

# The singer behind the song...

PEOPLE OFTEN ask me in the course of conversation, of all the many artists that I've met in person over the years, who are the most interesting? It's an almost impossible question to answer since it implies a degree of personal favouritism that some might see as likely to colour my critical assessment of their recordings, and also, having named one person as a memorable personality, you immediately recall another who has just as much claim to the title.

Also, then, you get asked who were the disappointments, and this is a much trickier area because we all have our off-days, and it might be that I met an artist who seemed grumpy and uptight during one such spell.

I have always tried to consistently draw a fine distinction between the real, human person behind something, and the work of art which, as a writer, I dissect.

One can love an artist on a personal level, and because of this, feel that much more saddened when their latest record doesn't measure up, but like any other sphere there will always be some performers who, through the sheer weight and force of their personalities will leave a distinct impression with you that is entirely separate from that which you have come to know via their records, so, I thought I'd write about some of those artists whom I've met in person who have enriched my life not just through their records, but by personal contact too.

YOU'D HAVE to go a long way to find a character so full of outgoing friendliness and togetherness as **Jerry Williams Jr.**, or **Swamp Dogg** as he is sometimes known.

I first met him as he was stepping out of a lift in a London hotel, and approaching him from the back I called his name. Startled and surprised, he swung round and said "I thought you was a hit-man!" With a guy like this you never know what to expect — the person projected from his work is very different to that of the real life guy.

His devotion to his wife **Yvonne** and his children is immense, and yet never, ever does he lose his sense of fun and humour. **Yvonne** and I got along so well and found we had so many ideas in common that after a while **Jerry** kept interrupting us saying "Hey I'm supposed to be the Star around here!" and when **Yvonne** and I both agreed on the subject of atheism, **Jerry** made towards the door saying "I'm getting out of here before you two put a hex on me!"

**Jerry** and **Yvonne** both have a lot of time for people, and a lot of respect and tolerance (as well as love) for one another, and in many ways they represent all that is good about civilisation, because they are

truly interested in all aspects of life and its higher manifestations through all forms of art.

WHEN **Harvey Fuqua** sang "Sincerely" way back when, he was giving a clue to his own inner nature, because this guy is just about the most sincere and wholesome kind of fellow you could ever wish to meet.

We first met when I was on my trip to Motown HQ in Detroit in 1963 when he was married to **Gwen Gordy**, and was working as producer and composer. His natural modesty tended to make him hover in the background, but when we were finally introduced I said, "Not the Harvey Fuqua?" and his face lit up over this belated recognition.

His marriage finally succumbed to the stresses and strains that so many show-business marriages risk, and then a few years ago tragedy struck when his young daughter died. Since then however he has been living and working out in California, and is hoping that soon he'll be able to make it back to the UK again.

His previous visit was with **Marvin Gaye** in the 60's, and no one who was there will ever forget how through popular insistence, he sang "Sincerely" at a fan-club reception for **Marvin**, and how all of us present (**Marvin** included) gave him one of the longest and loudest receptions it is possible for an artist to know.

Yes, don't ever forget **Harvey Fuqua**, because in my book he's one of the best.

WHICH by way of natural progression brings me to **Marvin Gaye** again! What can one add to all that I, and others, have written about this guy?

Maybe we get along so well because we both appreciate an ironic form of humour. When I met him again after such a long time on his recent visit I went up behind him and said "Marvin Gaye!" He looked at me for a second, blinked and said "Oh my God!" and I replied "Well that's so kind of you to say so!", and immediately it seemed like we'd been unable to see one another for only a couple of weeks or so.

**Marvin** is also an intensely thoughtful person. He sees through so much of the artificiality and tinsel that makes up so much of "show biz glamour". He still calls **Diana Ross** by her original name "Diane".

He and **Harvey Fuqua** were once brothers-in-law, but they've drifted apart a good deal over the years, but they really should get back together again. I have no idea at all if the current rumours that **Marvin** may be joining CBS are true or not, but one thing's for sure, there's only one **Marvin Gaye**, and people don't come much nicer or groovier.



## The Dave Godin Column

SO WHAT about female then? Well, here's an area where the hoity-toity overlap with the utterly wonderful. We'll concentrate on the latter I think.

For sheer warmth of personality and charm you'd have to go a long way to meet someone who has more than **Tamiko Jones**. She's such a bundle of fun and has an effervescent personality that is entirely natural and spontaneous.

Then there's **Doris Troy**. Once met, never forgotten who can carry herself with all the assured confidence of a Jean Harlow, and yet can cuss and fuss with the best of 'em when she's a mind to. (again as good as Jean Harlow!).

One of the frustrations of getting to know artists on a highly personal level is that you get told so much that is either unprintable or told in strictest confidence, but it's reassuring perhaps to know that artists, like us, are flesh and blood and subject to moods and depressions just as much as elations, and I always take it as a great personal compliment when an artist shows that they know and trust me well enough not to feel constrained to try and hide the fact whenever they've got the blues.

