



House Music is a Chicago born musical art form that combines electronically-generated sounds, vocals and samples from genres such as jazz, blues, disco and gospel; which when added to the foundation of the drum beat and synth bass line has become a global juggernaut. This spiritual force was birthed in Chicago's underground music scene in the late 70's and early 80's in the iconic club The Warehouse. The music brought together cultures, races, ages and alternative orientations like no other medium of that day.

The story of House Music in Chicago is not short, nevertheless this summary pays homage to the pioneers both dead and alive and the great Chicago institutions that nurtured the genres rise, aided in its fall and supported its resurgence.

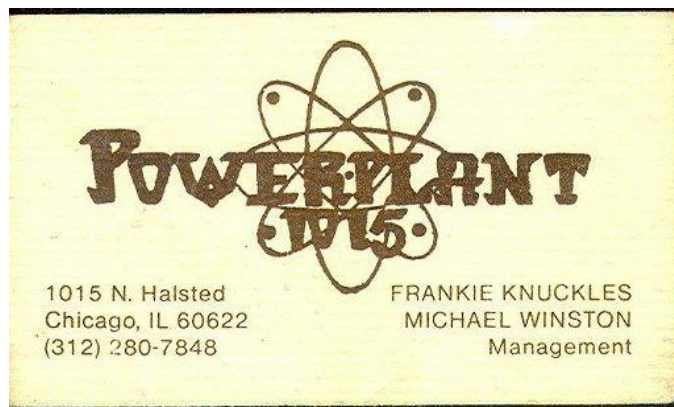
Black Music Past shapes Chicago's Black Music Future

The sounds of Soul Music from artists like James Brown took a turn in 1967 to a "four-on-the-floor" rhythm that led to the birth of funk, R&B and disco. By the mid 70's, European influences using electronic sounds from the German group Kraftwerk and disco hit's including "I Feel Love" from Donna Summer and Giorgio Moroder changed the city and the country's tone from Civil Rights to Human Rights and the music followed suit.

Chicago "House Music" was aptly named for the underground members-only gay club The Warehouse located at 208 South Jefferson. Owner and Businessman [Robert Williams](#) arrived from New York City to Chicago and brought the legendary Frankie Knuckles to create a powerful sound-system-fueled dance music scene at what was then an almost empty three story West Loop warehouse. The demise of American disco, a decidedly Black, Gay and Drug associated music form, created an opportunity for those alternative communities to build a new sound and a new era of collaboration.

Chicago House Music Desegregates

DJ Frankie Knuckles was a Chicago area superstar when the Warehouse closed in 1982. By 1983, the election of Chicago's first Black Mayor, [Harold Washington](#) created an energy and optimism in Chicago's youth and alternative communities. Mr. Williams opened a new club The Music Box and in 1983 Frankie took his fame and followers to his own club the Powerplant at 1015 North Halsted. Like the Warehouse, these Chicago addresses in the late 70's and early 80's were industrial, dark and empty, under-the-radar and perfect for after-hour events. These clubs and the sounds that emerged brought teens and twenty-something straight kids together with Black, Gay, Latino and White adults all immersed in lyrics that suggested they should "Bring Down the Walls" and "Brighter Days" were to come. More explicit content included in songs like "Baby Wants to Ride" and "Waiting on My Angel" unified the DJ and dancers in spirit and in movement. The songs were hopeful as was the era. Gays were open and free in a space where straights did not judge, stare or become violent. Blacks, Whites, Asians and Hispanics became one with the music and in turn created an atmosphere where unity was bigger than difference.



1983 Powerplant Club Business Card | Courtesy of @DanceMusicFound – Michael Winston Collection

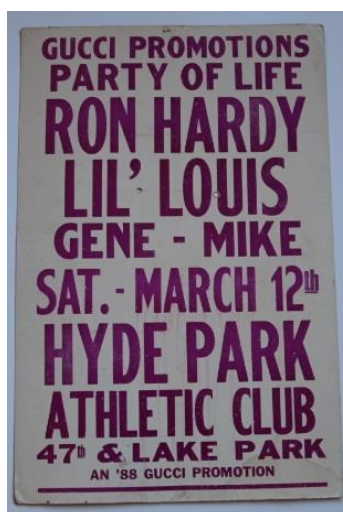
The Chicago DJ Becomes the Star

Chicago area superstars included DJ Ron Hardy, the resident DJ at the new club the Music Box on 16th & South Indiana, the DJ's of Chicago radio station WBMX's Hot Mix 5 including Farley "JackMaster" Funk, Mickey "Mixin" Oliver, Ralphie Rosario, Kenny "Jammin" Jason, and Scott "Smokin" Silz, the creator of the House Music Anthem "Move Your Body" DJ/producer Marshall Jefferson, the House group Fingers Inc. which included DJ and producer Larry Heard, vocalist [Robert Owens](#) "Mystery of Love", DJ Jesse Saunders and Musician Vince Lawrence who pressed the first vinyl House Music record "On and On" in 1984, vocalist and producer Jamie Principle and DJ/artist/producer [Steve "Silk" Hurley](#) whose 1986 hit "Jack Your Body" became the first Chicago House Music artist to have a song hit number one on the UK charts. The DJs used turntables and beat machines including the iconic Roland 808 to launch music careers that many of these ordinary Chicagoans could never have imagined.

