

The Dave Godin Column

Sounds for the soul

IT IS ODD how the impact of "disco" as a musical concept has affected the British Soul scene. To begin with we nearly all claimed that it would prove to be the biggest fillip Soul music had had in this country since the pirate radio stations, but of late, a definite and clearly discernable backlash amongst Soul fans has manifested itself.

Whilst this is understandable, it didn't surprise me when, as the "disco movement" got underway, fewer and fewer of the items included were bona-fide 100% Soul sides.

Soul never has been easy to market in Britain, and had the recent boom been identified as a "Soul craze" rather than a "disco" one, I think we'd find that we had much more to feel aggrieved about, for we'd be finding the tag "Soul" put on just about any side that had a few brass stabs, a two-second wail from a sax, and any half-hearted effort at vocally mastering a true Southern accent!

But is everything quite so gloomy on the Soul front as some people say it is? I was delighted to see the **Emotions'** "Best Of My Love" become such a big hit in Britain, and similarly, I was pleased to see my prediction of US success come true for **Heatwave**, but I think that perhaps the one area that has diminished in influence and power (the area that was disco before the word "disco" passed into popular usage) has been that of Northern Soul, and I think it fair to say that the majority of letters of complaint I get come from people involved in this particular phenomena.

With the sudden closure of Blackpool Mecca's Highland Room (for so many years THE bastion of Northern Soul), surely it is time to wonder aloud again, just WHAT, (precisely and exactly), constitutes Northern Soul in 1977? And how long will it be before the tremendous musical energy of the 60s (which created the phenomena in the first place), exhausts itself simply because the output of that era is drying up?

Time and again I have urged Northern jocks to move with the times if they want to survive, and yet, so fixed is the obsession of some that they will not spin a new side even if it has all the ear-marks of a Northern "classic" of tomorrow. Not because of its music content, but simply because it is NEW, and sometimes, because it has been issued in the UK!

If there is a better formula for self-extinction, then I don't know of it. I have often thought that DJs tend to pay too much attention to what their patrons tell them they want to hear, forgetting that the role of a DJ is to innovate and

pioneer, and not to reflect the innate conservatism of those who dance and listen.

Ask any person in the street to name some current hits, and chances are that they'll name records that were in the charts anything up to six months ago! Similarly, disco patrons expect a selection of known and liked favourites, but a wise DJ will have faith in his own taste and judgement, and often back his hunches even in the face of open hostility from the floor.

The biggest error that anyone who seeks personal popularity makes, is to (a) under-estimate the intelligence of his audience (they are always, and without fail, much, much cuter than you think! Which is why, in passing, I have never insulted my readers by writing down to them); and (b) be so keen to maintain popularity that the pursuit of this becomes more of an occupation than the job you're paid to do in the first place!

There is a world of difference between being an individualist and between having contempt for your patrons (or readers!), and only by sticking to the former are you likely to earn the respect, and subsequently affection, of those who look to you to give them some sort of service.

These rules affect me as a writer just as much as they do you as a DJ. In any case, why should we be in any different a position to the artists we so admire? They're only as good as their last record — and they know it!

It would be sad if in five years time we look back at 1977 as the year in which Northern Soul ground to a dead halt, but unless DJs on that circuit loosen up a little and become less dogmatic with their "faith", then as much as it saddens me to say so, it could well be.

I know too that the situation is further aggravated by the fact that there are just so many good records being issued nowadays, and the sheer effort and time involved in trying to keep abreast with all of them makes it easy to overlook and miss some goodies. Which is why I urge you to keep checking on those which I write about.

Unlike some, I don't mention records simply to settle accounts for having received a free copy in the first place, but because I feel, genuinely and sincerely, that these are SOUL records that SOUL fans will enjoy, and which may well "appreciate" and grow in stature in time.

Currently my premier single has to be the incredible triple-funk of **Cameo's** latest single "Funk, Funk" (**Casablanca** 112). You'd be forgiven if on a casual hearing you

thought it was **Parliament**, but all credit to **Cameo** that, after a disappointing LP, they managed to pull off one of the ultra-funk records of the year.

