

Talent to spare

ONE COULD perhaps be forgiven for thinking (especially when faced with the daily saga of the **Sex Pistols** in the national press), that there really is a genuine shortage of new, vibrant talent around.

Certainly it would seem like this in Britain when particularly one considers that immediately on signing with Vertigo, **Graham Parker** comes up with a limp, lacklustre cover of the **Tramps** "Hold Back The Night" which is totally devoid of creativity, excitement or, for that matter, talent. Contrast this with the rough ride certain American artists get over here whose talent is so overwhelming that it little short of a scandal that they have yet to break through.

Top of the list of these "great unknowns" must surely be **Rufus**, and if, as is reported, **Chaka Khan** intends to branch out on a solo career, it looks like her whole spell as part of **Rufus** will have been wasted so far as the vast majority of UK record buyers are concerned.

Certainly, when faced with the output of this group one has to concede that there are avant-garde elements about it that perhaps do not go down too easily in this country, but surely this is because the media very seldom keeps pace with what's happening and being developed.



Chaka Khan

The BBC remains perpetually under the illusion that a living, ever-changing scene like the record-world can somehow be contained within the limited terms of reference that most of the DJs in their employ (and their respective producers) can respond to. Contrast this with the USA, where DJs actually vie with one another to be the first to bring to their listeners any shift which is likely to prove significant.

Here, this task and responsibility is left very much to writers, and we are very disadvantaged in that we can not illustrate what we write with audio examples, and if the record company promoting the side that you rave about are themselves not too enthusiastic about it, one is presented with an impossible Herculean task of helping make a hit almost single-handed. It just can't be done.

And this in turn creates its own Catch-22 situation, because then, having duly raved and nagged in print, if you try to get more enthusiasm and conviction from the record people concerned, they will like as not point to your own efforts and say this further justifies their sloth because the public just aren't biting!

I do not believe, and never have done, that reviews sell that many records. I think this is rumour circulated by writers in order to justify themselves and their role in the scene, but what they can (and should) do, is to stimulate interest in particular artists and their recordings.

Once this curiosity is aroused in the reader then it may be that they will seek out the artist's work and give it a listen, but even I would only claim about 20 loyal readers whose tastes so parallel my own that they're prepared to buy anything I rave over without first having heard it.

Again we are brought face to face with the problems of linking good art with fortunate commerce. I am constantly amazed (especially amongst those who have been in the business for several years) how record people do truly delude themselves into thinking that if a record is a hit it MUST therefore be a good record.

It is a preposterous proposition that I never have, and never will subscribe to, and I don't think there can be many real Soul fans who'd disagree with me about this.

Soul music has in fact yielded up just about every new trend there's been in pop music over the past 20 years or so, and although it might be presented in a diluted or altered way from the original, the blueprint used has had its roots somewhere or other in Soul.

As I write, there must be some hopeful somewhere performing in front of their wardrobe mirror to all the songs on the latest **Rufus** album...

But let's not forget either the



The Dave Godin Column

immense changes that have taken place in the social climate of America over the past ten years or so, and the effect that these have had on Soul music, because I don't think a **Beatles** / **Rolling Stones** situation is ever likely to happen again. The lesson that black America learned through this period of plagiarism and robbery, was that Soulfulness was not, as previously assumed, dependent on sounding "black", but had already extended itself way beyond this somewhat limited reference, and in 1977, black America knows that its ace card lies in its talent.

It has always been so, but the awareness of its power has only been realised over the last decade or so. Nobody is going to be able to duplicate the intricate skills of people like **Chaka Kahn** or **Roy Ayers** easily, and since they also happen to be highly popular in the States, it says much for the collective musical awareness that exists in that country.

But although talent such as this will always receive the highest praise from people like myself, until the air-waves adopt a more evolved and progressive policy themselves, this talent can certainly

be held back from any kind of commercial success.

It is all too easy for Radio 1 to reject records by these artists, and settle for the tired old play-it-safe mediocrity of the **Graham Parker** side; and only when the message has come up from the bottom in terms of an unexpected runaway hit, will the BBC start claiming that they really loved them all the time... but how much longer is the public going to fall for that one? Quite simply, they'll have to do better.

Dave's raves

1. **J. J. Barnes** "Sara Smile" Contempo

Still my most played single, and still a side that I urge you to seek out and hear because it's a soulful slab of performing artistry that deserves the widest possible audience.

2. **Joe Tex** "Ain't Gonna Bump No More (With No Big Fat Woman)" Epic

I try wherever possible to listen to new releases "blind", which means I rid my mind of preconceived notions before listening to it. **Joe Tex** as a name immediately creates an image and a preformed judgement which may or may not work in his favour.

