

What is Soul?

THIS IS the second time in the ten years in which I have been writing for B&S that I have used this title for a column, but I return to it again simply because I would like to make a personal re-capitulation of what I consider "Soul Music" to be.

So often, some of Soul's most vocal followers whilst quick to condemn any record which they consider to be devoid of Soul, nevertheless are very, very reluctant to actually define their terms of reference for all to see.

Hence, "Soul" to them can mean whatever they want it to mean at any given time, and this nebulous, wishywashy thinking indicates to me at least that perhaps they've never been quite too sure of what exactly it is, and so, by keeping their options open, they can go whichever way the wind is blowing and still be in the majority!

Of course this sort of thinking (which is more political than aesthetic) ensures that the public at large are even more confused about it than anyone — after all, if Soul music fans can't define it, how can they be expected to?

But like all art, Soul, if the term is to have any value or real significant meaning, must be definable, or otherwise it will merely drift into an all-things-to-all-men catch phrase

like "Rock and Roll" (which in my own lifetime, has had about five distinct meanings, some of which are in direct contradiction to each other in musical terms, covering as it does rough hill-billy basics to modern glam-rock).

We must also remember when attempting to define Soul that the word is of fairly recent development, and passed into fairly widespread use when "Billboard" (the American music trade magazine) decided to drop the term R&B (Rhythm & Blues) in the 60s because by then it had developed no longer applicable overtones and undertones, and adopted the word "Soul" to indicate records made generally by, and selling generally to, black Americans.

It is ironic that, having pioneered the use of the term "R&B" because "Billboard" found the formerly used term "Race music" offensive and unseemly, they then found these same connotations gradually resting around the term "R&B" which they'd invented to begin with!

Not quite the same thing has happened yet with the term "Soul", but many of those who have been on the scene long enough that you'd think they'd have learnt better, still persist in using it merely as a polite

euphemism for "race".

Prior to its universal usage, the term "Soul" was really another way of saying "secular gospel" — it was music using a religious musical structure and means of vocal delivery, but with lyrics which were entirely non-religious.

If I were pressed to name what I consider to be the first actual "Soul" record, I'd probably cite **Maxine Brown's** "All In My Mind" which was released in late 1962. Prior to this key record being made, sides could usually be defined as R&B or Gospel-orientated, but it was this mind-shattering outing that indicated that new pastures were about to be cultivated.

The previously well-defined borders fused and became hazy, and this seemed to stand mid-way between previous classics in a similar vein such as **the Chantels'** "Maybe" which nevertheless was solid bed-rock Gospel, and the nebulous jazztinged ahead-of-their-time offerings from the guy who could probably be named as the first real Soul singer of all time, **Johnny Ace**.

As with all art forms, no one thing can be said to have been the first, because art develops gradually towards an evolutionary change just as we do, but once something has arrived and is recognised as a style or genre, so too we can see more clearly what the precursors or forerunners to the style were leading up to.

In my view, the racial connection in people's minds is one of the biggest burdens that Soul has had to labour under, and whilst the average-man-in-the-street finds Soul records difficult to accept because they're a bit too musically evolved for him, all too often this reluctance is interpreted by those who have race hang-ups as their own, as evidence that a subtle form of racial discrimination is at work!

The truth is much more mundane and prosaic, and in the next part of this article, I'll attempt to show why Soul music's biggest handicaps in the UK are the BBC and Soul music fans!

Dave's raves

1 J.J. Barnes "Sara Smile" Contempo

Daryl Hall & John Oates are well-known friends of this publication and myself, but I'm betting they'll be more than delighted when they hear what J.J. has done with their beautiful composition "Sara Smile". Their own version of it was superlative and soulful, and this latest version is soulful and superlative. Not only do I want this to be a Top 10 hit, but with just a shade of luck I reckon it'll get there without any prompting from me at all. Certainly one of the best sides ever to be released on **Contempo**, and one that all concerned can be truly proud of. And that includes **Daryl and John!**



The Dave Godin Column

2 Essence "I Ain't Much, But I'm All I Got" Epic

Stylish and classy, this is just the sort of side that gets totally overlooked when issued in this country, only to become a rediscovered "classic" years later (when doubtless we will be assured that it was originally issued in 1977 on the *Direction* label!) One gets dry for superlatives when faced with a side like this. Dig it if you can.


