

I hate to say I told you so, but . . .

1977 is a very special year for me. I'll have been writing for "Blues & Soul" for ten years, and I'll have been a fan and collector of the music (under its various names of R&B, Rock & Roll and Soul) of black America for twenty-five years. Like my collection, the 45 rpm single in Britain is also a quarter of a century old, and 1977 is also the Centenary of the gramophone record itself.

I hope over the years I've told you something worthwhile on a few occasions, but it looks very much as if 1977 is going to see the fulfillment of one of my more baleful prophecies which was that when Soul is finally poised to breakthrough to the irreversible big-time in Britain, then many will conveniently forget that its roots are in black America, and it may well be that it is paraded as a "British" phenomena.

All very comforting for the British record industry of course, less so for Tin Pan Alley who may see publishing revenues seeping back to American composers, but when faced with the inevitable, people often have a strange way of accommodating to it, ensuring that if the flood-gates are going to burst, then this inevitability will be maximised to their own best possible advantage.

I have often said that what the British industry most dreads is a return to the situation in the 50s where American recordings dominated the charts, and faced with a "Soul music explosion", you might be forgiven for thinking that this would be inevitable once Soul takes over in the public consciousness. You underestimate the forces that are at work and which black America has stacked against them!

Already you may have noticed in the British "black" musical press a softening up process at work which results in more and more attention being paid to British acts and performers than their American counterparts.

Valid excuses can quite easily be given for this. The UK acts are to hand, their American counterparts are far away and difficult to reach. We might all know that Irma Thomas has more talent in her walk than Tina Charles has in her dance, but Tina gets the coverage and Irma gets the brush-off.

Since publication is, so regrettably, geared to advertising revenue, in these chill economic days it is all too easy to let the record companies decide via their advertising budgets which of the many acts they represent, shall have priority. As pioneers of "disco music" in Britain, "Blues & Soul" had every right and justification to add this appendage to its cover when years of hard-working effort were finally beginning to show results in terms of sales and chart-entries.

The very term "Northern Soul" was invented and first used by

"Blues & Soul" over five years ago, and has since passed into everyday language, and for over ten years we have always maintained that the best disco music is Soul music. We have never felt any need to apologise for using this term, which, all the while it was synonymous with Soul in our minds, was never a "dirty" word.

Now those to whom the word "disco" (as in "disco dross") was once a dirty word, are forced, by a variety of considerations chiefly to do with survival and the ability of the record industry to use a little bit of muscle on influencing editorial policies, to come to terms with reality, and faced with a double-think complete about-face, now claim themselves as pioneers of the genre.

But, if this means more promotion and coverage for black American records, then it is no bad thing, and can be seen as a belated triumph for common-sense and a listening to the streets as opposed to dictating to them.

However, there are more straws in the wind. Increasingly we see British "Soul" referred to in a way that does not any longer regard it as either a fluke, or a clever imitation, or the exception that proves the general rule that Soul music is almost totally American and black. If it's no longer that, then it's about time we thought up a new term that reaffirmed ownership and roots.

"Soul" is just a word like any other, and is not sacred just as "R&B" wasn't, but let's at least know what it is we like before the term is wrenched from its former meaning forever, so that if a new term does emerge then perhaps it will be less liable to being stolen and altered.

If there were just one point I had to make about why I am proud to have been associated with "Blues & Soul" for a decade, it would be the irrefutable fact that during its life it had consistently and constantly demonstrated its belief that "R&B" or "Soul" music is the almost exclusive province of black America.

Of course there has been a 10% area that perhaps has disatisfied those who are very conservative in their definition, but taken in toto, such a margin of deviation is in itself exceptionally small over such a period. And American has tended to come before blackness, and in my view this in itself is exceptionally healthy and wise.

As I see it, in the coming decade it is not so much the awareness that white artists are capable of making Soul records that will be important, so much as the awareness that more and more black artists will be making records that are *not* Soul.