The incessant hand-clapping augmented rhythmic pattern is overlaid with a melodious enough vocal, and some brass work that is so beautiful it'll produce a total body-metabolism invasion! Cool, deceptively off-hand and casual, it is a brilliant example of just how much catching up UK groups will have to do before they can even begin to enter this sort of league.

Edging close to this one, although in a different bag altogether, is **Gloria Jones'** latest outing "Bring On The Love (Why Can't We Be Friends Again)" (**EMI** 2720) which is totally haunting and which should be a Top 20 entry by the time these words appear in print.

I am, of course, unashamedly biased in favour of Gloria — she's had a tragic run of bad luck of late, and I'd like to see the cruel indifference of fate resoundingly answered with a big hit for her, and I think this one could just do it too!

Never has she been in better -vocal form — her phrasing, diction and delivery on this are just immaculate! In fact, it is a genuine compliment to her if I compare her to the adored and respected **Dee Dee Warwick!** Super arrangement by **Paul Riser**, and an overall evocative sound that's bound to stir more than just a few hearts.

I know Gloria is going to pull through the ordeal life has presented her, and I hope this record contributes in a small way to this victory for her.

Over long last **Sylvester's** superb "At Over & Over" (**Fantasy** 144) has been issued here, and I'm only hoping that heavy import traffic hasn't marred its chances of chart potential. Although a disco record, this is far more Soul laden than most, and at time borders on pure gospel. Remember, this is definitely one you first read about here!

The re-activated **Stax** logo has relaunched itself with a never-before-released item from the **Emotions** "Shouting Out Love" (**Stax** 501) which is not surprising considering their commercial potential now. With an ace label design, **Stax** is bound to be of constant interest to Soul people, and very few will be disappointed with this release.

Not quite the tempo of their present output, the voices remain as immaculate as ever, and the mid-tempo pacing should make it particularly suitable for radio spins, and so far as I can tell, I've yet to meet a Soul fan who doesn't love the **Emotions!**

Magnet is not usually a label that provides much Soul material to write about, but out the blue they've issued **Ray Crumley's** "It's Uncanny" (**Magnet** 103) which is a disco-orientated version of the

Daryl Hall & John Oates original, and which seems to have been very influenced by the American success of **Simon Soussan's** Motown work-out. Such is the price of success, and spots which played that successfully should sort this one out too.

Ray has a nice enough voice, and gal chorus, castanets, tambourine, and the sound of a clock being wound up provide novel colouring. Could well be a surprise hit given half a chance.

As a company, **A&M** can always be relied upon to inject a little class into our lives, and in **L.T.D.** they have on of the classiest and most talented acts around right now. Their new single "Back In Love" (**A&M** 7319) is outstandingly good. Not a million miles from **James Brown's** "Get Up Offa That Thing" to begin with, the lead vocalist (**Jeffrey Osborne**) is sheer Soul perfection — the type of vocal that just can't be faulted — and the addition of a cracking femme backup make this side a must.

At present, **L.T.D.** don't seem to have all that big a following in this country, I think it'll only a matter of time before their name is well known to all contemporary Soul fans. The energy and excitement they generate on "Back In Love" is what Soul music is all about.

Lenny Williams "Shoo Doo Fu Fu Ooh" reminds me so much of **Gene Chandler's** "Nothing Can Stop Me", but it deserves its hit status and sounds so much like a Northern monster of ten years ago that I'm sure its appeal has been nationwide. His LP "Choosing You" (**ABC** 5232) is bound to become equally as popular, for not only does it have his hit, but also contains the dynamic side after which the LP was titled, and what for my money is his best tract, "Riding The High Wire", which I hope might eventually be culled as a single, and apart from its altogether excellence, teems with that magic that used once to pervade every Soul record that seemed to be made! Working itself up to a stirring climax, **Lenny** sings with total conviction and honesty.

Run-out groove

- **Paul Newman's** new movie features **Maxine Nightingale's** "Right Back Where We Started From", so it could well spark off a second time around hit for her.

- Seeing "Uptight" on TV again recently, my disappointment with it when it was new and I reviewed it for B&S, didn't seem misjudged after all. The original movie on which this was based, "The In-former" was boring enough, and this "black" remake was no better. Pity, because I'd like to see a natural and unselfconscious black cinema evolve.

- Until next time then, keep the faith — right on now!