This sheer honesty of emotion in

**Doris Troy** shows just how large her heart is. So large in fact that it sometimes works against her, for she is more than generous to a fault.

I remember once how I was going through a lean financial patch, and as I left her she slipped her fingers into my breast pocket saying "Here's something for a packet of cigarettes". I protested but she'd have none of it, and when finally I got into a shop to buy some cigarettes, I discovered that she'd eased £15 in there!

I used to love teasing **Doris** by raving over other femme favourites in her presence, and she'd really rise to the bait saying things like "You wouldn't like that bitch. She's evil and ugly and no good for you". In the "character" stakes **Doris Troy** has it in aces.

FOR SHEER charm and charisma I have to mention **Irma Thomas**, for few other artists that I've met exude a mysterious presence like she does.

To compare her with **Greta Garbo** would be wrong inasmuch as their personalities are so different, but on another level there is a similarity. **Irma Thomas** (like **Greta Garbo**) is blessed with sheer presence — just to be in the same room with her makes people wonder about her. A "star" in the proper sense of the word, and a quality which she carries quite naturally down to her very fingertips, it has always saddened me that **Irma** has not by now got further with her career, and become one of the leading luminaries of the music scene.

Maybe I feel it more than she does because she told me that her role as a mother always had to have precedence over her role as artist, and perhaps the **Barbra Streisands** of this world get where they do simply because they know the sacrifices which have to be made, and they're prepared to make them.

Who knows, by change of circumstances, **WHO** might become or be the hottest property around, but having met them personally and got to know them well, I'd love to see success and fortune smile on all of the six performers I've mentioned here. More than just Soul, they've also got heart.

## Dave's raves

1 **William Bell** "Tryin' To Love Two" Mercury

Although I'm late off raving about this side (I'm hoping and betting that by the time this is in print it'll already be a Top 30 entry), it is without doubt one of the most beautiful and accomplished sides I've heard this year.

Penned by **William Bell** and **Paul Mitchell**, it has sheer excellence in every groove, and is just the sort of Soul record that will appeal universally to all Soul fans, regardless of what particular subsection tends generally to be their particular favourite. A winner that must not get lost.

2 **The Isley Brothers** "Voyage To Atlantis" Epic

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## Dave Godin

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From their excellent "Go For Your Guns" LP, "Voyage To Atlantis" is a wailing and soulful outing (with subtle and effective use of echo chamber) that reminds me very much of some of the great recordings made by the late **Tim Buckley**.

More and more Soul is breaking through the narrow confines from which it had to draw its terms of reference in the past, and this side shows that so many new and exciting pastures have yet to be opened up and explored.

Other tracks on the LP are also commended, particularly the atmospheric "Tell Me When You Need It Again", and the solid back beat "Livin' In The Life". As a Soul delivery service, CBS records have just about got it all worked out now, and let's be thankful for the great work they are doing in this area.

**3 Maze** "Happy Feelin's" Capitol  
Again, a track from their LP which is totally commendable. **Maze**, who feature Northern Soul favourite **Frankie Beverly** on lead vocals, constitute another of those amazingly talented outfits that Capitol have the knack of pulling out of the goodie-bag and surprising us with from time to time. (I'm sure they have a secret finishing school somewhere in the Nevada desert!)

"Happy Feelin's" is a great mid-tempo ballad, but you can also try

"Time Is On My Side" (not the **Irma Thomas** classic, but a new composition with the same title), which is the ace opening mover of side 1. In passing, it must also be recorded that **Frankie Beverly** has an excellent and distinctive voice too.

Like so many mazes, I think once you find yourself getting into this one, you'll find it difficult to get out of! There are seven members of the group, and they all have beards and/or moustaches, which I should imagine, is another highly sensible claim to uniqueness too!

**4 Bobby Patterson** "If He Hadn't Slipped Up And Got Caught" Contempo

Another undoubted beauty that is pure 1977-Soul! If you dig the aforementioned **William Bell** side then this too will delight.

**Bobby Patterson** sings with feeling and conviction and yet again it is a fine testimony to **John Abbey's** personal handling of his Contempo label which ensures that NOT all releases sound like those already clicking — the Catch 22 situation which I mentioned previously does not apply here! Don't miss it.

**5 Gloria Gaynor** "Why Should I Pay" Polydor

From her "Glorious" LP **Gloria** sounds more than ever like she did at Jocida, and again displays her pre-eminence as the natural disco-Soul queen. A potential Northern monster (given the plays), it is a skillful mover that is full of zest and all-nighter ambience.

**6 The Gap Band** "Out Of The Blue (Can You Feel It)" Tattoo

A good mover that perks along at a happy sing-along pace, and the only thing going against it I should think would be the title since everybody who hears the lyrics is going to be asking for "Can You Feel It". However, the lead singers really lay it down and a cracking rhythm section which is later joined by a super brass line-up will ensure it is warmly received in all quarters. Great sound.

