5.4 Re-appraising Hi-Nrg, the queer soundtrack to the 1980s

David Carroll[2]

Abstract

Only in recent decades has the appraisal of pop music gained footing in musicology (Buckley, 2003). Pop's many intersections with gender and sexualities have been well documented (Bullock, 2017; Gill, 1995; Whitely, 2000), but this paper argues that a comprehensive analysis of the genesis and impact of the 1980s genre of pop music, *Hi-Nrg*, remains unrecorded. The paper unearths the history and trajectory of the genre and affirms its place as a cultural milestone. Emerging as a sub-genre of disco, the paper illustrates how its characteristics were innately queer, in terms of its origins, and in its thematic content. From these original DIY roots, the rise of Hi-Nrg, and its subsequent appropriation, into one of the defining pop sounds of the late 1980s, is documented.

Keywords: pop music, 1980s, homosexuality.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to establish and convey the magnitude of influence that Hi-Nrg would come to exert over the pop music landscape of the 1980s, despite being a relatively unchartered subgenre of disco. From unflinchingly overt representations, to less explicit, yet abundant manifestations of coded, homo-sexualized reference points, Hi-Nrg is presented as pioneering in reach and content. Despite predominantly reflecting the lives of gay men, examples where the form can be aligned to, and located within queer theory, with its "(...) emphasis on permanent rebellion and submission of dominant social meanings and identities" (Mottier, 2008, p. 45) exist. The genre's trajectory, from the underground clubland of North America and Western Europe to its world-wide zenith in 1989 (Stock, 2004), also yields an alluring illustration of the cultural appropriation of facets of queer culture into the mainstream.

2. The death of disco?

Disco's enduring cultural impact has been well evidenced, and its place as a soundtrack to new representations and voices is also well documented (Dyer, 1992; Maitra, 2011). By the late 1970s, the disco sound saturated the pop landscape, and the aesthetics of the genre embedded further into wider pop culture (Echols, 2010). As the decade entered its end, the form's continued infiltration of the mainstream would see an increasing number of artists, as unlikely as Dolly Parton and Rod Stewart, embrace the trend as it continued its sojourn of annexation (Abjorensen, 2017).

2. Dublin City University, Ireland. E-mail: david.carroll35@mail.dcu.ie

2.1 The paradigm of The Bee Gees

The paradigm of British group, The Bee Gees, whose harnessing of disco had seen them attain levels of success exceeding previous career highs, was noted by many artists hoping to replicate such triumphs. The group's soundtrack to the film *Saturday Night Fever* had become the best-selling album of 1978 (McLeod, 2006, p. 349). Becoming eponymous with the disco genre itself, in 1987 it earned induction into the United States National Recording Registry based on its cultural significance (Bilyeu et *al.*, 2013). The effect on this mainstreaming of disco in relation to its constituent queer and non-white audience has been examined. For Doggett (2015, p. 475), their success was evidence of a significant shift:

In The Bee Gee's hands, Disco became the basic language of popular music. Their success coincided with a shift in perception of the discotheque's function. It was no longer an arena for subverting society's sexual mores, and breaking taboos, but proof that one belonged inside the mainstream – or in selected circles, within the social elite.

Other scholars have concurred, citing the album as "(...) marking the beginning of the 'popularisation' of disco by repressing its black and homosexual origins" (Maitra, 2011, pp. 275-376). Despite criticisms to the contrary, disco had progressed stylistically during its ascent, "(...) from its funk-orientated origins in underground clubs and private parties into a more upscale, sophisticated sound associated with the smooth consonances of *Philadelphia Soul* and heavily produced orchestral music" (McLeod, 2006, p. 348).

2.2 How disco challenged rock music

Rock music had been deeply challenged by disco. Epitomised by the infamous 'disco demolition' nights, whereby rock music fans were invited to literally burn disco records (Greenburg, 2010), the resistance has since been depicted as being as much about self-protection, reinforcing the previously rigid, heterosexual, and mainly white, representations of rock (Gillen, 2007; Mankowski, 2010). While there was significant resistance, the genre would survive in various shapes and forms, in many ways its 'death' an exaggeration (Robb, 2020). It would take, for an artist forever aligned with the genre, Gloria Gaynor, to sagely observe, "Disco music is alive and well and living in the hearts of music-lovers around the world. It simply changed its name to protect the innocent: Dance music" (Hubbs, 2007, in Robinson, 2010, p. 51).

Although disco was now losing its vice-like grip as a mass phenomenon, "(...) the gays hadn't stopped dancing yet" (Smith, 1999, in Kirk, 1999, p. 13). The 1980s, a decade in which the music industry would enjoy "(...) enormous expansion", (Jones, 1997, p. 18), would see the emerging Hi-Nrg gain significant popularity.

