

Get ready to remember the '70s—even if you can't. The ineluctable wave of nostalgia began breaking last Xmas and threatens to rage higher, wider, and deeper than the decade that spawned it. First, Polygram unleashed the two-CD collection *Let's Start the Dance*, unearthing and annotating 18 rare dance tracks that have long been the building blocks for today's house-derived dance mixes. Hot on the heels of that package came Rhino Records' boggling anthology of half-remembered singles and glorious pop embarrassments that has now blossomed to ten volumes of *Have a Nice Day: Super Hits of the '70s*.

This spring, Larry LaRue, deejay at the Stud in San Francisco, showed me a freshly minted set of CDs and moaned, "Look! This is *horrible*—they've reissued my entire play list for oldies night!"

Not quite, LaRue. The folks at Profile Records weren't able to secure the rights to "Le Freak" by Chic, but the label's *Mega Hits: Dance Classics* series (Volumes I-IX, 108 cuts in all) gathers most of the pop faves from the amyl era—many out of print, most never before available on CD. Unfortunately, the collections make no stab at a chronology in the liner notes and forgo extended versions (since rates to publishers escalate when a song runs over five minutes). The low price and small number of quality cuts are enough to make any collector or deejay wince, though. Now you too can relive the sound track of Andrew Holleran's salad days in the privacy of your own boudoir.

None of these collections does justice to one of my favorite memories—the emergence of two rebel gay rockers in the early '70s. In fact, these days, neither do the men themselves. Sizing up the two studiously heterosexual artists today, it's hard to believe that in 1972 David Bowie and Lou Reed were every Bible Belter's nightmare of a queer pied piper playing rock and roll—not Alice Cooper cartoons but real cock-suckers in mascara.

The year after the Stonewall riots, Bowie discovered the New York downtown scene that had coalesced around Warhol's Factory, and he celebrated it with his brilliant fourth LP, *Hunky Dory*, in 1971. It was a scene that Reed had already begun to chronicle with the Velvet Underground. Reed emphasized the deadpan perversity; Bowie, the camp. But both brought the queen's vernacular to rock and roll. It was a gay outlaw vision they were enacting—mockingly innocent, willfully aberrant, and alien.

To this gay teenager, hearing Bowie angrily croon his theme song, "Changes"

("And these children that you spit on/As they try to change their worlds/They're immune to your consolations/They're quite aware what they're going through"), it sounded like a tough, fay anthem for a planetful of budding gay rebels.

In 1972 Bowie told the pop press that he was gay and produced fellow flamer Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side," which suddenly provided a roster of hustlers and transvestites with a berth in the top ten. The unspeakable suddenly became downright unavoidable. It was a liberating blow—not so much for the budding population of gay clones as for the generation of kids who flocked to the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* in towns across America.

In the '80s, both Reed and Bowie rather abruptly dismissed their gay pasts. Bowie recently explained his affection for the band Guns N' Roses, calling them a sterling example of the enduring tradition of authentic small-minded bigotry in American culture. Bowie compared them to the embittered homophobic painter Thomas Hart Benton. "I find them the ultimate American band in the regionalist sense: the Tom Benton school. Macho. Hard drinking. 'Fags don't paint pictures.' And the Norman Mailer thing. It's like they're sons of that," he crowed.

Well, isn't that special? Bowie's music once had the power to startle and inspire, so it's probably a wise move on his part to be focused on reissuing his old catalog (even touring to reprise the hits) before doling out another vinyl turd by his current band, the Tin Machine.

Rykodisc's reissue of the Bowie catalog (remastered, with bonus cuts added) is exemplary. Of those thus far released, the greatest-hits disc, *Changes: Bowie* (whose 18 tracks include the rare homoerotic track "John, I'm Only Dancing" and a recent remix of "Fame"—along with the *good* stuff) and the *Hunky Dory* disc come highly recommended. The wonder is still there; "Changes" and "Queen Bitch" still give me chills.

While Bowie is working his past, Reed has returned to his—collaborating with John Cale, his original partner in the Velvet Underground, for the first time in 25 years. The project, *Songs for Drella* (Sire), is a suite of oft-spoken songs inspired by their late mentor, Andy Warhol.

No one talks to a tune quite like Reed, and in taking Warhol's voice, we find him once more impersonating a gay man. "Bad skin, bad eyes—gay and fatty/People look at you funny/Growing up in a small town," Lou lays it out in the opening cut, voicing

# Memories Light the Closets of My Mind

## Reissues From Some Ex-Friends

Drella's dreams of escape from the "small town" of Pittsburgh. "I'm no adorable lisping Capote—my hero—/Do you think I could meet him?/Oh—I'd camp out at his front door," Reed enthuses with the genuine, dreamy delight that obviously belonged to Warhol.

*Songs for Drella* is no piece of '70s nostalgia; it's an attempt to re-create the person Reed and Cale knew and a way for Reed to reclaim a fouled friendship from beyond the grave. This is spooky, sometimes stunning business. "Nobody but You," a riveting, savage sketch of Warhol's eventual emotional and sensual paralysis, is scary but fine.

A portrait of the artist and a personal quest, it's a remarkable piece of music as theater—stories demanding a voice and an ear.

The work is available in two special formats: You can get it on video in a live home-movie performance (without an audience), which Cale and Reed gave at the Brooklyn Academy of Music directly after their series of performances there. You can also, for a price, get the CD in a special limited-edition art package—featuring a booklet illustrated with early pictures from the Factory and a self-portrait of Warhol—the whole shebang packaged in an embossed black-velvet box. I think Drella would have approved. It's queer enough even for me.

—Adam Block