

The Dave Godin Column

THAT there is a vast chasm between the Northern and Southern disco scenes is a well established fact. Northern Soul as the term was once used, can hardly be said to exist any more, having been effectively killed, not because of a dramatic change in taste amongst its followers, but by those whose kiss proved to be fatal and lethal.

Since I have not been living in London for some years now, I was full of excited anticipation when the opportunity recently arose for me to visit Ilford's "Lacy Lady". Having no preconceived notion of just what to expect made it that much more of a refreshing treat, and, I must admit, not a little wave of nostalgia swept over me from just hearing the accents of the people there as they engaged in conversation.

And what a beautifully heavy little number this joint is! After being there for only a few minutes I could easily suss out why those, whose knowledge of Soul stretches just as far as their own back-yard and is firmly rooted in the sounds of a decade (a tenth of a century!) ago should be so intimidated by it, as to them, 1977 Soul turns into a quicksand which shows them just how out of touch they are with contemporary trends in the United States.

As one who deplores conventional attitudes (that is, attitudes which are held without the necessity of prior thought), and is, hence, a bit of a philosophical freak, I felt entirely at home in the free ambience of the "Lacy", since it is peopled by human beings who have liberated themselves by their own efforts and who have overthrown all those dry, dispiriting and clapped-out values that were once foisted on the young by an elite who thought they were someone special!

Don't dare, I told Chris Hill, announce my presence over the speakers. The last time he did this, the "star" visitor got (quite rightly) the Big Raspberry, and in any case, who needs "stars"? Certainly not the crowd at the "Lacy"! It's living testimony of my oft repeated dictum that *everybody* is a star.

What a feeling of blessed relief it is too when those much talked about divisions of class and race and orientation really do fade away into insignificance. In the face of such a stimulating grass-roots ambience it could hardly do otherwise, but the difference is that whereas so many write and talk (especially talk!) along such lofty theoretical lines, here one is simply face to face with a manifestation of the reality; unselfconscious and spontaneously natural.

The "Lacy" is a dead natural place. So natural in fact that it's only after being there a couple of hours that you realise there's a sizeable gay minority on the floor

Nights in Ilford...

too. Not ghetto'd or tolerated in the "some-of-my-best-friends-are" inverted prejudice way, but simply there.

No person alive should ever have to justify their existence, and the "Lacy" seems to know that. And instead of just talking it, quietly gets on and does it.

Is it then unique? I like to think not, since one hopes that in the grim economic and Nazi-revivalist times in which we live, there are many such oases of good living, liberated by healthy sexuality and healthy music, free from that insidious impotence that needs to revenge itself in terms of cruelty, spitefulness and morbid pathological authoritarianism. If somebody shouted "Fire!" at the Lacy, I'm sure at least half a dozen would reply "OK, when I'm ready".

Not surprisingly therefore, there are some who would feel achingly intimidated by such a subliminally heavy scene, but (and maybe this is also an explanation as to why they'd feel as they do), it is not the heaviness of aggression so much as the aggression of healthy randyness. Which of course is superbly reflected in Soul music, and which is why the patrons of the "Lacy" demand it.

It is too what Soul music at heart is also all about (which additionally explains why Soul attracts so many passengers and freebie riders who seem so totally NOT in those particular stakes...).

The "Lacy" comes closer to the actual ambience of a genuine American Soul club than any other UK disco spot I have ever visited. Not the artificial pretend-intensity of the Roxy-Ritz-Putting-On-The-Style elite of the New York WASP set, but the real Brooklyn-Detroit Everything-Is-Everything stance of letting life come to you.

All those ads which bombard our daily lives seem so daft after a place like this; whereas they point to a world that doesn't really exist, this one is so much better, and right here in front of you.

I'm sure that for many, the "Lacy" is the weekly weekend Gates to Paradise. And why not? Let those who disapprove find their salvation in more sedate surroundings.

Chris Hill of course is so well known as to defy further comment or description from me, but it happened to be the first time I had seen him perform as a DJ. Shortly before my visit he'd been a guest DJ at a disco mid-way between the North and South, and when he actually tried to put the unity theory into practice he found several non-Soul zombies determined to stop this from happening

because for them, Soul music stopped growing and developing about the same time they did.