3. Origins

More than anyone, Hi-Nrg's origins can be attributed to Patrick Cowley and Bobby Orlando (Kirk 1999; Waterman, 2000). As Disco continued its evolution into a mass cultural medium, both would adapt aspects of its stylistic trademarks, and introduce other characteristics, which would come to define the Hi-Nrg genre. Both were from the United States, and while Cowley identified as gay, Orlando's interest in Hi-Nrg's development was perhaps less obvious. Described by poet Dennis Cooper as "(...) a hyper-macho, incredibly cocky, rampantly

homophobic ex-boxer who made gay disco" (2020:s/p), Orlando cuts a complex character; authoring a book on creationism and offering to cure his artists of their homosexuality, all the while producing songs which, in the main, were "(...) brazen odes to sex and partying" (Cooper, 2020:s/p). However, this seemingly contradictory stance does little to detract from his role as a pioneer of the form.

Despite such differences, both shared a similar approach to the execution of their productions. Of the period, Fikentscher (1991, p. 10) notes, "The early 1980s were a period in which the lines between studio producers, engineers, songwriters & DJs became increasingly fuzzy. Many DJs, in addition to spinning records, ventured into dance music production". Both producers were exemplary of this new breed of DIY musical entrepreneurs, even on occasion performing vocal duties for their songs. Again, the timing was crucial, coinciding with a period when, "(...) major record companies scrambled to drop the disco acts they had ravenously signed up, plenty of small independent labels run by gay folk sprang up to meet the demands for up-tempo dance records in their own communities" (Walters, 1996, p. 72). Although clearly derived from disco (Fritz, 1999), in a departure to what had come before, both producers sped up the traditional disco sound, establishing something altogether more frenzied. The tempo of the records paced at least 120BPM (Beats per minute), typically at 127BPM, produced a dramatically urgent sounding style (Buckland, 2010).

3.1 The term Hi-Nrg

In terms of the genre's etymology, there is a general consensus that as a term, 'Hi-Nrg' was coined by artist Donna Summer describing her song, *I Feel Love*, as having "a high energy vibe" (Jones & Kantonen, 1999; Shapiro, 2000). Produced by Giorgio Moroder, the "godfather of disco" and fellow forefather of the Hi-Nrg sound (Nika, 2015; Vivarelli, 2016), Moroder had with Summer's previous hit, *Love to Love You Baby*, introduced the concept of one track extending over the entire side of a 12-inch recording (Baumgartel, 2013).

Cowley's success came earlier, by the late 1970s he had helmed recordings which had crossed over to enjoy mainstream chart placings. Sung by Sylvester, an unapologetically queer, black artist (Gamson, 2005), one of Cowley's earliest hits, *You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)*, was described as 'genre defining' (Shapiro, 2005, p. 74). The same work would observe how Orlando accrued some chart success, notably, in the Benelux countries (Shapiro, 2005, p. 71), although it would take a few years later before he would attain acknowledgment as a founding father of the genre. Subsequent Hi-Nrg productions for acts such as Divine and The Pet Shop Boys, would chart world-wide (Jay, 1995) ensuring additional prominence. Of note, scholars have suggested that Cowley's legacy, that of exploring sexual realms within dance music, "(...) in particular, the homosexual ones, probably contributed to his relative obscurity" (Marke, 2019, p. 23), and the implications of this queer association is shown later, to have contributed to the genres eventual demise. However, in recent years there has been a more robust re-appraisal of his legacy, as with that of his Orlando (Lefebvre, 2016).

Both in its audible stylistic modifications to that of 'disco', and in terms of the lyrical themes and qualities utilised, 'Hi-Nrg' was, by the end of the 1970s, replacing its predecessor as the perpetual soundtrack of gay nightlife (Kirk, 1999). As the genre progressed into the emerging decade, it began to develop additional characteristics which further distinguished it from its original lineage. Influences, from the gay nightclubs of Western Europe (Arena, 2017), began to gather momentum and further broaden the genre's scope.

3.2 The musical styles of Hi-Nrg

Linguistically, the term Eurobeat was coined to describe Hi-Nrg style records which began to emanate from the English club scene, courtesy of producers such as Ian Levine. Levine's output, producing tracks such as *So Many Men, So Little Time*, his 1982 produced hit, fronted by Evelyn Thomas, would use the genre's name as its title, *High Energy.* (Laski, 1993 in Miller & Shaw-Miller, 1993; Rimmer, 1984). In Italy, the term Italo Disco was used to describe the flourishing Hi-Nrg scene there. The format was soon repeated in other countries, with French, Spanish and German artists following suite (Krettenauer, 2016). Just to compound the complexity, an additional idiom; Euro-Disco, has often been used interchangeably to describe Hi-Nrg, Eurobeat and Italo Disco, and as an umbrella term for all three. A final convolution comes with the term Boys-town, also used to describe Hi-Nrg, mainly in the United States and Canada (Brewster & Broughton, 2006). Taken from the name of a suburb of Chicago, where the queer community had coalesced in the early 1970s to create one of the first 'gay villages' (Baim, 2008), the term would be increasingly replicated to describe similar urban development and migration patterns occurring across cities of the Unites States. Such was its association

with homosexuality, the name would be subsequently adapted by San Francisco band, Boys-Town Gang, whose fleet of early 1980's releases were some of the earliest Hi-Nrg songs to chart (Roberts, 2006).

