

After first turning heads as a backing singer on Bowie's *Young Americans* album, the imperious Luther Vandross went on to become one of the most acclaimed vocalists of his generation

SMOOTH SOUL

INTO THE EYE OF THE QUIET STORM WITH THE
FINEST ARTISTS THE GENRE HAD TO OFFER...

STEVE O'BRIEN

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WHAT IS IT?

Soul is a genre with many tentacles, from the salty R&B of Otis Redding to the swoonsome amour of Barry White and jet-engined power of Aretha Franklin. In the 80s, though, it was smooth soul – sometimes known as 'quiet storm' – that reigned.

As slick as caramel, as stylish as the most well-tailored sophisti-pop and often dreamily romantic, smooth soul was birthed not just from soul, but from funk,

jazz and pop. Unlike its sonic cousin, pop-soul, smooth soul was mostly ballad-driven, something that a DJ might spin at the end of the night, as the clubbers got smoochy on the dancefloor. Of course, there are examples of smooth soul outside of that decade (hello The Stylistics and The Delfonics), but we're sticking with the genre's 80s superstars here, when that sound was the dominant force in soul, both in the UK and US.



ESSENTIAL SINGLES

SADE SMOOTH OPERATOR

ALEXANDER O'NEAL
CRITICIZE

TEDDY PENDERGRASS
LOVE T.K.O.

AL JARREAU
MOONLIGHTING

GEORGE BENSON
MIDNIGHT LOVE AFFAIR

ESSENTIAL ALBUMS

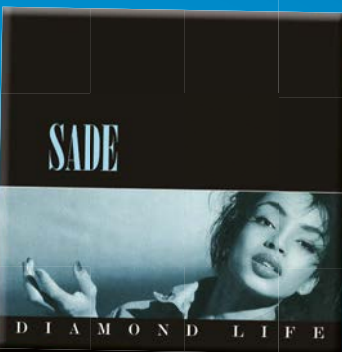
LUTHER VANDROSS NEVER TOO MUCH

Luther Vandross' debut album shows off the New York-born soulster's voice – passionate, dynamic, nuanced – with a stellar collection of songs, including the Grammy-nominated title track and stirring cover of the Bacharach/David classic, *A House Is Not A Home*.



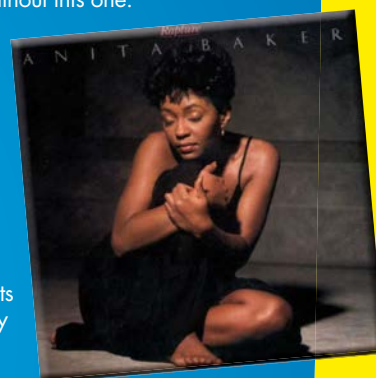
SADE DIAMOND LIFE

Across nine confident and unrushed tracks (the majority are around the five-minute mark), Sade Adu's soulful yet understated voice is impeccably complemented by an unshowy backing of saxophones, pianos, keyboards and wah-wah guitars. No dinner party in the 80s was complete without this one.



ANITA BAKER RAPTURE

Anita Baker's debut album, *The Songstress*, is a fine record, but sophomore LP *Rapture* is the keeper. Peaking at UK No. 13 and No. 11 on the Billboard, *Rapture* would be the breakout record for the one-time Chapter 8 vocalist. Baker's gospel roots are never far from the surface on many of these numbers, which fuse soul and jazz to electrifying effect.



ALEXANDER O'NEAL HEARSAY

Alexander O'Neal's most successful recording is a concept album based around a party, complete with interludes of guests' chatter that help immerse the listener in this imaginary soirée. There are traces of pure pop, R&B, post-disco, funk and new jack swing on this feelgood classic that's produced by the great Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis.



ESSENTIAL ARTISTS

Luther Vandross

Over the course of his 54 years on this earth, Luther Ronzoni Vandross Jr was nominated for eight Grammys and achieved 11 consecutive platinum albums – not bad for someone who, until 1981, had been a humble backing vocalist, helping out artists such as Chaka Khan, Stevie Wonder and David Bowie. But it was his lead turn on the song *A Lover's Holiday* by the band Change that really woke the world up to his velvety vocals. A wealth of solo hits followed, including 1981's *Never Too Much*, *Give Me The Reason* and *Stop To Love* (both from 1986) as well as the 1992 duet with Janet Jackson, *The Best Things In Life Are Free*. Sadly, Luther died of a heart attack on 1 July 2005.

Teddy Pendergrass

Having made his name as frontman with Philly soul outfit Harold Melvin & The Blue Notes, Teddy Pendergrass finally tasted solo success in 1977 with his self-titled debut album. In 1982 he was involved in a car crash which left him paralysed from the waist down, yet in the years that followed he continued to record and perform, enjoying such hits as 1984's *Hold Me* (with Whitney Houston). Pendergrass retired in 2007 and died just three years later from respiratory failure.

Alexander O'Neal

After missing out on being lead singer of The Time (he was replaced by Morris Day following a fall-out with Prince), Alexander O'Neal found fame in the UK in 1985 with *If You Were Here Tonight* (which, despite hitting No. 13 over here, cratered in the US), following it up with a string of UK hits including *Saturday Love* (No. 6), *Criticize* (No. 4) and a reissue of *Fake* (No. 16). His success in Blighty has led him to guest in many UK reality shows over the years including *Celebrity Big Brother* and *Wife Swap*.

Anita Baker

Baker released debut LP *The Songstress* in 1983 after four years with Detroit's Chapter 8. Her big hit here remains *Sweet Love* (No. 13 in 1986), but it's worth checking out *Giving You The Best That I Got* (US Top 5) and the silky *Just Because* (1988). She hasn't released an LP since 2005's *Christmas Fantasy*, but continues to perform, even singing *The Star-Spangled Banner* last year in Philadelphia prior to a NFC game between the Eagles and San Francisco 49ers.



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WHAT THEY SAY

"It opened up the whole thing where ballads could break in without having to compete with up-tempo songs." **Nelson George, quoted in The New York Times**

"Sensuous and pensive, quiet storm is seductive R&B, marked by jazz flourishes, 'smooth grooves,' and tasteful lyrics about intimate subjects. As disco gave way to the 'urban contemporary' format at the

outset of the 1980s, quiet storm expanded beyond radio to emerge as a broad catch-all super-genre."

Jason King, quoted in Listen Again: A Momentary History of Pop Music

"A blend of pop, jazz fusion, and R&B ballads – all elegant and easy-flowing, like a flute of Veuve Clicquot Champagne."

Ben Fong-Torres, Rolling Stone

FURTHER READING

The New Blue Music: Changes In Rhythm & Blues, 1950-1999
by Richard J. Ripani

Luther: The Life And Longing Of Luther Vandross
by Craig Seymour