3 Deneice Williams "Free" CBS

This lovely outing has just gotta be a hit too, and as the copy I received was pressed slightly off-centre, the comparison with **Minnie Riperton** was even more evident! But beautifully sung it is, and simply but cleverly arranged, it really should repeat its US success this side of the Atlantic too. Super lyrics and of such overwhelming appeal and charm that any radio DJ who doesn't spin this is unfit for his job! Brief and consequently more-ish!

4 Bootsy Collins "Ahh ... The Name Is Bootsy, Baby" Warner Bros.

Superlatively inventive track from a superlatively inventive act, it has a compulsive swing hook that just doesn't let up and is an apt re-


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MARCH 1977

Sat/Sun 19/20

Sun 20th

Thur 24th

Sat 26th

Sun 27th

"BEACON" ALLNIGHTER at The Baths, Yate, Nr. Bristol. 1am-9am.

MANCHESTER CLUB NIGHT 7pm-midnight, at Romanoffs, Oxford Street.

WEYMOUTH CLUB NIGHT 8pm-1am, at Pavilion Ballroom.

NORTHAMPTON CLUB NIGHT 8-12, at Lings Forum.

MANCHESTER CLUB NIGHT 7-12.


APRIL 1977

Show at CIRENCESTER.

MANCHESTER CLUB NIGHT. 7-12.

NORTHAMPTON CLUB NIGHT. 8-12.

MANCHESTER CLUB NIGHT. 7-12.



Sat 2nd

Sun 3rd

Sat 9th


Sun 10th

MANCHESTER CLUB NIGHT. 7-12.

MANCHESTER CLUB NIGHT. 7-12.

MANCHESTER CLUB NIGHT. 7-12.

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minder of the basic musical truth that "In the beginning there was rhythm". Cutting brass, cutting remarks (only **Bootsy** could get away with using a tired old cliché like "sock it to me" in 1977, and break into a mickey-taking phrase or two from "All Of Me"), it borders on actual surrealism, and becomes a truly fantastic outing that stuns as it hypnotises as it lay it on you as it lets it all hang out. Weird and truly wonderful, such happenings make dreadlocks seem positively effete. I only dread the almost inevitable, that some pseud is one day going to start taking sides like this dead seriously (and thus grind all the fun and spontaneity out of them)!

5 Rufus "Everlasting Love" *ABC*
Best track on their "Ask Rufus" LP, and that's a fact.

6 Bootsy Collins "The Pinocchio Theory" *Warner Bros.*

You'll no doubt recall that whenever Pinocchio told a lie his nose increased in length and size, I've a feeling that when **Bootsy** tells lies something else happens! Groovy, insanely funky with the apparent chaos that is invariably the result of much hard work and talented skill in action, I tremble to think what diabolical contortions UK plagiarists will get themselves into when they think they're ready to start imitating this kind of stuff! Superb — no other word will suffice.

7 Michael Zager & the Moon Band "Do It With Feeling" *Bang*

Wisely reissued by Phonogram (it was out last year on *London*), this mover has a pretty pounding and aggressive beat similar to that sometimes used by **K.C. & The Sunshine Band**, but in its own right it's a winner that has pace, zest and that special something that makes all the difference. Strangely gospel influenced too. Don't miss it this time around!

8 Rufus "Close The Door" *ABC*

Smooth and satin-souled, this melodic item from the "Ask Rufus" LP is further proof that **Chaka Kahn** is one of the best femme vocalists around today, and the smoothness is deceptive. It perks along into a swirling climax that is intense and just perfect.

9 L.T.D. "Love To The World" *A&M*

Title track from their altogether splendid LP, this opener is on a grand scale, rather in the manner of "Exodus", but its undertow soon catches you up in its swing. **L.T.D.** are certainly a group to watch — not only do they handle their singing with super soulfulness and panache, but they've also got some of the best brass work around. They'll go further yet, and they'll get to you yet — if you'll let them.

10 King Floyd "I Really Love You" *Contempo*

Charming side that is getting some belated recognition (probably because it was overshadowed by the official A side "Body English"), it is most positively a side that grows with each successive spin and proves that even when handling West Indian musical metaphors, the Americans still come out on top!

Continued over page

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Book reviews

Continued from page 39

IT IS a fact that books about popular music very seldom sell in any quantity in this country. The hundreds of remaindered copies of "The Drifters", "The Sound of Philadelphia" etc., which can be bought at a fraction of their original cost in the many shops in London which specialise in cut-out reading matter, bear grim testimony to this fact.