Evidence of the interchangeability of these terms can be elucidated by an example from the pages of British music industry magazine, *Record Mirror*. Recognising the surge in songs produced in the Hi-Nrg musical style, the publication launched the first 'gay chart' in 1982. Running until 1988, although its original name was changed a number of times, to 'Boys Town Disco chart'; then the 'Hi-Nrg chart'; and by its demise, the 'Eurobeat' chart' (Rollo, 2019). While the addition of the chart signals a recognition of sorts, it would fall to a less likely source, Smash Hits, to dismantle what seemed a profound silence in relation to Hi-Nrg's advancement, on the part of the music press. The most successful of the influential weekly pop publications, with a specifically young readership, (Toynbee, 1993), the magazine would forecast Hi-Nrg, as "the sound of 1984" (Elliot, 2016, p. 14).

Tellingly, even in these relatively early days of its genre's genesis, the piece demonstrates a reluctance on the part of industry stakeholders to affirm its queer associations.

When proffered with the lyrics, from the then recent hit, *So Many Men, So Little Time*, as an example of the homoerotic overtones common to the genre, the interviewee (a music executive) is keen to dismantle any such same-sex associations. The author notes, how during the denial, "(...) a coy smile breaks out across his face" (Elliot, 2016, p. 14). Evidently, such acknowledgment was deemed still too risky a strategy. Despite this, the article is clear that the origins and success enjoyed by the genre thus far were of a resolutely queer nature, and that for many, Hi-Nrg was indeed, 'gay music'. Evidence as to why this was thought to be the case, is presented below.

4. Lyrics, titles and soundscapes

Lyrically, Hi-Nrg songs were frequently sexually suggestive, and commonly imbued with homocentric, glorifications of the male body. Social concepts and linguistic constructs related to the emerging urban gay experience were commonly referenced (Bell & Binnie, 1984).

4.1 'Cruising' for sex

The particularly queer idiom, 'cruising', would prove a popular theme. The act of seeking out potential sexual partners in public spaces has long been established as a method of engagement, enabling the bearer access to a world still largely stigmatised by the mainstream. Forming part of an illustrious and subversive tradition involving the use of verbal and non-verbal codes, Stacey (2005, p. 1926) succinctly describes its primary role as a conduit to initiate sexual contact, citing it as "(...) the gay male sexual sport arena, where it is all in the gaze". The subject is reflected in a plethora of titles, *Searchin'* (Looking for Love); *So Many Men, So Little Time*; *Unexpected Lovers*; *Faith in Strangers*, all allude to the forays of the practice, with even more transparent examples in the form of, *Cruising*; *Cruising The Streets*; *A Walk in the Park*, and *Cruising in the Park*.

The employment of such idioms as song-titles constitutes just one element of a wider repertoire of sexualised lyricism. Frequently songs contained provocative connotations to the degree that it can be considered as a defining characteristic of the genre. With titles such as, *Bring on the Men*; *I Need A Man*; *Megatron Man*; *Thank God For Men*; *Male Stripper*, the repeated espousal of desire for, and veneration of, the male body is a predominant theme. That some scholars have attributed this to be part of the lyric's allure to a gay male audience is hardly surprising (Buckland, 2010, p. 68).

A third selection of titles illustrate a final aspect common to the linguistics of genre, that of the employment of thinly veiled sexual innuendo (Walters, 1996), with titles such as *Man-Sized Love*, *Pistol in My Pocket*, and *Slice Me Nice*, all indicative of this trend. On occasion, any remaining nuance would be disregarded. With titles such as, *I am So Horny for You*, or in example of the Modern Rocketry song, *Homosexuality*, the queer intention is unavoidable.

Patrick Cowley's 1981 opus, *Menergy*, provides an archetypal example of the genre's use of the linguistics of gay male communities. Again, references to the act of cruising permeate, the concept indelibly stamped as a definitively queer cultural practise (Stacey, 2004; Espinoza, 2019). Referencing the 'back-room' vividly locates a geographical sphere for the lyric, the argot term adopted to describe the sex-on-premises bars of

the emerging gay, metropolitan centres of the United States (Martin, 1987). Further settings - the bar, the street, and the bedroom are each united by the commonality of serving as spaces where the possibility of sex is to be envisaged. This is graphically confirmed by Cowley's protagonists, who 'shoot off' in each verse's setting. Inclusion of the phrase used by gay men as a vernacular description for ejaculation lays bare to the explicitly queer resonance to Cowley's formative take on the genre. Such was its implicit resonance, a variation on the phrase would feature as a title to Cowley contemporary, Bobby Orlando's track, *Shoot Your Shot*. While cyclical in nature, its lyrics illustrate a similarly queer bent. This type of bawdy sexual assertiveness had rarely been observed in pop music lyrics, and never from a queer perspective.

