebrand, decided to go the whole hog and launch Syncopate as a full in-house dance label.

It was a move which, for some, threatened to raise the ghost of Sidewalk, since Syncopate seemed to have a major built-in disadvantage in not being able to pull product in from Capital, EMI America, or indeed any other EMI own-brand label — quite the opposite, in fact, of the original role model as demonstrated by Club. Syncopate would stand or fall on its own signings and independent US acquisitions, and to be fair has not really had time yet to really get into either swimming stride or sinking spiral. Indications actually look good — Lola's Wax The Van was an astute pick-up, and the recent releases by Lacharanda and



REAL ROXANNE another CoolTempo winner



SKIPWORTH AND Turner provide hits for F.A.B



A&M's biggest seller is Janet Jackson

Lanier & Co were good dance chart material. The new Chairman Of The Board release, in fact, could be the one to give Syncopate its major pop chart breakthrough.

Polydor, put somewhat into the shade dance-wise by the success of its sister companies — Phonogram with Club and London with itself (never a dance label as such, but nonetheless one on which virtually every release is a dance record of some persuasion, and almost all are hits — and with a very astute dance staffer in the form of DJ Pete Tong) — made its first pitch for the market a couple of years ago with Boiling Point, which was more a revival of the Steppin' Out split-logo approach of yore rather than a full label in itself.

Boiling Point launched a handful of hits — notably last year's big pop crossovers by Gwen Guthrie — but its role has now been superseded by Urban, which is quite definitely its own animal. Fortuitous access to some in-demand 'rare grove' back catalogue, notably Maceo & The Macks' Cross The Track and the Jackson Sisters' I Believe In Miracles, has got the label off to a smokin' start, but there is no reason why it should not hold its own with current signings.

Not to be overlooked in this survey are the dance labels set up under the auspices of two smaller and otherwise rock-oriented labels. Mute has Rhythm King, consistently the source of some of the hardest Hip-Hop, House and DC Go-Go music to be released in this country. Small wonder that Rhythm King, then, has arguably the strongest street-level credibility (in the South of the UK, anyway) of possibly any dance label in the country. It can also push the pop crossovers, though, as witness Taffy's recent hit I Love My Radio.

Meanwhile, over at Beggars Banquet flourishes another high-cred dance subsidiary in Citybeat, which is run by Tim Palmer, who with his brother Chris was the one-time brain behind the Groove record label and its international novelty dance hit Wikka Rap. Citybeat's flag-flying act is former Freeze leader John Rocca, who has had his own share of solo chart success. The label is currently also off and running with a spread of US and UK acts, however, including New Yorkers React and Carlton Smith, and London duo Cairo.

And just about celebrating its first six months of operations as this MW special appears is A&M's dance label Breakout, the launch of which was in fact spotlighted in

detail in the last Dance Supplement in these pages. A&M planned carefully and shot for the top from the beginning, bringing in Jason Guy and Mike Sefton, with considerable joint experience in dance A&R and promotion, as chief label architects. A&M's biggest-selling act of the day, Janet Jackson, and the joint boss of the whole caboodle, Herb Alpert, were both persuaded to have their new releases moved onto this upstart offshoot, and every detail down to the label design and the type and thickness of card to be used for 12-inch sleeves, was carefully organised for maximum market credibility.

The result has been a total 100% success rate so far in the dance chart, and a virtual repetition of some in the Gallup top 75 too, with only Vesta Williams' slow movie ballad not matching the success of the other releases. Janet Jackson and Herb Alpert have had two top 30 smashes apiece, and Stock Aitken Waterman's Roadblock has provided a massive home-grown smash, while Roxanne Shante's Have A Nice Day brought New York hip-hop to the top 75.

Breakout is perhaps the epitome of the successful major dance subsidiary because it has consciously re-applied all that collective dance industry experience mentioned

earlier into every aspect of what it does.

Current grapevine has it that MCA, a considerable part of whose output on single is dance product anyway, will be the next major to emerge with an in-house dance label under its belt. Paul Bunting, the label's dance promotions manager, is amused by the certainty of some of the forecasters, but says that the idea is merely a possible option for consideration at the moment. What MCA is urgently undertaking is the design of a new generic 12-inch sleeve for dance product, a move which in itself will give that product a unifying identity aside from the label's pop and rock output.

