



KEEP ON KEEPING ON

By the time Northern soul's golden era had come to a close in 1976, it had helped set the scene for electronic dance music culture as we know it. Ahead of a lavish new fictional depiction of the era, called *Northern Soul*, coming to cinemas, and a mammoth book, *Northern Soul: An Illustrated History* being released, DJ Mag finds out more about the culture that gave birth to the dance scene today...

Words: **CLAIRE HUGHES**

Pics: TWISTED WHEEL: **MIKE BIRD**, WIGAN CASINO DANCEFLOOR: **SHARRON WOLSTENCROFT**, WIGAN CASINO RECORD BAR: **FRANCESCO MELLINA**

If you can remember the Northern soul scene, you probably weren't there," says 59-year-old Martin Clough, from Lancashire, a regular at Va Va's in Bolton and Wigan Casino in the 1970s who

still goes to soul all-nighters today.

"For us it was about the music, the dancing, staying up all night and being out all weekend. We lived for the weekend."

It's that sentiment that's captured in new movie *Northern Soul*, out now in cinemas.

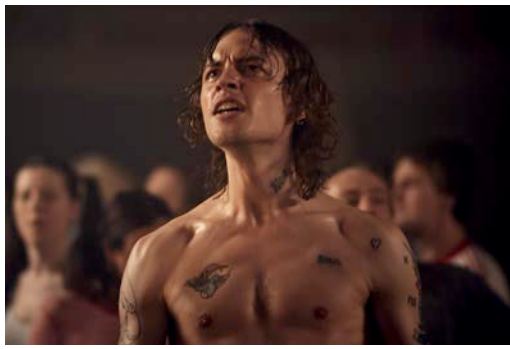
The film, set in Lancashire in the early 1970s, tells the story of two teenagers who find friendship, love and an exciting lifeline in the soul scene that exploded across the North of England in the late 1960s and early 1970s. And it's a tale set to a soundtrack of fast-paced, American soul music with soaring bpm's and cool vocals.

The movie — written and directed by photographer and Northern soul veteran Elaine Constantine — was 17 years in the making. It was an idea, says 49-year-old

Elaine, first sparked on the dancefloor, at the youth clubs and discos she went to in Lancashire in the late-1970s and early 1980s, when traces of the potency of the early Northern soul scene were still inspiring young people to spin, drop and bop across dancefloors to soul tunes such as Frankie Valli's 'The Night' and Gene Chandler's 'There Was A Time'.

"Before the Northern soul scene happened you didn't actually get parties controlled by the fans," says Elaine, who co-wrote a book called *Northern Soul* released in 2013 by Random House, and whose new book with Gareth Sweeney, *Northern Soul: An Illustrated History* is out now through Ebury Publishing. "Previous to that licensees, leisure companies or breweries controlled the nightclubs. They hired a DJ to play the charts or you'd get a live band doing cover songs. Northern soul music started as a movement totally driven by promoters, DJs and clubbers. That's why it's the template for today's dance music and club culture. That and the fact it was drug-fuelled and driven by a soundtrack of fast-moving, 4/4 beats."





MOTOWN TOUCHPAPER

In February this year, Radio 1 DJ Annie Nightingale did a show on Radio 4 called Shine Like Tokyo — Northern Soul Goes East featuring interviews with DJs across

Japan who play music inspired by the early sets of Wigan Casino's resident DJ Russ Winstanley. She also interviewed UK DJs still "keeping the faith", nearly 40 years after the Northern soul scene first emerged in the northern part of white, working class Britain. Keeping the faith, these days, is easier than it used to be. If you walk into any HMV shop this month you'll more than likely see an entire stand of compilation albums dedicated to Northern soul.

"Back in the 1960s, people got into Northern soul by hearing Motown tunes on the radio, on stations such as Radio Luxembourg," says Ian Dewhirst, a Leeds-born DJ (who played Northern soul under the name 'Frank' in the 1970s) who now lives in London and runs Harmless Records, a label that recently released 'Northern Soul: The Film Soundtrack' album, featuring songs from the movie.