Either way it's wrong, and this, if it were from some unknown newcomer, would undoubtedly be hailed as the fresh, exhilarating and exciting sound it is. I'm glad **Joe Tex** is back, and particularly that he's bounced back with such a dazzler.

3. **Roy Ayers** "Come Out & Play" Polydor

Roy Ayers is so talented that I've added to the tiny band of artists who I want to collect everything from. Although Polydor have only issued one LP from him so far, his other albums are readily available on import, and each shows new facets of his remarkable gifts.

This track is from his "Vibrations" LP which is issued in the UK, and although the cover is dull and monotonous, the contents decidedly are not. One of the best LPs so far this year.

4. **Kool & the Gang** "Open Sesame" Contempo

The full version on just one side, this funky mover is part of a double pronged single from Contempo, and both sides are winners in their own right.

I give the edge (just) to "Open Sesame" because it is so dynamic and full of unexpected quirks, and either way, surely chart success can only be a few yards away now for **Kool & the Gang**. Haven't they waited long enough? From **Mojo** to Contempo — it figures; and must happen for them soon.

5. **Jimmy Helms** "Putting It Down (To The Way I Feel About You)" Pye

A rather nice surprise this, but **Jimmy Helms** is nothing if not consistent, and this is his keenest outing for a long time. Presumably a UK production, don't let that

continued on page 34

Dave Godin

continued from page 12

deter you, because it's got what it takes, and **Jimmy Helms** is the vital link that strings it all together beautifully. A potential hit perhaps, but win or lose, a commendable side.

6. **Latimore** "Something About Cha" TK

What a sound! Truly laid back and full of Soul mastery, I've a feeling that when I've lived with this side a little longer it'll be at the No. 1 slot of this section next time I write.

Must be pulled off as a single hopefully, and must be acclaimed (surely) by all Soul fans in the land.

7. **Johnnie Taylor** "Love Is Better In The A.M." CBS

Couldn't agree more, and **Johnnie Taylor**, skilful and accomplished as ever, puts it all across with style and panache. Hope it happens for him, and for CBS — do you realise just how much good Soul this company is bringing to us of late? And this is just one such.

8. **Tata Vega** "Blame It On The Sun" Motown

From her "Totally Tata" LP (will, I wonder, we ever live to see this strangely named artist have an LP called "Tit For Tata"?), she is still fulfilling the promise of her debut album, and "Auntie Iris"

(that's **Iris Gordy** whom I remember affectionately as a groovy young girl!) as the sleeve refers to her producer, can be well pleased with how she and **Tata** get it all together. **Tata** will go places, mark my words.

9. **Teddy Pendergrass** "The Whole Town's Laughing At Me" Philadelphia-International

More consistency here and a side that's sure to collect a sizeable legion of devotees. Don't miss it.

10. **Natalie Cole** "Party Lights" Capitol

Not the old **Claudine Clark** number (whatever happened to her?) but a superior disco type side that might well give her renewed chart action. If only all disco output were of this standard... At present only on her "Unpredictable" album, but surely destined as a 45 eventually? I hope so.

Run-out groove

STILL THOSE dreary disco discs continue to churn out, with their fatuous mindless optimism, and their breezy disregard of all the laws of commonsense! **Van McCoy** must surely by now have hit rock-bottom with his candyfloss confection "Shuffle", and **Andrea Runs-True-To-Form Connection** by urging us on her current flipside to "Keep It Up Longer". What a bore they are all becoming — a sort of desperately painful attempt to

get into the rhythm of life and a kind of muzak of the senses.

If this is the musical diet that the majority of New Yorkers actually do get off to then may be saccharin isn't the only artificial sweetener that the Health Authorities should consider banning!

Dreary **Barry White**, dreary **Van McCoy**, dreary so many of the sides that come via the companies' disco promotion departments these days, and, what's interesting too is the fact that although the word has not yet filtered up, nobody's playing them! And the disco scene is all the healthier for it.

Graham Parker on "Top Of The Pops" recently should have paid money (hard cash) NOT to have been followed by **Billy Davis & Marilyn McCoo**. The contrast in vocal skill gave me vertigo!

● United Artists seem to be doing the right thing by **Fats Domino** these days, and not only have they released a superbly packaged, excellent value for money "20 Greatest Hits" set, but also promise for release later this year a six volume compilation containing just about every record he ever made at Imperial.

Fats is truly one of the greats of the whole music spectrum, and it is great to see his importance recognised and acknowledged in such convincing terms.

