

## DONNA SUMMER

[Cont. from 15] well, and people believed the story I was acting," Summer said in 1979.

Neil Bogart, the shameless, marketing-savvy head of disco label Casablanca Records, heard "Love to Love You Baby" and instructed Moroder to expand the song from three minutes to 17. "You're crazy," Moroder supposedly retorted, but he complied – and the song was a breakthrough smash. Summer had found the song "very difficult" to record, and she later said, "There were times when I hated the...sex-goddess image."

When her subsequent records with Moroder and co-producer Pete Bellotte didn't match "Love to Love You Baby," Casablanca worried that she would become a one-hit wonder. The retro-sounding title track from her 1977 album *I Remember Yesterday* was a dud, until DJs began playing the B side, "I Feel Love," on which Moroder and Bellotte layered synthesizers, drum machines and other otherworldly electronic effects. When Brian Eno heard the record, he told David Bowie, "I have heard the sound of the future." He was right: "I Feel Love" is one of the building blocks of modern dance music, and its influence has never waned.

As Summer's fame grew, she struggled with depression. She began balancing anti-depressants with Valium, and "went through years of walking into rooms...unable to remember anyone's name because I was



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so out of it." In her memoir, Summer wrote about an aborted suicide attempt in a hotel room in 1976, after which she became a born-again Christian. "She always tried to convince us to be born-again," says Harold Faltermeyer, who co-wrote "Hot Stuff." "We weren't allowed to use the 'f-word' in the studio. She was a tough, strong woman."

In 1979, Summer recorded "Hot Stuff" with a rock solo from Steely Dan guitarist Jeff "Skunk" Baxter. She won a Grammy for Best Female Rock Vocal Performance, becoming the first winner of the then-new award. Albums like the double LP *Bad Girls* were packed with multipart suites that showed off Summer's songwriting chops and ambition.

Bruce Springsteen wrote "Cover Me" for Summer to sing, and after deciding to keep it for his *Born in the U.S.A.* album, he wrote her another one, "Protection," which Summer recorded with Quincy Jones in 1982. (Springsteen played guitar and sang backing vocals.) A year later, she released "She Works Hard for the Money," an uplifting song about the struggles of working women; it was an MTV hit.

Summer came to dislike the term "disco singer," which she felt minimized her range. "When I was younger, I would wear wild costumes and paint my face," she said in 2010. "I'd been in Europe for years, and I was doing a lot of strange things. If I'd been white, it would have been seen as 'cre-

ative.' But because I was black, they couldn't understand me having that level of creativity."

Neil Bogart's son Evan, a producer and songwriter, worked with his "Aunt Donna" on her final album, *Crayons*, which came out in 2008. "You can count on one or two hands the voices as big as hers," he says. And Bogart hears her influence in electronic acts from Chromeo to Daft Punk: "David Guetta specifically told me he wouldn't be doing what he's doing without 'I Feel Love.' Disco never died – it turned into dance music."

Like most friends, Bogart was unaware Summer had lung cancer; not even her agent at William Morris knew. "I saw her a year ago, and she looked great," Bogart says. One of the few people who knew was Michael Omartian, who co-wrote and produced "She Works Hard for the Money." He'd been diagnosed with lymphoma, and they both began treatment at Cedars-Sinai hospital in L.A. in 2011. "She was adamant about keeping it private," Omartian says. In the last two months of Summer's life, Omartian talked often with her husband of 31 years, songwriter Bruce Sudano, with whom she had two daughters. "He said, 'We're fighting, Mike, we're fighting.' Those were his words. 'We're planning on winning.'"

Summer was sure that one day her music would be understood as more than disco. "When people go back, they're gonna be like, 'Whoa,'" she said. "Where was her mind at? She was *out there!*"

## TRIBUTE

### Stax Bassist 'Duck' Dunn, Played on Immortal Soul Hits

**B**OOKER T. AND THE MGs bassist Donald "Duck" Dunn – whose low-end grooves on classics including Wilson Pickett's "In the Midnight Hour," Sam and Dave's "Hold On, I'm Coming" and Otis Redding's "(Sittin' on) The Dock of the Bay" helped define the sound of Sixties soul – died in his sleep on May 13th while on tour in Japan. He was 70.

Born in Memphis, Dunn bought his first bass at age 16. "I tried the guitar," he once recalled. "It was just too complicated, man!" Before long, he joined organist Booker T. Jones' legendary Stax Records house band, playing on countless hits. "He was so physically strong – we had such a solid



bottom with Duck," says Jones. "He's the only bass player of his kind."

Dunn went on to work with a wide range of stars including Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, Jerry Lee Lewis, Neil Young, Rod Stewart and Tom Petty. "He played simply, but melodically and brilliantly," says Petty.

"The two greatest bass players that ever lived are Paul McCartney and Duck Dunn – he's on that level."

Like many session players of his era, Dunn was never properly compensated for the smash Stax singles he played on. "We were cheated a little bit," he later said. "But with the music and what I learned...it doesn't matter. I have no regrets." AUSTIN SCAGGS