



Photos by Kevin Higley

Couple grooves to the latest disco vibrations at Uncle Sam's, a discotheque at 24th and O streets. Some go just to dance; others have more offbeat goals.

I could have boogied all night

By Rich Tillson

"... Now I know that all you people like disco dancing. You like to go to parties and steal dances from your negro friends... but I know that some of you still can't get that emphasis on the two and four beat, so we're going to show you how to do it." (Enter three transvestites beating on garbage can lids)...

—spoken prelude to "Disco Shit," by Darryl Rhodes and the Hahavishnu Orchestra, Atlanta, 1976.

Probably the biggest thing to hit the entertainment world in the seventies is Disco, which is rapidly developing a culture, a lifestyle and a major force in music and fashion. The disco is a phenomenon far beyond the fad level, in creating a new multi-level industry supporting it. According to a recent article in *Newsweek* magazine, there are over 10,000 discos in the United States, or about seven times the number existing two years ago.

The author visited three local places, risking health and sanity in search of the disco phenomenon in Lincoln. There may be more, but he doesn't want to know about them.

Fanny's, at the Lincoln Hilton Hotel, is what you would expect a hotel disco to be. More of a lounge than anything else, the evening population consists mostly of junior executive types, traveling salesmen, secretaries, receptionists, with a few students thrown in. The dance floor is small, and the light show resembles an after-Christmas sale of blinking tree lights. The music the deejay selects is slow-to-middle gear, and on the night I was there almost no one danced.

The place seemed to be heavily hustle-oriented, but a few persons came in to talk and dance. The costumes the waitresses wear indicate the scene there: "Fanny's" is embroidered across the dettierre of the shorts. Cute, real cute.

"I'm in here every night... It's a good place to boogie and pick up chicks, and... you know..."

Little Bo's East, a larger disco at 27th and Cornhusker Highway, seems to be more universally appealing to people under thirty. If dress is any indicator, it also draws people from many economic and social classes.

The emphasis here is on hustling, with predatory members of both sexes out on "search-and-destroy" missions. The deejay, Don Crawly, is adept at crowd control. He keeps the action at moderate levels most of the night, but he throws in an occasional rocker to get people to "boogie down." The patrons seated at tables look extremely bored, but those coming with or finding partners who dance seem to have a good time. Little Bo's is almost always packed to the rafters.

Uncle Sam's, 24th and O streets, has college students as its primary clientele. Sam's has the most sophisticated light show in town, and the sound system is good. Seemingly less hustle-oriented than the two places above, the emphasis is on drinking, dancing and some conversation. Its environment is more tightly controlled with a dress code and large bouncer staff. Sam's also has a live drummer who copies the drum lines in the songs.

Face to face
toe to toe
heart to heart
we hit the floor
Limber up
Limbo down
... locked embrace

we stumble 'round...
I say "Go!"
She say "Yes."
Dim the lights
You can guess the rest.
OHH-Ohh, can't you see
Love is the drug I need to score..."

"Love is the Drug" by Roxy Music

The disco (from "discotheque", a French word meaning a record library) has brought with it a specific music, a new technology of manipulating environment, snazzy clothes, a new variety of disco jockey or deejay and several new dances—notably the bump, the hustle, the bus stop, the rope and the roach.

The discotheque originally was a European invention migrating to the States in the 1960s. It stayed popular only in metropolitan black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods, pushed there by the rise in popularity of rock concerts, dances with live bands and psychedelia. In the seventies people decided they had had enough of "relevance," social chance, anti-establishment attitudes and hallucinogenic drugs.

The disco was there as an escape form as the '60s died out. Early discos brought the act to the streets in the form of mobile disco jockeys in disco-vans equipped with sound and light equipment, and—of course—records.

The gay community made the advancing discos their home for a while. At a disco everyone is anonymous and relatively ignored, and boys dancing with boys and girls with girls were acceptable. The straight world, hit by inflation, began to see in discos a cheap night's worth of entertainment. The expansion of the business seems to have no end in sight.

Disco music has become mainly a device for manipulating the emotions and moods of dancers. With roots in soul, Latin and rock music, it has become a distinguishable entity. As a rule, over-orchestrated arrangements with predictable, repetitive riffs support inane and repetitive vocal spots—disco has become this generation's "easy listening" music. Often the discos will add a live drummer with a full trap set, who adds his live sound to the records coming in on headphones. The disco deejay can select the slower music to calm down a crowd, or he can wind up the dancers to a frenzy with faster numbers leaning toward rock.

The disco mania also has brought back the peacock in human beings. Disco clothing designs show off the body of the wearer, while being comfortable enough to spend all night dancing in. Body shirts, jump suits and tight, flared pants are accompanied by all kinds of jewelry. The disco also has brought back the once rebelled against as repression, the dress code. Uncle Sam's enforces a policy of "no T-shirts, tank tops, hats, faded jeans or shorts."

Disco music usually is accompanied by an impressive array of seventies technology in lighting. Colored lights flash underneath translucent dance floors, on wall and ceiling, and coupled with stroboscopic and ultraviolet lights and mirrors. Flaring and changing with the music, they create moods from intimate sensuality to frenzied robot entropy. Together with the music, they can be disorienting to the point of nausea upon entering the disco, but in time the nervous system adjusts. The lights give the illusion of frantic movement on the dance floor, even when people are crowded so they barely can move.

Why do people go to disco? During my alcohol-crazed research, I received several baleful glares, some shrugged shoulders, two "get lost," and several "I dunno." Some responses were more imaginative.

"I just like to dance. You wants dance?" replied one girl, who identified herself as Bunny the Terrible.

"I'm in here every night," a young man in a blue jumpsuit and razor-shag haircut said. "It's a good place to

boogie and pick up chicks, and... you know..." Spying a likely prospect just coming in the door, he approached her and put his arm around her waist. Looking uncomfortable, she disappeared into the crowd, with him following.

"I don't dance. I just come here to sit and drink and be disgusted," said Jim Wallace, a UNL student.

"I come here because it really fascinates me," said Mark Safarik, another UNL student. "I want to figure out the whole game so I can... use it, manipulate it. It's really a strange scene."

In the Lincoln discos, no dance step prevails. People move catatonically, jerkily, smoothly, spastically, up and down, in and out, around and around. The totally programmed nature of the disco environment produces a sort of artificial electronic sensuality, and some of the more uninhibited dancing can politely be described as "copulating with the air."

But the prevailing attitude is narcissism, where each dancer is converted by clothes, lights, music and alcohol into his or her very own superstar.

"Last call for alcohol" precedes the final number, usually an upbeat rocker that brings the disco to a final crashing climax, leaving the crowd wanting to come back. The deejay is in a hurry to go home.

"You have two minutes to drink up," he says. A few minutes later he is visibly more irritated. "C'mon, we all have parties to go to. Let's go." A few minutes later all pretenses of hospitality dissolve. "We all have parties to go to... let's get out of here... move your behinds... floormen, you may assist people out of here. Let's GO!"

Hand over mike, the deejay points to the crowd and says something obviously uncomplimentary about them to the drummer. 12:40 a.m. is the magic moment when the adored deejay tells his fans to bug off.

The crowd, for the most part untouched by the rude stage display, nevertheless shuffles slowly toward the exit, presumably to boogie again another day.

Standing in line to get my coat from the cloak room, I hear a conversation between two men in front of me that summed up the evening.

"Wotta night," says one.

"Bummer... BUMMER!" agrees the other.