When a poll result places Ella Fitzgerald (a lady for whom I have the deepest respect as a vocalist, but whom no way would I define as



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either "Soul" or "R&B") as "Best R&B Vocalist — Female", then what's to stop Shirley Bassey being voted "Top Soul Singer — Female", another year?

The error, gentle reader, comes from an undue emphasis on *race* as opposed to *aesthetics*, and if my ten years of writing about music have taught me anything, it is the fact that the music of black America has been handicapped and dogged by a British media that thinks racialist first, and aesthetics second.

The difficulty and reluctance of media people to define "Soul" ensures that the swiftest shortcut is to use skin pigmentation instead, and despite the appeal there is in having a human race that comes in a variety of differing hues, mere "colour" is a poor substitute for talent... or breadth of imagination come to that!

Only a few months ago, an editorial described my thinking as "dangerous" because I am democratic enough to concede that I have no special rights or qualifications in terms of years or aesthetic taste, to dictate to people what records they should or should not buy!

If disco dross rules, then being in a minority is so entirely familiar to me that it doesn't worry me, but that

said, neither does it give me the right to argue that this is other than my own, personal opinion, or to assume that the majority are wrong.

It may well be something lacking in myself that prevents me sharing their enthusiasm for something that leaves me cold.

If a "UK Soul Explosion" is about to be unleashed upon us, I think that the majority of readers of "Blues & Soul" will see through it and act accordingly. Some might even welcome it so that the real thing might return to its rightful family and friends of hard core dedicated supporters, and like other fads and crazes, it is certain that it will eventually pass.

Whether or not this will mean that the real thing will have to wait another five years to breakthrough it's hard to say because in that time even the real thing may change beyond what we are able to envisage today, but whatever the outcome, you can rest assured that "Blues & Soul" will remain true to the genuine article, as indeed the majority of you will too.

For my part, I promise to keep on keeping on; perhaps (and only perhaps!) when Jean Plum is singing "Look At The Boy" on Top Of The Pops will I think of relaxing my efforts a bit!

Dave's Raves

1. Andraé Crouch & the Disciples "You Gave To Me" *DJM*

It's always struck me as rather odd how some people regard gospel as something over and beyond Soul, as if the two weren't in fact inseparably and irreversibly intertwined together. I'll grant that technically this is, I suppose, a "religious" record, but at heart it's as secular as I am! Taken as pure Soul it is a joy to hear, and standout vocal backups from the Disciples as well as strident but melodic strings, make this a real winner for Andraé Crouch.

And the lyrics? Well, they could just as well be any girl thinking aloud about her guy... A superlative release that puts it all on the line without ambiguity or concessions.

2 Darlene Love "Lord If You're A Woman" *Phil Spector International*

More religious sentiment I suppose, but it opens up sounding like a warm-up jam session in a cavernous and yet-to-fill-up ballroom. Such an evocative sound too — much like the floor used to sound from the distance of the cloakroom of the Lyceum on those esoteric Sunday afternoon sessions that have since passed in legend.

Darlene Love has always had a following over here and this won't disappoint her fans, or those of Phil Spector in general come to that. Older readers will recognise and warm to the two-bar string phrase that is briefly inserted at one point, and which is lifted straight from *The Crystals*' "Then He Kissed Me".

Great stuff; may 1977 see a revival of this sort of earthy Soul sound. Help make it a hit.

3 Norman Connors "We Both Need Each Other" *Buddah*

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Michael Henderson and Phyllis Hyman take vocal honours on this super track from the "You Are My Starship" LP, which is almost as great as the title track outing.

Working along at a steady pace from a lyrical opening, by the time it ends it's into a pretty heavy groove with swinging undertow. More subliminal eroticism, and this should (but probably won't) be their next single over here.

4 Earth Wind & Fire "Imagination" *CBS*

The stand-out track on their sterling "Spirit" LP, it has overwhelming beauty and strength, finely orchestrated and handled with skill and finesse by multi-talented **Earth, Wind & Fire**. It is the sort of side that will win them many new followers in this country.

