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MUSIC | NILE RODGERS

Haunting hooks, great grooves; the lesson of a super producer



MASTER MIXER | Nile Rodgers was an icon to excess at the famed Studio 54

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for thelondonpaper

IF you want to talk super producer look no further than Nile Rodgers. This man was Pharrell, Timbaland and Dangermouse rolled into one, almost single-handedly inventing disco with Chic and Sister Sledge in the 70s, and a decade later, with the mega success of Madonna, Bowie and Duran Duran, came equal excess. We pick his brains for the good stuff.

Secret to a hit

For me, a hit song is about having a great groove and an infectious hook, and having the body of the song supporting what the payoff is going to be. Take a very simple song like *We Are Family* (sings), "Everyone can see we're together when we walk on by". That's a nice little ditty, but the real payoff is when you get to (sings) "We are family". It's unbelievably simple and the only way that works is because the music is complicated—there are three or four major rhythms happening at that one time.

The sound of now

I think electronic minimalism is starting to mock acoustic minimalism and that's sort of

cool to me. You go back and listen to some of the funkier records of all time. Take James Brown—it's just two guitars, bass and drums and James, and you throw in a horn section. Now you listen to Timbaland on Justin's (Timberlake) record and it's super minimalism, just basic simple groove stuff.

Modern frustration

I love Duran Duran with all my heart. I worked on their last record, but it wasn't the greatest for me. I'm a romantic. I like the artistic standards of the past. I understand that most people are going to hear my music on an mp3 player—I get it—but it's really hard for me to make a

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record like that. The sonic presentation for new school producers is not nearly as important to them, because they know the engineers will come in later and make everything sound good.

SOUND SEMINAR

Nile Rodgers is one of the speakers at "Production Magic",

a day-long seminar on music production that also features a ton of heavyweight producers like Guy Chambers (Robbie Williams), Phil Ramone (Paul Simon), John Leckie (Stone Roses) and Jon Kelly (Kate Bush).

Saturday, 11 Nov, 10am-6pm, The Magic Circle, 12 Stephenson Way, Euston, London. Students £75, Trade Body Members £115, full price £155. Log on to www.musicbank.co.uk/production_magic.htm to book tickets

Madonna

Madonna and I knew *Like A Virgin* was massive. It was very interesting for us because at the time her manager was Freddy De Mann, who was coming off Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. Talk about me and Madonna feeling like it was us against the world. Was she grateful? I would think so. I'm grateful. How can you be pissed off with the biggest record of your life? It's the biggest record of her life and mine. I'm working with an artist, Lanz, now. She's signed to Interscope (Eminem, Gwen Stefani) and everyone is calling her the Madonna of hip hop. She's the bomb.

80s excess

The 70s was the celebratory decade after the very political 60s—we had the Vietnam war and all this stuff, and in the 70s

it felt like we'd brought it to a halt, and we celebrated our victory. But the 80s, however, set the tone for the crazy world we have now. If you want to talk about partying, drug abuse and self-indulgence...I died eight times, what you call flat-lined. My heart stopped eight times in the 80s.

Studio 54

During the really luxurious super-hip years, Studio 54 was magical and amazing. I was part of the inner circle but the underground part of the inner circle. My years at Studio 54 seem to be much more interesting than when I hear somebody like Liza Minnelli or Michael Jackson talking about Studio 54, I'm like: "You're kidding me. You thought that shit was fun? Let me tell you what we were doing!" But that's a whole other interview.