4.2 The idea of queer sound

From its inception, Hi-Nrg would prove itself sonically adept at producing music, specifically designed "(...) to enhance the excitement of man-on-man cruising, illicit sex, and chemical stimulants through electronic means" (Marke, 2016, p. 22). Describing the effects of the sound on the more traditional setting of the dance floor, Buckland (2010, p. 96) describes how

> *It was under aided with heavy bass-tones, so that dancers did not only hear the beat, but they also felt it. The pulse felt like it was coming from deep inside your body. This connected the body to the soundscape environment, so that rather than being acted upon, participants actively engaged and intervened with the soundscape.*

Further confirmation of the genre's "(...) enthusiastic embrace of the sexual possibilities of electronic music, particularly the homosexual ones" would be affirmed (Bieschke, 2019, p. 25), and it seemed that such frontiers were in reach. While the ashes of disco still simmered, Cowley and others benefited from an unrelenting demand from queer club-land, for increasingly up-tempo records to dance to (Flick, 1997).

5. Aesthetics and performativity

The aesthetics associated with the Hi-Nrg also commonly projected transgressive subversions. Routed in the reflection of several expressions of dress and performativity already utilised within queer communities, these representations subversively challenged established gender norms and the pervasively heteronormative imagery of pop. Two divergent categorisations of such representations can be elucidated, which share the etymological distinction of having both originated as colloquial terms.

The first, the 'gender bender', is attributed to the mainstream music press as a means of describing the surge in artists who, through their attire, application of make-up and feminine performativity, demonstrated a total disregard for gender traditional roles (Brownlee, 1995; Whatling, 1984). Unlike other ambiguous popstars of the day, such was the blatancy of the appearance and aesthetics of the gender bender, there was little room for the plausible denial of their queer roots. Discernible correlations can be drawn which link the innately queer performativity of the gender bending artists, to that of the ideas of sexual theorists. Such Hi-Nrg manifestations evoke Butler's (1993) theories of gender and its acquired nature. Here, Butler credits the practice, for its role in exposing the discursive nature of gender performativity itself. Drag, she notes, "(...) in imitating gender, implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself" (Butler, 1993, p. 187). Butler's endorsement, of the parody of such performances, as assisting in the deconstruction of previous gender norms, is echoed by the overlap of the participation of the gender-bender within the resolutely queer sub-culture.

Conversely, the second term, the 'clone', originates from within the community, and was gaining linguistic popularity at the same time as Hi-Nrg's ascent (Levine, 1998). While the gender-bender brazenly transgressed rigidly held traditional demarcations of male and female gender representations in pop, the aesthetics of the clone instead reflected a sexualised, hyper-masculine homosexual ideal of manhood (Cole, 2000). The employment of gay tropes and imagery had already been successfully exploited by The Village People (Midgley, 2014), with variations of styles mined by the group dominating the fashion aesthetic of the male, gay community from the late 1970s and early 1980s (Han, 2009). Stimulated by a broad palette of sartorial reference points which encompassed everything from gay pornography (Kirk, 1999) to militaristic uniform (Rubin, 1994); the trend was unvarying in its appreciation of the projection of a rugged masculinity previously un-equated with homosexuality. Buoyed by an emerging gay leather scene (Rubin, 1994) and the growing cult status of Finish artist Touko Laaksonen, whose work as 'Tom of Finland' exemplified the chiseled, muscular aesthetic (Hooven, 1993; Shapiro, 200), this newfound style of representation was generously appropriated by several Hi-Nrg artists.

5.1 A queer eye for style

The aesthetic is most graphically depicted by the no-less explicitly named Hi-Nrg group, Man2Man. The duo's chosen attire authentically reflected the origins of their sound and was complimented with lyrics and titles emblazoned with heavily sexualized innuendo. A review of their 1987 performance on United Kingdom pop music chart show, *Top of The Pops*, sums up the homocentric nature of the attire chosen by the band.

> *Go-go boys in leather and military garb add to the atmosphere while Paul Zone strips off his leather to reveal more leather, then flannel, then a vest, then some bondage accessories to the delight of the squealing and oblivious, girls in the crowd. (QX team, 2016)*

Each item mentioned holds association with aspects of the clone's predisposition, for fabrics and attire which accentuate the sexual identification of homosexuality with masculinity. Such was the pervasive nature of the aesthetic accoutrements and imagery, that the uniform would culturally outlast Hi-Nrg, manifesting across the mainstream in several other coded guises throughout the 1980s and beyond (Levine, 1998). For example, Jones (2017) and Jonanac (2007) are just two of the commentators to explore how pop singer George Michael incorporated clone imagery to signify to multiple audiences, in turn aiding his successful career trajectory from frothy pop duo, Wham, to fully fledged solo artist.

