



# Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco

By Peter Shapiro

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**Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco** By Peter Shapiro

**A long-overdue paean to the predominant musical form of the 70s and a thoughtful exploration of the culture that spawned it**

Disco may be the most universally derided musical form to come about in the past forty years. Yet, like its pop cultural peers punk and hip hop, it was born of a period of profound social and economic upheaval. In *Turn the Beat Around*, critic and journalist Peter Shapiro traces the history of disco music and culture. From the outset, disco was essentially a shotgun marriage between a newly out and proud gay sexuality and the first generation of post-civil rights African Americans, all to the serenade of the recently developed synthesizer. Shapiro maps out these converging influences, as well as disco's cultural antecedents in Europe, looks at the history of DJing, explores the mainstream disco craze at its apex, and details the long shadow cast by disco's performers and devotees on today's musical landscape.

One part cultural study, one part urban history, and one part glitter-pop confection, *Turn the Beat Around* is the most comprehensive study of the Me Generation to date.

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## Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco By Peter Shapiro Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From [The New Yorker](#)

To its detractors, disco was nothing but a pageant of glitter and Ultrasuede, but Shapiro's history emphasizes its roots in nineteen-seventies New York, where hippie idealism had given way to stagflation and gang warfare. While the city decayed, marginal communities—gays, blacks, Latinos—congregated in abandoned warehouses to commune on makeshift dance floors. Shapiro argues that disco was "glamour as defiance," a movement that promoted racial integration and aided the mainstreaming of homosexuality. His book ranges widely, from Nazi Germany, where Swing Jugend (proto-discogers, in Shapiro's view) met covertly to dance to "degenerate" jazz, to the rooftops of the Bronx, where Latino gangs did the hustle. This dance step, curiously, found favor with the conservative columnist William Safire, because it required a partner, and thus responsibility.

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From [Booklist](#)

Few pop-music genres have so dominated the charts and airwaves as disco at its height; fewer still have subsequently been so reviled. Shapiro considers disco as much more than glitzy dance music with fashion ramifications. Emerging at a time when gay sexuality and rights were exploding and African Americans were entering the "post Civil Rights" era, disco combined elements of the subcultures of both. Shapiro describes how disco grew from roots stretching from World War II, became a worldwide phenomenon, and ended in a homophobic, racist backlash. High points in passing include Shapiro's incisive disquisition on how *Saturday Night Fever* had "more popular culture impact than any movie since *Gone with the Wind*." Shapiro cites record producer Nile Rodgers: "Those songs are powerful . . . just as relevant and as valid . . . as when the Sex Pistols . . . Pink Floyd [or] the Beatles are delivering a message." Let the pop-culture wars begin anew, with Shapiro's deeper, more balanced take on disco vitally informing the discussion. *Mike Tribby*

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## **Review**

"Excellent. Leaves no doubt that disco lives at the heart of recent music history." --Frank Broughton and Bill Brewster, authors of *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life: The History of The Disc Jockey*

"Peter Shapiro not only recovers disco from unjust critical malevolence, he proves himself one of music journalism's most provocative, expansive, and engaging writers. Unearthing a story that stretches from Nazi resistance to outcast American counterculture, through artistic triumphs and unlikely crossover, and finally into a massive backlash coded in racism and homophobia, *Turn The Beat Around: A Secret History of Disco* is riveting, powerful, and essential." --Jeff Chang, author of *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*

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