

# ACID HOUSE

## A surreal mix of electronics and kitsch takes over where punk and disco left off

From the abandoned warehouses of London's West End to the chic clubs of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, the cry is heard: "ACCEEEID!"

Dancers sporting Afro wigs, bell bottoms, clogs and smiley-face T-shirts gyrate to the electronic, synthesized, monotonous beat, "jacking" (contorting) their bodies through strawberry-scented smoke as digitally sampled snippets of basslines from "Shaft" and bad Abba songs waft through the speakers. Psychedelic lights flash on buttons embossed with sayings like "Burn, Baby, Burn!" and "Jack Your Body." But as dancers hold up two fingers and shout "peace," laughter follows. The dancers find the hippie saying ridiculous. And they wear their outdated clothes with their tongues firmly planted in cheek.

The scene above only can be described as the 1970s on an acid trip - literally.

The scene is called Acid House, a counter-cultural music, art and fashion movement that takes 1980s nostalgia to new extremes with its high-camp, satirical interpretations of old disco and acid rock, hippie drug culture and '70s fashion. The hideous '70s smiley face grins down on the scene as its mascot.

Acid House is an intense, cultish

variation of Chicago House music. Chicago House -- a hypnotically repetitive, electronic genre of dance music based on digital samples of old disco records re-mixed with a thumping bassline -- was created in an underground Windy City club called The Warehouse (hence the name House music). Acid House takes the genre a step further by mixing creepy noises, subliminal messages and sampled dialogue from campy old films and disco songs into the generic House bassline. Acid is basically "body music" -- mindless, beat-crazy fun designed for dancing.

When songs by House groups like M/A/R/R/S, S-Express and Bomb the Bass debuted on London dance floors, the Brits went wild. A craze as trend-prone as punk was born. London nightclub-goers shaved off their Mohawks, donned Reeboks, gold chains and welcomed the changing of the pop cultural guard.

The trend experienced a new twist in the summer of 1988 and became Acid House, according to SPIN magazine's London correspondent Sean O'Hagan.

"When a trippy, electronic Chicago record called 'Acid Trax' by Phuture appeared on the scene, it singlehandedly changed the rules of the game," O'Hagan wrote.

Sound wizard Todd Terry, of the

House group Todd Terry Project, has claimed that the term "acid" is derived from the black slang word "burnin'" -- stealing another musician's work -- but the Brits embraced the more obvious interpretation: drugs.

The drug connection to Acid House makes sense -- most of the music is trancelike and surreal...like, well, an acid trip.

The Acid House drug of choice is Ecstasy.



"It is THE club drug," an Acid House fanatic said in Britain's New Musical Express. "It relaxes you, makes you dance and talk and helps you meet new people."

In essence, Acid House is a self-indulgent, hedonistic movement. Since most of the music is created by anonymous producers who use pseudonyms, the musicians are invisible to their adoring public, so the dancers wind up being the stars.

Some of the hipper-than-thou musical savants claim Acid House will become as big as punk or the 1960s Mod scene. Call it the "Third British Invasion," if you must. Or perhaps "The British Interpretation of Black America Invasion." We'll see.

But beware if you're in the market for Acid House. All the Acid music compilations are imports and run at least \$12 an album -- so know what you're in for before you buy or you might wind up with something you'll want to burn, baby, burn. Following is some House and Acid advice:

**Jack The Tab, "Acid Tablets Volume One."** (Castalia Records, U.K.): Rumors claim this Acid compilation of various "bands" is really a compendium of work by Psychic

TV (or Psychick TV -- spellings seem to vary, according to the band's whims). Former Soft Cell and Psychick TV member Dave Ball did a lot of the keyboard work. Regardless, some of the most caustic, surreal Acid around is on this LP. Side One's "Psyche Out" by King Tubby contains a spasmodic, trippy layer of synthesized whistles with samples of a gothic ghoul repeating the line "apathy has to pass" over and over. And "Oxygen" by Griselda contains a great sample of Peggy Gravel's "I hate nature" speech from John Waters' 1977 cult film, "Desperate Living." The L.P.'s best track is "Meet Every Situation," a digital celebration of burping, contorting keyboard noises, a bassline that could have been lifted from any Godzilla movie soundtrack and hilarious samples of nasal-voiced New York housewives talking about drugs. The rest of the tracks are industrial, funk-up mayhem that aren't recommended for the unimaginative. (Grade: B +).