The camp-associated elements of fabled 'trash' aesthetic (Koestenbaum, 2001; Warner, 2012), as attributed to pop-art forerunner Andy Warhol and 'pope of trash' filmmaker, John Waters (Waters, 1981, p. 22), are also evoked. While preceding Hi-Nrg by over a decade, the two forms share the distinction of both centralising the portrayal of unrepentant queer desire as prominent threads throughout their representations. Warner's description of the aesthetic, and in particular, its fondness for "(...) extravagant display" (Warner, 2012, p. 48) can be facilely extended to fit the rigorously camp outputs associated with Hi-Nrg.

While each facet of Hi-Nrg complimented the other, the relationship between the music and the aesthetic also had specific links. Shapiro (2005), describes how the genre's tempo created an urgency, reflecting a community "(...) striving for superhuman perfection, by pushing the clone aesthetic to its furthest limits (Shapiro, 2005, p. 71). In earlier work, Shapiro had already attributed Cowley and Orlando as having created "(...) an aural fantasy of a futuristic club populated entirely by 'Tom of Finland' studs'" (Shapiro, 2000, p. 44).

5.2 The complexities of male queerness and Hi-Nrg

Previously, scholars have observed "The very fact that there are gay disco charts which are differentiated from non-gay disco charts suggests there is a range of music which gay people feel has specific importance to them" (Laski, 1993, p. 116). However, studies have also illustrated that despite gay men generally demonstrating a predilection for more commercial, 'disposable' pop than their lesbian counterparts, there is also a strong indication that being queer does not predispose one to a particular musical style (Taylor, 2012). Despite this, we must also recall, Hi-Nrg's enduring association with homosexuality (Kirk, 1999). Complex questions arise from these various studies, perhaps indicative of the recent inauguration of research focused on enhancing understanding of the many intersections of pop and sexuality.

Despite the evidenced orchestration of a sonic landscape which effectively sound-tracked the lives of emerging queer audiences (Marke, 2016; Flick, 1997), some scholars have observed that ultimately, "[...] whether this music is unique to gay discos, or whether it is mainstream music which is interpreted in different ways by gay disco goers, is not really relevant" (Laski, 1993 in Miller & Shaw-Miller, 1993, p. 121). For many, the motivation of Hi-Nrg, and its intended audience, was made abundantly clear: "This is gay ghetto music with no other goal than to pump up the drama, sexual innuendo and BPMs for a male insider audience" notes Walters (1996, p. 72).

6. The assimilation, decline and complex legacy of Stock, Aitken & Waterman

The mainstreaming of Hi-Nrg is directly attributable to three English, very un-queer gentlemen, namely, Mike Stock, Matt Aitken & Peter Waterman. As producers of early Hi-Nrg artists Divine and Dead or Alive, they set about building a pop empire, with allusions of repeating the success and model of the legendary Motown records.

The trio's statistics are impressive. In the United Kingdom, they attained record sales exceeding 100 million in the final four years of the decade and by 1989 were estimated to hold a 27% market share in the English music business (O'Hare, 2009; Stock, 2004). Self-titled as 'The sound of a bright, young Britain' (Elliot, 2017), the trio would repackage Hi-Nrg, and see become a predominant chart sound of the late 1980s. They soon demonstrated they were willing to turn anyone into a popstar, from soap opera stars to television puppets. Songs were increasingly fronted by "(...) squeaky clean acts, wholesome and beaming" (Lindsay, 2019, p. 14), the same work lamenting that, "It was hard to believe the architects of records as lustily feral as *You Spin Me Round* were now making music with virtually interchangeable synth bass lines" (Lindsay, 2019, p. 14). Stock, Aitken and Waterman's ethics were increasingly compared to that of the ruling Conservative party in England (Sandbrook, 2019). Despite its distinctly queer associations, underground birth, and ascendancy, Hi-Nrg was increasingly becoming equated as a soundtrack to something very different; "(...) an avaricious product of Tory Britain" (Climie, 2012, p. 72).

Yet, their legacy is complex. Stock, Aitken and Waterman had produced Hi-Nrg records, considered genre defining. Neither did the trio ever deny the culture from which they mined: "We make gay records, there's no question about it and we're not afraid to say that", noted Waterman (Bernard,1986, in Elliot, 2017, p. 46). Regardless, and repeating the pattern of disco's appropriation, acts as unlikely as Debbie Harry, Cliff Richard, and even Judas Priest would seek out the trio for production duties. As such, the de-sexualisation of queer proclivities, formerly innate to the form, would continue as the genre's ubiquity approached saturation point (Arena, 2017), aptly described by artist Pádraic E. Moore, as the 'vanilla cul-de-sac' of appropriation (in Abbot, 2017).

