

# Northern Soul at the crossroads

THE ONCE private, enclosed and Soul-music orientated Northern Soul scene has, over the past couple of years, been the subject of much journalistic comment, and even now the split which divided the scene into a "traditionalist" and a "progressive" rivalry is still with us.

The letters continue to go back and forth, and feelings run high as to what exactly constitutes "Northern Soul" in 1977, and whilst all can be fairly calm when rival factions are on their own territory (Traditionalists at Wigan, and Progressives at Blackpool), when they overlap, as at the Ritz Manchester All-Dayers, the sense and feeling of rivalry can sometimes create bad vibes to such a degree that instead of producing a musical formula that pleases everyone, it satisfies no one.

For the record, we should perhaps reiterate that "Northern Soul" was simply a term I coined to describe records which were made in the mid-60s (generally), and which became popular in the North about five years later. (In 1967 I listed Denise LaSalle's "Love Reputation" in my personal Top 20 of the year, but it was not until 1971 that it was "discovered" in the North!)

Oldies then are nothing new in the Northern Soul spectrum, but what caused a major rift was the decision of Ian Levine and Colin Curtis who operate mainly at the Blackpool Mecca, to stop hunting elusive sounds from the past, and do what I had urged them to do five years before, and introduce records of a contemporary nature into their repertoire.



Maxine Nightingale

Since tastes were changing in the USA, this sudden jump from 1965 to 1975 was bound to seem dramatic, and, finding these newer sounds too way-out and unsettling for their liking, this situation created amongst those who felt that way, a back-lash reaction which was determined to cling to "stompers" more ardently than ever before.

They saw the very basis and foundation stone of "Northern Soul" under attack from disco-funk. The allegations and accusations flew back and forth, and like two opposing armies, people retrenched to their own citadels — Wigan's Casino being the haven for traditionalist and oldies fans, and Blackpool catering for modern, New-York-disco type audiences. With a change in the music came also a change in the life-styles of the two groups. Both wanted to show their differing allegiances by the way they dressed, and which DJs they highly regarded.

So fierce and heated has the battle become at times that truth often spilled over into fantasy, and when facts didn't quite fit then lies were made up and circulated. Right now word has it that Ian Levine and Colin Curtis both plan to quit working at the Mecca, and yet both assure me that nothing is further from their minds. A petition to "reclaim" the Mecca for "Northern Soul" is currently being circulated for signatures... as if the management could care so long as those paid admissions keep on coming!

WHAT PEOPLE tend to forget nowadays is the fact that before I coined the term "Northern Soul" the name of the game in those days was actually "Rare Soul" and rare it certainly was too. However, whilst many are quick to accuse DJs of having foresaken "Northern Soul" and not having kept faith with it, it was in fact the record pirates who did, and who still do, ensure that rare records do not stay rare for very long... or at least, stay rare just long enough for them to make a fat and profitable killing.

Only those DJs who can honestly say that they have never ever spun an EMI-disc or a pirate pressing can claim to have kept the faith with Northern or Rare Soul, for without their spins, the pirates would be bereft of customers.

And it is all too easy to blame the customers in this question of piracy. They are at the very bottom of the league inasmuch as they actually have to work and buy all the records in their collections, and just as one might settle for a reproduction antique if one couldn't afford the real thing, so they want the sound they get hooked on.

The manipulation that goes on is unscrupulous and relentless, and arguments become so defensive that you're left with the feeling that pirates are actually doing a public



## The Dave Godin Column

service! Which I'll believe when these thieves let the public have their product at cost price!

Although it might not immediately seem so, it was in fact record piracy that killed "Northern Soul" because if any "rare" scene becomes flooded with counterfeit material, it will in the end, depreciate the value of the original too. Many DJs, working in concert with pirates and sometimes with record shop outlets, deliberately built records which they knew they had a chance to make a financial profit from, and, if there was any crisis of conscience, they could also justifiably claim that by playing these sounds they were giving the public what they wanted, and keeping faith with the music too.

There would be some credibility in the claim to remaining faithful to the "old-type" sound if DJs so declared, had played heavily Maxine Nightingale's "Right Back Where We Started From", but it is a fact that not one Northern DJ played it, despite the fact that they had (in conjunction with *Pye*) leaned heavily on Nosmo King's sound-alike some month's earlier. Only if "traditionalists" are playing Maxine Nightingale's new one will I be impressed with their claims.

THE SWING at the Mecca towards modern New York disco sounds must also be viewed in conjunction with Ian Levine's career as a record producer too. If it didn't make sense five years previously to air newly released singles, one can sympathise with those who feel just the same way in 1977, but if on the other hand, Ian and Colin can hold their audience and keep the place buzzing, then obviously the formula has pleased an awful lot of people too.

