

The Dave Godin Column

A quarter century of Soul...

ALTHOUGH somewhat eclipsed by that *other* Silver Jubilee, 1977 in fact marks a very special anniversary of my own, for it was 25 years ago that I bought my first R&B records, and so got launched into and helplessly addicted to the music of black America. So, I couldn't let the year pass without paying a personal tribute to the many artists, musicians, and composers involved in what we now term Soul, who have given me so much intense pleasure over a quarter of a century.

Time has taken some of them from us, and others have slipped into obscurity. Still others never even hit the big time, but offered up one masterpiece and, like shooting stars, fell out or orbit as quickly as they'd come into it. Others however have stuck the course and are still around, working and recording.

So often I am asked by readers to say what I think are my favourite records of all time, and having been writing about Soul for 10 years, I foolishly assume that because I think I've written about them quite enough, I forget that many of today's readers have not been reading me for as many years as I've been writing, so I thought a good idea to commemorate my own Soul Jubilee would be to take my reputation in my hands and list and comment upon what I consider to be the best 100 Soul sides of the last 25 years!

As you can imagine, the task was colossal, and an undertaking filled with heartache as I got it down to about 150 sides, and then had to ruthlessly preen 50 out to get it down to the magic 100!

Your own personal all-time favourite may not be included either! But it would have been counter-productive to take politics into consideration, and so I quite shamelessly restricted myself to picking just those sides which have given me the greatest personal Soul satisfaction, and which, on a critical level too, are worthy of respect and acclaim.

Having got the list down to 100 titles, I thought, it would be impossible (as well as unfair) to try

and further refine it by putting them in order of merit, so what follows will be in strictly alphabetical order.

Some interesting facts emerged which even surprised me. Only 40% of the sides are by female singers or female led groups; which perhaps doesn't belie my constant avowal that I prefer femme singers so much as indicate how much greater the proportion of male singers to females still is.

The selections also indicate how genuinely I consider the 60s to have been the high point of Soul music's development, and a disproportionate amount come from that truly Golden Era. Records which I've set aside for this year's Top 20 were not included in my choice, and to simplify matters with reissues, changing licensing deals etc., I've included the original American label, or the American label on which it became a hit (in cases where a small label master was bought up and put out on a bigger logo to become a hit in the States).

So — here goes...my Top 100 Soul sides of all time!

Johnny Ace "Pledging My Love" (Duke)

Memphis-born **Johnny Ace** was, in my view, the world's first genuine Soul singer, even though he recorded and performed in the 50s before that word had slipped into popular usage. His senseless death in 1954 robbed him of his true recognition, but "Pledging My Love" is still a highly listenable side after all these years.

The jazz influence was more apparent in the 50s when this side was new than it is now, but despite the dreamy and languid atmosphere, there is an intensity of passion in Johnny's vocal that still retains the power to stir your heart and mind.

Faye Adams "Shake A Hand" (Herald)

The magnificent and powerful voice of **Faye Adams** opened up a whole new

vista for femme singers in the early 50s, and few there have been to equal her.

"Shake A Hand" was unashamedly "churchy" with its rolling piano, staggered choruses, and discreet brass workings. A huge hit in the States too and a key record in Soul music's development in my view.

Johnny Adams "If I Could See You One More Time" (SSS International)

If ever there were a neglected talent, then **Johnny Adams** is that talent. An incredible vocalist of great merit, who has poise, skill and over-powering ability. But, Lady Luck has never really favoured him, and the Soul scene is the poorer for him not being heard more often.

This side which was part penned by the amazing **Wardell Quezzerque**, is another example of pure "church" — organ, guitar and ebbsing brass, and on top of that a vocal that is so pure and so Soulful it stands as, and in my estimation will always remain, a truly Southern masterpiece.

The Ad Libs "Nothing Worse Than Being Alone" (Share)

Before **Van McCoy** went silly, I was amongst his most ardent and vocal champions in this country, and this masterpiece that he penned for **The Ad Libs** is one of the sides I am most proud of having launched onto the Northern Soul scene where it eventually became a monster. Quite rightly so too.

It is one of the sides that totally epitomises the whole concept of Northern Soul, and the deeper values which you know all about, but which only I have written on. A total paradox of a side being totally and almost mindlessly optimistic and yet full of blue tonalities which give it a bitter, sad undertone.

Roshell Anderson "Know What You're Doing When You Leave" (Sunburst)

One of our mentors, **Roshell** shot up in the early 70s and has since vanished from sight. Such is the craziness of the record business.

