

# feature



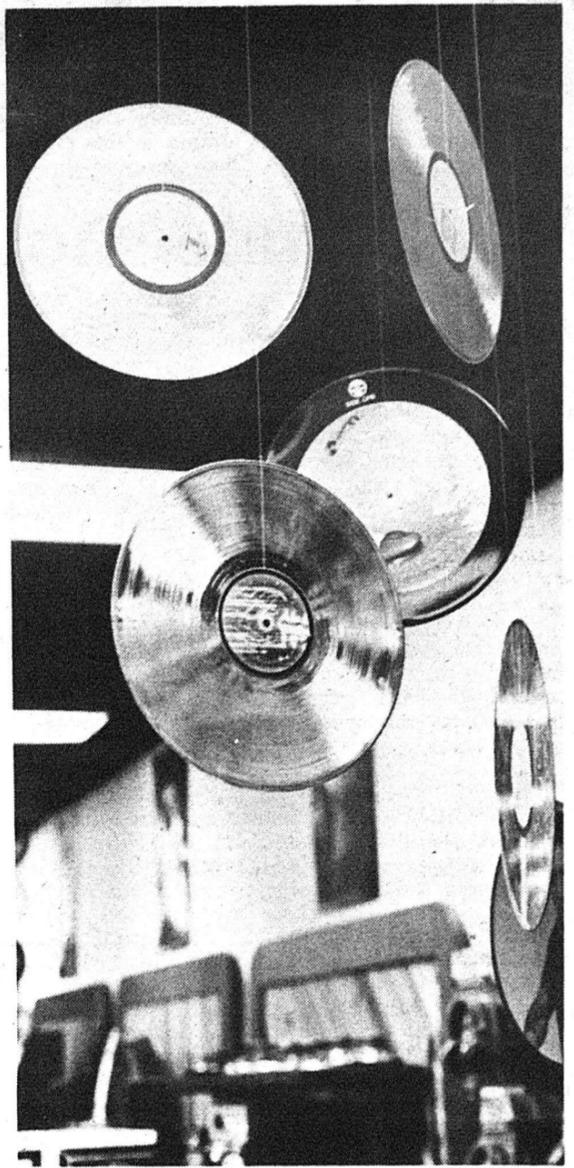
style Rhythm and Blues once personified by such acts as the Four Tops, Supremes and Temptations are dead as far as sales. One notable exception in this genre is the new "Blues Brothers" album, but sales are accounted by the publicity generated by exposure on Saturday Night Live. Black groups have generally gone the disco route or have been dropped by their labels. Some notable exceptions include the Isley Brothers (who are heavily rock influenced) and the Pointer Sisters, whose latest album, "Energy" is selling up to 150 copies a week at some locations, when they can get the album from the manufacturer.

All store managers agreed that trends change from week to week and that if there is any certainty involved in the record selling business, it is that they are sure to be caught short when a new record release takes off. To illustrate this point, the new Rod Stewart album, "Blondes Have More Fun" is generating tremendous demand, due to his recent television appearance for U.N.I.C.E.F. Yet the record was not in the stores the day after the broadcast and potential sales suffer due to lack of foresight on the part of record distributors.

Generally, any television appearances of an artist guarantees sales. So does AM radio airplay. One reason for the tremendous sales of disco product is because it is receiving more and more airplay. As well, in times of economic unrest people need diversions, and certainly the tremendous explosion of discos across North America is witness to this fact.

One problem facing all the stores contacted was the poor quality of record pressings, especially in light of a one dollar price increase to be announced by all major labels in the near future. Some labels such as CBS and A&M Records have already hiked their list price to \$8.98. During December, A&A Records sent back 23 boxes of defective albums. Terry Reeves at Sam's feels that consumers are too lax in accepting "alright" records. He told *Gateway* that stores are often caught in the middle when "customers take their anger out on us and record companies turn a deaf ear to stores".

Allan Luyckfassel, on the other hand, feels "a lot of people don't know what a defective record is. They think a piece of dust is a defect". He also stated that with the large number of records being pressed, such mass production means potentially defective records are a reality. Colin McDonald told *Gateway* that "People are



picky but with prices going up, they have to be". George Dempster felt that returns at his store were high, but he had little advice to offer irate customers except to keep exchanging the defective records for better copies.

Faced with ever increasing prices and decreasing quality, the record buyer has little recourse except to petition the major labels. However, it is generally felt that the majority of record buyers, who are between 17 and 25, could never get together on any large enough scale to have any impact. As Florence Roberts put it, "Many rock fans can't live without four new albums a month". Most other managers echoed the same sentiment. Many rock fans have such a built-in need for music that they will pay whatever price is being asked and record companies are only too well attuned to this fact.

In a lighter vein, the new sales gimmick for the 1980's appears to be a video screen hooked up to a turntable, so that you can watch your favorite group perform. One company is even reputedly manufacturing a two inch thick "water disc" featuring a sealed layer of water sandwiched between two transparent discs. Electra records is also pressing the first 45 rpm picture discs of their group Cars, and this may start a new trend.

Gordy Records, a subsidiary of Motown Records, had the logo "It's What's in The Grooves That Counts", on its label. That message was a plea for radio programmers to give their black artists such as Martha & The Vandellas and the Temptations a crack at airplay. Today in 1979, it appears that record companies are less concerned about reproduction quality or even the quality of what's in the grooves for that matter, as long as it sells. Interestingly enough, Gordy Records has long since dropped their logo, and it appears that the record industry has followed suit.

Jazz and classical sales are still doing well, though in the case of jazz, sales are mainly for jazz-rock albums. Student Union Records manager Florence Roberts estimates that one quarter of all their sales are derived from classical music. She stated that many of their customers have diversified tastes, and may also pick up a jazz and light rock album while hunting out new classical releases. At Opus '69, jazz is the second biggest seller behind rock. Meanwhile, Kelly's is considering cutting back their jazz selection and at present their classical section is stored under the rock bins.

While sales trends and customer age groups tend to vary at the various stores contacted by *Gateway*, it seems that the old



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