Policy changes will always upset someone, but simply on the volume of records released and recorded the Mecca is going to find it much easier to keep coming up with fresh new sounds than those who want to perpetuate the idioms of the 60s.

In this respect, I have sympathy for both sides at dance floor level particularly since "Blues & Soul" pioneered through the written word a respect and dignity for Northern Soul which it should always have been accorded, and we have always defended it and acknowledged it as part and parcel of the Soul music scene.

It is ironic that those who once knocked it for its "commercialism" are now faced with a musical output from the States that is probably the most commercial product that black America has ever put down, but since I don't knock commercialism as such, this factor doesn't worry or upset me.

What does worry me is the fact that increasingly the young people at dance floor level are finding it more and more difficult to express their views and feelings, and already it is not without significance that the traditionalists have now produced their own magazine in the form of "Soul Time" in an effort to overcome this.

Music always goes in cycles and patterns, but if traditional Northern stomper fans feel they're being starved of new product these days, just stop and consider for a moment what a barren desert Deep Soul fans are currently having to walk through!

Despite everything, the only real barometer there is sales. When record companies note that a certain type of sound is selling, and selling well, then you can bet your life they're going to sit up and take notice. Traditionalists can easily show their strength of numbers by buying *RCAs* "Jumping At The Go Go" LP, and the progressives should help get Rufus established as a force over here. But above all, we must all remember that taste can never be governed by absolutes, and those who take an intolerant stand must bear in mind that the world is wide enough for all of us!

I'll not feed you platitudes about it all being Soul because that's self evident, but if you feel your viewpoint needs airing, then write me and let me know why you feel as you do. And who knows, you may convert someone to your viewpoint!

## Dave's Raves

1 Rufus "Everlasting Love" ABC  
From their immaculate "Ask

Rufus" LP, this is not the old Robert Knight number but an entirely original item that has such an intense funk groove that its compelling melody and rhythm border on deep hypnosis! It will really put you under its mesmeric spell, and Chaka Khan's vocals are in peak form.

Sooner or later Britain will have to lower its resistance to this outstandingly talented group (as they did previously for The Three Degrees) and although it's gratifying to see them well respected in the States, artistry such as theirs deserves world-wide international acclaim. Definitely one of the best sides I've heard so far this year!

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

Still high in my estimation, this is slowly being picked up on by several jocks around the country who report good reactions. Although only on the "Starship" LP at present, given the spins I think it'll grow quite a bit more yet.

3 Bobby Womack "One More Chance On Love" *CBS*

Although he seemed like a permanent fixture at *United Artists*, Bobby Womack is the latest to join the black exodus to *CBS*, and this track from his "Home Is Where The Heart Is" LP shows him in more gritty vocal form than he's used in recent years.

Perhaps a shade too raw to make it outside of strictly Soul circles, its slightly old fashioned charm won't harm it, and fans will be delighted that it proves the guy's as vibrant and original as ever.

4 Johnny Williams "You're Something Kinda Mellow" *Polydor*  
Sneaked out in 1974 by *Polydor* as a B side, this was rescued from obscurity entirely through the efforts of Richard Searling who backed it from the start. A really subtle side that actually is mellow and restrained, it perhaps needs a few spins before its full beauty is revealed.

Seldom have I heard a record that more perfectly captures the very soul of an all-nighter; it deserves the fullest support from us all.

5 Essence "I Ain't Much But I'm All I Got" *Epic*

Lovely ballad superbly performed and arranged, it could well surprise us all and become a big hit ... well, in 1981 perhaps! Certainly it's the sort of side that gains with every spin and it has so much going for it that Soul fans owe to themselves to seek it out and give it a listen. Big ballad fans will adore it. Classy, stylish, excellent.

6 The Chi-Lites "Vanishing Love" *Mercury*

Over a year ago I was knocked out by John Edward's immaculate *Aware* reading of this Sam Dees song, and I'm delighted that it's been rescued from oblivion via this groovy revival by the ever-loving Chi-Lites. It could be just what they need to give them their first hit on *Mercury*.

Not only will it spread its wings via disco spins, but it'll appeal right across the boards because the melody is infectious and winning. Don't miss it, I'd hate to see this as one of 1977's "also-rans".

7 Black Satin with Fred Parris

"Tears, Tears, Tears" *Buddah*

Powerful revival which has Fred Parris is surprisingly well-versed vocal form. The thunderous arrangement zips along and is both refreshing and irresistible, and must surely become a hit on the strength of the thunder-clap hook alone. Strings fans will wilt, discos delight. Ace outing.