Tom Jones would give all his capped teeth to be able to sing like this. Deep Soul never had a better calling card, and this side remains a testament and a revelation. It's lack of critical acclaim says more about the state of Britain's critics rather than about the song itself!

Bessie Banks "Go Now" (Tiger)

When I first got this issued in this country, I felt certain it would become a hit. It sold less than 100 copies! Then,

when we issued it on (Soul City) it had reached legendary enough proportions to sell many thousands of copies.

I wish now that when those terrible cover versions by British groups were issued I'd actually bought copies, because it would be marvellous to play them side by side with the original on the air so that the public at large could realise that what we said all along WAS the simple, plain unvarnished truth; the original Soul version is always the best. This side is so good it hurts.

Darrell Banks "Open The Door To Your Heart" (Revolot)

If there were one side that epitomised the high water point of Soul during its Golden Era of the 60s, then surely few would quarrel with picking the late **Darrell Banks'** own composition and performance of "Open The Door To Your Heart".

In those days, the vocal was all, and although arrangement and backing were vitally important, they had not yet dominated to the degree that records were robbed of personality and human warmth. And it serves as a particularly fitting reminder of the truly great contribution to Soul music that EMI's (Stateside) label made during its lifetime.

Homey Banks "A Lot Of Love" (Minit)

This side has more naked aggression in it than any punk opus of the present era, but superficially it is a love song, and was shamelessly ripped off by a British group.

It marked a new and important departure for Soul when it was first issued because arrangements were getting far, far more complex and records were actually getting louder too.

There is a point towards the end of this magnificent side where everything collides and crashes into a stupendous crescendo climax, and the hypnotic and naked-kiss quality of this record has seldom been equalled.

Chris Bartley "I'll Take The Blame (Buddah)

Chris Bartley has always been one of my favourite singers, and again, it's said to think he has not progressed further in his career. This side like the one by **The Ad Libs** earlier, was penned by **Van McCoy** and his mate, **Joe Cobb**.

Together they really made sweet music, and **Chris Bartley** interpreted and read this number to perfection. Full of charm, the **Four Tops** should seriously consider doing a new version of this. By the way, the femme backing group I've praised on this side on previous occasions, is none other than a multi-tracked **Van McCoy** singing falsetto!

Continued over page

Dave Godin:

Continued from page 43

Chuck Berry "Roll Over Beethoven" (Chess)

When the post-War era of this present century is looked at from the viewpoint of those who have yet to be born, I'm inclined to think that of all the people involved in "popular" music, **Chuck Berry** and **Bob Dylan** will be seen as the most truly original creative forces, and their reputations will eventually eclipse those of the **Beatles**, the **Rolling Stones** and **Elvis Presley**.

One can not over-estimate the immense contribution **Chuck Berry** made to the music scene of the 50s, even though Britain was so slow to catch up with him that they missed out on so much of his best stuff. Not only were his lyrics great, but his tunes were good too, and never were these two talents better emphasised in my view than in "Roll Over Beethoven".

Near surrealist lyrics and a break-neck speed perfectly reflected all that being a teenager in the 50s was about — well, if not for the majority, and least for an ultra-hip minority, and a fitting reminder too of the days when Rock was virile and zestful before it became intellectualised, frigid and impotent.

Birdlegs & Pauline "Spring" (Vee Jay).

What I love most about "Spring", is its conception which is totally remarkable, and still unique. There has never been another record quite like this, and like the tension required to create all great art, this side almost pulls you off in two separate directions.

Total romantic sentimentalism, this song still says more about the real facts of life than all the brash cynicism of latter-day pretentious phoniness.

Rufus Thomas first broke this record on his radio show in Memphis, but **Birdlegs & Pauline** never hit the big time again.

Bobby Bland "Turn On Your Love Light" (Duke)

I've restricted every artist to just one side for this top 100 selection, and **Bobby Bland** was one of the artists from whom it was tough to pick just one song, but I think his stupendous reading of the original version of this pretty often recorded number is the right one.

I fear Britain will forever live in ignorance of this vital and brilliant Soul stylist, but for Soul fans, his contribution will always be a source of great and abiding pleasure. When this side was issued, purists dismissed it as mere "pop" because they weren't ready for the emancipation into its brash tearaway vulgarity symbolised.

