

## DJ Power!

ANYONE WHO is even vaguely interested in Soul music will know that it has always had to rely very much on non-broadcasting DJs to sustain itself over here, and over the past three years or so, the influence of these DHs has come to be not more powerful, so much as officially recognised, and nearly all record companies have a special disco department to service and liaise with non-radio jocks.

Yesterday's rebels have become part of the establishment, and whilst this has been beneficial in some ways, it has produced some less desirable side effects which create difficulties for certain types of Soul music.

Years ago, DJs were usually a band of rugged individualists who, feeling themselves considered of little use or value by the record industry, were able to operate in a foot-loose and totally free way, which was actually helped by the fact that the vast majority of them were also fans of the music and often responsible for the first thousand or so sales on any Soul side.

It is a strange paradox of human nature that one tends generally to value that which one has paid for more than that which comes free, and when DJs used to buy nearly all of their repertoire they were highly selective and choosy, and, what's more important, played it because they'd spent hard earned cash on acquiring it.

The situation is now very different, and nearly all DJs are the recipients of an avalanche of vinyl each week, much of which has only the vaguest connection with disco, and often none whatsoever with Soul. The temptation to "play it safe" is bigger than ever before in the history of Soul music.

I have often been struck by the fact that often, those DJs who have the most to say for themselves in print, then list the most conservative, safe, and commercially orientated playlist imaginable.

And on reflection, is "giving the people what they want" either a sound operating policy, or in the long term, any help to anyone other than the DJ who has weekly to convince his management that his services are worth retaining?

As I see it, the DJ should have more back-bone than this, and should realise that part of his function is to help mould tomorrow's tastes as well. Or when tomorrow comes, he may find that tastes have changed so radically that nobody wants to listen to what he's playing any more!

Right now, the British music scene is wide open for any new trend that wants to come along and take it by storm. It is a pre-Beatles situation again, and one that could well work to Soul's advantage, but this is hardly likely when we have DJs who would still rather spin "Young Hearts Run Free" again rather than take a chance on the latest Rufus single or one from Earth, Wind & Fire.

In many ways, British DJs have always been comfortably cushioned by America because it is there that



## The Dave Godin Column

sides have to be built from nothing to something, and the problem of decision and evaluation has so often all been done for them by the time imports begin to filter over.

As Chris Hill so rightly pointed out recently however, the American disco scene has NOT been responsible for putting one single record into the American charts (in fairness, it's doubtful if any of America's non-radio DJs would consider this part of their aims even), whereas here there are a few sides that can be cited as having made it via clubs first, and radio second.

Even in the North where rugged individualism once ruled to a fascinating degree, the tendency over the past year has been to revert back to a "trusted and true" formula, although the special circumstances that surround that particular scene create special reasons for so doing, and in this regard I respect their predicament.

At this moment however, there is still a sizeable gulf between Britain's Soul acceptance and America's, and unless non-radio DJs get behind it and make efforts to bridge that gap, I fear that we are

going to get to a situation similar to that of the mid-60s when so many brilliant Soul sides fell by the way-side simply because they couldn't recruit enough friends and allies to help them make it. For all the pious platitudes we've heard since his death, let's never forget that Otis Redding never had one million-seller *during* his life.

As I see it, DJs have a tremendously important contribution to make to Soul music's progress in this country — there's a lot of truth in the saying that they're "too good for radio", but increasingly many of them are becoming more concerned with keeping their names on record company mailing lists rather than keeping the faith, and although they may not realise it yet, time will yet pass them by.

It is no use getting the buzz on a record and then saying "I've had that record sitting at home for weeks" because this is really just a confession of lack of expertise and skill in appreciating potential in a side.

Neither is "playing it safe" in itself reprehensible (after all, conservatism has its part to play in all the arts), but having said that, let's not then hear these same people telling us what's wrong with the record industry, and how they could run the A&R departments better and more efficiently than those presently engaged in it.

One can't have it both ways, and if a DJ has to rely on ideas and feedback reaching him from his customers before he'll take a chance on a side, then in my view he is not fulfilling his job properly and lowers the status and value of the very name DJ.

Disc jockeys should remember always that "jockey" is the second part of their title, and as such they should be prepared to lead the field against all comers and know how to spot a winner when the odds are still 100-1 against.

Only then will they merit the cheers of the punters as they race past the winning post, and though rewards might be small and intangible, at least they'll have that soul-satisfaction of knowing that where they lead others followed.

## Run-out groove

A SAD note on which to open this time, in recording the death by suicide of **David Gilmartin** who was resident in New York, and was a well known figure on the disco scene over there. Sad too that it is only now that I heard of it in conversation with **Key Roberts** (who assumed I already knew), but the tragedy occurred some months ago.

**David** had been keen to feed disco info back to us via "Blues & Soul", and although we had never met personally, it is sad to learn of his death under such tragic circumstances, and one can only pass on one's condolences to his widow.

Well, at last all those rumours are coming out into the open, and **Willie Dixon** and **Muddy Waters** are both suing their publishing company for unpaid royalties which

they allege they are owed from several years through hazy and indifferent accounting. It may take a year to prepare it all for court, but it'll no doubt have a big impact on future contracts which are signed in the USA.

Although unable to attend, I'm sure that the Wigan Casino Oldies All-Nighter Anniversary will be a huge success. Thanks largely to the pioneering enthusiasm of **Dave Evison**, this winning formula has managed to please nearly everyone, both newcomers to the scene, and the old-timers who never really took to the more modern sounds that America produced at the beginnings of the 70s. Our congratulations to all concerned, and **Dave Evison** and **Mike Walker** in particular.

According to "Music Week", present demand for 45s is such that records are having to be pressed abroad and shipped back into the UK. **EMI** who manufacture about half of all the singles in the UK Top 50 said that to meet present demand they needed about 100 45 pressing machines, but were having to do the best they could with about half that number. All very encouraging since I have always believed that a buoyant singles market eventually benefits everybody.

Had a super time as guest of **RCA** at the **Daryl Hall** and **John Oates** concert, and those who persist in dismissing this talented duo merely because they are white should have heard their rendering of "Sara Smile" which was so soulful it hurt.

After the show **Daryl** and **John** were full of life at their reception and were highly complimentary about the article I'd written about them last summer, and had some highly complimentary things to say about B&S in general.

Nice too to meet **Rodney Burbeck** who has contributed so much to the UK Soul scene from the unheralded side-lines, and **Greg Lynn** too whose enthusiasm for his job is infectious and refreshing. Also **Shirley, Lorraine, James** and **Ron** as well as our own **Richard Searsling**, who all helped to make it a really memorable evening (not that anyone who saw **Ron's** little caper is likely to forget that in a hurry!)

Nice to see BBC TV repeating their series "The Friendly Invasion", particularly the vintage film of jitterbug and Big Apple champions performing in a way that makes the most far-out Northern dance look simple by comparison.

At the time of writing, the results of the B&S Annual Poll have not yet been compiled, and **John** is not giving any hints as to how it's shaping up, but I'm betting that this year is going to see some really radical shifts with old favourites gone, and established ones consolidating their popularity.

I'm always interested in seeing which of the newer artists get voted into the final results, and particularly for this past year, when ultra-talented newcomers have not really been all that thick on the ground.

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