The new bag concept, however, is certainly inspired by the successful use of striking generic packaging by in particular, Breakout and Music Of Life; MCA, after all, knows the rules of the marketing game too, and with a largely dance 12-inch output is, like London, only not a dance label because it happens to be everything else too. Those majors which have taken the plunge with an in-house dance label, market-wise 1987 style, are finding the water very much to their liking at the moment.

'Those majors which have taken the plunge with an in-house dance label, market-wise 1987 style, are finding the water very much to their liking'

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MORE THAN ever, the story of dance music in the US is one of significant groups surrounding the fringe of pop. Brian Chin probes deeper.

IN HOUSE, rap, Latin-hip-hop and New York's underground R&B club music, one witnesses a much purer, more hard-core expression of ethnicity and youth culture than ever in the crossover-oriented history of dance music.

And in that context, even the aura of the biggest pop star who may record a danceable record or commission a remix-and-additional-production overhaul to cover the market, must pale in the face of the undiluted source material of Eric B. and Rakim, Jamie Principle, Noel and Touch.

Yet, in the cradle of disco (not to be confused with the phenomenon of the discotheque itself, which is of course a European idea), there's a pervasive sense that dance music may be in a musical cul-de-sac right now. Because of the clear

demarcations between musical approaches — no problem telling Silent Morning from Do It Properly or I Know You Got Soul, is there — the numbing formulaicisation of dance music has reached troubling proportions.

And it's been the rare record indeed that has crossed over to very kind of listener, since the development of identifiable strains created a Latin constituency, a rap crowd, a house/garage crowd who could spend an entire evening listening only to one kind of music. Marshall Jefferson's Move Your Body — The House Music Anthem was one all-encompassing hit, while Do It Properly, also a broad-based record, expressed a coalition mentality that hadn't yet emerged in the marketplace by declaring that it had been per-

formed by 2 Puerto Ricans, a Blackman and a Dominican. A hopeful, praiseworthy metaphor, if not quite true.

Of course, to most of the major labels, the strength of dance-tempered "hot" and "Power" radio stations was signal enough to get on the bandwagon. Using Atlantic's leased-master approach, formerly dormant players in dance music — Epic, Virgin, RCA, Chrysalis and Capitol among them — began scouting Miami, Chicago and New York's underground to find the possible crossover record and even the prestigious cult hit that would prove the street-level credibility of the label.

This precipitated the liveliest bidding wars since Bronski Beat and Full Force, as such regional records as Will To Power's Dreamin', and Pretty Poison's Catch Me (I'm Falling), found a seller's market awaiting them in the wake of such diverse dance crossovers as Debbie Gibson's Only In My Dreams, Exposure's string of pop-disco hits, Company B's Fascinated, Cover Girls, Show Me, Paul Lekakis' Boom Boom, and Sa-Fire's Don't Break My Heart.

Even where spotty radio play failed to generate the impressive pop chartings of Lisa-Lisa and Cult Jam (who scored a No. 1 pop hit with Head To Toe), the disproportionate sales power and reasonable asking prices of dance records made them an irresistible deal.

This, in turn, created conditions for an unprecedented welcome for new production, performing and technical talent to the mainstream

music business. The veteran names in remix work — Jellybean Benitez, Steve Thompson/Michael Barbiero, Shep Pettibone, John Morales/Sergio Munzibai, among others — were moving ever more surely into production, and a high-water mark was reached early this month when six DJ-produced records, an all-time record, were listed in the pop charts.

In their wake, an even more ambitious young group of aspirants, many of them unselfishly mentored by such first-generation dance mover/shakers as Arthur Baker, Mark Kamins and Jellybean, were mucking their names in post-mix editing and even production with astonishing speed and assurance, having learned from the mistakes of their forerunners.

Such newcomers as The Latin Rascals, Andy 'Panda' Tripoli, Roman Ricardo, Gail King, 'Little' Louie Vega, Aldo Martin, Robert Clivilles, Joey Gardner, David Cole, Bruce Forest, Freddie Bastone, Junior Vasquez, Fred Zarr, and many others, basked in the knowledge that impeccable street credentials and the burning desire to succeed put industry notice and, indeed, the pop charts, well within their grasp.