The criss-cross harmonic blends towards the end are truly masterful and utterly splendid, and can stand up to repeated plays and spins.

5 Billy Preston "Girl" *A&M*

From his outstanding "Billy" LP (which has been retitled all sorts of other things elsewhere), **Billy Preston** maintains his usual high musical standards on this infectious and groovy number. Obviously influenced by his work with **Stairsteps** of late, it has cosmic vibes, a repetitive hook, and a fascinating bag-groove that just don't let up.

6 The Barkays "Summer Of Our Love" *Mercury*

Hidden away on the B side of their latest release, this is a mid-tempo side that'd do anyone credit as an A side. Good vocal styling with a femme chorus trying to steal the limelight from the male leads, it has a nice backing, and is altogether meritorious enough to draw to your attention.

7 Dorothy Moore "For Old Times' Sake" *Contempo*

Lovely lark back on another lovely song which has shades of slow country in the great tradition pioneered by such Queens of Soul as **Esther Phillips, Betty Lavette, Irma Thomas** and others.

It's hard to predict its UK chart chances since the UK market is so entirely unpredictable these days, but I'd like to see it hit. Strings and horns arranged by **Wardell Quezergue** whose name I can at last pronounce, and whose great talents are constantly shining through on sides I like.

8 Doris Troy "Lyn' Eyes" *Midland International*

There is always room in my heart for **Doris Troy**! Being entirely ignorant of any other versions of this song it came entirely fresh to me and **Doris** is such a great singer that she manages to project her whole personality across through the grooves to you. This is not another "Just One Look" or "I'll Do Anything", but it's her alright, and that's enough for me!

9 Sly & the Family Stone "Blessing In Disguise" *Epic*

From his "Heard Ya Missed Me,

Well I'm Back" LP, this is a subdued but highly musically evolved **Sly**. Neo-classical overtones abound, and its mid-tempo groove perfectly blends with **Sly** on lead and **the Family** giving vital backup.

A track to hear a few times perhaps before you get hooked on it, but give it time and I'm confident you'll love it too. The whole LP is good too, and particular praise should be given for the good artwork on the front and back sleeve. Yes **Sly**, we *did* miss ya!

10 Junior Walker "Whopper Bopper Show Stopper" *Motown*

People like **Junior Walker** give a great continuity to the Soul music scene. It seems like they've always been around, and they can always be counted upon give satisfaction. This, the title track from his latest album, is pure **Junior Walker** at his dazzling best, and is a gutsy barrage of sound that moves and grooves away as only **Junior Walker** knows how. Must, surely, be picked off as a future single? I hope so.

Run-out groove

PERHAPS I was a little harsh over **Clive Richardson's** application for a spot on Radio 1 and the petition he launched to get the Beeb more involved in the music. In my haste to put two and two together, the circumstantial evidence perhaps gained the upper hand in my thinking, and I now feel sure that the two events were not inter-related. So, apologies to **Clive** if my rush to judgement caused him any hurt, and my condolences (now that we know what the Beeb have decided we *can* have!) to him on not getting the slot.

In the ten years we have known each other, **Clive** and I have crossed swords on only a very few occasions, so I'm happy now to publicly declare our reconciliation, and at the same time pay tribute to the untiring and constant efforts on behalf of Soul music that **Clive** has put in over the years...

Ian Levine recently working hard completing new sides with **Doris Jones**, and **Barbara Pennington's** side looks as if it's really going places in the USA via the disco circuit where it it currently nicely placed in their charts...

The speed and efficiency with which **RCA** is currently getting into Soul-gear is quite breath-takingly admirable, and I predict that before 1977 is out, **RCA** and associated logos will be firmly entrenched in the UK Soul market... With the departure of **Nigel Grainge** to form the **Ensign** label with bionic **Chris Hill**, the vacancy of A&R man at **Philips** has been filled by former Ted and good guy **Johnny Stainz** who is a non-nonsense dealer and sharp-shooter who will surely deliver the goods and do right by Soul fans in Britain. I wish him every success, and have every confidence in his ability to succeed...

