

i Venti d'Azzurro presents:  
The history of Italo disco 1978 – 2012  
By Marcello d'Azzurro & Jeroen "Gino" Peterink



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## Introduction

Many Italo fans all around the world are still curious about the music, artists and record labels that were involved in making and producing Italo music. So we (Marcello and Gino) tried to write a small biography of this music style. We know it's not complete and we will see things in a different way than others. Nonetheless we have a lot of experience in this scene. Our contacts and dozens of visits to Italy and studio's, artists, record companies, vocalists and music promoters throughout the years gave us some picture of the birth and flowering period of this music style.

We've made it into a story through time, discussing the different periods and the highlights. We also give some insight in the people behind the music, the ones that compose, wrote, sang and produced the music. We consider Italo as the dance music made and created by Italians and which over the years evolved in many styles like Italo Disco, Italo House, Italo Progressive, Italo Dance and Italo Euro Beat (sometimes called Hi NRG music).

The i Venti d'Azzurro company was founded in 1986, the year that Italo disco flourished in many European hitparades. The company still exists as a record company creating, producing and publishing "new old" Italo tracks, see [www.iventirecords.com](http://www.iventirecords.com). The 41 labels from I Venti Records try to cover the different music styles from the 80s, keeping that magic sound alive. "Old" news and more information can be found at [www.iventinet.net](http://www.iventinet.net). The present times offer new possibilities to promote music so we switched some years ago to the internet and social media informing fans and staying in contact with the Italians. But a lot of fans asked for the stories behind the Italo Disco movement, so we've decided to write this "old style" book as an information source for the fans all over the world.

After reading this book you will discover that Italo music was not a small period in the disco or dance movement but still plays a part in the disco and dance music history. On the attached the CD/DVD (that comes with this book) is, besides many pictures and scans, a list of records published between 1978 and 2012, the list contains the publishing year, the composers/writers and producers and when known the vocalist(s).

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Enjoy reading!

Marcello d'Azzurro and Jeroen "Gino" Peterink

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## Chapter 1: The early years: 1978 – 1982

Let's go back to the 1970s where the music industry sees the birth of a new genre called Disco Music or short Disco. The 1977 movie "Saturday Night Fever" led to a disco explosion. The soundtrack of this movie was a million seller in no-time. All around the world clubs and discotheques were suddenly playing this kind of music. Also in Europe and Italy it became very popular. The musicians of that time started to make disco orientated music. In the hit charts we can see some Italian groups that made the disco dance music. A nice example is the group La Bionda. Their song "One for you, one for me" scored international success in 1978. In Italy many other artists followed the disco style, maybe you can remember Pinod'Angio with "Ma quale idea". But across the ocean, in the USA, other Italians created a new form of disco music that was a mix between the American disco style and the Italian melodies. In 1978 the Italian Mauro Malavasi living in the USA at that moment and a guy from the Caribbean, Jacques Fred Petrus, decided to start a new record label called Goody Music. They wanted to make disco music for clubs and created their own style: American disco with an Italian touch.

In fact it was not just an Italians only project but more an American-Italian project. Musicians at that time were Mauro Malavasi himself, Davide Romani, Rudy Trevisani and Paolo Gianolio, all Italians living and working in the USA. The vocal parts were mostly done by American singers who became in the 80s mega stars in the USA and around the world, we want to mention Jocelyn Brown, Luther Van dross and Terry Lewis (with Jimmy Jam producer of Janet Jackson and SOS Band). In the period 1978-1981 a lot of 12 inches and albums came out. Well-known names are the Peter Jacques Band, BB & Q Band, Change, Macho, Thea Vaness and many more. All music was then played with real instruments backed with some synthesizer sounds, a track of more than 12 minutes was no exception. The Italo-American sound was full of melody and catchy sounds. If you want to know how this music sounded play the tracks from Macho - "Roll", Macho - "I'm a man" and Revanche - "New York City".

