

## WHERE HAVE ALL THE BLUE NOTES GONE?

AND I'M NOT referring to Harold Melvin's group. With the upsurge of disco music over the past couple of years or so, more and more people ask me: "why aren't records as SOULFUL as they used to be?" Without wishing to pursue yet again the debate as to what exactly constitutes Soul, I know what they mean.

Time was (in the mid-60s) when it seemed like Soul was never going to stop reaching new peaks of artistic achievement, but although nowadays we are certainly not starved for new releases, a far greater proportion of them seem to lack that intangible, magic ingredient that, as James Brown once put it, "touches you deep down in your heart."

Records from black artists somehow don't seem quite so "black". Well, the answer is not in "black" so much as "blue" because in my view the magic ingredient that we are all pining for is in fact the "blue" notes — the "Blue" tonality that once dripped from nearly every record black Americans made (yes, even the shamelessly teen-orientated ones like Dee Clark's "Hey, Little Girl", and if you don't believe me, play the 45 at 33).

It was precisely this "blue" tonality that white plagiarists always experienced the most difficulty in copying, and thus we have an explanation why cover-versions by white groups always seemed to lose a vague something, and somehow sounded washed-out and blanched out.

Now, with the American disco scene increasingly influencing what's being put down in the studios, what we are finding being ironed out with distressing regularity is the "blue" tonalities. That past master of them, Van McCoy, now seems to have totally forgotten what they are, and many artists who once thrived on "blue" notes have similarly forsaken them.

So what, you might by now be asking, is a "blue" not or a "blue" tonality, and, without going into great technical musical explanations, they are notes which are in a minor chord and which elicit from the listener, a minor or sad response.

Classical composers have long known about their effectiveness (just as discords can be utilised to great effect) and the Blues proper of course have always given them great prominence, and even, the Beatles had an awareness of them in some of their compositions (although in my opinion they ran to morbidity rather than an inner echo of understanding), and Soul records once used them so cunningly and so craftily that we were getting to the stage where we were ready to drop from sheer emotional exhaustion almost! Examples are perhaps preferable to the written word.

Well, there's Aretha Franklin for a start — she couldn't abandon "blue" tonality if she tried. For an almost text-book example listen to Darrell Banks "Open The Door To Your Heart", or Third Time Around's "Soon Everything's Gonna Be Alright" — both are

outstanding examples of this magic ingredient, and show too that actual tempo has little to do with it.

Many, many Northern favourites of yesteryear teemed with "blue" tonality — they'd perk along and just as you expected them to take an upward swing, they'd sneak up on you from behind and take one in the opposite direction instead.

This has always been such a vital and secret part of Soul that maybe very few people are consciously aware of it, but I'm convinced that's part of the answer as to why so many of today's records, whilst perfectly "correct" in every other respect, seem to be missing something that you can't quite put your finger on.

And whilst many link "black" exclusively with Soul, "blue" is a much more accurate colour to describe just what it is that grabs us.

## DAVES RAVES

### 1. Dooley Silverspoon & Jeanne Burton "Am I Losing You — Parts 1 and 2" Seville

Super, real Soul side that should add sizzle to the summer, and although at the time of writing I've no idea if it has in fact been issued on a 12 in. single-sided single, I hope it might be, because it really is a Parts 1 and 2 record (i.e. a continuous, uninterrupted performance chopped in half). Therefore, no particular side for preference. Superbly arranged and produced (thank you, **Sonny Casella**), with winning Latin beat and some really gutsy vocal work, vaguely reminiscent of **Gladys Knight's** "Stop And Get a Hold Of Myself". Towards the end of side 2, **Jeanne** contributes some effective wailing — a real tonic in these days of bland, disco dross, and it comes across with much feeling. She and **Dooley** then cap it all with some harmony singing — a rare Soul characteristic indeed these days! Great mover, and, I hope, a potential hit.

### 2 The Brothers Johnson "Strawberry Letter 23" A&M

From their "Right On Time" LP, the **Brothers Johnson** certainly fulfill the promise of their first LP. This particular track was penned by **Johnnie Otis**' son, **Shuggie** and is a mid-paced stepper that employs a dulcimer with great effect and in a very subtle way, plumbs some swirling emotional depths. **The Brothers Johnson** (like **Bootsy Collins** and **Parliament**) obviously put so much thought into their records, and in the end it sure does tell. Pulled off at Christmas this could well happen then. Further proof that the A&M logo is a consistent pioneer in opening up new directions for modern Soul — perhaps the initials really stand for "Avant-Garde & Modern"!

### 3 Graham Central Station "Saving My Love For You" Warner Bros.

From their "Now Do U Wanna Dance" LP, this is a mid-paced dancer that is melodic and very well produced and orchestrated. Thumpy bass line will appeal, and slightly zonky vocals won't harm its chances either. It has an overall groovy charm that will get to you.

### 4 Brainstorm "This Must Be Heaven" RCA



# The Dave Godin Column

From their "Stormin'" LP, this is a beautiful ballad with evocative sax and well handled vocals divided up between male, female and chorus. Not at all commercial alas, but Soul fans will dig deeply, especially if you favour slower and well-worked-out lush arrangements. If you loved **Barbara Mason's** classic "Yes, I'm Ready", you'll almost certainly groove on this one too.