It would be unfair to land the culpability for the genre's decline entirely at the hands of Stock, Aitken, and Waterman. Instead, a combination of factors may be considered. Despite their bleaching of the genre's queer roots, perhaps Hi-Nrg never lost its queer connection, to the genre's own detriment? A critic recalls attending a music conference in the late 1980s, at which "(...) the general consensus was that even a brilliant Hi-Nrg record would suffer from the albatross of a queer connection" (Flick, 1997, p. 24). Furthermore, a significant shift in pop music of the latter part of the decade has also been observed:

> *"The 'traditional values' of Reagan & Thatcher had already chilled the political atmosphere. But it was the eruption of the 'gay plague' into the news headlines in the mid-'80s that was to decisively turn the tide on both sides of the Atlantic against the androgynous, gender-bending culture of New Wave (Simpson, 2015, n/p)*

There was also a final, less malevolent aspect to the genre's demise, the simple issue of changing tastes. Just as Hi-Nrg had emerged from the ashes of disco, the emerging genres of House and Techno music were in-turn derivative of Hi-Nrg (Fritz, 1999; Hawking, 2013). By the end of the decade, both had established themselves as more than adequate rivals to the increasingly bland offerings of Hi-Nrg's now over-familiar, chart-friendly execution. Hi-Nrg's days were numbered.

7. Conclusion

Pop music's proven dexterity as a fostering agent with the capacity to imbue a sense of mutual connectivity among audiences is both long and reputable (Gill, 1995; Siegel, 2001). Despite having attained little endorsement for having done so, this study argues that Hi-Nrg realised a cultural milestone, in its deliverance of a form which offered an undiluted expression of transgressive queer sexualities.

At its zenith, Hi-Nrg was the whole package; a heady mixture of electronic music and pulsating beats, supported by lyrics commonly exuding a sense of camp, and/or overt homosexual suggestibility, delivered with a visual aesthetic that frequently reflected both. The cultural penetration of the genre is even more remarkable, given the candour of the lyrics and aesthetics characteristically employed in the performance of the music.

Pioneering queer Journalist Kris Kirk noted in 1984 of the genres that "like it or not, it is regarded as ours" (Kirk, 1984, p. 117) and it is here that Hi-Nrg remains unmatched, the correlation between it and its queer audience irrefutably validating its unique cultural value. Hi-Nrg was not infallible, and it certainly spoke and reflected the lives of gay men more than others under the queer umbrella. Nevertheless, what the genre did achieve, was realising a cultural milestone in its deliverance of an undiluted, unapologetic sexual soundtrack, singing directly back, to an audience "(...) now hungry for gay role models" (Jones & Kantonen, 1999, p. 45).

Funding: This work was funded by a Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship. Project ID: GOIP/2019/1854.

References

» Abbot, R. (2017, August 6). Bobby 'O', Hi-NRG and the expression of queer desire. *Babette*. Retrieved from: https://babettepress.tumblr.com/post/163882186175/bobby-o-hi-nrg-and-the-expression-of-queer

» Abjorensen, N. (2017). *Historical dictionary of popular music*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

» Arena, J. (2017). *Europe's stars of 80s Dance Pop: 32 International music legends discuss their careers*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company Publishers.

» Baim, T. (2008). *Out and proud in Chicago*. Illinois: Agate Publishing.

» Baumgartel, T. (2013). Turning the Machine into a Slovenly Machine: Donna Summer, Giorgio Moroder and 'I Feel Love'. *Thanyris/Intersecting*, *26*, 43–54.

» Bell, D. & Binnie, J. (2004). Authenticating Queer Space: Citizenship, Urbanism and Governance. *Urban Studies, 41*(9), 1807–1820.

» Bieschke, M. (2019, October 12). Patrick Cowley, the gay genius of Hi-Nrg. *DJ Magazine*. Retrieved from: https://djmag.com/longreadn/patrick-cowley-gay-genius-hi-nrg.

» Bilyeu, M., Cook, H. & Hughes, M. (2013). *The ultimate biography of The Bee Gees: Tales of the brothers Gibb*. London: Omnibus Press.

» Brewster, B. & Broughton, F. (2006). *Last night a DJ saved my life: The history of the Disc Jockey*. (2 ed.). London: Headline Books.

» Brownlee, M. (2010). *The history of bubble-gum pop*. London: Omnibus Press.

» Buckland, F. (2010). *Impossible dance: Club culture and queer world-making*. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.

» Buckley, P. (2003). *The rough guide to rock*. London: Rough Guide Press.

