

# Disco Phenomenon Continues to Spread at UPEI

It's 12:30 a.m. in Charlottetown and a frosty winter wind stirs on the U.P.E.I. campus. Junior Flanagan leans calmly against his pinto cruiser, arms folded, studying the line of people that snakes from the door of the Disco Barn. Many have been waiting for some time now to get in but they don't resent it. The Disco-Barn is a new student activity, it is a starship of the disco phenomenon now sweeping urban Canada. They come in various shapes and sizes, and have as their common denominator loud music and non-stop dancing. The formula is simple and highly profitable: rent a space, polish the floor, find a bank manager to put up the money for the sound light system, hire a disc jockey who hates empty dance floors, serve liquor if the law allows it or orange juice and milk if it doesn't, open with a splash, and wait for the money to roll in.

Discos surfaced first in New York in the early Sixties, when twisters made such places as the Peppermint Lounge and Arthur's celebrity pit stops. Their popularity slipped at the end of the decade with the ascendancy of acid rock, which drew people to clubs and concerts not to dance but to listen. When black rhythm and blues pulled them to their feet again in 1971 the discos began a slow comeback, first in New York's chic homosex-

ual clubs. Their rate of growth jumped noticeably two years ago when gays began to welcome a hetero crowd. Inside the discos the music is hard, fast and ear numbingly loud. There is no room to stop and worry, just to dance. Today they are the late night escape from the nine-to-five pressures of the daylight world trend-setting showcases for style and tastes.

Style is at the centre of the disco experience. When Limelight owner Yvon Lafrance expanded his club recently, he threw a party for Montreal disco freaks and ordered them to attend in white only. More than 1,000 showed up, a symphony of gleaming white conformity. Currently, men lean to workboots, denim and plaid Viyella shirts, preferably second hand. Women have reached back to the Forties for long dresses with gathered shoulders finishing the look with sculptured hair, shaded lips and rouged cheeks. "Actually anything goes," says Toronto designer and disco-regular Larry Foden. "What's happening in the clubs is that people are really starting to use their clothes for self-expression." This craving for individuality is evident on the dance floor where free-form experimenters jostle for elbow-room with people doing such disco-spawned dances as the Bump, Salsa and Hustle.



Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver are Canada's disco centres, each with two dozen clubs and more on the way. Controversial liquor laws have stunted their growth on the Prairies (clubs with dance floors can't serve liquor) but Maritime discos such as Moncton's Cosmopolitan and Halifax's Piccadilly draw vast crowds. At two to three dollars to get in, discos are a cheap thrill. The interior decors range from Fifties Kitsch (Marvin's, Vancouver) through Suburban Rec Room (David's, Toronto), to Eaton's Victoriana (the Piccadilly, Halifax). Twenty-three-year-old Norey Steiger's Monkey Club in Toronto is a leafy, glittery tribute to all that is Latin American in discos. He created his own club because he couldn't afford any more junkets to Montreal and New York. "My wife and I are disco freaks," he says. "We love to dance and until recently the best dancing was always in New York and Montreal." Steiger opened last January and already he's grossing an average of \$6,000 a month, enough to upgrade an already good sound system with \$16,000 worth of gadgets that give his DJ even more aural punch to hurl at the club's dancers.

In the disco world the DJ is everything. He controls the sound system from a console that usually includes two turntables, a tape deck, a mixer and an equalizer. Although they rarely earn more than \$50 a night, DJs can make or break a club. They are obsessed with keeping the dance floor alive with perspiring bodies. "They're manipulative." But people don't come to di-

scoteques to make decisions. They want to be told what to do, away from the uncertain world outside." A favorite bit of audio trickery employed by the disco DJ is "double tracking" each turntable carries the same disc and the DJ cuts from one to the other to lengthen the song, sometimes to 10 minutes or more. Using an equalizer, he can also shade various frequencies to alter the original sound. The emphasis is on rhythm which is augmented by flashing light and strobes.

The discos' popularity is made the DJ a hit-making force in the music industry. Lady Marmalade by Labelle was a disco hit long before it reached aboveground success. Hot selling disco groups such as The Ritchie Family and Silver Convention aren't even heard on am radio, and record stores now report morning-after stampedes for new disco music.

The only sour note in the disco story has been sounded by Canadian musicians, up in arms because clubs that once featured live entertainment are being converted to discos which require only a stack of records and a DJ to keep going. They also accuse DJs of tampering with recorded music, remixing it away from its original shape. James Lytle, Secretary of the Ottawa/Hull District Federation of Musicians, says, "We're definitely going to make a stand against them. It's going to be war."

But A.W. Spriggs and Charles Sandeman Allan couldn't care less about the gathering storm. They are young active UPEI students, hitting the scholastic grindstone until the big Tuesday night arrives. Charles, better known as Sherlock Holmes, and A.W. Spriggs, better known as A.D.M. T.S.S. will get sooped up for the evening and boogie on down to the Disco Barn. They will dance with future teachers, social workers, physiotherapists, all of them Tuesday night bloomers. If there are no partners available they will dance by themselves.

On Wednesday morning they'll wake up, wishing they were dead, and put on each other's socks, so they can walk blearily to their routine Thursday classes.

For disco freaks, work is only a concession to the necessities. The great affair is to dance.

*Dave Garrison*



THERE'S A Disco Barn THIS TUESDAY (MARCH 9TH) AFTER THE BREAK