### 5 People's Choice "If You're Gonna Do It" Philadelphia International

Groovy mover that perks along with verve and panache. Obvious disco choice but don't let that deter you, this one's got class. Super drumming, guitar and organ work all add extra bonus sparkle. Pity that it's spread over two sides though because if you stick just to the 'A' side you'll miss the rough, raw, gritty solo vocal hidden away on side 2.

### 6 Maze "Happy Feelin's" Capitol

Great stuff from a group who really seem set to go places and do things. Beautiful SOUL vocal from lead singer **Frankie Beverly**, it has a heck of a lot going for it and will certainly recruit hoards of fans from the Soul fraternity for this potentially dynamite act.

### 7 Norman Connors "For You Everything" Buddah

From his "Romantic Journey" LP this will delight all fans of Sweet Soul. **Eleanore Mills** has a charming, pure voice, and she and **Phillip Mitchell** make a potent combination. And the whole LP is a good buy too!

### 8 Gloria Gaynor "Why Should I Pay" Polydor

Super glorious track from her "Glorious" LP, this really must be pulled off as a 45 single real soon. So "Northern" you'd be forgiven for thinking it was a tailor-made, but it's no, such hype, and should create a strong revival in back-drops and hand-stands in no time at all. Perky chorus chirps along under **Gloria's** excellent lead vocal, and though the lyrics may puzzle, they'll delight too.

### 9 Hodges, James & Smith "People Needing People" London

Not a firm of solicitors driven into the recording studios by the economic recession, but three young ladies who sing with unmistakable Soul with the occasional touch of pure gospel thrown in for good measure. Produced by **William Mickey Stevenson**, it has nice lyrics and all in all is a nice introduction to a group who seem full of exciting potential. Anyway, don't you just LOVE the London label? I do.

### 10 Touch Of Class "You Got Nowhere To Come" GTO

From their "I'm In Heaven" LP, **Touch Of Class** are well named indeed, and yet again one welcomes a gutsier approach to the vocals, well demonstrated on this particular track. Nice echoey guitar break and faultless singing on a strong number. Hits are probably just around the corner for this group, and this is gritty, feeling stuff. So much the better for all of us!

## RUN OUT GROOVE

FIRST OFF an urgent message for **Kim Gihlin**. Would you please write to **Lynne Callaghan** who tells me that this is the only way she can get in touch with you again since B&S is the only magazine you read! If you've lost her address get in touch with me and I'll pass it on to you.

Next another urgent call from our regular correspondent **Paul White** of Hexthorpe. **Paul** tells me that more support is needed for the Soul night at the 'Bentley Drum' and that DJ **Reg Williams** is doing a great job which will only flourish if more of you go along and support him. As **Paul** says in his letter, there are lots of Northern fans in Doncaster, so get yourselves along to the Drum on a Friday and at least give it a try.

Hang your heads in SHAME all you DJs who played **Shalamar** into the charts and yet didn't spin the vastly superior "Broken Hearted Melody" by the **Sharonettes** when it was first out on **Black Magic!** But, that said, I'm glad for **Simon Soussan** and for **RCA's** faith in Soul paying off at last too!

And glad for **Ian Levine** too. Hits

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## DAVE GODIN

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may elude him of late in the UK, but **Barbara Pennington's** taking off in a big way in the States at least, and may well make **Ian** hot in-demand as a producer/writer over there yet! If only people realised how much **HARD WORK** is often involved in getting a hit away.

The film "Taxi Driver" is a pretty harrowing experience, and as a friend so aptly said as we left the cinema, "it certainly puts the New York disco scene into a better perspective"! The media sustain a "joy, joy, joy" image of American discos simply because at this present moment they're short of things to write about.

Don't, please, write me any more letters moaning about **Tony Palmer's** TV series "All You Need Is Love". Did you really expect it to be either factual or objective? First off you're ham-strung simply by what film clips are available, then, add on to this shortage the well-known fact that **Tony Palmer** has never in the past displayed much warmth or sympathy for Soul music, and you have history distorted yet again to conform to the historian's prejudices and personal hang-ups. At least the sequence with **Jim Morrison** of **Doors** should serve as a warning that in the drugs "game", there are no winners.

Nice to see **Tata Vega's** "Just When Things Are Getting Good" (a former Dave's Rave) out on a 45, albeit a B side. Give it a whirl and see if you don't agree with my verdict. And, talking of **Motown**, whatever happened to **Caston & Majors**? I thought, and was hoping, they were really set for big things.

If American **Columbia/Epic** sign up any more Soul artists I can see that some future editions of **BLUES & SOUL** will read more like their house magazine! Not that I'm knocking them. I'm delighted, and believe me, those lovely computers they have really do print out fair and square royalty statements — overseas sales included too!

My apologies to all of you who wrote and phoned demanding to know what the hell had happened to my contribution for **B&S 226**. (I'm getting to be an old man you know, I can't stay on the barricades all the time!) It was partly my own fault since a sudden tooth trouble flared up real mean and resulted in my missing the deadline. To quote Sly "Heard you missed me" — well, thanks for your concern! Until next time then. **Keep the faith — right on now!**