» Bullock, D. (2017). *David Bowie made me gay: 100 years of LGBT music*. London: Overlook Press.

» Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"*. New York: Routledge.

» Climie, S. (2012, June 4). Stock, Aitken and Waterman - Readers' Panel. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2012/apr/06/stock-aitken-waterman-readers-panel.

» Cole, S. (2000). *Don't we know our gay apparel: Gay men's dress in the twentieth century*. London: Berg Publishers.

» Cooper, D. (2020, April 27). The strange case of Bobby Orlando. *Dennis Cooper Blog*. Retrieved from: https://denniscooperblog.com/_black_acrylic-presents-the-strange-case-of-bobby-orlando-2/.

» Doggett, P. (2015). *Electric shock - from the gramophone to the iphone, 125 years of pop music*. London: Vintage Press.

» Dyer, R. (1979). *In defence of disco*. In R. Dyer (Ed.) *Only Entertainment*. (pp. 149–58). London: Routledge.

» Echols, A. (2010). *Hot stuff: Disco and the remaking of American culture*. New York: W.W. Norton.

» Espinoza, A. (2019). *Cruising: An intimate history of a radical pastime*. Unnamed Press: Los Angeles.

» Fikentscher, K. (1991). Supremely Clubbed, Devastatingly Dubbed: Some Observations on the Nature of Mixes on 12-Inch Dance Singles. *Journal of Popular Music Studies, 4*(1), 9-15.

» Flick, L. (1997, February 8). Hi-Nrg's about-face on gay nexus won't help. *Billboard Magazine*.

» Fritz, J. (1999). *Rave culture: An insiders overview*. New York: Small Fry Press.

» Gamson, J. Reality Queens. *Sociology For The Public, 12*(2), 52–54.

» Gill, J. (1995). *Queer noises: Male and female homosexuality in twentieth century music*. London: Cassell.

» Gillen, F. (2007). Discophobia: Antigay prejudice and the 1979 backlash against disco. *Journal of the History of Sexuality, 15*(2), 276–306.

» Han, C. S. (2009). Asian Girls Are Prettier: Gender Presentations as Stigma Management Among Asian Gay Men. *Symbolic Interaction, 32*(2),106–22.

» Hawking, T. (2013, July 3). Revisiting Divine's overlooked musical career. *Flavorwire*. Retrieved from: https://www.flavorwire.com/375986/revisiting-divines-overlooked-musical-career.

» Hooven, V. F. (1993). *Tom of Finland: His life and times.* New York: St Martin's Press.

» Hubbs, N. (2007). "I will survive": Musical Mappings of Queer Social Space in a Disco Anthem." *Journal of Popular Music, 26*(2), 231-244.

» Jay, B. (1995). *Not simply Divine: Beneath the makeup, above the heels, and behind the scenes with a cult superstar.* London: Virgin Books.

» Jonanac, R. (2007). *George Michael, the biography*. London: Piatkus Books.

» Jones, A. & Kantonen, J. (1999). *Saturday night forever: The story of disco.* Chicago: Acapella Books.

» Jones, M. J. (2017, May 1) *George Michael's queer masculinity: An exploration and an elegy*. *Musicology Now*. Retrieved from: http://www.musicologynow.org/2017/01/george-michaels-queer-masculinity.html.

» Kirk, Kris. (1999). *A boy called Mary*. London: Millivres Publishing Ltd.

» Koestenbaum, W. (2003). *Andy Warhol*. New York: Orion Books.

» Krettenauer, T. (2016). Hitmen: The euro disco sound. In M. Ahlers & C. Jacke (Eds.). *Perspectives on German popular music*. (pp. 77–88). London: Routledge.

» Laski, A. (1993). The politics of dancing: Gay dance music and postmodernism. In S. Miller & T. Shaw-Miller (Eds.). *The last post: Music after modernism*. (pp. 110–31). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

» Lefebvre, S. (2016, May 8) Waking the spirit of a disco innovator. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/07/

arts/music/patrick-cowley-disco-reissues.html.

» Levine, M. P. (1998). *Gay macho: The life and death of the homosexual clone*. New York: New York University Press.

» Lindsay, R. (2019). *Hitsville UK: The Stock, Aitken & Waterman Story*. London: Anthem Publishing.

» Maitra, A. (2011). Hearing queerly: Musings on the Ethics of Disco/Sexuality. *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, 25*(3), 375–96.

» Mankowski, D. L. (2010). *Gendering the disco inferno: Sexual revolution, liberation, and popular culture in 1970s America*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan]. University of Michigan. https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/77806/dlmankow_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

» Martin, J.L. (1987). The impact of AIDS on gay male sexual behaviour patterns in New York city. *American Journal of Public Health, 77*(5), 578–81.

» McLeod, K. (2006). A Fifth of Beethoven: Disco, Classical Music, and the Politics of Inclusion. *Journal of American Music, 24*(3), 347–63.