● Everybody loves the Capitol label. In any conversation sooner or later some side or other that has been issued under this logo will be mentioned. Good to hear that they intend to bring **The Sylvers** over later this year because on-the-spot appearances might just give them the elusive hit they've been looking for so long.

Actually, I'm always puzzled why they've not had hits galore already. Still, let's keep our fingers crossed that this year they'll do it. Capitol is such a diversified label that one sometimes tends to forget that they really are an all-round company.

Two recent releases of some importance in my view are "Stan Kenton's Greatest Hits" and "Gene Vincent — Greatest" (both on authentic Capitol mauve-magenta labels). Not directly relevant to Soul perhaps, but there is no denying the immense influence that **Stan Kenton's** innovative music had during the 40s and 50s on both white and black America. His skill with complex orchestral arrangements did not go unnoticed nor unimitated, and much of today's use of brass can be seen in an identical form in some of the very earliest tracks on this set, and anyone who is even remotely interested in big band sounds should check this out even if much of it now is only of academic interest.

Gene Vincent similarly took and gave. His talent, though slight, was clearly influenced by 50s R&B, and yet there was nothing of the plagiarist about him. Although it might sound heresy to say so, guys like **Gene Vincent** really did help break down the barriers that so rigidly segregated music in the 50s, and brought an added dimension of rebellion that so many found they could identify with.

● The RCA festivities to launch the TK label in the UK were highly enjoyable, and not only was it a happy occasion to meet many friends from RCA, but also to meet visitors from the States such as **George McRae**, **Jimmy Bo Horne** and the one and only **Timmy Thomas** who, were he never to make another record, would always be loved and respected for his all-time classic "Why Can't We Live Together". His new LP "The Magician" is a highly potent brew that stirs and moves you, and I'm convinced that TK will really emerge as a multi-talented Soul complex now that RCA are working alongside them. The talent's there, and the hits will come.

● Although dogged by a few production problems, "Irma Thomas — Live" is finally in the shops complete with a smashing photo of **Irma** on the cover and selling on the budget-priced **Help** logo. A very commendable set, and one which I truly was honoured to do the sleeve notes for.

Also on the same label is **James Booker's** "Junco Partner" which is an interesting though somewhat weird blend of just about every musical genre ever! Certainly if you like piano jazz you'll want this one, but I've a feeling that **James Booker** is the type of artist who has his own dedicated and loyal following, and only by making drastic compromises would he be able to break out and reach a wider market. Highly individualistic, and therefore something that you'll have to check out for yourself.

● Interesting to see that single cassettes are now in the manufacturing pipeline which, it is reckoned, will sell at about 66p each. It will be important to watch what sort of sales record these tapes chalk up because the next couple of years will, in my view at least, be crucial in deciding whether or not tapes are going to become a probably replacement for conventional discs. For what it's worth, I think discs will win out.

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

EASTER WEEK REMINDERS

Saturday, 9th April — Northampton
Sunday, 10th April — Manchester
Monday, 11th April — Oxford All Dayer
Thursday, 14th April — Weymouth

"BEACON" ALL NIGHTER

SECOND ANNIVERSARY
SATURDAY/SUNDAY, 16/17 APRIL
Twelve Hours from 9 pm-9am
THE BATHS — YATE — Nr. Bristol

SUNDAY CLUB NIGHTS

MANCHESTER — ROMANOFFS
Every week 7-12, details elsewhere

NORTHAMPTON — SATURDAYS

8-12 at LINGS FORUM
(2nd and 4th week each month)
APRIL 9, APRIL 23, MAY 14

SATURDAY CELLAR CLUB

8 pm-2am SHAFTESBURY
(ROYAL CHASE HOTEL)
(1st and 3rd week of the month)
COMMENCING SAT. 7th MAY

SUMMER SEASON PREVIEW

Free advance tickets to members only
for First Nights in May at either
WORTHING or SOUTHSEA

For details of Membership, Badges, Pen Friends,
travel information and Club News send s.a.e. to:

INTER CITY SOUL CLUB (UK)
P.O. BOX 28, SHREWSBURY [0903-47679]

Records & Tapes

TONY WALKER RECORDS

The specialists in Northern Soul & rarities.
Send Large SAE for lists

To:-

29 Dukes Brow,
Blackburn, Lancs
Tel: 0254-52114

GROOVE RECORDS

IMPORTS - U.K. RELEASES
JAZZ - SOUL - LATIN - REGGAE
52, Greek Street, Soho, W.1
Mon.-Sat. 12.30 mid-day-10.30 p.m.