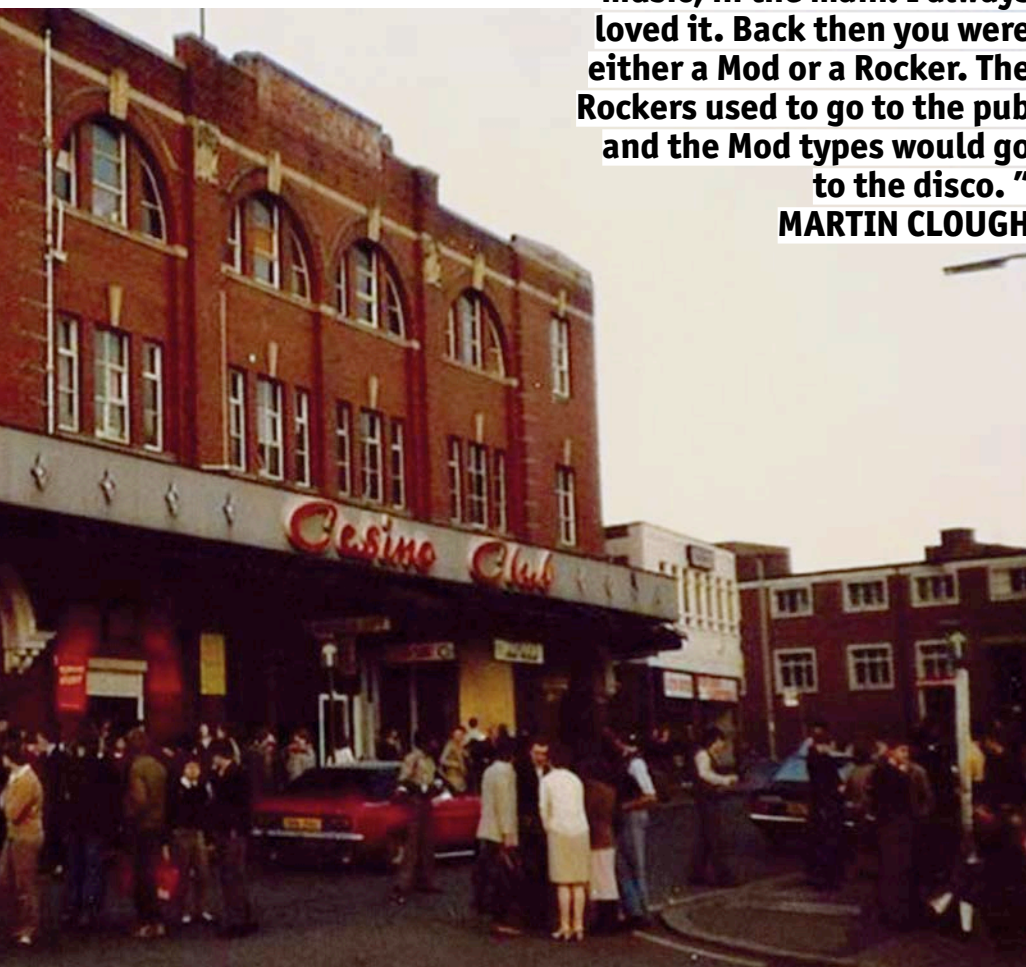
"That first wave of Motown hits that started with 'Baby Love', 'Stop In The Name of Love' and 'Reach Out I'll Be There' and all the rest of it. Anyone who was born a baby boomer, in 1955, and lived up north would be hearing those records on rotation when they were aged 10, 11, 12, and that kind of set the scene for the whole thing."

In the 1960s it was Motown — along with ska, R&B and the kind of soul music that came out on Stax and Atlantic — that provided the soundtrack to the Mod movement.

Mod started in the dingy basement clubs of London's Soho in the late 1950s and by the early 1960s this countercultural youth movement, hooked around listening to black American soul music, dressing sharp and dancing in discos, had taken hold in the north of England too.

