

What's happening to the Northern scene?

THE USUAL slow build up after Christmas seems to have culminated in a more widespread post-Christmas depression than in past years. I have been spoken to by many people in the last month or so asking me what is happening to the Northern Scene. Is Northern Soul falling apart? Is the scene dying? are just a couple of the questions... where really I think the question should be, "Why doesn't everyone else agree with *my own* particular ideas of Northern Soul?"

Not that I'm putting these questions down. It's just that I think they've got wrapped up in fall out from the political infighting amongst jocks and promoters that has raged for the last couple of years.

From a state where the Northern Soul Scene was a grass-roots underground scene with jocks and club owners/promoters as much fans as the people who pay their entrance money, the interest of record companies and the National Press had those self-same people vying for the ego-boots and the money until friendly rivalry became immersed in a battle for honours and financial rewards.

The jocks paid for their own adverts which stated that each club played better music than the others. The club owners felt it necessary to put down other clubs in order to boost their own figures and income. Northern Soul became, and remains big-money.

People being what they are — essentially competitive — this has rubbed off with the fans until we have arrived at the point where it is no longer necessary to talk to Frank Elson about how good their own favourite club is; they now find it necessary to throw in a few derogatory remarks about the jocks at the club up the road, following that up with a comment on the senses of people who will pay good money to enter that club.

A few years ago, long before I worked for this mag, Blues and Soul magazine campaigned deliberately and forthrightly for a spreading of Soul music... to spread the word it was necessary to unite all Soul fans, no matter what their particular leaning, in a struggle for more recognition for Soul music.

I've tried to carry this thought on in my writings, remembering, as I can, a time when my friends and I had to spend a lot of time and money just to find a club that would play our type of music.

Those of us who were particularly fond of one branch of Soul music wouldn't have dreamed of complaining when a club concentrated on another branch. The less shy amongst us carried their record boxes up to the deejay position and contrived to get them played. That's how the top jocks around today got started in most cases.

Now there's no way that I'm going to advocate any kind of socialistic revolt against money on the

CHECKIN' IT OUT



Frank Elson's fortnightly Soul Tonic, in which our intrepid hero infiltrates notable Soul havens and reports on UK Soul activity.

scene. Wages *have* to be paid, records *have* to be bought and overheads *have* to be lowered... the tax man wants *his* cut. What I do want to see more of is people becoming a little more *tolerant* in their treatment of other people's opinions.

Let's have some *positive* thinking instead of the other. Instead of spending your time knocking the opposition (i.e. those with tastes different from your own) try *enjoying* your own scene and leave the other people to their own scene. That way you may find that you have more time to enjoy yourself!

Samantha's, Sheffield

FOR THE last six years Samantha's, in Sheffield has promoted Northern Soul in some shape or form. From Friday nights, to Wednesdays, to Sundays to All-nighters and All-dayers, Samantha's has been there and is carrying it on.

John Vincent has been standing behind the decks for all that time. They've had *good* periods, *great* periods and *downright terrible* periods. The popular All-nighters closed recently but a Wednesday night scene, 8pm to 1am continues the good fight.

Figures on my last visit a week or so ago weren't world-shattering, in fact the manager told me that they were about as low as he could allow them to be without losing the Northern Soul night altogether but in wandering around and listening to the music, talking to people and watching the dancers, I have a feeling that Samantha's is not licked yet.

Reasons for this optimism are varied but there is one that covers all. True John Vincent is one of the hardest working, most dedicated jocks on the scene. He is continually working to discover new sounds and is one of the top jocks who ac-

tually listens to requests. But it isn't that really. It is the punters, paying customers, the kids who will hold this club together.

That abstract "*atmosphere*" which we all write about is there. It's the sound, touch and smell of people enjoying themselves (*aren't we in a philosophical mood this week Elson?*). I've found it in Cricket clubs, British Legions, Social clubs, Mecca monoliths and dance-halls with water running down the walls when nobody is in the place. I've found it in Wrexham, in Manchester, in Wigan, in London, in Edinburgh and in Northwich (to name just a few!) and it's there in Sheffield.

To come back down to earth, let's have a look at some of the details... you know the time and the day; cost is 65 pence, which is higher than some mid-week discos, lower than others, and jocks are of course John Vincent and Howard Sorsby, a gentleman who's second name is about as well known as my middle one.

Howard "does" the oldies and with a little bit of luck his list of current favourite oldies at the club will appear in B&S.

Some of Johns current top sounds include:—"This Gets To Me", Pookie Hudson (*Jamie*); "I Belong To You", Milton Wright (*Satiron*) — vocal to "The Gallop" — "Interplay", Derek And Ray (*RCA*); "Don't You Ever Care", Leslie Uggams (*Atlantic*); "Ready On Ready", Donnie Vann (*Reddi*); "Gotta Tell Somebody" Chris Bartley (Vando); "Nothing You Can Do", Bobby Womack (*Souffle*). I was suffering one of those colds that makes you deaf (*yer what?*) but as John repeated everything about six times I may possibly have got a few of those correct!

As far as music policy goes, John features a bit of everything, New York, stompers, oldies, so long as its good he'll play it. The management

has decreed a move towards more modern, commercial music in an attempt to catch a few more people but with the openmindedness of most Sam's regulars that will not spoil anything.

St. Ives, not by the sea...

AS MY body absolutely refuses to move outside my home on a Saturday night until Starsky And Hutch have shot the perpetrators, I have found it impossible to visit the East Anglian Soul Club's St. Ives All-nighter for some time (Wigan is close enough to get there after "Match Of The Day") so my good friend Gary Mader of Cambridge, just a spit and a whistle (*filthy habit that, Mader*) from St Ives, volunteered, under pain of death (*and a bribe of a quarter of dolly mixtures*), to ascertain some information (*get the lowdown*) for me.

