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Chi-Lites & The Delfonics

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With Record emerging as the new lead vocalist, The Chi-Lites’ popularity began to increase with the steady release of independent singles over the next four years. In 1968, they were poised to break out when they signed with the large Chicago-based label, Brunswick Records. By 1969, they had released their first national hit, Give It Away, which climbed to #10 on the R&B charts. It had been a long, arduous process, but The Chi-Lites finally hit the national scene.

Their prosperity continued in 1971 with the release of Are You My Woman (Tell Me So), a song that started a four-year string of top-10 hits. Their politically motivated song, (For God’s Sake) Give More Power to the People, would prove to be their first true pop hit, but it was only a taste of better sounds to come. They exceeded the song’s success with their next two releases, which were vastly different than give More Power to the People. The 1972 releases, Have you Seen Her and Oh Girl, were slow and soulful ballads that were embraced by the nation. Both reached #1 on the R&B charts, and Oh Girl skyrocketed to the top spot on the pop charts.

In 1973, the group faced some adversity when Jones left the group and was eventually replaced by Willie Kelsey. The parts had changed for The Chi-Lites, but the results proved to be more of the same. The new team went on to release three more top-10 singles, Homely Girl, There Will Never Be Any Peace, and Toby. From 1969 to 1974, The Chi-Lites recorded five gold LPs, Five gold singles and an astounding 18 top-20 singles. The world fell in love with the sound of their Chicago Soul and they grew into an international sensation.

The late 70s became a transitional phase for The Chi-Lites. Doc Robertson replaced Kelsey, Record left to pursue a solo career and David Scott and Danny Mercury joined the group. The group also left the struggling Brunswick label for Mercury Records.

Just when it appeared that The Chi-Lites were slowly disappearing, they proved the cynics wrong. In 1980, the original group reassembled under Record’s new label, Chi-Sound. By 1982, they had regained their old form with the top-15 single Hot on a Thing. The next year they moved to Larc Records, where they released yet another top-10 single, Bottoms Up.

Jones would retire by the end of 1983, but the group continued to tour as a trio to the delight of their thousands of loyal fans. Record left yet again to pursue a solo career in 1990, and was replaced by Anthony Watson. The Chi-Lites were pioneers for the sound of Chicago Soul. The Chi-Lites were associated with many names, faces and record labels throughout the years, but their magic never died out.

They will be recognized as perhaps the premier soul band ever to hail from the Windy City. The group that graced the city with their music went on to impact R&B music throughout the world.
The Delfonics

One of the first groups to showcase producer Thom Bell’s “Philly Sound” was the Philadelphia-based group, The Delfonics. As they rode the rising trend of R&B soul bands in the late 1960s, The Delfonics reached stardom almost immediately after entering the music scene.

Driven and organized by the bream of then 14-year-old lead vocalist and lyricist William “Poogie” Hart, The Delfonics (made up of Hart, his brother Wilbert, and high-school friend Randy Cain) began performing at local parties and dances in the early 60s. As they matured, the group moved on to perform at area dance clubs.

As The Delfonics embodied the ambitious philosophy of Hart, they released their first single, He Don’t Really Love You, under a minor record label. It didn’t take long for the group to gain significant local recognition. Shortly after the release of their first single, The Delfonics released the single You’ve Been Untrue. As their popularity gained momentum, perhaps their most important fan would be Stan Watson who immediately signed the group to his prospective label, Philly Groove.

In 1968, the group released the song La La Means I Love You, their first work with Bell and the title of their first full-length album. The partnership was indeed a success. The song would showcase The Delfonics’ smooth, distinct melodies and Hart’s soft vocals. As their popularity gained momentum, it would be Bell’s collaboration with William Hart that would truly put The Delfonics on the map. The song reached top ten status, and The Delfonics gained international recognition.

The group would release the hit singles You Get Yours, I’ll Get Mine; I’m Sorry; Break Your Promise; and Ready or Not. But the songs, even with their remarkable success, were only a sample of greater songs on the horizon for The Delfonics. Sure enough, in 1970, they released the single Didn’t I Blow Your Mind This Time, which climbed into the #1 spot in Billboard Magazine and sold over one million copies by the year’s end. Their time had truly arrived.

The success story that was The Delfonics continued into 1971, when they were awarded a Grammy for Didn’t I, recognizing it as the top soul hit of 1971. The Delfonics were at the height of their popularity. They dominated the airwaves and appeared on variety shows throughout the country. There was a certain mass appeal to The Delfonics that captivated the country. They combined their sexy melodies with charisma and showmanship. They were more than singers; they were performers who supplemented their singing with precisely choreographed dance routines. Their ballads had become the favored “make out music” of the time as well. The Delfonics offered something for everyone.

Achievement certainly did not lead to complacency as the group released another hit album in 1972, Tell Me This Is a Dream. In 1973, they released their best-selling The Delfonics Super Hits, a compilation album of their greatest hits.

Even today, the impact of The Delfonics is still prevalent throughout the entertainment world. Their songs have appeared in the movies The Five Heartbeats and Crooklyn, and in Quentin Tarantino’s hit film Jackie Brown. Such popular R&B artists as Silk and the Fugees, along with R&B legends Regina Bell and Aretha Franklin have re-recorded Delfonics songs that were welcomed with widespread fanfare.

The Delfonics are not merely a musical memory, however. They released their most recent album, The Professionals, in 1998, and they have plans to release another album, Hooked on Delfonics. They continue to tour globally and are followed by loyal, long-lasting and budding fans alike. They have put their stamp on R&B’s past, and continue to influence the sounds of its present.

The Chi-Lites

While groups such as The Delfonics and The Stylistics molded the popular “Philly Sound” in the early 70s, there was exciting new talent in the Midwest ready to explode onto the R&B scene. At the forefront of that movement was The Chi-Lites, a group who broke away from the gritty blues music associated with the Windy City to create their own smooth, distinct sound that would truly put Chicago on the R&B map.

The Chi-Lites achieved massive popularity in the 70s, as they released 11 top-ten R&B singles during the decade. From their smooth ballads to their socially conscious protest songs, The Chi-Lites proved to be consistent with the popular style, but they ranged in substance.

The origin of The Chi-Lites was quite similar to that of The Stylistics, in that they formed from the merger of two local bands and evolved from local notoriety to national success. In the early 60s, Marshall Thompson and Creadel Jones of the Desideros joined forces with Eugene Record, Robert Lester and Clarence Johnson of the Chantones to form the quintet known as the Hi-Lites. The group gained local recognition with their six singles on the Daka and Ja- Wes labels.

In 1964, the group changed their name to The Chi-Lites, with the added “C” paying homage to their hometown. It proved to be a smart move as it gave them a name to associate themselves with the Chicago area for years to come.
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