On reflection, it is not perhaps too difficult to understand why this should be. The written word can never convey the nebulous character of music — records are essentially things to be heard rather than read about, and no matter how much people like myself might rave over a side, the ultimate acid test will be when you first hear it for yourself.

My purple prose might arouse your interest in it, and hopefully make you seek out something you'd not perhaps otherwise have bothered about, but no matter what, records are consumed with the ears and not the eyes.

However, being a literate type of person myself, I must admit I do enjoy reading anything that fills in the background of the music scene, and even though such books do not sell, that's not to argue that therefore they are not worthwhile projects, and so I feel that occasionally I should give some critical appraisal regarding those books which are on offer from time to time which touch upon the subjects that "Blues & Soul" is dedicated to.

"The History Of Rock & Roll" Ritchie Yorke (*Methuen Import only*) was written in conjunction with Toronto's CHUM radio station who also broadcast a series of illustrative programmes at the time of publication in Canada. It's a pity that books like this can't be produced with cassettes which allow you to hear the records mentioned in the text, because unless you've actually heard the side under discussion, then really it is somewhat self-defeating.

Starting in 1955 (a date which I'd dispute as the year from which to start such a history), right in the very first chapter it becomes evident where Ritchie's sympathies lie — "R&B records only became mass-market hits against the toughest of odds", and throughout the book's profusely illustrated 176 pages, Ritchie constantly reminds readers of the overwhelming debt that all popular music owes to black America.

Each year is taken one by one, and a general survey made of what was happening on the musical front at that time, but in addition to this, Ritchie Yorke has also given a brief re-cap on the social and political situation in the States and world in general at that given time, and this stroke of genius on his part has ensured a work that is in a class of its own.

Too often, records are discussed in isolation from the prevailing mores and attitudes that existed in the society from which they were nurtured, and because of this, it must

often be puzzling for younger people to try and understand why certain records were considered "daring", or "sick", or "way-out" in bygone days, when from the distance of 1977 they merely sound corny or tame. By outlining the overall social canvas against which yesterday's sensations were produced, Ritchie has put the whole music scene into a better perspective and understanding than I have ever before come across in similarly ambitious works.

But, although this was a masterpiece on Ritchie's part, it must also be said that he has been no more successful than any other music-historian in resolving the problem of commerciality. All such histories have fallen into the perhaps inevitable trap of having to write from the viewpoint of commercial success, which in itself might not be a bad thing, but which carries with it the implicit suggestion that if a record was not a commercial hit, then it was not a superb artistic example of the genre under discussion.

One can sympathise on this point since few would want to read a book littered with titles that they'd perhaps never even heard of, but the fact is in my view, that some of the most significant and artistic sides ever produced, are ones which had no degree of commercial acceptance at all.

We therefore have the problem of whether to chronicle art, or whether to chronicle commercial hits, (some of which may indeed be works of high artistic worth).

It is difficult to know how to resolve this dilemma, and it results in unforgivable aesthetic lapses such as mentioning "Go Now" by the Moody Blues, but not by Bessie Banks. However, overall the book makes a fascinating read, and Ritchie writes in a style that is smooth, entertaining and non-prententious. For such small and relatively rare mercies, we should all be truly grateful.

"The Blues Line — A Collection of Blues Lyrics From Leadbelly to Muddy Waters" Compiled by Eric Sackheim with illustrations by Jonathan Shahn (*Collier-Macmillan*) is just what its title says, and although extravagantly spread over 500 pages, it could, with a little economy of lay-out, be reduced to a volume of less than half that number. Again, such works have their special problems to overcome, not least of which is the undoubted fact that what can make your spine tingle on disc, can look quite daft on the cold printed page.

"Nehi Blues" for instance takes on an almost dada appearance as it concludes:

"So we single men can tell a married woman from a child
Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm
mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm
mmmm"

Very profound! But the line after that is quite different, and reads:

"Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm
mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm"

See what I mean? Certainly some of the songs included do have an undoubted poetic quality in their lyrics, but again, devoid of the musical setting in which they are rendered, much of their magic evaporates

into thin air. Even an enduring Blues masterpiece like Howlin' Wolf's "Smokestack Lightnin'" seems denuded of the sinister magic these same words convey via the record:

"On-ohh
Smokestack lightnin'
Shinin'
Just like gold
Oh, don't you hear my cryin'
Woooooo-oooooo
Woooo-oooo-oooo
Woooooo"

The line illustrations by Jonathan Shahn are particularly inept and amateurish too, being no better than one might reasonably expect from a first year art college student, and although it seems a worthy project to attempt a permanent printed record of fleeting lyrics (many of which have probably never been put down on paper before), it is only in conjunction with the music and the performance that accompanies them that their inner beauty shines out.

