

**AN INTERVIEW WITH MARK DOBSON (AKA BUTCH) - RECORDED SATURDAY 20TH NOVEMBER 1999 @ LEA MANOR COUNTRY CLUB, ALBRIGHTON**

On approaching Mark Dobson (AKA "Butch") with regard to an interview on behalf of Manifesto, it was with certain scepticism that our subject would respond to your regular South Wales Super-scriber. However with our sincere reassurances, that the feature was to highlight the massive contribution we believe our subject had made to the Rare Soul Scene, with his innovativeness both at plundering the ever-shrinking U.S. vinyl mountain and continuously re-activating the right sounds at the right time, whilst also maintaining a regularly classy play-list. We convinced him of our desire for him to reap the plaudits we truly believe relevant, to such an individual we deem a Soul D.J.'ing icon. The old cliché "It's what's in the grooves that count" remains very true, however the right groove at the right time... in the right place ensures that the South Wales Soul Patrol amongst many others are "At the right place... at the right time!" Just to get a flavour of some of the sides we regard as 'Anthems', we've listed a selection that possibly, may have never seen the light of day had the guy's appetite and enthusiasm not been 100%. Our principal objectives when attending Soul venues are enjoyment, entertainment and education with regard to the music we love, and whilst you continue at the controls Mark... we are guaranteed just that! Utmost respect The Soul Patrol!

**WHERE DID IT ALL BEGIN FOR YOU?**

"Well my brother was a regular at the Torch All-niter in Stoke, and he used to come home from the All-niter when I was just finishing my paper-round, and as he was a record collector he used to bring records home and I used to play them. And they all sounded pretty good so, he used to say you ought to come up to the Torch, but obviously I was a lot younger than him and I looked very young! I never really had the courage to go over there because I was only about 13 or 14 when he was going up there. Time passed by and the Torch closed down because of the drugs issue, and he was obviously devastated. We read about this new All-niter in Wigan that was being set up. So he went up there and came back and said that it's a good All-niter, with a lot of people there who used to go to the Torch attending, so I thought yeah, I might try

that one. So I eventually plucked up enough courage because I was still pretty young at the time, and went up there with a bunch of guys – and once you've done the Casino, well that was it! The early days of the Casino were absolutely fantastic, and obviously at the time I was a young teenager and Motown was the 'IN' thing to be listening to, and you were either listening to Led Zeppelin or it was Motown. Obviously a lot of us were influenced by the Motown sound, and Reggae was pretty popular as well. And then from Wigan I just went to places with All-niters at and got to know all the characters on the scene.

**WHAT WERE YOUR MAIN INFLUENCES?**

"I don't think there's one major influence or any particular person, it's just ever since I started listening to the music, a lot of people and a lot of things have influenced me. Just the experience of going to the Casino, and a lot of other All-niters. I don't think there was one individual or one place – It's just pretty much a lot of people and a lot of places over the years, and a lot of good records and sounds.

*MIKE/PAUL - "Considering, at that time the sounds at Wigan were so fresh to everyone, you are – Even after 25 years, still digging up sounds of that calibre (and even better). Was it the progressive D.J.'s even then that pushed it forward for you?"*

"I thought for the first ten years of going to All-niters that pretty much a lot of sounds were new, I mean they may have been playing stuff at other venues I wasn't attending, but eventually they ended up in the All-niters we were going to and really went big. I got in with a crowd of people in Stoke who were pretty much into what was new, and we were into more of the newer stuff people were playing. And also we had our own little scene where we were digging up obscure things ourselves and covering them up. We had this little scene in Stoke with about 50 people involved in it, and they would try and find unknown things themselves. A lot of main-players on the scene probably just laughed at us at the time.

*PAUL - "Was that still in Britain then, or were you going out to the states then to find stuff?"*

"At first it was just buying from Soul Bowl, as it was the main place. And we used to have this page of sales and I think my

take-home pay at the time was about £15 or so, and you could buy £5 specials off Soul Bowl, and occasionally you could get a real good one that nobody knew and we used to have our own little club. We used to go up there and play them on a Wednesday night, and occasionally you would get a bit of reaction from one of the records you put on."