**7 Garnett Mimms** "What It Is" Arista

Great mover that's very well orchestrated and arranged, and is an excellent vehicle by which to welcome back veteran Soul friend **Garnett Mimms** (although on the label his surname is spelt "Mims" this time).

A disco certainty, it should (despite the rather goopy gal chorus) quickly re-establish **Garnett Mimms** in Soul people's affections and might well share the wealth with popsters too by going national.

**8 The Tavares** "Fool Of The Year" Capitol

The flipside of their current hit, and on their "Love Storm" LP, this is a ballad very much in the vein of the **Moments** "Look At Me I'm In Love", and fans of soft, smoochie Soul will wait at first hearing. Again, another group who really know how to sing faithful and true, and for such **Tavares** we should all be truly grateful.

**9 Norman Connors** "For You Everything" Buddah

Actually sung by **Phillip Mitchell** and **Eleanore Mills**, this easy late-night listening outing should find a big following in no time at all. From the "Romantic Journey" LP which, in toto, is better than **Norman Connors'** previous one. Easy and skillful.

**10 First Cosins Jazz Ensemble** "Fit It To The Rhythm" Capitol

Avant-garde funk-jazz Soul that'll go down a bomb with the ultra-hip dancers at the most sophisticated discos (i.e. those in and around Essex rather than St. James's), it's full of much inventiveness and colour.

From their LP if you like **Roy Ayers** then this will be your kind of brew too.

**Wah Wah Watson** whom you'll recall had an LP of his own out on CBS not so long ago, is featured on guitar, but more than that excellent contribution, it'll probably be the brass working that'll fix you.

## Run-out groove

AND NOW, the 12in. EP! **Pye's** "Big Deal" series have four tracks in the 12 in. format, and collectors of these special pressings are bound to dig the arrangement. Sides particularly appealing to readers of this magazine will be **BD 110 The Tramps** "Zing! Went The Strings Of My Heart"/"Rubber Bandd "Hold Back The Night"/"Sixty Minute Man"; **BD 109 Isaac Hayes** "Shaft" **Johnnie Taylor** "Who's Making Love"/**Judy Clay & William Bell** "Private Number"/**Booker T & the M.G.s** "Time Is Tight"; and **BD 112 The Casualeers** "Dance, Dance,

Dance"/**Chuck Wood** "Seven Days Too Long"/**Wigan's Chosen Few** "Footsee"/**The Javells** "Goodbye, Nothin' To Say". Considering the brevity of some LPs these days, I can see a point of overlap will soon be reached! What then? . . .

And what can one say to those DJ's who recently have been miffed to be informed that they have been regarded by a record company into "A", "B" and "C" groups, and will be discriminated against accordingly! What gets me is why they were told, when the company could just as well have adopted this procedure without hurting anybody's feelings.

I should imagine that all spins of this company's product from the "B" and "C" stream jocks will be very minimal in future! And not a few will remember this slight when eventually they graduate to the "A" stream! "Your eyes may shine, your teeth may grit" . . .

Must admit a slight disappointment with **Freda Payne's** debut single on Capitol, but there's compensation, and especially for Northern Soul fans, with the flipside "I Can't Live On A Memory" which has that all-nighter beat aplenty . . .

Northern fans will also be pleased to note two old friends on recent LPs from other artists. **Wally Cox** ("This Man") is on the **Marvin Gaye** Palladium set, and **Sydney Barnes** ("I Hurt On The Other Side") turns up doing backing vocals on **Deniece Williams** album . . .

Amazed to read a glowing review of an album that had rather disappointed me, in one of our music papers. Amazed that is, until I read the reviewer's name which happened to be that of one of the staff of the press office of the company that issued the LP! My, my, my, this business is getting so devious these days! . . .

Hope all you Northern DJ's are leaning very heavily on **Eddie Holman's** "Time Will Tell" on Salsoul because otherwise you're gonna look kinda dumb in 1978 if you start spinning it then . . .

Ditto hopes for **Charlie Whitehead's** Contempo outing. He's a great guy that **Charlie Whitehead**, so just take my word for it and give him a break . . .

**Marvin Gaye** delighted at hit success of his single in the UK, and tells me he hopes to be back again real soon. My own sentiments precisely . . .

What's happened to **Ronnie McNair**, and the **Stairsteps**, and **Jean Plum**? Save our souls, keep them singing! . . .

Had a delightful surprise in the form of a lovely letter from **Betty Lavette** who'd got my address from our **David Nathan** in New York, and she said she was writing to say, after a wait of 10 years, how much she appreciated all the kind words I'd written in the past about her, and in particular about her classic "Let Me Down Easy". What a gesture! And what an unexpected pleasure! If any of you would like to drop her a line, write her c/o me at Contempo, and I'll forward them on to her . . .

● Until next time then. Keep the faith!

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