At that time this disco music was not considered Italo disco or something close to that, the Italians called it "Musica discoteca". It was just disco dance music but it influenced a lot of musicians to create a similar sound, in the USA, the UK but also in Italy. Claudio Simonetti and Giancarlo Mea, two Italians from Rome, decided to work together and make their own dance/disco records. This resulted in musical projects like Easy Going {"Fear" and "Baby, I love you"}, Vivien Vee - "Give me a break" and the group Kassa with several hits. The Roman dance label they created is Banana Records and was part of a big company called Universo Publishing Company, a company that also produced films and (Italian) pop artists. The advantage for being part of such a big company is a good distribution network and international attention. The projects of Simonetti and Mea scored some international success. The success of Simonetti, Mea and Malavasi also inspired Celso Valli, an Italian musician and producer. He already cooperated with Mauro Malavasi in the Macho project and in 1979 he made the epic track Azoto- San Salvador which still is a classic disco record. Other projects followed like Tantra ("Hills of Katmandu"), Passengers and Peter Richard. In the 80s he also produced the hit albums of Eros Ramazzotti and Matia Bazar.

Attracted by all this international success a new record company was founded in Rome by the brothers Claudio and Franco Donato in 1980: Fulltime Records. The first releases of this new record label were disco/funky ones as Vin Zee, Kana and the Rainbow Team. The music was composed in Italy but mainly sung by native English artists, just like the Jacques Fred Petrus projects, to give it an international attitude. Fulltime Records used a lot of American and UK singers and composers for their records like Ronnie Jones, Glenn White (aka Kana), Orlando Johnson, Patty Johnson, Peter Richard and Jimmy Ross. Worldwide success came with the project Kana: "Another life", "Queen of witches" and the album sold

many copies around the globe. Very aware of the success coming out of Rome, more people from the music industry jumped at the disco train. In Milano (Milan) three new companies were created in the early 1980's: Baby Records (already founded in 1974 but turned to the disco sound around 1980), Discomagic and il Discotto. Baby Records succeeded in getting large budgets for their artists, the label founder Freddy Naggiar signed talented producers (Pierluigi Giombini, Daria Farina, Roberto Turatti and Miki Chierogato) and was able to create big music stars. Most famous artists in the dance catalogue of Baby Records are Gazebo, Den Harrow and Tom Hooker. Discomagic started to grow after the huge success of Ryan Paris- "Dolce vita" in the summer of 1983. Il Discotto was not that mainstream with big names but found a place in the booming worldwide disco market (even though Gary Low- "You're a danger" from 1982 was a big hit in Europe). Discomagic was also very successful in distributing singles (7 inches) whereas il Discotto did more with maxi singles (12 inches) and this was also the reason why sometimes the single version of a maxi single from il Discotto was distributed by Discomagic.

In 1983 Mauro Malavasi returned to Italy, the others (Trevisani, Romani, Gianolio) from the band followed the next years. From 1983 you can see their names appear on different Italo disco projects and a lot of Italian pop artist and groups. Did they took the melody back to Italy? Yes, of course, but in 1980 other young Italian artists and musicians already started to experiment with disco and dance music. Another source of inspiration in the early 80s was another Italo American guy called Giorgio Moroder. His songs "From here to eternity" and "I feel love", "Love to love you baby" with Donna Summer, inspired many people, even today those songs are floor fillers.

But there was another factor that contributed to the making of disco music in Italy and Europe. Due to the high oil prices and the dollar and pound exchange rates vinyl records imported from the USA and UK were very expensive on the European mainland and also in Italy. This led to a domestic market with "own" artists and independent distribution companies. Since it was much cheaper to produce, manufacture and distribute your records in the domestic (European) market. This is what happened with the smaller independent companies like Discomagic, il Discotto and Fulltime Records in the early 80s. The Italian labels distributed their records all over the world but the main market became Europe. A lot of people wondered if Italo records were ever distributed in big countries like the USA. The answer to this is yes, they were exported to the USA but as the normal pressing was around 3000-5000 copies and sometimes less, you cannot expect that you'll find Italo records easily in the USA. But people in cities like San Francisco, Chicago, New York and Miami were fond of the Italian sound.

As we shall find out later on, the Italian sound was in fact the basis for the Chicago house sound! The main releases in the early days coming out of Italy were happy dance style like "Dolce vita", "Vamos a la playa" and "You're a danger", but also an underground sound was created, but at that time it was not discovered by many. We would like to mention the producers duo Franco Rago and Gigi Farina, who became cult heroes in the 90s and 2000s. Listen to their songs like "Robot is systematic" and "The garden" by the group 'Lectric Workers and imagine the time in which they were created: incredible! The most influential record labels in the 1978-1982 period were Goody Music, Banana Records and Full Time Records they paved the way for other companies the coming years.