**WHERE AND WHEN AND WHY DID YOU START D.J.'ING?**

"That was a long time after, and I had no real intention or interest in starting D.J.'ing. The main All-niter's had your standard or regular D.J.'s i.e. Richard Searling or Ian Levine and all those characters, then when they all dropped out of the scene in the late seventies and early eighties, Keb Darge and Guy Hennigan took over, and I was pretty close with them, as friends I had met on the scene, especially Guy. I met Guy at Wigan and he used to always turn up at the Casino with a box of oddball things and we'd sort of exchange information. So when he and Keb took over D.J.'ing at Stafford they became the top jocks in the country. I was really very close to them, but I didn't really want to D.J. at Stafford, as I was pretty happy just listening to what they were playing, and moving records to them that I'd found that I thought were worthwhile. That went on for about eight years, but towards the end of Stafford I just found I'd got myself a right good collection of oddball records that I thought were really good which hadn't been played. To top it all off, this guy named Jim Wensiora, who had this monstrous collection with some fantastic unknown in, sold up. This was just at the end of Stafford, and I was the first one to look in his collection. I must have brought about ten really good records off him, and then I went back the week after and brought another ten. I had this great collection of unknown things, and I just thought maybe it needed something extra, and maybe I could just join in with them. Guy and Keb were coming to the end of a long hard slog of playing new records through Stafford and other venues. So that's what I did, and I just started off that way."

*MIKE - "Would you say that when Keb and Guy were D.J.'ing at Stafford, it seemed like the turnover of records was very quick – Similar to years ago at the Casino and other venues?"*

"I think it was quick in the early days of the Casino, then it was slowed down. And then you had Richard (Searling) who was playing records for like two or three years

at a time, and Pat Brady did that at Stafford as well, Pat had a fantastic selection of records at Stafford, and he played his for like two to three years as well and really made them big records – But you can only really do that if they are ultimately, really rare records! If they're not rare then they are going to turn up in other people's spots, or if they're not that good enough they're not going to make the grade anyway. Going back to original question, I do think that Guy and Keb's turnover was a bit too quick, but they felt that it was the right way to do it, and that was fine by me! But some of those records were probably only played for six months, and probably had a life span of about four or five years."

*MIKE - "I didn't frequent Stafford on all that many occasions, and there is stuff that I am hearing now for the first time and finding that it was a big Stafford sound – And I don't know it! The refreshing thing is that although Stafford couldn't emulate the 'Golden' years of the scene, the fact that with the likes of yourself and others who we've come to associate with great records, have always come up with something new and refreshing, and we're not be able to guess what the D.J. is going to play next! It is always refreshing to go to these clubs and get that freshness, and that is what keeps us all interested! And the Rare Soul ranks are swelling now because they all want to hear these sounds."*

"On that point, I've worked with Tim Ashibende, and obviously we've talked about the scene a lot, and we often say that we couldn't think of a club that we would want to go to now if we were just regular punters – We couldn't think of club that we would want to go to for something new. We can't think of any D.J.'s we could really follow that were progressing the scene, for me it's a bit unfortunate. In the eighties I could go and listen to a handful of D.J.'s who were pushing the scene forward, whether they were Northern or Modern D.J.'s."

**HAVE YOU VISITED THE STATES MANY TIMES OVER THE YEARS?**

"Because I work, I can only really go when it's my holidays, but I would've liked to have gone more often! When Tim (Ashibende) and I first went in 1979, it was a different States then to how it is now – The seventies in America was a very exciting place, and it was so new to us. Britain in the seventies was like a completely different place than the U.S.

– It isn't now, the two countries are pretty much the same, similar cars and similar everything!"

**WOULD YOU AGREE WITH THE FACT THAT TECHNOLOGY HAS MADE THE AVERAGE RECORD SELLER IN THE STATES AWARE OF THE NORTHERN SCENE?**

"It's the Internet of course, it's a complex issue about the awareness of the American dealer, and the subsequent increase in prices. It's a real complex issue, but I know for a fact that when a lot of people were buying records in the late seventies/early eighties in America, there was a 'Code Of Conduct'. It was unwritten, but a few dealers who used to buy from America used to stick by it. There were rules that went along the lines of, you didn't tell an American what the records were worth over here, and you didn't really tell them what you were after. It was a case of going over there and getting stuff as cheap as you could. But

now it seems that there is a different breed of people, and the first thing they do is give the dealers a 'Want's' list with a photocopy of the record, and are willing to give the full price! The problem is that there will always be somebody who wants to pay a lot more than everyone else, so they normally shout the loudest saying "I'll give you X amount for this record", and then the dealer gets it in his head that the record is worth that much. He then goes and tells all his mates in the area, so his mates get to know about it and then that price is fixed for that record."