8 Maxine Nightingale "Love Hit Me" *United Artists*

Super bouncy mover from much-loved thrush, this will delight all fans of mid-60s Soul, and if she gets another US hit with it she'll be responsible for some influential changes over there too. Bright, happy and a bit of a bitcheroonie, I hope it happens for her.

9 Double Exposure "Baby I Need Your Loving" *Salsoul*

From their "Ten Per Cent" LP, Double Exposure do a first rate job with their revival of the Four Tops classic, so heavily orchestrated that it'll no doubt click the world over. With a song like this they could hardly go wrong, but they stamp it with their own brand of originality and spirited it surely is.

10 Muscles "Love Is All I've Got" *Big Bear*

Muscles you may recall, were the group who made a little bit of British legal history some while back when they successfully appealed to the Race Relations Board when declined a booking as a Soul group on account of the fact that they're white. Since Soul must be judged on aesthetics alone, it was a verdict that I agreed with.

Their latest outing is a cracker, very much influenced by the Delfonics, but in its own right worthy of spins and attention. It is further proof (were any more needed!) that Soul is becoming an increasingly international commodity these days, and even five years ago it would have been inconceivable to even think that a sound like this could be captured in a British studio.

It'll be most interesting to see how it fares when released in the USA, but meantime it'll help establish them over here for sure.

## Run-out groove

Sad to see in "Billboard" that Isaac Hayes has filed to the tune of 6 million dollars, and has also given up his label *Hot Buttered Soul* ... On the movie scene, Columbia Pictures together with *Casablanca* and *Motown* are planning a film "Disco" which promises to feature many top recording stars ... Those of you who saw the superb film "Carrie" will no doubt have been as impressed as I was with the excellent use made of Martha & the Vandella's "Heatwave" in one scene, and which really added to its dramatic impact ...

*Island* made my day recently when they called and asked if I'd do sleeve notes for them on a forthcoming LP they are issuing by Irma Thomas on their *Help!* label! Not only was I delighted to oblige, but was also overjoyed that this superb artist was getting some product out to keep her name before the record-buying public.

The album is a recording made of

her at a night club in New Orleans, and not only does she perform her own classics, but also turns in some groovy interpretations of recent Soul hits.

In and around New Orleans Irma Thomas is regarded as a Star of the first magnitude, and over here her followers border on fanaticism, so I'm sure they'll all join me in thanking *Island* for issuing this LP, of which more I shall doubtless write in due course!

Nancy Wilson must think I'm a heel! When I did that interview with her some weeks back she made me promise to send her a copy to her home, and don't you know I've mislaid the piece of paper I wrote her address on! So if any friends of Nancy Wilson are reading me, tell her that a copy is waiting for her down *Capitol* HQ! ...

Smart move on *Capitol's* part over here to reissue her in-demand "End Of Our Love", but although the label is black, it is not the original label design we were promised, which rather negates the whole concept. Still, *Capitol* is a rich catalogue, and let's hope that one day they'll do a various artists Soul collection, because in my view it could be a real winner ...

The appearance of *CBS* disco singles reissues reminded me that originally we had intended that all singles issued on *Deep Soul* label were to be in blue vinyl, but the concept was dashed because in those days the only place where this could be done was in Japan! So we settled for the conventional colour in London ...

The question of whether or not record shops should pay a royalty to play records to the public is hotting up now that PRS (Performing Rights Society) has issued writs on some members of the Musical Trades Association. Seems unfair in my view to expect dealers to pay when their efforts often result in actual sales ...

Annual loss in record sales through blank tape recording from disc now estimated to be £25,000,000 in the UK alone ...





Those of you who are kicking yourselves for missing out on Parliament's LPs will be pleased to know that they are now available through *EMI* Imports which means any shop can get them for you. Only their *Casablanca* output of course, but this means "Up For The Downstroke", "Chocolate City", "Mothership Connection" and "The Clones of Dr. Funkenstein" ...

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

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**APRIL DATES TO NOTE:** Friday 2nd — SHOW at CIRENCESTER. Saturdays 9th and 23rd — CLUB NIGHTS at NORTHAMPTON; EASTER MONDAY — 11th — OXFORD ALLDAY. Thursday 14th — WEYMOUTH CLUB NIGHT; and one no Member should miss: Sat/Sun 16/17th "BEACON" ALLNIGHTER — at Yate — SECOND ANNIVERSARY of the "BEACON".  
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