

Weeknight specials help clubs survive

Area disco business beginning to lag

By LOUIE ARTHUR
Battalion Staff

One-two, one-two, one-two....

The dancers' feet, the pulsating lights, even the movements of the bartenders seem synchronized to the endlessly pounding beat. The entire place lives and breathes a continuing rhythm — you could almost believe the building itself sways in time.

The mirrored walls and shining chrome accents catch the lights and reflect them on the dance floor, the bar, the ceiling, everywhere — filling the room with a visual rhythm as well.

This is the soul, the spirit of disco.

People of all ages (a surprising number of them middle-aged) come out to play in this world of make-believe, where they can leave their unremarkable lives for a few hours.

They dress in expensive, well-made clothes that are as dramatic as the disco's atmosphere. The style of dress is closely copied from the clothes worn by the "beautiful people" in the Hollywood-New York-Paris discotheques — places they've seen only in magazines, on television and in the movies.

"A guy could be a grocery clerk

during the week. On the weekend he can put on a vest and patent leather shoes and be somebody totally different," a local disco manager said. "People come in and buy one drink and then suck on ice cubes the rest of the night just to be at the 'in' place."

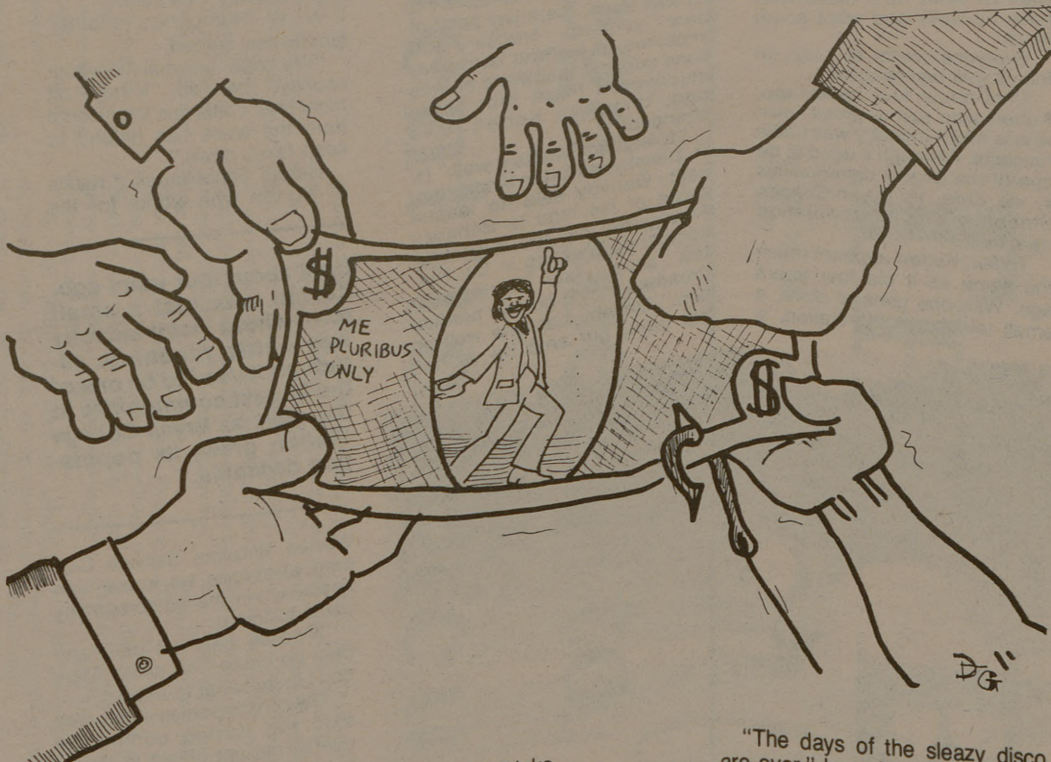
Residents of Bryan and College Station are not immune to the disco-mania that has swept the country since the release of "Saturday Night Fever", but the attraction is not as great today as it was in the past.

"There are two reasons why people go to discos," Sports Club manager Billy Howard said. "They want to be seen, to show off in front of their friends and their peers. The second reason is the dancing."

