

# My Top Albums of 1976

ALBUMS continue to play an ever-increasing part in the career of Soul acts nowadays, and the variety and selection on offer can sometimes bewilder a potential buyer simply because our radio broadcasting system doesn't air much of what is available.

Soul LPs still sell either on the strength of a hit single, or on word-of-mouth recommendation. In making my selection I have looked for a variety of factors that the casual buyer might rightly think are somewhat nit-picking. But, to my mind, the following LPs represent good value for money, high artistic skill in interpretation and execution, and perhaps most important of all, are "whole" albums — conceived as such with a constant standard running through rather than being just a couple of hit singles surrounded by "fillers", as regrettably, more and more albums these days are becoming.

## 1 **Stairsteps** "2nd Resurrection" *Dark Horse AMLH 22004*

I have by now probably bored you silly with my constant eulogising over the majestic and newly resurrected **Stairsteps**, but not only do I regard this as the best LP of 1976, but it would certainly have a place in my Top 20 LPs of all time.

Vital, organic, erotic and full of inventiveness and brilliance, it is perhaps four or five years ahead of its time, but for those with progressive and forward-looking tastes, once you've heard it and got into it then you too will regard it as an album you'd never part with.

Full marks too for a sleeve that is in perfect harmony with the mood and content of the music inside. A classic of tomorrow maybe, but classic it undoubtedly is.

## 2 **Barbara Lynn** "Here Is Barbara Lynn" *Oval OVL 5002*

As I recently wrote at some length about this album, I'll just repeat that I'm eternally grateful to *Oval* for having the courage to issue it here at long last, and it too is a classic Soul album.

## 3 **Billy Preston** "Billy Preston" *A&M AMLH 64587*

**Billy Preston** has been around so long (many of us first seeing him when he accompanied **Little Richard** on his first ever UK tour) that he suffers somewhat from "media classification".

Were this a debut set by some unknown newcomer however, the media would doubtless be patting themselves on the back for their own cleverness in "discovering" this new talent. As it is, most people expect always to hear "Billy's Bag" and when they don't get it, they register disappointment.

Well, forget all that 60s and 50s jazz — this is **Billy Preston** 1976,

and is a fascinating musical feast that is richly inventive and full of hidden surprises. It is strange to my mind how so many of the very profound changes that have taken place subtly in the background of Soul over the past year or so have generally gone totally unremarked.

We can not go on forever regarding "What's Going On" or "There's A Riot Going On" as the peak achievements of modern Soul because they were five years ago! The new trends aren't being played in the discos either (most DJs play it safe either out of expediency or sheer survival!), and very, very rarely does this get much air-play (a few notables excepted of course), and only when the buzz starts right at the very bottom and works its way up will most people generally say "here's a whole new thing"! To which you, gentle reader, can blow a big, fat raspberry!

## 4 **Syl Johnson** "Total Explosion" *London SHU 8494*

Nothing avant-garde here, just straight Soul music played with sharp blues overtones and all threaded together with perfection. **Syl Johnson** has always been a keen Soul singer, and the combination of his earthy, no-nonsense vocals with the hypnotic rhythmic over-kill that *Hi* records seem able to constantly achieve, makes this a heady brew that can intoxicate even in very small quantities.

**Willie Mitchell** too deserves special congratulations for his continuing presence in the studios, and at a time when everybody is rushing pell-mell into all kinds of different bags, he, probably more than any other one individual, is keeping the faith and producing some of the purest Soul music around today. Plain and simple truth.

## 5 **Nancy Wilson** "This Mother's Daughter" *Capitol E-ST 11518*

What an enigmatic singer Nancy Wilson is. Again, as I recently wrote about this album I'll not repeat myself again, but suffice to say that if you can abandon your preconceived notions as to just what bag **Nancy** is in, and give this a listen with an innocent ear, then you'll maybe be surprised (as I was) at just how soulful it is!

## 6 **Robert Palmer** "Some People Can Do What They Like" *Island ILPS 9420*

Without a doubt in my mind, 1976 will almost certainly be looked back on from the future as the year when the racial barriers of Soul finally fell.

More and more white artists and performers adopted a Soul idiom or base as a springboard for their own creativity, and unlike previous attempts which to me were merely plagiaristic or downright phoney,



## The Dave Godin Column

some of the recent blue-eyed outings actually gelled and made sense. But having said that much, let it not therefore be assumed that they all fell into the Soul vernacular easily or comfortably.

1976 still had its share of embarrassing "black ups" and they probably outweighed the successes, but there were acceptable exceptions in 1976, and **Robert Palmer** was one of them. Already his previous albums had a sort of underground-within-the-underground following amongst some Soul fans, and sensibly he goes to the USA to record using the best musicians he can enroll to help him.

