## WELCOME TO THE HIPPODROME

"Why aren't the people in here pogoing?" And with those immortal words. STEVEN WELLS descended into the murky, gyrating, glitterball-lit netherworld of DISCO. Shaking a tail-feather with him on this whitesuited, Night-feverish odyssey are JON **SAVAGE and KEVIN** SAMPSON, responsible for new dance documentary The Rhythm Divine. Oops upside your hedonism or what?!!

f you want to wind up one of the bright young flibberty jibberting E-kids of the EQUITY CULTURE, all you have to do is use the word 'DISCO'. No no no no no! It's DANCE music!

'Disco', like 'punk', is a horribly '70s word, filling the heads of all who hear it with images of Sharon Stiff and her glitter-wigged mates prancing around their handbags, their deely-boppers bobbing maniacally in time to the castrated squeal of some BEE GEES monstrosity whilst all around them red-faced lager lads in crap polyester JOHN TRAVOLTA suits wiggle and writhe like a black person's worst nightmare in a hideous parody of the sexual act.

'Disco' is a dated and derogatory term, akin to calling feminists 'women's libbers' (horrid '70s bra burners) or the anti-war movement 'ban-thebombers' (duffle-coated students with little round glasses into modern jazz). 'Dance music' is coooooool. 'Disco' is considered tacky, moronic, consumerist and

Until now. In a brave attempt to rescue 'Disco' from the dumper of pop history, Farm manager KEVIN SAMPSON and pop journalist JON SAVAGE have compiled The Rhythm Divine-an hour long documentary to be shown on Channel 4 on April 29 which, if it is successful, will see 'Disco' revived as the buzzword dripping from the Lucozade lubricated lips of every sweating '90s ultra-hip love child.

Savage made last year's documentary in Channel 4's Out On Tuesday series Disco Revenge because he was sick and tired of reading articles about dance music in the pop press which never mentioned a basic truth - that the whole shebang started in GAY clubs. Savage is an ex-first generation punk rocker who was reading Nietzsche, not having sex and generally punking out in 1976 and 1977 when the hip gay community were having fun, tons of sex and generally dancing themselves into hedonistic frenzy. He's now making up for lost time.

Sampson was wearing a white shirt and shaking his booty to The Clash, Kraftwerk and Bowie in Liverpool clubs like The Swinging Apple and The Harrington Bar before he made the "quantum leap" to listening to and actually liking the soundtrack album of Saturday Night Fever.

The first British 'punks' were soul boys, swanning in and out of hip boutiques like Acme and Sex and boogleing the night away in discos where, in the search for ever more silly dancing gear, the

## A POTTED HISTORY OF DISCO

clientèle were experimenting with bin liners and safety pins. When punk became punk rock, the soulies dropped it like a pair of out of date pegs.

Meanwhile, in New York, the most fun you could have with taking your clothes off, were the gay clubs where any record with a strong black vocal and sufficient THUD THUD THUD lured thousands on to packed and sweat-slippery dancefloors. It took a long time for the record companies to realise what they were missing out on but they eventually leeched onto the scene, making Disco the pop music of the late '70s.

Ironically, by 1977 the punks and the Disco kids were sworn enemies. Disco was regarded as mainstream boringly and safely heterosexual with the Bee Gees singing "You can tell by the way I walk/I'm a woman's man. The film Saturday Night Fever desperately tried to bury Disco's gay roots with John Travolta furiously engaged in sex with WOMEN and relocated to a macho, blue collar Italian family.

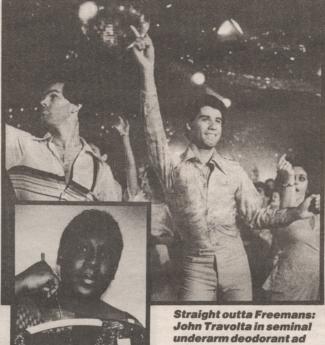
Ironically, in America the DISCO SUCKS campaign dismissed Disco as 'faggot music' and the thousands of Springsteen, Zeppelin and Sex Pistols fans who attended the blowing up of a huge pile of Disco records in Cominsky Park, Chicago, saw themselves as defending 'real' rock music made by 'real' men.

But there was no way punk and Disco, sexy young things that they were, could be kept from interbreeding.

"'I Feel Love' by Giorgio Moroder was a turning point," says Savage. "It showed the arty boys that Disco was cool and that's what started off Normal. Throbbing Gristle and The Flying Lizards - all of whom made arty punk Disco records in 1978.'

"And you've got to mention Kraftwerk - who were a prime influence on House - and Bowie's 'Low'," adds Sampson

The NMEs of the period make



"I Thought I Thaw A Puddy Tat": Disco Queen

interesting reading. Punk furies Julie Burchill and Danny Baker championed Disco (much to the derision of contributors to the letters page - some things never change). Nobody could ignore class acts like CHIC and SISTER SLEDGE and it wasn't long before we got the first (and the last?) genuine punk/Disco crossover record - BLONDIE's 'Heart Of Glass'. Boy, did that piss a lot of people off.

