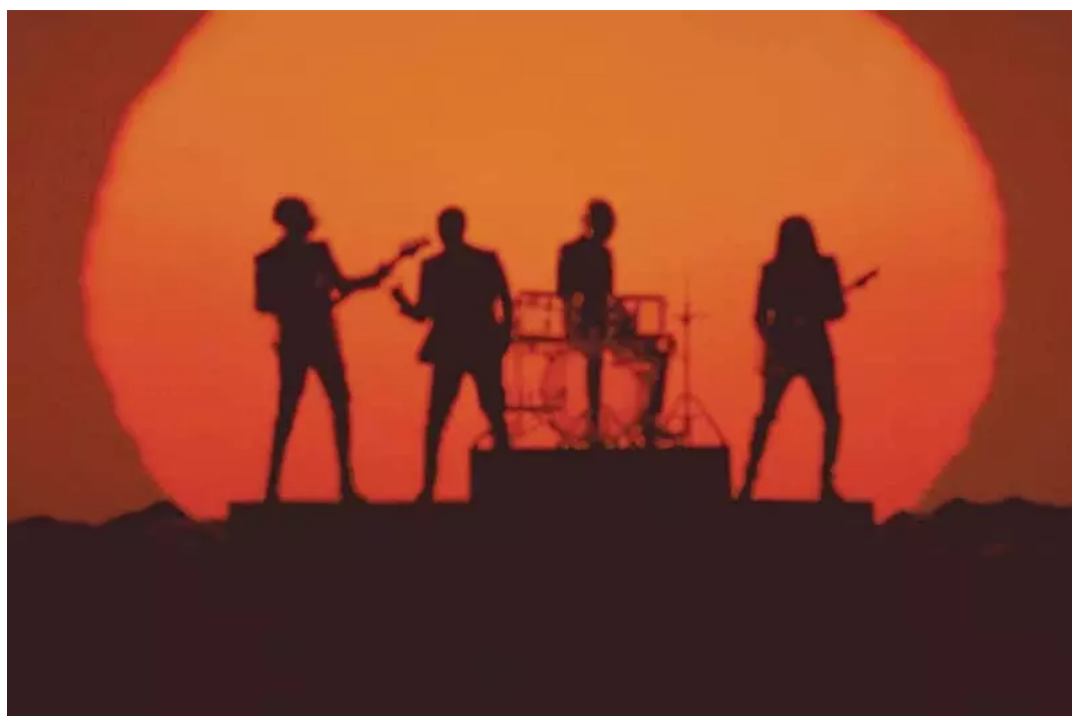


Four Essential Daft Punk and Pharrell Williams Collaborations

BY EMILY REILY
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With their fourth and final album, *Random Access Memories*, French house duo **Daft Punk** (Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo) cut new inroads into EDM while generating a resurgence in the genre by shifting from its historical structure. “We wanted to do what we used to do with machines and samplers but with people,” **Bangalter** told *Rolling Stone*. In doing so, they enlisted a team of musicians who were ready and willing to contribute. Mixing analog synthesizers and vintage disco and progressive pop influences with organic, live instrumentation and vocals was key to *RAM*’s success.

By working with artists such as Panda Bear, Chic’s Nile Rodgers, Giorgio Moroder and Chilly Gonzales, Daft Punk also achieved permanent crossover royalty status and created surprisingly authentic results. With manipulated vocals from The Strokes’ Julian Casablancas, the conventional drum beat and uncomplicated melody overlay humanizes and gives heart to “Instant Crush” rather than take them away.

Upon its release on May 17, *Random Access Memories* quickly became the official summer album of 2013, eclipsing everything else with hits like, “Get Lucky,” “Lose Yourself To Dance,” and “Give Life Back To Music.” The leadoff single “Get Lucky” swept the internet with crackling intensity, hitting the number 1 spot on dozens of international charts. The news of *RAM*’s 10th anniversary this year even **sparked its return** to the top of Billboard’s dance/electronic chart.

In addition to introducing Moroder’s genius to new legions of fans, Daft Punk also further elevated the profile of rapper, singer-songwriter and record producer Pharrell Williams, who by 2013 was polishing off his own biggest hit, “Happy.” Pharrell, a genius himself at synergy (a slice of his impressive pile of collaborative hits is [here](#)), can drive the soul of a song the way Daft Punk can hear the hidden potential in an obscure disco record.