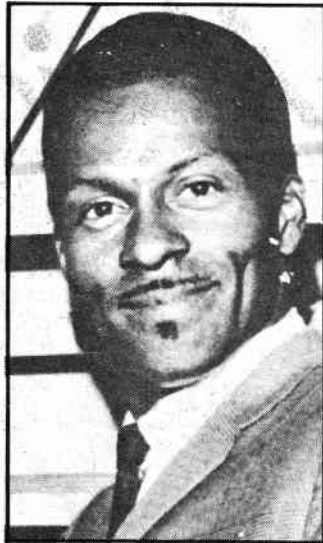
It was the beginning of a new and permanent phase and it was saying goodbye to a heck of a lot that needed to be booted out of the musical spectrum. A horrendous masterpiece if ever there was one!

Maxine Brown "All In My Mind" (Nomar)

Apart from being one of the most beautiful records ever made, **Maxine Brown's** reading of "All In My Mind" was a key record in Soul music's development, for it marked the transition from R&B to conscious Soul at the very beginning of the 60s.

Looking back now it can be seen even more clearly than at the time to have been a prophetic sign of what the decade was to become more and more about. Troubled and overtly anxious, it heralded a move towards introspection in Soul which, though at this present time has been eclipsed by the grim froth of the disco beat, will, mark my words, re-emerge again in due course. So perfect it just can not be faulted, and had **Maxine** never made another record, this debut outing would have qualified her for a place amongst the true immortals of Soul.

Possibly too, the first true Deep Soul



Chuck: immense contribution

record in the way the term is presently used and understood.

Solomon Burke "Everybody Needs Somebody To Love" (Atlantic)

Increasingly gospel idioms crept into black music in the 60s, and "Everybody Needs Somebody To Love" emerged in **Solomon Burke's** hands as a pure sermon! Declamatory and full of the most incredible bounce and rhythm, you can clearly hear **Doris Troy** and **Dee Dee Warwick** helping out in the backing vocals, and **Solomon's** testifying qualities were never bettered than on this remarkable opus.

The back beat is dynamic, and it's a great pity that for the majority of people in Britain they only know of this song through the effete version so embarrassingly rendered by the **Rolling Stones!** But, this original vividly demonstrates the immense gulf that exists between real Soul and the make-believe sort.

Billy Butler "The Right Track" (Okeh)

One of the sad aspects about all art (or rather, great art) is the natural law that prevents you from ever again experiencing to quite the same degree, the exquisite rush one sometimes gets when a great work of art first hits you smack between the eyes!

Billy Butler's "The Right Track" was a side that quite devastated my consciousness when I first heard it, and although thousands of subsequent spins haven't diminished the esteem in which I hold it, I'd really love to have a second whirl at the sensational response it provoked in me that very first time!

I was so happy to be responsible for getting it issued over here, and I still regard it as a side that is so perfect it is almost impossible to describe. It says it all much better than I ever could!

Ray Charles "What'd I Say" (Atlantic)

Again, a key record in Soul music's development as more and more gospel idioms were fused to the R&B ethic. **Ray Charles** might have gone a different artistic route to that which many of us would like to have seen him pursue, but this landmark of a side with its drive, force and sheer joy of living, truly is a classic, and one which never fades in the least.

Morris Chestnut "Too Darn Souful" (Amy)

Although this side enjoyed an immense popularity in the North, I still regard it as a generally under-rated record because there is a lot more to it than first meets the ear.

For a start, the arrangement is one of the most brilliant I've ever heard and is so well thought out in its complexity that it is like a finely woven cloth with all the various strands skillfully pulled together to make an overall pattern that is masterfully dominated by the impossibly named **Morris Chestnut's** vocal.

Surprisingly relegated to the B-side in

the States, and shamefully never officially issued in this country!

It's a side that the North can be truly proud of rescuing from possible obscurity.

Arthur Conley "Let Nothing Separate Us" (Jotis)

In his early days, **Arthur Conley** was groomed as a Deep Soul singer, and on this **Otis Redding** penned number he excelled nearly all others before and since in this field. Pure gospel roots with secular lyrics, it signalled so much of what was afterwards to come from Memphis in the 60s.

Surely one of the most beautiful Soul ballads ever, and rendered and arranged with total sympathy and sheer excellence. Blessed indeed are those whose lives bring them the first hand experience of what this record is putting down, and that's a fact!

Sam Cooke "Bring It On Home To Me" (RCA)

The premature death of **Sam Cooke** was yet another tragedy that marred the Soul music scene's history, and seldom was he in better form than on this immaculate song that he wrote and sang to perfection.

Never shall I forget his superlative stage performance at Woolwich on the opening night of **Little Richard's** first British tour, and I treasure the memory of the time we spent together in the pub opposite chatting and talking Soul. **Sam Cooke** was yet another tragedy that marred the Soul music scene's history, and seldom was he in better form than on this immaculate song that he wrote and sang to perfection.