Like all sex manuals, this book forgets to remind its readers at the outset that there is no substitute for the real thing.

Run-out groove

DJM continue to do sterling service on behalf of oldies fans as well as Soul and R&B historians and collectors. Following their superlative **Jimmy Reed** double LP, they've now issued two more twin sets. **The Dells** "Cornered" (*DJM DJD-28032*) consists of material they recorded for Vee Jay between 1955 and 1965, with some of the tracks getting their first ever release anywhere in the world!

As **Tony Cummings** points out in his excellent sleeve notes, **the Dells** have been making records for 25 years, having issued 77 singles and 17 albums, and are still up there in the higher echelons of the Soul scene today! No mean feat indeed...

The classic Soul side by **Booker T. and Priscilla Jones**, "The Crippled Crow", which they recorded at A&M in 1973, and which I reviewed as a Significant Side some time ago, surprisingly reappears in the new movie version of *A Star Is Born*, sung this time by **Kris Kristofferson**. It's included in the LP soundtrack too, so let's hope A&M might decide to release the Jones' single now and give us all a treat.

John Lee Hooker's set "Dimples" (*DJM DJD-28026*) also consists of *Vee Jay* repertoire (some of which has previously been issued in the UK on *Stateside*), and again, spans a long period from 1955 to 1961. That last year being represented by "Boom Boom" which, amazing though it might be to recall now, actually made the UK Top 20 at the time of its first release!

These sets, alongside those representing the *Loma* decade, as well as *CBS* sets on *Okeh* sides, and *London's* retrospective of *Cameo-Parkway* under the title of "Philadelphia Freedom Volumes 1 & 2", are a perfect way of building a history in sound of the Soul music of

America, and I sincerely hope that they will all sell well enough to merit further volumes in the series... In passing too, how about a "Vee Jay Story" set from *DJM*?...

Nice surprise to open the "Guardian" recently and see, in connection with a feature on local radio, a photo of **Andy Peebles** smiling up from the page!...

Those of you who are currently enjoying **Lynn Varnado's** "Wash & Wear Love" might like to drop her a line and tell her so. Her address (and her real name) is as follows: Allean Varnado, 3920 Hillcrest Drive, Apartment D., Los Angeles, California 90008. I'm sure she'd like to hear from you and know how well her record's doing over here...

Bumped into long-time-no-see DJ **Pat McGuire** the other day who tells me that rumour has it that Cleethorpes might soon be re-opening. **Pat's** now working for Arena Entertainments and can be reached for bookings on 0522 30209...

Two long years ago, when I rejoined "Blues & Soul", the urgency to get any available photo of me resulted in our having to use the only one that was immediately to hand, which also included my lovely dalmatian bitch.

This event (which I had almost forgotten about) must have festered in some poor soul's mind for an anonymous someone recently crowed in print "We don't give you pics of Bootle club DJs or columnists clutching Dalmatians".

The anti-working-class elitism of this statement is obvious (Bootle being regarded as unworthy of attention to such Citteeh-Slickers, and whilst sarcasm is used towards me, were it **Marvin Gaye** and his dalmation, this same author would doubtless be open-mouthed and goggle-eyed with wonder — "Gee man, that's cool. Groovy!"), but more importantly it shows to me a much deeper hang-up.

Previously my avowed vegetarianism has been used as a stick to beat me with, so to confirm my other belief that Soufulness is inextricably bound up with respect for life in all its manifestations (and in particular for my many co-vegetarian readers), we again reproduce **Spottie** in all her spontaneous charm — a mere speck in the evolutionary scale, but an apt reminder that "the whole case for behaving decently towards animals rests on the fact that we are the superior species".

Sadly this truth has yet to sink in for some, since they only behave decently towards blacks because deep down inside they believe that white people are the superior species! The evolutionary speck on the left is Yours Truly...



• Until next time then. Keep the faith — right on now! (And all the rest is propaganda!)