» Midgley, A. (2014). 'Macho types wanted': The Village People, Homophobia, and Representation in the 1970s. *Australasian Journal of American Studies, 33*(1), 104–19.

» Moore, John. (2008, November 20). How I nearly made a gay anthem. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2008/nov/20/gay-disco-anthem

» Mottier, V. (2008). *Sexuality: A short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

» Nika, C. (2015, December 2). Meet Giorgio Moroder, the godfather of modern dance music. *Time Magazine*. https://time.com/3701060/giorgio-moroder-interview-dance-music/

» O'Hare, P. (2009). Undervalued stock: Britain's most successful chart producer and his economy of production. *Journal on the Art of Record Production*, *4*. Retrieved from: https://www.arpjournal.com/asarpwp/undervalued-stock-britain's-most-successful-chart-producer-and-his-economy-of-production/.

» QX team. (2016, April 2) Les Poppeur's Most Outrageous Moments in Italo and Hi-NRG. *Qxmagazine.Com*. Retrieved from: https://www.qxmagazine.com/2016/02/les-poppeurs-most-outrageous-moments-in-italo-and-hi-nrg/

» Rimmer, D. (2011). *Like punk never happened: Culture club and the new pop*. London: Faber & Faber.

» Robb. (2017, December 7) 40 years later: The facts and myths about the impact of Steve Dahl's disco demolition night. *DJRobblog*. https://djrobblog.com/archives/8631.

» Roberts, D. (2006). *British hit singles & albums*. 19. London: Guinness World Records Limited.

» Robinson, L. (2010, June 1) Boogie nights. *Vanity Fair*. Retrieved from: https://archive.vanityfair.com/article/2010/2/boogie-nights-an-oral-history-of-disco.

» Rollo. (2019, December 20). History of the UK charts: Specialist charts. *Music for Stowaways*. Retrieved from: https://musicforstowaways.wordpress.com/2019/12/20/history-of-the-uk-charts-specialist-charts/.

» Rubin, G. (1994). *The valley of the kings: Leather-men in San Francisco, 1960-1990*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

» Sandbrook, D. (2019). *Who dares wins: Britain 1979-1982*. London: Penguin Books.

» Shapiro, P. (2000). Disco. In P. Shapiro (Ed.). *Modulations: A history of electronic music*: *Throbbing words on sound*. (pp. 38-54). New York: Caipirinha Publications.

» Shapiro, P. (2005). *Turn the beat around: The secret history of disco*. New York: Faber & Faber.

» Siegel, P. (2001). A right to boogie queerly: The first amendment on the dance floor. In J. Desmond (Ed.). *Dancing desires: Choreographing sexualities on & off the stage*. (pp.267–83). Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

» Simpson, Mark. (2015, June 9) Was 80s new wave a casualty of AIDS? *Out.Com*. Retrieved from: https://www.out.com/positive-voices/2015/8/06/was-80s-new-wave-casualty-aids.

» Smith, R. (1999). *Introduction*. In K. Kirk. (ed.). *A boy called Mary*. London: Millivres Publishing Ltd.

» Stacey, J. (2004). Cruising to Family Land: Gay Hypergamy and Rainbow Kinship. *Current Sociology, 52*(2), 181–97.

» Stacey, J. (2005). The Families of Man: Gay Male Intimacy and Kinship in a Global Metropolis. *Signs*, *30*(3), 1911-35.

» Stock, M. (2004). *The Hit Factory: The Stock, Aitken and Waterman Story*. London: New Holland Publishing.

» Toynbee, J. (1993). Policing Bohemia, Pinning up Grunge: The Music Press and Generic Change in British Pop and Rock. *Popular Music*, *12*(3), 289–300.

» Vivarelli, N. (2016, June 13). 'Godfather of Disco' Giorgio Moroder on scoring 'Tron' and other New Forays Into Soundtracks. *Variety Magazine*. Retrieved from: https://variety.com/2016/music/global/godfather-of-disco-giorgio-moroder-on-scoring-tron-and-other-recent-forays-into-soundtracks-1201794283/.

» Walters, B. (1996, February 4). Low Octane. *The Advocate*.

» Warner, S. (2000). The Banality of Degradation: Andy Warhol, the Velvet Underground and the Trash Aesthetic. In S. Whitley (Ed.) *Counter Cultures and Popular Music*. (pp. 45–64). New York: Routledge.

» Waterman, P. (2000). *I wish I was me*. London: Virgin Books.

» Whatling, C. (1984). The 'Gender Benders'. In P. Childs & M. Storry (Eds.). *Encyclopaedia of Contemporary British Culture*. (p. 227). London: Routledge.

» Whitely, S. (2000). *Women and popular music*: *Sexuality, identity and subjectivity*. London: Routledge.