Sad that **Pye** were unable to get **Norman Connors' "You Are My Starship"** away over here since I was hoping that if this were a hit it might go some way towards restoring their

status in the eyes of UK Soul fans.

Alan McLachlan who is now in charge of all their American repertoire is sitting on so much good unreleased material that nightly the nation's importers must offer up prayers that he remain always in his perpetual state of oblivious unawareness...

Gladys Knight & the Pips' recent brief visit hardly likely to satisfy their legion of fans outside of London, and the film "Pipe Dreams" is still without a UK distributor... Belated praise due to the **BBC** for their first-rate series on BBC 1 "The Devil's Music". Unfortunately it often clashed with rare films being shown at the same time on BBC 2, but the parts I did see were fascinating and absorbing...

Coillion sent me a very interesting import over Christmas entitled "Funky Christmas" featuring **Lou Donaldson, John Edwards, the Impressions, Willie Jackson, Margie Joseph and Luther**. Normally this type of excursion into the jingle-bell stakes leaves me cold, but surprisingly, this was first rate, and could well become another preennial like the old **Phil Spector** Christmas set. **John Edwards' "The Christmas Song"**, **Luther's "May Christmas Bring You Happiness"** and **the Impressions' "Silent Night"** were particularly enjoyable, and let's hope that next year it is issued here to garner in Soul Christmas airplays...

Two immaculate double albums to commemorate two giants of R&B music: "Big Boss Man" from **DJM** bringing us again 28 of **Jimmy Reed's** most memorable sides at **Vee Jay**, and for me, an absolute treasure in the double-LP "Howlin' Wolf" and is now available repackaged by **All Platinum**.

Philips intend importing it in quantity and it will be available at any record shop. 24 tracks of outstanding merit by a colossus of the R&B idiom, well packaged, well noted and well mastered onto disc again. This is a set that belongs in every collection because it indicates where and how today's music all began, and more importantly, is, in its own right, an example of sheer perfection and artistry in American music...

Madeline Bell is currently (five long years way overdue) collecting rave press notices for herself with her appearances at 'The Talk Of The Town', and **DJM's** re-release of the **Vee Jay** recording of "Black Nativity" reminds us just how long the waiting has been for **Madeline** since it was when she toured over here with this show in the 60s that she decided to settle here. Formerly issued on the **Stateside** label to begin, "Black Nativity" was a huge commercial success and even now still sounds timeless and joyous...

Finally, congratulations to both **Capitol** and **Contempo** labels. To the former for issuing at last **the Tavares'** previously unissued "Check It Out" LP, and to the latter for making available **Bettye Swann's** until-now-quite-rare LP "Make Me Yours".

•Until next time then. Keep the faith — right on now!

INTER CITY SOUL CLUB (UK)

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New Calendar

Members — have you seen our new style JANUARY to APRIL 1977 Calendar yet? Send large s.a.e. or stamp for your copy. It contains all the Club dates and venues for the Spring of 1977.

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19/20 Sat/Sun — 1am-9am at Yate, Nr. Bristol.

"BEACON" ALLNIGHTER.*
25th Friday — 8pm-1am at Pavilion Ballroom, WEYMOUTH. CLUB NIGHT.*
26th Saturday — 8pm-12 at Ling Centre.

NORTHAMPTON. CLUB NIGHT.*

*substantial discounts for club members.

VENUES MARCH

CLUB NIGHTS — NORTHAMPTON, WORTHING, WEYMOUTH. "BEACON" ALLNIGHTER at Yate.

VENUES APRIL

CLUB NIGHTS — NORTHAMPTON and WEYMOUTH "BEACON" ALLNIGHTER — *Second Anniversary*, EASTER MONDAY ALLDAYER — OXFORD SHOW visits STROUD and CIRENCESTER.

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