'There's a pervasive sense that dance music may be in a musical cul-de-sac'

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North and south continued . . .

DESPITE PROTESTS from dealers, I stand by my observations (MW, 22 August) regarding the reasons for the north and Scotland's undeniable bias towards Hi-NRG, a strident, muscular and, some would say, unsophisticated form of disco music typified by Spagna, Sinitta and Man To Man, with a beat count of 120-135 per minute, or more.

In trying to explain this phenomenon, I seem to have upset dealers in these regions, who saw my comments as being yet another attempt by a southerner to dismiss as sub-standard and unworthy anything that happens outside the capital. Nothing could be further from the truth — I was born in the industrial north and am proud of my undiluted Celtic (Welsh/Irish) parentage.

To protest, as some did (MW, 29 August) that the north and Scotland's ready acceptance of Hi-NRG is due to these regions being more open to new forms of disco/dance music that has been around for over a decade. Key records in the genre's history include oldies

AFTER RECEIVING flak from north of Watford Alan Jones clears up and expands his front page article (MW 22 August) on a musically divided UK.

like I Feel Live by Donna Summer (1977), You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real) by Sylvester (1978), Born To Be Alive by Patrick Hernandez (1979) and others of similar vintage. Secondly, Scotland and the north are usually amongst the UK's more conservative areas musically, returning above average sales on traditional pop and rock records, but never reaching the national average for new and developing forms of music, be they rock in the Seventies — new romantic and punk — or black — house and electro — as they are now.

Furthermore, it is sad but true that people in these regions have a lower disposable income than the UK median, and, out of necessity rather than choice, the vast major-

ity who vacation abroad do so on package tours to the less exclusive resorts, where Hi-NRG is the dominant form of music. To say so implies no criticism, nor is it controversial to point out that on returning from such a holiday they will be likely to seek out the records most likely to trigger happy memories.

No one is denying that Spagna et al ultimately sell in the south, or even that people from London take Club 13-30 and similar holidays, but the fact remains that despite Hi-NRG's other powerbase being in the gay clubs of London and the south coast, such records sell in substantial quantities in the rest of the UK only after they force their way into the chart, and, therefore, on to the airwaves, after

breaking big in the northern half of the kingdom.

The less inhibited and more spontaneous nature of Northerners makes for more demonstrably enjoyable dancing, and the faster the tempo, the more obvious this is, hence the popularity of Hi-NRG.

Disco-goers in the south are frequently so pre-occupied with appearing cool and upfront and sophisticated that anything as un-subtle as Hi-NRG fails to get a fair hearing. The fraudulent nature of such an attitude was vividly illustrated and shrewdly exploited by the ubiquitous Stock/Aitken/Waterman, whose Roadblock single, though a brand new recording, accurately imitates the 'rare grooves' phenomenon currently so fashionable in the south, and was embraced as a genuine and worthy Seventies artefact and playlisted by influential DJs who ordinarily wouldn't consider a Stock/Aitken/Waterman disc, before their involvement was revealed.

Elsewhere, the record was simply accepted as a good dance record, regardless of origin and/or vintage.

It's worth noting that Hi-NRG registers higher than average sales in every region of the UK where the majority of MPs returned at the last election were not Conservative — and only in these regions. Socio-economic factors undoubtedly determine voting patterns, and musical sophistication, or lack of it, and is all part and parcel of the same complex set of attitudes and experiences — even down to the level of whether one

'The less inhibited and more spontaneous nature of northerners makes for more demonstrably enjoyable dancing, and the faster the tempo, the more obvious this is'

hears Top 40 records on a jukebox in a working men's club or absorbs obscure jazz-funk imports at an exclusive wine bar. Working men's clubs do exist in the south, just as wine bars can be found in the north, but not in nearly the same abundance.

Finally, to refer, as I did, to Hi-NRG as unsophisticated is not to denigrate it or its aficionados. My dictionary defines sophisticated as 'changed from natural character; artificial; deceptive; misleading; perverted' — so who wants to be a sophisticate?