"Rock and roll is not that easy to dance to," he explained. "Disco brought back 'touch-dancing'. These people don't listen to disco music at home. Their record collections look like everyone else's. They just like to dance, and disco is easy to dance to."

Gary Seaback, manager of Studio 2818, agreed that dancing is the main attraction of the discos.

"The music just grabs you," Seaback said. "Dancing these days...you can do anything you



want. I didn't like disco at all at first. I felt intimidated by most of the guys doing these dance steps. But there were a lot of really nice women so I kept going back."

Although several new discos have opened in the past few years, things haven't been so rosy for them financially lately.

"Business is down 40 percent from last year," Howard said. "The disco trend is starting to level off. Saturday Night Fever made business go crazy; there was a big media push on discos. Now, even the discos in Houston are having some trouble. Business has been down for them in the last two years."

Competition and money seem to be the two main reasons local clubs are having trouble. College students are generally on a limited budget and don't have a lot of money to spend on entertainment. Discos are more expensive than the popular local beer joints. Most have cover charges and higher-

priced mixed drinks. "The people are spending the money elsewhere," Seaback said. "There is so much competition. There aren't enough disco-ers to fill the clubs except on weekends."

Seaback said disco-goers do spend a lot more money. Since he converted his club to a disco, he has found that his gross money intake for one night is six times the amount he used to make off the same number of people as a regular club.

Although this statement would make the disco business seem outrageously profitable, this is not the case.

"Disco people don't go out as much," Howard said. "The people that would go to the (Dixie) Chicken four times a week only go to the disco once a week."

Howard said when he used to work for a company that owned and operated 12-15 nightclubs, he discovered that people are starting to build bigger, more luxurious clubs.

"The days of the sleazy disco are over," he said. "Three or four years ago, about \$250,000 to \$750,000 was spent to build a club. Now, they're spending anywhere from \$1.25 million to \$3 million."

Seaback said although the trend in bigger cities like Dallas and Houston was towards fancier clubs, the people in Bryan-College Station don't like it.

"I hate to say it, but everybody's saying 'disco is going down' and it is," he said.

Despite continued popularity in big cities, the fate of the disco in this area is a little uncertain.

Live entertainment, country and western nights, contests, disc jockeys — all are gimmicks currently used by local discos in an attempt to pull in the somewhat reluctant college crowd during the week.

If these tactics are successful, discos will continue to survive and prosper in this area. If they fail, the clubs will have to make enough money on their weekend crowds to pull them through.

Skate business really rolling

United Press International

NEW YORK — The roller skating craze among young people in America which spawned the skateboard industry now is taking off on its own.

Business is so good that both manufacturers and retailers of skates and boots are having trouble meeting demand, said George Pickard of the Roller-Skating Rink Operators Association in Lincoln, Neb.

Pickard discounted some reports that sales of quality skates are running at 300,000 pairs a month. "That's ridiculous," he said, "but I'm sure it's upwards of 150,000. Most of the manufacturers are not public companies and don't publish their sales and output figures."

But Donald Tattenbaum of the Herman Sporting goods store chain owned by W. R. Grace & Co. said Herman's retail roller skate sales are likely to be up around 440 percent for all of this year. They were up 379 percent in the first half.

Ed Jamos, vice president of Hyde Athletic Footwear, which makes skateboot sets, said "sales are going crazy, we have been backordering skates for the past four months with no slowdown in sight."

People, young and old, are seen skating everywhere — on the streets, in parks and indoor rinks. Many younger people skate to disco music.

The modern roller skate is a far cry though from the metal hardware skates kids used to clamp and strap on ordinary street shoes. It is bolted or riveted to a high grade nylon or leather shoe and the skate has the wide polyurethane wheels of the skateboard.

"Actually, the skate manufacturers adopted these plastic wheels before the skateboard came along," Pickard said.

Tattenbaum said stock model skates with boots sell for anywhere from \$16 to \$75 a pair but some aficionados go in for custom-built jobs costing several hundred dollars, "with hand painted designs on the boots."

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