Homem-Christo [once said](#) collaborations are “about the moment and the situation. When it feels right to us, when we feel it, we do it, and when we have the time.” For his part, Pharrell was willing to do whatever it took to work with Daft Punk, allegedly saying “If you just want me to play tambourine, I’ll do it.” Sometimes the will is all it takes. It was only a matter of time before Pharrell’s soul and Daft Punk’s perfectly crafted musicality were brought together to create enlightening results.

These four mutual collaborations have been among their most successful.

“Harder Better Faster Stronger (Neptunes Remix)” (2001)



Even the way Daft Punk **sampled records**—tempting fate by pulling from the stacks at random—led to insightful homages to long-lost music. For “Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger” off their second album *Discovery*, the duo opened with a lo-fi, groovy keyboard hook and tapping cymbals from Edwin Birdsong’s “[Cola Bottle Baby](#),” immortalizing the underground artist. Daft Punk speeds up the tempo of the original, then breaks down the new catchphrase electronically, twisting and wiggling it to within an inch of its life. The refrain remains one of Daft Punk’s biggest thumbprints on mainstream music, touching everyone from hip-hop star Kanye and his drugged up version “[Stronger](#),” to disco king Moroder, and on to Pharrell.

For Daft Punk’s 2003 remix album *Daft Club*, The Neptunes, with Williams, mold “Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger” with additional synths and a dreamy refrain about soul-snatchers. The Neptunes announces their involvement in the remix with a callout, then warms up the digital tone with Pharrell’s smooth vocals, increasing the potency of the stabbing synth and hard, crunchy hand claps in the background.

“Gust of Wind” (2014)

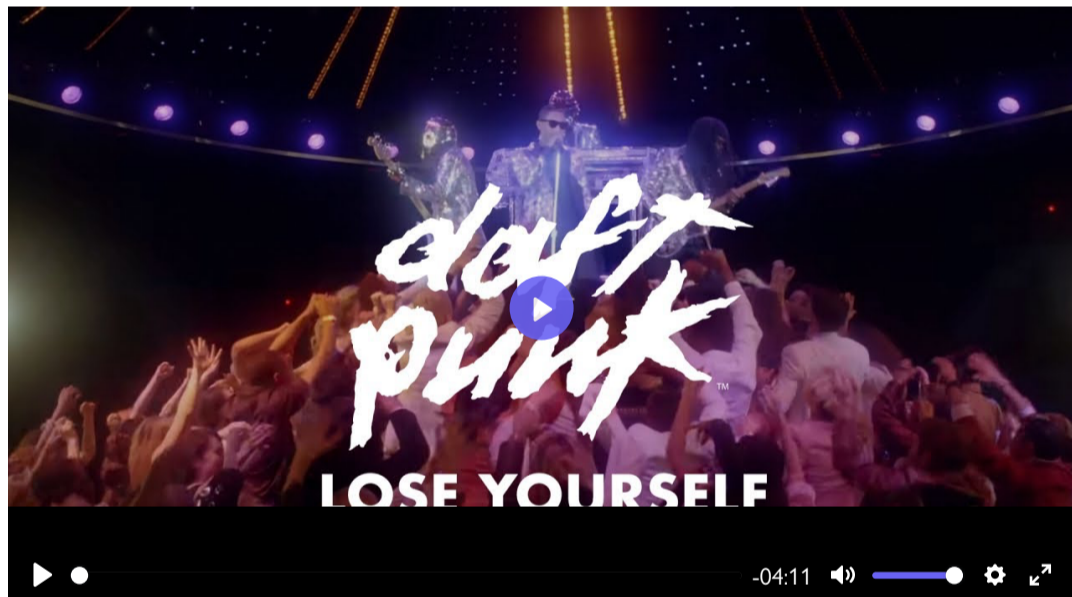


“Gust of Wind” begins with Pharrell’s trademark four-beat bump, a technique that immediately engages and holds the attention of the listener, who may be wondering why the record is skipping. (Listen to the formula on “Happy,” or hear it drawn out with a symphonic intro on “Marilyn Monroe.”)

On “Gust Of Wind,” a lovesick Pharrell equates a girlfriend to something intangible, a shapeless form who can “push” him closer to his dreams. Daft Punk’s shimmering strings and melodic vocoder-produced lyrics extolling a someone’s headstrong personality complement Pharrell’s falsetto.

Like the song title, the strings that shape the intro form a constantly moving wave, first ascending as if climbing steps, and then descending. The funky guitar riffs and hand claps maintain buoyancy.