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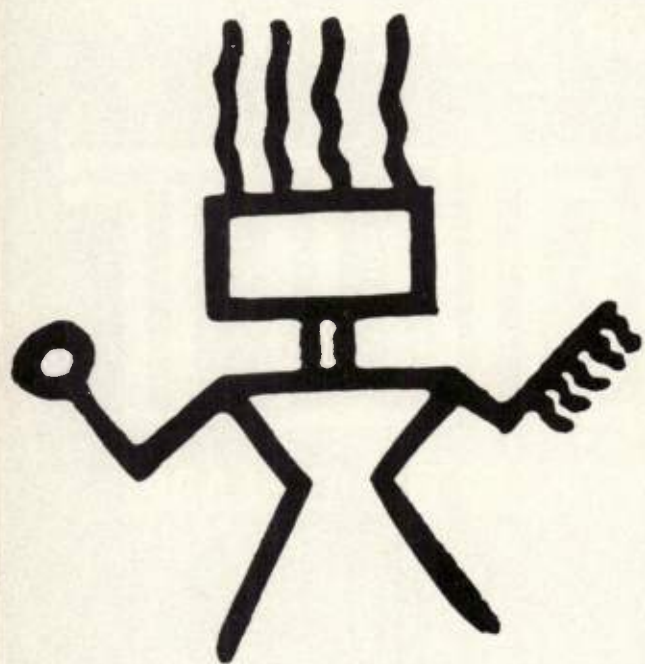
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Autumn breakout for dance music

BARRY WHITE, who some ten years ago was the biggest-selling black artist in Britain, returns to vinyl next month as one of the major names on the dance music release schedules for the early autumn. White is newly signed to A&M for the Breakout label, and as an album titled *The Right Night* due here in early October, on which he plays drums, bass and keyboards as well as singing; the Love Unlimited Orchestra are still in attendance, too! Just how much the classic White sound has adapted to 1987 will first be revealed later this month, when the 12-inch *So You Right* appears on Breakout as a taster for the LP.

Coincidentally(?), Phonogram also has a Barry White release due in October. Club is issuing a new, updated remix of his 1974 smash *Never Gonna Give You Up* on 12-inch, which if it proves to be as

THE NEXT few months see the release of a wealth of dance-orientated music. Some old some new as Barry Lazell found out.

effectively done as the Donna Summer remakes of a couple of years back from the same source, could well see the rotund one back in the charts with new and old material simultaneously. Both singles will be good profile-raisers for the album, anyway, so it is unlikely that Breakout will make too much flak about 12-inch competition.

Also upcoming from Phonogram is a new Cameo single, *She's Mine*, which will tie in the band's early October tour here — a trip originally scheduled for May which had to be postponed because of Larry Blackmon's heavy studio commitments at the time.

Polydor's major dance re-

lease of the near future is its first album by David Grant, titled *Change* — partly after his current 45, and partly presumably because of the change of direction which his new deal signifies for Grant. The album is self-produced for the first time, under an agreement with Polydor which has given him total Stevie Wonder-type writing and production freedom.

MCA is particularly excited about its new UK signing Paul Barry, who is being produced by Phil Harding for Stock/Aitken/Waterman, and for whom the label has Rick Astley-sized aspirations. MCA also has several major dance album releases on the way, however, including a new Col

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BARRY WHITE: The big man is back.

Abrahms set entitled You And Me Equal Us, Shalamar's Circumstantial Evidence, of which the title track has already appeared as a taster, The Vocals Album by the Crusaders, which is a collection of their outstanding vocal collaborations with the likes of Randy Crawford, Joe Cocker, etc, and guitarist Larry Carlton's Discovery, a set which includes a guest slot by Michael McDonald, and has already been raising quite a buzz on import. 12-inchers over the next few weeks from MCA will include releases by Jody Watley, the Jets (launching a new, less teenybop image for the family group), the Pointer Sisters, Patti LaBelle, and Blue Mercedes — the latter being another new UK signing and a further Stock/Aitken/Waterman discovery.

The Debut/Passion organisation is moving into high gear over the next few weeks in a multi-release concentrated assault on the 12-inch charts. Debut has two hot new US acquisitions in If You Should Need A Friend by Blaze (acquired at the New Music Seminar from the Quark label, following good reception here for Blaze's earlier Whatcha Gonna Do on Champion), and

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► FROM PAGE 15

Do You Really Want To Wait by Jimmy Williams, who used to be Double Exposure's lead singer and more recently has been working live as lead for the Trammps. Produced by Surface's David 'Pic' Conley, this is Williams' first solo record, and has already been buzzing as an import.