**ARE THERE ANY EXPERIENCES WHILST YOU'VE BEEN IN THE U.S. – EITHER MEMORABLE OR OTHERWISE?**

"I was hitch-hiking once with Tim (Ashibende), we were near Chicago and we decided to split up for the day to go record hunting, and there was no form of transport to the place I was trying to get to, so I hitched a lift off this guy, this trucker. He picked me up and I told him where I wanted to go, and he says yeah he's going that way – So off we went! Well then, about ten minutes down the road, after we've been making conversation about his trade etc (Joinery) he says, "I tell you what – I'll take you right to the place where you're going to, it's a bit out my way but it's no problem", so I said

"Great pal, thanks". So we carried on a bit further and then he says "My dick's hard!" – Well, I thought this was a bit of harmless banter so I said 'Yeah, yeah, yeah' to him. So he says to me "Is your dick hard?" – Well fuck, I thought this guy doesn't really know me, but I played along with him and I said "Well, not really but you know..." And then he starts asking me if I like 'Pussy', so I said 'Yeah, yeah!' I'd got my own vision of what 'pussy' was – But his vision was 'My Pussy', and as we're going along he starts making it pretty clear to me that he wanted me back at his house, and did I fancy going back for a few beers and a bit of 'Pussy'? What with his hard-on, I was the 'Pussy'. We're still going along and I'm feeling pretty uncomfortable about it, and I'm thinking well, he's giving me a lift there and I can't really do anything then and there about it. And then I start to think, what if this

Americans, he just shrugged his shoulders. So I said can I play a few? He said that the equipment wasn't set up (I was desperate for him at this point to set the equipment up so as I could listen to them), he wasn't bothered at all, and didn't really think much of these acetates.

So he finally set it up so as I could play these acetates, and there was some interesting stuff. He turned out to be a really nice guy. That's where I got my copy of The Butlers 'Think it over' from. He knew all about the record, he said that it had the same backing track as Yvonne Baker 'You didn't say a word', so when I put it on and listened to it – Well, it was immense! It was a dream come true finding something like that!"

**WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON BOOTLEGS?**

"It makes me wonder what the real interest

know their product is out on CD yet. Saying that, it must be impossible sometimes to find whoever owns the rights to these records, they're that obscure!"

**IN YOUR OWN OPINION, WHICH RECORDS HAVE YOU HAD THE MOST SATISFACTION FROM WHEN BREAKING THEM ON THE SCENE?**

"If I do a good set, and it goes down well, that's what gives me the buzz! You might do a similar set somewhere else, and the crowd's disappointed. That's what gives me the buzz – Getting the set right at a certain club and everybody seeming to enjoy it. I don't really pick on individual records, and initially when I get one, and it could be any type of record, Deep Soul or Modern or any good record! Initially when I have it in my box, the first couple

of weeks of playing it and I'm worrying to death, that's what gives me the buzz, it's the set at the club, and if it goes down well then that's what makes me happy. It's not any particular record at all, it's having a set of records that I think I can rely

on for a few years, occasionally one or two might be bootlegged, or some might be found in large quantities, or odd ones won't do anything for the dance floor so you need to drop them, and then you need to bring in a couple of other things to take over. Occasionally, I try to pick up on a few things that are happening for other D.J's. And sometimes a few oldies that fit in to the spot, just to make it a nice set. You don't want all exclusives, and you want a few things from the past!"

**DO YOU HAVE A PERSONAL TOP-TEN?**

"Quite a lot of people ask that question, what's your top five or ten records or what's your number one record? I never really had a top ten or anything else – Never! My tastes constantly change, I mean this week it could be a Sweet Soul record, and then next week it could be a Northern record! The week after it could be an oldie, it's like constant movement for me – Which is my favourite record or which is my favourite top ten! A lot of the time my top ten would never be in my 'play' box, as it's quite easy to get bored with the stuff you've been playing. And that's always been a fault of a lot of D.J's, getting fed up of their own set of records, before the crowd have even have latched on to it! What amazes me is that a lot of people out in the clubs don't

**And then I start to think, what if this guy suddenly stops the truck and gets out a gun and says "Bend over"**

guy suddenly stops the truck and gets out a gun and says "Bend over". Anyway he just keeps on quizzing me whether I was into getting back to his place and having a few beers and a bit of 'Pussy'. Well, we finally get where I wanted to be and he says "Right, you here – Are you sure you don't wanna change your mind?" – So I said "No thanks" and got out of the truck – Phew!"