Intolerance ruled at this spot at least, but the past does have a way of dwindling down life's plug-hole despite minority efforts to stop the moving hands of time, and so Chris wasn't too discouraged about the incident. Certainly it is an attitude of mind I've always deplored, and in any case, who wants a few hundred readers in a magazine that is read by many thousands?

Play to the gallery too long in the Soul stakes, and before you know it, the gallery's empty whilst the stalls and circle are chockablock with people blowing raspberries!

Chris doesn't so much dominate the proceedings at the "Lacy" (although that said, there's no denying his forceful and all-pervading presence), but rather, gets the measure of the mood on the floor, and encourages and leads it along the lines it has already decided to go anyway. Perhaps a text book definition of what good disco DJ'ing is all about.

Just as well he's wise enough to play it that way too since if he tried the big ego tripping number then the crowd in all likelihood would simply give him the bird as they did the visiting "celebrity" who demanded the big name checks bit.

Music is the message, but this is augmented by, in equal measure, an unashamed and uncluttered frank sexuality that is almost a tradition that has never entirely vanished from certain parts of London and neighbouring localities. So much the better for them, and so much the better for the music.

Too many people hook onto Soul to compensate for their own (literal) short comings, but this place of healthy eroticism perfectly reflects so much of what the music is really all about. There is a world of difference between the libidinous eroticism of, say, the Emotions and the pornographic contortions of Legs & Co. If you can't feel the sense of this, then there's little point in trying to spell it out, and certainly then the "Lacy" probably wouldn't be your sort of scene.

In the eyes of the "straight" society, Soul music always has, (and probably always will be), seemed "dirty", because for such people all healthy sensuality is regarded as dirty too. It is the gulf that exists between pornographic pop (cruel, nasty, Nazi-fixated and life-negative) and its opposite, which is Soul.

Fashion (that modern catering to fetishist whims) naturally plays its part in the "Lacy's" proceedings because it is only right, proper and natural that everybody wants to look their best when hunting and dancing. Maybe it's not natural to wear mascara in two inch circles around the eyes, but then come to that, it's not natural to either wear

clothes or use toilet paper.

Whereas other spots got their buzz from uppers, the real buzz at the "Lacy" is as old as Adam and Eve. Light wheels turn, electric bulbs of multi-coloured hues flicker in optical illusions of chasing one another, and beneath them those heavily made-up eyes are full of awareness and vitality as they scan the scene and keep pace with the beat which is entirely rhythmic and sexual.

Of all the many discos and nite-spots I have visited in my long and exquisitely complex life, I rate the "Lacy", without reservation or quibble, to be amongst the top five.

It's a long stretch from New Orleans, or Brooklyn, or Chicago, or Detroit, to Ilford, but they are linked by a universal language. Soul is part of its vocabulary, and the beat is simply life itself.

Run-out groove

FIRSTLY, two sad events to record. **Gloria Jones** and **Marc Bolan** were involved in a car crash that resulted in Marc's death and Gloria being seriously injured. They had lived together in free union for some years, and although I didn't know Marc as well as Gloria, he was always very kind, generous and mindful of the enormous debt all popular music owed to black America.

To Gloria, we must extend not only our sympathies on her bereavement, but must also project a lot of love-light too because she's going to need all the strength she can command in order to get over this dreadful tragedy in her life.

Next, **Mike Rolo Rawlinson** who died suddenly and prematurely, and whose death has robbed the disco scene of one of its real characters and most vocal supporters. Although we never met personally, he used to be a prolific letter writer to me, and his enthusiasm and happiness in what he did always marked him out a name to easily remember. I extend my sympathies to his fiancée and family.

A heavy weekend approaches (at the time of writing) which I am much looking forward to. On Friday I'm off to Liverpool to participate in **Phil Easton's** four hour tribute to Tamla-Motown on Radio City, and which I know, from previous experience, will be fun.

Then on Saturday it's up to Wigan for their fourth Anniversary which I am sure will be as great as ever.

Then, on the Sunday after that I'm off to Manchester to guest on **Andy Peeble's** "Soul Train", telling it like it is and then some.

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