On Passion, a trio of strong-sounding Hi-NRG releases is headed by the return of Kelly Marie on an update of Billy Fury's Halfway To Paradise, alongside Fighting For Our Lives by People Like Us, and Tracy Ackerman with Take My Body (And I Will Take Your Love) — the latter a move into the 'Miami' dance sound which is currently barraging the US charts. And back on Debut, Nigel Wright has a new Madonna megamix under the This Year's Blonde name: Who's That Mix pulls in bits of the recent Madonna repertoire like Who's That Girl, Papa Don't Preach and La Isla Bonita, as well as earlier hits like Holiday and Into The Groove.

Meanwhile, to turn back to Breakout again, the label also has albums scheduled from two female performers. One marks the welcome return of stalwart Brenda Russell on a set titled Get Here, and the other is a potentially exciting debut from a 14-year-old US newcomer named Shanice Wilson, who is described as "sounding like Deniece Williams, and looking like Janet Jackson". Her album, aptly



SHANICE WILSON: Fourteen year old with new album *Discovery* due out in the autumn.

titled *Discovery*, will be preceded in the first week of October by an introductory single, *Baby Tell Me Can You Dance*.

This is merely a random sampling of upcoming new dance product, but it is clear that release activity is going to be building to a

peak again as the Autumn season gets underway. There don't seem to be many megastar albums in early view, but the general attitude is probably a wise of one giving Michael Jackson's *Bad* plenty of legroom, rather than getting trampled in the crush!

Blatant move toward dance charts

CASTLE COMMUNICATIONS, the reissue licensing specialist, was an unexpected entrant into the dance field with the *Genius Of Rap* compilation set, released a few weeks ago. This brought together the best of the Sugarhill label's hit output of recent years, including tracks by the Sugarhill Gang, Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five, and further permutations thereof. Significantly released on CD as well as LP — a still-rare development in the dance compilation field — it also introduced a new Castle label, Blatant, which will be devoted purely to dance releases, and which has three more LPs imminently in the pipeline. Of particular interest will be Afrika Bambaata's *Death Mix Throw-down* album, cut by the Hip-

Hop pioneer several years ago before Planet Rock brought him international fame, and never previously available in the UK.

Also due shortly from Blatant are two further compilations, both (like *Genius Of Rap*), double-album packages in single sleeves at mid-price. The *Best Of All Platinum* reissues that label's dancefloor hits of the late 1970s, with tracks by the Moments, Sylvia, Shirley & Company and many others. Hip-Hop Chartbusters speaks for itself, and rounds up crossover rap/Hip-Hop hits from a variety of labels, presenting all in their original 12-inch mixes.

Finally, Blatant has already taken Castle into the (for it) virgin territory of the 12-inch single, with a re-issue of Grandmaster & Melle Mel's *White Lines*, ever still in demand even after its record chart run, and particularly since PRT deleted the original pressing.

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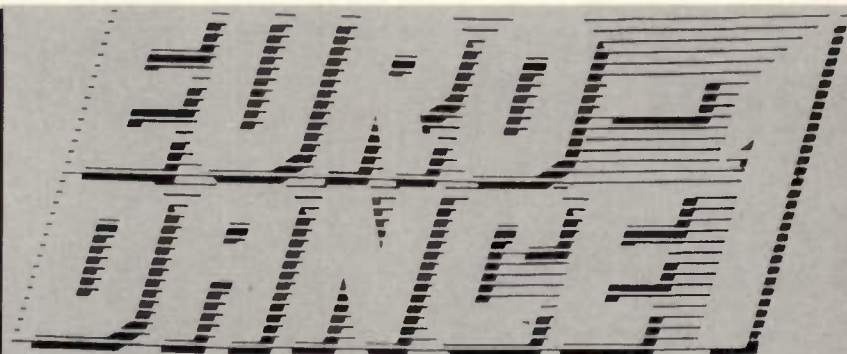
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Club promo vital link to sales

A UNIVERSALLY-recognised vital link in the selling of dance music in the UK is club promotion. It is accepted that there are many records — in fact, whole genres of records — which would never receive their initial kick to the public in the traditional way via radio. This is because broadcasters will always, inevitably, put new examples of 'good radio music' before dance-type body music on any daytime playlist pecking order.