**ARE THERE ANY STORIES OF FINDING RECORDS, OR MEETING ANY PERSONALITIES ON YOUR TRAVELS?**

"My mate in Philadelphia tracked down Billy Jackson, I'd seen his name on records before, but my mate said that he met Billy after phoning him up and arranging a meeting to discuss some of the records you produced. At this meeting with Billy Jackson he turned up at this Diner, sat down and supposedly put a gun on the table! When I met Billy he was the nicest guy you could ever meet, and he said do you want to look at some records – Of course I said yes, and he took me to his brother-in-law's house. I didn't really find much but I bought a few things off him. He then invited me back to his home, as he had his own recording studio with all the equipment. When we got there I saw he had this pile of acetates, I said 'Em – Acetates' to him, and like a lot of

is in the record? Not mentioning any names, but is it making money, if it is then fine but is there some ulterior motive? I can't understand why anyone would be bothered, I mean – What's the point? It's been a major part of the scene from the beginning, and it's all about money in the end. I'm not really interested in that side of things, I mean everyone's interested in making money but the bootlegger ruins the scene! There's a code of conduct on the scene, and everybody plays by these rules except certain people that come along and ruin it. With bootlegs the timing of them is always wrong as well, there's normally a lot of play in these records, great records aren't turned up very often these days, and as soon as the record is bootlegged it's dropped by the D.J's – And that's it, you don't hear that record again for probably another ten years until someone reactivates it. That's detrimental to the scene! I wouldn't mind if I could get five years play out of a record, and then I could say well I have played that one enough now. The timing is always bad, and people jump in and try to be the first one to bootleg it before 'Fred Bloggs' gets it done before them. Then there's the question of the rights to the record, Billy Jackson was in the country last year trying to get some royalties for some of his stuff, and he didn't get very far. I know a few other people in America who don't

recognize some of your records, even three or four years later. I've been playing records for eight years now, and some people come on stage and say what the hell is this! And that has happened to me so often, and it dawns on you pretty quickly that not all your records sink in to the consciousness of all the people. There used to be a magazine called 'Soul Sauce' run by Chris Fletcher in the seventies, as well as doing articles and label lists etc he used to do venue reports. His venue reports weren't just about who would be there, but would be like – These were the

DJ's that were on and these were the most important sounds playing that night. We would be reading that and thinking, so you want to come to that club and hear that new record that's filling the dance floor? Not everybody attends the clubs week in and week out, and some of the current venue reports you can read them in two minutes and have then forgotten about them. You've got to get the right balance, has it got the music content, is it a good laugh to read, and do you talk about the good venues?"

#### DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE VENUE?

"The 100 Club is the only venue for me, and it has been for years. It's the only regular venue where the crowd and the

music are the most important things, the crowd is just the bee's knee's – They're just way and above any other crowd in the country, they're there to enjoy themselves first and foremost and are into the music! And they don't make no bones about it, and don't stand around waiting for something to come on – They just get up and dance to it and have a good time!"

#### DO YOU STILL ENJOY THE SCENE, AND WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN THE FUTURE?

"The main buzz I get from the scene is meeting people I like, I mean occasionally I go to All-nighters and don't meet anybody I know or like – Only joking! Sometimes it is a bit of a chore to go constantly, but it's more bearable if you go to a club and there are a few of your friends there who you like, that's what makes it all the better."

#### SUMMING UP

"I wouldn't do an interview for just anybody that's for sure, just like-minded people! I've been asked many a time for an interview, and I don't say never to people. I just say yeah maybe! I just feel that I would be doing them a service rather than them doing me any favours."

MR MARK DOBSON. KNOWN TO US ALL AS 'BUTCH' – THE SCENE'S MOST PROGRESSIVE D.J – THESE RECORDS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES!

To name just a few.....

**Del-Larks – Just you and I**  
**Antelecs – Love slave**  
**Mac Staton – There she goes**  
**Diane Lewis – You ain't got a chance**  
**The Just Brothers - Go on and laugh**  
**Cameroes – We're not too young**  
**The Sherrys – World of happiness**  
**Jesse James – Are you gonna leave me**  
**Volcanos - It's alright**  
**The Butlers – Think it over**  
**Jerry Williams – Be with me**  
**The Saints – I'll let it slide**

A class act!

"Thanks Mark, for entertaining us over the years and keeping the scene progressive!"

Mike Wilkes & Paul Fisher

*Paul had been so looking forward to doing this interview that it seems sadly ironic that he died before it was published. we've not touched it editorially choosing instead to print it just as it was submitted Hope you're happy with it mate. we'll miss you. Ian Palmer, Manifesto.*

*P.S. Thanks to Simon from Swindon for the transcription.*