“Lose Yourself to Dance” (2013)



Like all great dance music, the repeated lyrics of “Lose Yourself To Dance” points to one subject—letting go and hitting the dance floor. “Lose Yourself” leans heavily into that sentiment. In the video, disco dancers worship at the feet of Rodgers, Pharrell and Daft Punk on a revolving platform, all a-glimmer, Lucite-transparent keyboard and guitar on full display.

The song’s sparkling intro, with lazy guitar hook, ocean waves and bubbling bass, segues into Rodger’s funky, effortless guitar melody that never lets up.

Pharrell extends an olive leaf to the young office professionals, saying gently, “I know you don’t get a chance to take a break this often.” He offers her his shirt to “wipe off all the sweat, sweat...” escalating the rhythm with a gallant, romantic gesture and an overt sexual invite.

Pharrell’s suave vocals mesh and swirl with Daft Punk’s robotic vocoder treatment of the repeated “C’mon” which starts low and slinks upward. Rodgers’ ability to create breezy riffs practically bounces off Pharrell’s falsetto, while the funky interlude and popping hand claps add definition.

This combination of synths and electronica slicks down Pharrell’s sound even further, adding a sheen that appealed to hip hop fans, R & B fans and the disco community, spheres that don’t seem that far apart on the rhythm scale.

“Get Lucky” (2013)



A mix of funk, dance and electro with underlying bass notes, the celebratory “Get Lucky” has no Pharrell-approved four-beat intro; it just jumps right in. Its rhyming, robotic refrain of having “good fun” while “getting some” implies that he and his newfound girl are up all night, every night, and getting lucky at every turn. Lyrically, Pharrell talks of cosmic stars, the rising phoenix and spinning circles only goes higher from there. There’s a feeling of universal freedom in “Get Lucky” that still hasn’t been matched in electronic music.

While “Get Lucky” has a broader appeal and ultimately made a bigger impact than “Lose Yourself To Dance,” I favor the latter. “Get Lucky” has a zoned-out, more mellow approach with an upbeat, positive message of “we’ve come too far to give up what we are,” whereas “Lose Yourself” builds energy with every chorus.



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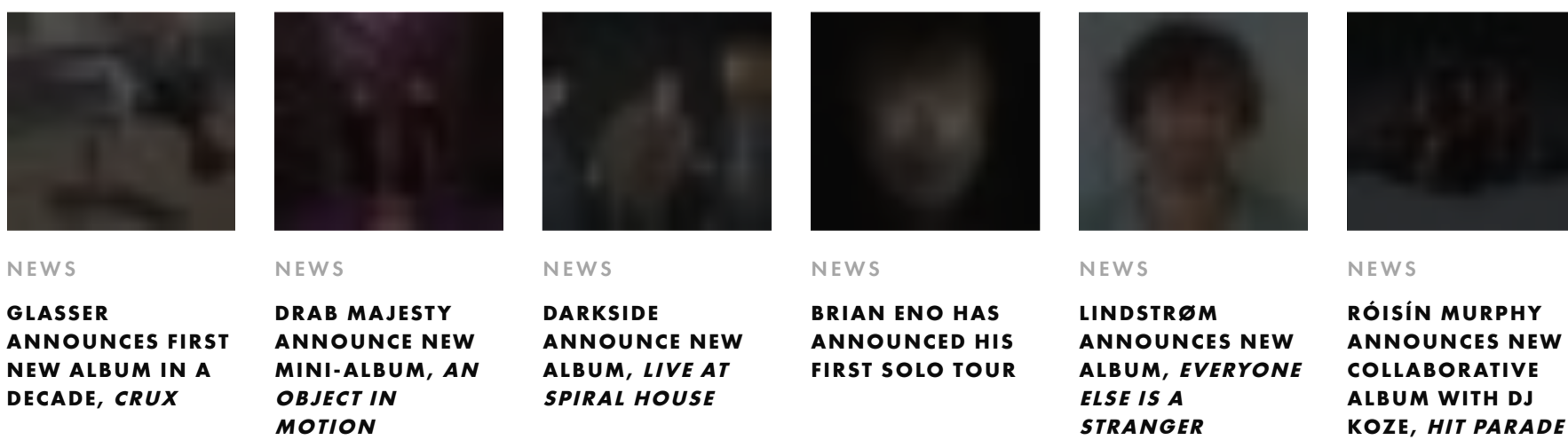
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