Promotion at a more grassroots level to a core audience from which wider popularity can be built, is now the proven alternative. So many major hits have now been broken over the last few years via the 'clubs first' route (generally, though

not always, with radio following on), that it is one which no UK record label with dance music product would ever sensibly avoid.

Probably the pioneer club promotion department within a UK record company was the mailing list set up by Ensign label boss Nigel Grainge in the days when he was a label/product manager at Phonogram in the early 1970s. Grainge had several US-licensed labels with a wealth of commercial, danceable R&B product, and this was made available on 7-inch singles (before the days of the commercial 12-incher) to disco DJs along with a chatty newsletter ('Total Elastic Alsatian' was Nigel's favourite phrase for a



THE DETROIT Emeralds rewarded Phonogram with a string of club originated hits in the Seventies.

hot single) and forms on which to report their own and their audience's reactions. Phonogram was rewarded with a string of club-originated hits by the likes of the Moments, Shirley & Co, the Detroit Emeralds, the Stylistics, the Joneses, Limmi & Family Cooking, and others.

Nowadays, club promotion is not only by far a bigger game, but a carefully-honed

science. It can involve the targetting from computerised lists of specific kinds of dance records at DJs and clubs where the musical bias has been carefully pinpointed. Both the present-day in-house dance promotion departments and the major independent club promotion companies (the latter being now comparatively few who, by astuteness and

successful track records, have prospered and seen off their opposition in this once ridiculously overcrowded area) can target funk records, Hi-NRG, Hip-hop and pop-soul records — even heavy metal dance records — with accuracy at the appropriate DJs catering to the appropriate audiences, nationwide.

Also, because of the way the



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dance side of the industry tends to be structured, with a close dialogue between the specialist shops, local radio and club DJs and a good deal of common personnel between them. Club promoters tend to service specialist retail and the specialist soul/dance radio shows and DJs as well, providing a still wider basis for the feedback to be evaluated. The results of all this are not a picture of what sort of reaction any given record is receiving at several levels of the specialist marketplace.

There are records which the DJs love but which go completely over the heads of their audiences, are there also dance-genre records which, perversely, fail in the clubs, but get a positive reaction with radio jocks. Frequently, there are records which take off in just one location or area of the country, and it is vital feedback to discover just why this should be and how (or if) the success can be widened.

As the overall importance of the club promotion role has become more and more apparent through the 1980s, with results in marketing terms which would have astounded the Phonogram pioneers in the Alstatian days of the early '70s, so more and more major companies have committed themselves to in-house organisation of such a department. Many majors have had such a commitment for years — Fred Dove's department at WEA, to cite the most

obvious, seems to stretch right back into the mists of antiquity. Others have tackled this area more seriously in recent times, quite often hand-in-hand with the establishment of an in-house dance-oriented label with which it could work closely.

EMI's entry into the field a couple of years back was seen as a major move; oddly, it more or less coincided with CBS's exit from it — a move which few in the rest of the dance industry have ever really fathomed. More recently, companies such as MCA (with Paul Bunting) and the Virgin label group (with Justin Lubbock) have made extremely effective entries into the fray, and A&M's Breakout has now just organised its own in-house club promotion list under recent recruit Rob Manley.

Departments like that at Club (incorporating product from London and all the Phonogram labels) have become a watchword of regular success and effective contact with the DJs in the field, as have the leading specialist independents like Rush Release (which handles most of the vast BMG output, among others), Impulse (which has Jive), and the DJ-popular smaller operations by such dance promotion experts as Adrian Sykes and Marie Birch. MW's dance pages have spotlighted the activities of most of these in earlier dance supplements and the weekly dance music coverage. They perform a service without which a vital sector of the industry could not survive, and they have made an enviable art and science of the process.

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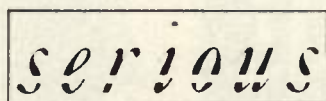
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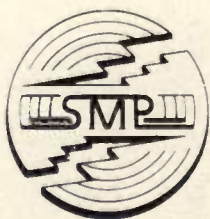
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