**The Todd Terry Project, "To The Batmobile...Let's Go!"** (Broadway): Todd Terry is credited by some as the founder of House. Whatever the case, this LP partially started the craze with House classics like "Bango" and "Back to the Beat." Terry uses various vocalists and samples of dialogue from the old "Batman" TV series and mixes them in with numerous keyboard and drum machine programs. The result is a sound that's a cross between the German computer group Kraftwerk and hardline Brooklyn and Bronx rap. (Grade: A +).

**Various Artists, "The Best of House Music Volume One."** (Profile Records): This 1988 double LP contains some of the best House hits from the genre's early days. Ralphie Rosario and Xaviera Gold's "You Used to Hold Me," a staple on New York dance floors the past two years, sounds like it could have been recorded in the '70s with its metronome beat and Gold's sexy, catty lyrics about her "man." J.M. Silk's "Jack

Your Body" originated the "jack your body" phrase London trendies shout like a club mantra. Jeanne Harris' "Just Another Man" is vintage House with its piano work and synthesized violins. This compilation, with its vocals, lyrics and passion, shows off House music's black soul roots without relying solely on computer programs. (Grade: B +).

**Various Artists, "The Hits of House."** (K-Tel, U.K.): Don't let the label name fool you. In the U.S., K-Tel no longer releases overly edited compilations of bad top 40 stuff like it did in the '70s, but overseas in England the label still thrives, as "The Hits of House" compilation herewith demonstrates. This is the best House music you'll find -- that is, if you CAN find this rare import that I've only seen on CD for \$17.00 and up. But if you do locate it, grab it. It contains the House classic "Theme From S-Express" by S-Express, a campy, techno tribute to hilariously awful early '70s "black power" films like "Shaft" and "Cleopatra Jones." "We'll Be Right Back" by Steinski and Mass Media is nothing but snippets from old commercials mixed in with a rap beat -- and it is surprisingly funky. Cookie Crew's "Rok Da House" and "Females (Get On Up)" are both fun British interpretations of American black rap. All 13 tracks are infectious, danceable House songs you'll never get tired of. (Grade: A +).

**Tekno Acid Beat, "Pure Acid."** (Temple Records, U.K.): Also rumored to be a Psychic TV project, this compilation is more tongue-in-cheek than the Jack the Tab LP, as song titles like "Godzilla vs. The Space Mutants" attest. The funniest track is "Liquid Eyeliner" by DJ Doktor Megatrip and Mista Luv. The song eviscerates everything that was so horribly cheesy about '70s disco: sirens, chants, tinny beats. "Liquid Eyeliner" contains samples of bad disco songs like "In the Bush" and a Donna Summer riff played at 78 rpm. Dig it, baby. (Grade: B).

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## Event Garde

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Events for June 29 through July 5  
**Lincoln**  
June 13 through August 13  
"American Ceramics Now: The 27th Ceramic National Exhibition," Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery  
June 27 through July 1 "Steel Magnolias," Nebraska Repertory Theater, Howell Theater, 8 p.m.  
June 29 through July 2 "84 Charlie Mopic," Sheldon Film Theater, 7 and 9 p.m. with matinees Saturday and Sunday at 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.

NO SCREENINGS ON FRIDAY, JUNE 30  
June 29 The Regulators, The Zoo Bar, 9 p.m., \$3  
June 29 Village Tavern Band, Antelope Park Bandshell, 7:30 p.m.  
June 30 and July 1 The Nace Brothers, The Zoo Bar, 9 p.m., \$3  
June 30 Lincoln Municipal Mandolin Ensemble, Antelope Park Bandshell, 7:30 p.m.  
July 1 Laurie and Sean Benjamin, Antelope Park Bandshell, 7:30 p.m.  
July 2 First Municipal Band Concert, Antelope Park

Bandshell, 7:30 p.m.  
July 3 The Tablerockers, The Zoo Bar, 9 p.m., \$2  
July 4 C.J. Chenier and the Red-Hot Louisiana Band, The Zoo Bar, 9 p.m., \$5  
July 5 John Walker, Foundation Gardens, noon  
July 5 Triple Play, The Zoo Bar, 9 p.m., \$2

**Omaha**  
June 29 through July 2 "Much Ado About Nothing," Shakespeare On The Green, Elmwood Park, 8:30 p.m.