Chicago House Music though made popular by the early DJs was largely driven into the communities by the radio stations, record stores and teenage word of mouth. Frankie Knuckles and Ron Hardy's sounds influenced teenagers at Chicago area high schools including Kenwood Academy in Hyde Park - 5015 South Blackstone Avenue, Lindblom Technical in Englewood - 6130 South Wolcott Ave. and Mendel Catholic in Roseland - 111th St & S King Drive. The talent and creativity from South and West Side youth became evident as basement beats led to the brilliance of teenage DJs, vocalists and producers including Kim Salter (K/Joy) "[Like This](#)" - Kenwood Academy, Producer/Filmmaker Irwin Eberhart (Chip E.) "If You Only Knew" - Kenwood Academy, heralded female DJ Lori Branch - Lindblom Technical and West Side DJ phenom Gene Hunt - Farragut High. Mendel Catholic High School has a special place in House Music History in that its Mendel Bi-Level parties held from 1976 to 1988 launched the careers of many now heralded House Music DJ's. Thousands of kids from around the city travelled to Mendel to dance to House Music for over a decade. The founder and producer of the event, Kirkland Townsend who raised millions of dollars for his alma mater, later became the business manager for the legendary DJ Collective "[The Chosen Few's](#)" DJ Jesse Saunders and DJ Wayne Williams and later a radio personality in New York City.

Chicago Supports its New Industry

Chicago area radio stations, record stores and record labels including Trax Records (using the old Chess Records pressing equipment) and DJ International were also instrumental in bringing House Music to Chicago area youth. The high powered WBMX 102.7FM in Chicago was the first to highlight Chicago House Music prominently in its weekly rotation. Rarely heralded yet critical marketing for DJ's, promoters and producers were Chicago's College radio stations including WNUR 89.3FM, Northwestern University's [Streetbeat show](#) which began highlighting House and Hip Hop Music to the north shore and north suburbs in 1983, WHPK 88.5FM University of Chicago's radio station and WKKC 89.3FM, Kennedy King Community College's evening show whose signal reached the south side neighborhoods. WNUR's T. Chablis (Tim Harris) and WKKC's PinkHouse became important Chicago area radio personalities by creating events and collaborating with artists. Record stores including Importes Etc. (711 South Dearborn), Wax Trax, Loop Records and Gramophone Records on the north side are credited with shortening the name of the club The Warehouse, to music heard at "The House," creating a DJ culture that sold millions of vinyl records throughout Chicago.



1988 House Music Party Promotion Poster | Courtesy of @DanceMusicFound – Gene Hunt Collection

Chicago's small venues and clubs including the Playground in Chicago's South Loop, [Jeffery Pub](#) in South Shore (one of the longest running gay clubs in the country) C.O.D's and AKA's in Rogers Park the Hyde Park Athletic Club, and many others that have come and gone kept the music alive over the years. The late 80's and 90's saw increasing attacks on the underground music scene which was the backbone of the genre. The AIDS epidemic, coupled with dance music drug culture unfortunately ended the lives of many talented artists. Finally, in 2000, Chicago's City Council enacted an ordinance banning unlicensed dance parties which slowly silenced DJs and promoters forcing them to find new opportunities across the country. Thanks to the overseas success of DJ Frankie Knuckles and the proliferation of cassette tapes, increasing technology, over and under-the-table label deals by label owners Rocky Jones and their representatives including Attorney Jay B. Ross, House Music exploded in Europe providing gigs as artists, executives and remixers.

Yeas -- Aldermen Granato, Haithcock, Tillman, Preckwinkle, Hairston, Lyle, Beavers, Dixon, Beale, Pope, Balcer, Frias, Olivo, Burke, Thomas, Coleman, Peterson, Murphy, Rugai, Troutman, DeVille, Munoz, Zalewski, Chandler, Solis, Ocasio, Burnett, E. Smith, Carothers, Wojcik, Suarez, Matlak, Mell, Austin, Colom, Banks, Mitts, Allen, Laurino, O'Connor, Doherty, Natarus, Daley, Hansen, Levar, Shiller, Schuller, M. Smith, Moore, Stone -- 50.

Nays -- None.

Alderman Natarus moved to reconsider the foregoing vote. The motion was lost.

The following is said ordinance as passed:

Be It Ordained by the City Council of the City of Chicago:

SECTION 1. Section 4-156-300 of the Municipal Code of Chicago is hereby amended by inserting the language in italics and deleting the language in brackets, as follows:

4-156-300 License -- Required.

(a) Unless specifically exempted in Section 4-156-305, it shall be unlawful for the owner, lessee or manager of any property, *or for any other person*, to produce, present or conduct thereon, for gain or profit, [or to permit any person to produce, present or conduct thereon, for gain or profit.] any amusement [without first having] *unless the owner, lessee or manager of such property has first obtained a public place of amusement license. If an amusement is produced, presented or conducted for gain or profit on any property without a valid public place of*

April 2000 Chicago City Council Anti-Rave Ordinance | Courtesy of @DanceMusicFound

Chicago politics and Chicago's mostly segregated neighborhoods shaped how House Music flourished, exploded overseas, then died in its neighborhoods. The proliferation of digital and emerging electronic mediums has catapulted House Music from its Chicago roots into a global power influencing dance, fashion and media. Chicagoans have mastered the genre winning Grammy's and chart topping hits with international artists including Michael Jackson and most recently Kanye West. Unlike early Chicago culture, in the House Music era, sexuality and heritage were not a deterrent to creativity and learning. This ideology and its transformative muscle has thrust House Music to its current massive pop presence and will undoubtedly continue to drive its future.