His voice has obviously studied the R&B and Soul techniques well, and such is the measure of his ability that black America found they were taking to him without giving the colour of his skin so much as a second thought. Would that our UK bigots were so tolerant!

The standout track "Man Smart, Woman Smarter" was smartly pulled off as a single, but so far at the time of writing, it doesn't seem to be getting the airplay it deserves. "Off The Bone" is positively atavistic... and **Robert Palmer** is positively soulful.

## 7 **Heatwave** "Too Hot To Handle" *GTO GYLP 013*

The amazing promise that this group showed with their single "Ain't No Half Steppin'" was satisfactorily fulfilled in this album, which was well conceived, well compiled and smartly packaged.

If ever there was a group in the Soul stakes that merited the title "most likely to succeed" then that group's **Heatwave**.

## 8 **Sun** "Live On, Dream On" *Capitol E-ST 11461*

The title track was a stunner that figured in my Top 20 singles for the year, but unlike so many newcomers who knock you out with their first single, **Sun** proved via this album that they were no mere flash in the pan, but a group who have many creative musical notions in their heads which are original and compelling.

May take years to break them in this territory, but I wouldn't mind betting that in 1977 they have a colossal hit in the States. A talented outfit that demand to be heard.

## 9 **The Commodores** "Hot On The Tracks" *Tamla-Motown STML 12031*

Not just the brilliant "Just To Be Close To You" but the whole of this LP sets a standard of excellence that makes **The Commodores** a name to be reckoned with.

But let's never forget that setting standards of excellence in Soul has been a pretty standard habit with *Tamla-Motown* over the years, and it's just that this LP is exceptional even by their consistently high standards. Perhaps "Right On The Tracks" would have been a more appropriate title!

## 10 **David Sanborn** "David Sanborn" *Warner Bros BS 2957 (Import)*

I wanted, if possible, to stick exclusively this year to UK released material, but **David Sanborn** is a saxophonist of such incredible talent and ability that it would have been grossly unfair to have left him out.

On this set he plays alto, soprano and also flute, and he and his team of ace musicians have created between them an album of outstanding beauty and musical integrity that will capture and entrance all who hear it. Music here is indeed the message, and it deserves your urgent pre-paid reply.

## Special compilations

**THIS YEAR** I've grouped compilation LPs into a category of their own because their appeal is so wide-ranging or limited (depending on how keen a singles collector you are).

Some are disaster areas too compiled by people who have little or no real awareness of the Soul perspectives of the catalogues they're dealing with, but to my mind the following represented best buys as well as imaginative and sympathetic handling on the part of the compilers. I've not put them in order of merit since this will depend on other fac-

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# Dave Godin:

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tors such as what you've already got and what your gaps are.

*DJM* probably can claim the lion's share of the compilation market, because not only do they have extensive American catalogues from which to pick repertoire, but they've got the right guys for the job in the shape of **David Yeats** and **Adam White**.

"Monster Soul" *DJD 28031* (Mid-price double set) dug up all sorts of half-forgotten treasures and at long last resurrected the old-time classics such as the grievously neglected **Evie Sands** "Take Me For A Little While", **King Curtis** "Soul Twist", **Dave Baby Cortez** "The Happy Organ" as well as many others.

OK, so everybody's already got "The Boy From New York City" about 20 times on 60 different albums, but with a few exceptions, all these tracks merit some kind of second time around whirl.

Much the same sort of comments apply to "Back In The Streets" *DJM 22051* (Mid-price) with the ever-lasting "Spring" by **Birdlegs & Pauline**, and the first ever UK airing for the splendid "Duchess of Earl" by **The Pearl-ettes**.

*ABC* had a really mouth-watering set with their 16 track "Soul Food" *ABCL 5179*. A good cross section of the many Soul styles

and idioms that *ABC* have captured on wax over the years this one really does live up to its sub-title of "Solid Gold". Don't miss it.

The same company also got together another 16 track set under the title of "Out On The Streets Again" *ABCL 5192* this time leaning towards the Northern Soul market more than any other. And why not?

Any LP containing **Jackie Lee's** immaculate "Darkest Days" and **The Marvelous** under-rated "I Do", must be worth a listen, and **Adam White** writes the sort of extensive sleeve notes that make everyone an instant expert!

*RCA*, despite having engineered and managed the career of one of Soul's true giants, **Sam Cooke**, do not generally have all that good an image amongst Soul fans in this country. Why this is I can't imagine since they've not only issued hundreds of first rate Soul sides over the past decade and more, but some are surely some of the greatest Soul sides of all time.