While sitting in the car waiting for the queue and/or the rain to go away, Gary realised that there were a lot of people going in that night. In fact Ken Cox, jovial promoter and the Bay City Rollers oldest fan (*only kidding Ken — give me my knee-caps back*), admitted that they were having the best night ever. A quick perusal of that night's new memberships evidenced the fact (*I'll spit this dictionary out in a while*) that people were coming from all over the country. It is my information also that St. Ives is rapidly becoming a popular place and a reasonable alternative to the established scenes.

While talking to the jocks, Gary didn't know about my hatred of cover-ups and as these seem to be on the up and up again I've missed them out. Thus we have a list of only two tips from Ginger: "Since You're Gone", Barons (*RCA*); "Mayflower", Alfie Kahn (*Belgian LP track*).

A few to add to John Vincent's list above include: "Long Time", Black And Ward (*RCA Canadian*); "Astral Strut", Mystic Moods (*no label*); "Let's Do Some Good Timing", Alvin Cash (*UK President*) — this last track is known as by Butch Baker but Max Rees, Gary's mate, has it and thus revealed the true identity.

Soul Sam will never change — after insisting that labels be kept a secret, he gave five tips including the labels of two of them. While I usually insist on labels I don't see why Sam's important contribution to the scene should be ignored because of my own ideas so here they are:—"These Things Will Keep Me Loving You", Blue Sharks (*Gran Prix*); "I'm Asking You", New People (*All Star*); "Baby Sugar I Love You", Peince Ella And Sydney Jones — described by Sam as the "best stomper since Lou Pride"; "Prove It To Me", Betty Fikes and The Passion; "Motown", Camotions — similar in technique to "The Best Disco In Town" but featuring all Motown songs.

Brian Rae's Oldie contribution to

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Checkin-It-Out:

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this epic is/will be featured in the oldies section of the mag. — this week, or next, or sometime.

Manhattans, great!

ONE THING that did get me to miss S & H one Saturday evening was the concert in Manchester at the grandly named Appollo Theatre (formerly the ABC Cinema, Ardwick — wot's in a name etc. etc.). Considering I've hardly any time for **Harold Melvin** and his lot, I was surprised to find him headlining the bill with the knockout **Manhattans** as support (*that's not counting a strange band of people called "Love something" ... they've recently signed with a record company and were so bad that they must be assured of a chart placing soon.*)

Manhattans were just great, a group that send chills down my spine they've had success in this country recently and thoroughly deserved it. Ever since their first hit "A Million To One" on De Luxe in the States I knew it had to happen.

Harold and his lot were O.K., I

suppose. **Dave Evison** told me later that they were good and that **Sharon Paige** was great, but I left halfway through 'cos I didn't like the performance, nor the music. Reading that sentence back it sounds like an insult, it isn't meant to be. I just don't like the music or the performance.

Linda & the Funkies

THE SAME night saw me scraping the ice off the car for the second time as I headed for Wigan for the show from Linda and the Funky Boys. I likd their first single for Spark last year, "Sold My Rock 'N' Roll (Gave It Up For Funky Soul)" and their current release, "Climbing The Steps Of Love" is a big sound on Northern Scene and Disco scene together. Very strong recording.

After an earlier date in Manchester, Linda was tired, *very* tired when she arrived at Wigan, her voice had just about had it but when she went on stage she and the Funky Boys (one with a Liverpool accent) really tore into their show.

I've seen it before, particularly at All-nighters when an artiste doing a second show has shown all the symptoms of a fresh corpse before

the show but there has to be something wonderful inside such people to make them shrug it off and perform so energetically and so well.

Although I had arranged to meet Linda again after the show, I bowed to circumstances and left the lady to a very well-deserved rest. If her stage show and her current record are anything to go by, this young lady has a very bright future ahead of her.

Ending bits

GREAT as Linda's show was, there was *another* appearance of far greater significance the same week as far as **Mike Walker** is concerned. His wife **Kath** gave birth to a little girl, **Alison**, and this column and all at B&S send regards to mother, baby and to the proud daddy.

I bumped into **Eddie Antimes**, roughly one half of **Ginger and Eddie**, recently and was surprised and a little disappointed to find that he'd been sacked from St. Ives for playing modern sounds. It's down to the man with the money who he pays to work but as I have solid reports that Eddie's music was received well by the paying customers it doesn't seem to make sense to me.

Ginger and Eddie are of course working separately at other places

besides St. Ives but they'll be together on Sunday nights starting at February 13th at Burnley's Cats Whiskers when a Soul night starts up there again.

What's happened to all the clubs then? It seems an age since anyone's written to me telling me about their local club, now the back trouble is over with and I have a car that actually goes I'm looking for places to go and find that there doesn't seem to be so many as before. Write to me giving all the information and we'll see about a visit.

Rapidly getting sorted out are plans for a few visits to the South of England to have a look around the scene there. Soon as I've got me passport in order ...

1976 has been a bad year for me, what with the car and the bad back I've got used to staying at home instead of getting out and about ... it's up to you lot to get me out again. ... I have about three and half million letters waiting to be answered and I'll get round to them as soon as I can but *please* remember if you want an answer enclose a SAE — it costs a fortune otherwise and that's what I ain't got.

That's all for now, folks. Keep the letters coming and let's have the fax an' info on your local clubs and discos.