By the late '70s the gay roots of Disco had been almost totally forgotten. It was thus possible for THE VILLAGE PEOPLEblatantly dressed in leather

**Saturday Night Fever** 

bondage gear, construction helmets and all the other colourful paraphernalia of gay club culture -to get 'YMCA' - a joyful celebration of homosexual nookie - played to death on Radio 1 and Top Of The Pops before anybody at the BBC 'discovered' (to their absolute horror) that it wasn't a song about girls after all. By then, fortunately, it was too late. The record was Number One in the

'Punk traitors' Steven and Gillian from **NEW ORDER** were hanging out in gay clubs - "We'd look around and say Hmmmmmm! Not many women in here tonight . . ." - stunned at the vitality and excitement.

"I mean for a straight guy like me," says Kevin Sampson, "going into all those gay clubs was a revelation. You realised that gays were human beings. I'm sure it's the same for a lot of kids getting into House now. When they realise how much their music owes to gays like FRANKIE

KNUCKLES it must knock a lot of shit on the head."

And, as Gay Times journalist **RICHARD SMITH proudly** boasts: "We set the trend with MOTOWN, SOUL, DISCO, **EUROBEAT, HI-NRG** and HOUSE and they assimilate and popularise them . . . (even) the rock snobs and the pop snoots want to cut a rug with the rest of

IN THE '80s, Disco became a dirty word. Gay Disco became **BOYS TOWN** (female divas singing lust anthems over video backdrops of beautiful and seminaked young chaps with hairy top lips) and HI-NRG. ELECTRO and HIP-HOP mutated into RAP and **TECHNO** and Chicago detoured

into HOUSE.
Hip NORTHERN SOUL DJ **PETER WATERMAN** took over British pop music by sticking Hi NRG and House behind pretty pictures of Aussie soap stars and milked the juices of an entire generation of female pre-pubes. And then, of course, came MANCHESTER - the ultimate capitulation of rock to dance. But by now nobody was calling it Disco any more despite the S-XPRESS video with its groovy flares, baggy shirts and Huggy Bear pimp hats and the horrible things done to our concept of sTyLe by massive Disco fans DEEE-LITE

"BOOM BOOM BOOM," says Savage in his dry monotone. "You can draw a direct line between the



fast Motown of 1967 to Northern Soul to Disco to House and all the way through 'You listen to 'Groovy Train' by

THE FARM" says Sampson, "and it's CRASH CRASH CRASH The 4/4 time smashes the

table with the palm of his hand. If I have a criticism of The Rhythm Divine it is that it fails to show the horrible side of Discothe meat markets where black women were described as "beef" and the white women as "pork"; of those horrendous mobile discos where an incredibly sexist git called Gaz in a massive pear drop collar imitated a Radio 1 zombie with amusing remarks about

Sampson is horrified at my "macho posture".

Tracy's 21st birthday.

"I think you should embrace the culture of the mobile disco and the Tracy and Sharon stuff. Celebrate its naffness!"

So presumably you'd defend The Hitman And Her?

"I certainly would do, certainly, yeah! It makes me scream with laughter! The Squeal Factor can not be underestimated.

So are we in the midst of a Disco revival?

"It's never gone away. Disco is the only pop music that has evolved. I think that what happened last summer is just the latest stage in that. Manchester is not a new phenomenon. Disco is a bit like sex really - an instant thrill. When it's good you really remember it but most of the time

it's best forgotten."
"The great thing about Disco," says Savage, "is that it's all about shagging, for God's sake! And that's what gives those early Disco records a certain distance now, certainly for gay people, because that blissful era of nonstop shagging has gone!'

Personally I've never heard a better argument for a Disco Revival. With condoms on, of

## **DISCO MOVIES**

Saturday Night Fever (1978): Rock hard John Travolta becomes the Disco Champion Of The World, gets called a poofter by his dad and suffers a nervous

Can't Stop The Music (1980): The Village People help perpetuate the myth that Young Christians everywhere are desperate for a bit of naughty same-sex snogging. Whilst this proposition no doubt contains a large element of truth, we are talking seriously BAD FILM. A Disco movie brought out just in time to celebrate the first-death of Disco. A massive flop.

**DISCOLIT** 

Discotheque by Steven Gaines (Hamlyn, 1977)

'Sensual rhythms . . . flashing strobe lights . . . the fever pitch of music madness . . ." Featuring "Bobby DJ" – "a brilliant young disc jockey hooked on cocaine His arrogance made him some dangerous enemies.

Thanks to the government's new school syllabus, Discotheque is now compulsory reading for all 14 to 16 year olds.



Donna Summer realises that Jimmy Somerville has nicked her handbag



Village Idiots: Mr Benn was a huge influence



**End of the Kier show** 

Dental! Dental!: Barry and Robin and their dwarf idiot half brother Maurice (NB: This is a joke, guys . . .)