Never shall I forget his superlative stage performance at Woolwich on the opening night of **Little Richard's** first British tour, and I treasure the memory of the time we spent together in the pub opposite chatting and talking Soul. **Sam Cooke** was one of Soul music's true greats and truly, he really did bring it on home.

Cookle & His Cupcakes "Got You On My Mind" (Chess)

The contribution of the Chicago based (Chess) and (Checker) labels was an immense part of Soul's history, and so astute were they that they'd quickly buy up likely-sounding masters such as this one and promote them into big hits.

This outing by **Cookle** is totally Southern in feel and atmosphere, with walking bass line, rolling piano and a declamatory vocal superbly handled and rendered. Perhaps more than many others in this top 100 selection, this side could be described as the epitome of Rhythm & Blues, and the actual Blues tonality and musical pattern is what gets it to you.

Quite a rare record, it has never, in my view at least, had its proper share of acclaim, and this must partly be due to the fact that it has never ever been issued in this country in any shape or form. Too late now, but my word, it was a killer when it was new.

G.L. Crockett "It's A Man Down There" (4-Brothers)

Although immensely influenced by the work of **Jimmy Reed**, the late **G.L. Crockett's** one stab at fame and fortune which worked out, has so much charm and appeal that it is totally irresistible.

A huge hit in and around Detroit, it was perhaps the parting shot of an idiom that has since almost totally vanished from the music scene. Pure blues again, but with an infectious jump beat, its ironic and witty lyrics may perhaps sound corny by today's more sophisticated standards, but that doesn't make them nonetheless true and telling.

G.L. Crockett had a nice and almost comforting vocal style, and the bag groove of the accompaniment fitted the whole to a tee.

The Crow "Tour Autumn, Of Tomorrow" (Inner Ear)

This, together with "Uncle Funk", must be one of the best double header couplings of all time, and I've chosen "Autumn" simply because it has an aggressive edge about it.

Strange now to reflect that when we issued this on the (Right ON!) label it was described in some quarters as "punk", but it does have a certain basic virility about it that comes within a hair's breadth of going over the top. That it doesn't quite is what makes it a masterpiece, and what makes it almost unique is the blend of primitive fascis coupled with sophisticated sentiments; a potent brew which I've never tired of mulling over!

Who **the Crow** were or are is immaterial — if more studio guys could get together and make sides the dramatic and dynamic impact of this, then they'd soon quit for the solo spotlight.

If nothing else, it's got to be one of the more unusual records of all time!

The Crystals "He Hit Me, And It Felt Like A Kiss" (Philles)

It was when **Phil Spector** found everything he touched turned to gold, but with this immaculate mid-tempo pounder from the ever-loving **Crystals**, he found he'd made an error of taste and subsequently the record was withdrawn from circulation.

Nowadays of course it sounds positively innocent compared to some of the vitriolic bile that comprises the lyrics of some contemporary pop, but it was simply too much when it was new for American media consciousness to handle. Britain never had a chance of course, and to this day it remains an unissued underground classic.

Is it in bad taste? Well, I suppose it is, but like so much good art that gives offence, we can recognise its sentiments — maybe that's why it disturbs and offends! At least it is violence that doesn't actually hurt anybody.

Brendetta Davis "I Can't Make It Without Him" (Liberty)

Barry White produced this cosmic whirlwind of a super production before he started to go silly, and although I've not heard of **Brendetta Davis** before or since, it shines like a beacon in a stormy sea. And stormy it certainly is, being a blend of deep Soul, orchestral accompaniment of symphonic proportions, and over which **Brendetta** sings out like a true Soul sister.

Girl chorus tries to get a look in somewhere along the line, and possibly it is the most over-produced side of all time. But the important thing is that it works, and the end result is like an exotic treat comprised from fifty different ingredients.

Tyrone Davis "Can I Change My Mind" (Dakar)

It is a little remembered fact that this started off in life as the B side in the States, and I particularly remember it because we were offered the coupling (Soul City) before it had got anywhere in the States, and I replied that we would love to have it on condition that we could flip it for UK release. By the time my reply had reached them, American DJs had concurred with my own verdict and (Atlantic) snapped it up for world-wide distribution.

A truly great mellow sound superbly handled by **Tyrone Davis** who is one of the true stylists still active in contemporary Soul, and who deserves a much larger and dedicated following in this country.

"Can I Change My Mind" has over the years come to be regarded by many as a true classic of the Soul idiom, and it's verdict that I fully support and uphold myself.

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