However, maybe "Jumping At The Go-Go" *RS 1066* will help to correct this erroneous prejudice. 20 unashamedly Northern tracks that collectively reflect a wealth of talent from the mid-60s, it's well to remember now that Soul fans in those days generally dismissed this sort of sound as "too pop".

It was left to younger and less-cluttered minds to rescue this vibrant music from the neglect it had received, and without a doubt this is the best LP ever compiled strictly for the Northern market.

In fact, one could go so far as to say that it is in fact the first 100% totally Northern Soul LP, and it was entirely appropriate that the task of doing the sleeve notes should have been put in the capable hands of **Richard Searling**.

Finally, at the tail end of the year, the *Philadelphia International* label reminds us that Philly still is a potent force on the contemporary Soul scene, and "Phillybusters Vol. IV" *PIR 81658* continues a series which demonstrates that special sound we've now absorbed into the mainstream of our music.

If you've not heard "I Love Music" by **the O'Jays** for some time, put this on and hear it again, and it typifies that incredible lift and good-time feel of mellow happiness that is so much a part of the Philly Sound.

## The Also-Rans

1976 was such a rich year for good Soul releases in the UK, that when I compiled my annual Top 20 for the last edition, I thought it would be a good idea to list all the other singles which were issued on UK labels which I considered to be of either outstanding or extra worthy merit. It might prove a useful check list in case there are any you missed out on altogether.

The order is strictly alphabetical: (and remember, there may be one or two that I missed out altogether on myself)

**Ruby Andrews** "I Got A Bone To Pick With You" *ABC*  
**Joan Armatrading** "Love And Affection" *A&M*

**Roy Ayers Ubiquity** "Mystic Voyage" *Polydor*

**Reuben Bell** "Asking For The Truth" *Contempo*

**Blue Magic** "Freak-N-Stein" *Atlantic*

**Brass Construction** "Changin'" *United Artists*

**Chairman of the Board** "You've Got Extra Added Power In Your Love" *Invictus*

**Commodores** "Just To Be Close To You" *Motown*

**The Detroit Spinners** "The Rubberband Man" *Atlantic*

**Charles Earland** "We All Live In The Jungle" *Mercury*

**Yvonne Fair** "Walk Out The Door If You Wanna" *Tamla-Motown*

**James Fountain** "Seven Day Lover" *Cream*

**Patrick Gammon** "Party Hardy" *Galaxy*

**Al Green** "Keep Me Crying" *London*

**The Fantastic Puzzles** "Come Back" *Right On!*

**Hall & Oates** "Sara Smile" *RCA*

**Heatwave** "Ain't No Half Steppin'" *GTO*

**Fred Hughes** "Oo Wee Baby, I Love You" *DJM* (Best reissue of the year)

**Gloria Jones** "I Ain't Going Nowhere" *EMI*

**Frederick Knight** "I Wanna Play With You" *Stax*

**Lovequake** "Lovequake" *Power Exchange*

**Grover Mitchell** "What Hurts" *Vanguard*

**Dorothy Moore** "Misty Blue" *Contempo*

**Dorothy Moore** "Funny, How Time Just Slips Away" *Contempo*

**Jackie Moore** "Tired Of Hiding" *RCA*

**The Notations** "Think Before You Stop" *Curiom*

**Ohio Players** "Who'd She Coo?" *Mercury*

**The Originals** "Just To Be Closer To You" *Tamla-Motown*

**Robert Palmer** "Man Smart, Woman Smarter" *Island*

**Paris & Clark** "United We Stand" *Elektra*

**Ann Peebles** "I Still Love You" *London*

**James & Bobby Purify** "Morning Glory" *Mercury*

**David Ruffin** "Heavy Love" *Tamla-Motown*

**Boz Scaggs** "Lowdown" *CBS*

**The Sharonettes** "Broken Hearted Melody" *Black Magic*

**Bunny Sigler** "Girl Don't Make Me Wait" *London*

**Dooley Silverspoon** "Game Players" *Seville*

**The Supremes** "I'm Gonna Let My Heart Do The Walking" *Tamla-Motown*

**Bettye Swann** "Heading In The Right Direction" *Atlantic*

**Evelyn Thomas** "Love's Just Not An Illusion" *20th Century*

**Ultrafunk** "Gotham City Boogie" *Contempo*

**John Valenti** "Anything You Want" *Ariola America*

**War** "Low Rider" *Island*

**War** "Summer" *Island*

**Wild Cherry** "Play That Funky Music" *Epic*

**Reuben Wilson** "Got To Get Your Own" *Chess*

**The World Column** "So Is The Sun" *Capitol*

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