"I started going to discos in Accrington when I was 13, in 1967," says Martin Clough. "The music was called 'club soul' at the time — black music, in the main. I

"I started going to discos in Accrington when I was 13, in 1967, the music was called 'club soul' at the time — black music, in the main. I always loved it. Back then you were either a Mod or a Rocker. The Rockers used to go to the pub and the Mod types would go to the disco."
MARTIN CLOUGH



THE CLASSIC COUNTDOWN



Ian Dewhirst, aka DJ Frank, sums up the biggest Northern soul clubs from the 1970s in 10 tunes...

01. Garnet Mimms 'Looking For You' (The Twisted Wheel)

"Originally issued in the UK in 1966 and first played at the Twisted Wheel and further championed by Tony Banks at Leeds Central, it's a powerhouse of New York production with a full orchestra."

02. Leon Haywood 'Baby Reconsider' (The Twisted Wheel)

"Released in 1967 on the Los Angeles independent Fat Fish label, this was one of the first to be bootlegged on the UK manufactured Soul Sounds label."

03. Duke Browner 'Crying Over You' (The Torch)

"Following the success of J.J. Barnes and Edwin Starr on Detroit's Ric-Tic label, collectors started digging further for small Detroit labels. This was a 100% natural for the Northern soul scene, with the Moog breakdown, a full string section and a relentless beat."

04. N.F. Porter 'Keep On Keeping On' (The Torch)

"Northern soul wasn't just about old records. Every so often a brand new US release would filter through. This has the all-important 4/4 beat. An incredible production by West Coast maverick Gabriel Mekler."

05. Tony Clarke 'Landslide' (Blackpool Mecca)

"When Ian Levine discovered this on Chess, it was a massive shock. How could we have missed one of the greatest Northern soul tracks of all-time? It made us all realise what else could be out there!"

06. R. Dean Taylor 'There's A Ghost In My House' (Blackpool Mecca)

"Levine returned from a US trip with this, a previously unheard Holland-Dozier-Holland song, and played it six times at the Blackpool Mecca that night. It instantly became the most sought-after record ever, especially as it was on V.I.P. — a Motown subsidiary."

07. Maurice Williams 'Being Without You' (Blackpool Mecca)

"Once again, Ian Levine found this — a million-mile-per-hour New Orleans Northern soul stomper which became the biggest record on the scene within weeks of being played."

08. The Carstairs 'It Really Hurts Me Girl' (Blackpool Mecca)

"This was a 1972 recording which never got issued — only a handful of demos surfaced. I got the second copy and it became the biggest record on the scene and virtually single-handedly ushered in the modern soul scene."

09. The Tomangoes 'I Really Love You' (Wigan Casino)

"Another incredibly rare record which typified the Northern soul scene at its finest. Released on the tiny Detroit label Washpan Records, this got me all the key gigs throughout that period. Probably a £10,000 record these days."

10. Dean Parrish 'I'm On My Way' (Wigan Casino)

"Russ Winstanley first played this at Wigan Casino and everything fitted perfectly. It even hit the UK Top 40 when it was released in February 1975!"

always loved it. Back then you were either a Mod or a Rocker. The Rockers used to go to the pub and the Mod types would go to the disco. I was more inclined to the Mod side."

A few years later, in the early 1970s, Martin and his friends started going to a club called Va Va in Bolton.

"But the main one for us was the Wigam Casino," he says.

"We used to go every week. I remember the heat when you walked in. You were off your head to start and it was so intense. There would be condensation dripping off the ceiling. It was an ancient building anyway, that was due to be knocked down when it started, I think. The condensation that dripped off the ceiling was brown, because the whole place was so nicotine-stained. It wasn't a small place but it was always packed — I reckon about 2,000 people every week. It was an old dancehall really — with a balcony — and one of those big glitter balls in the middle."

AWAKE ALL WEEKEND

When Martin and his friends went out on a Friday, he says, they often didn't come back till the early hours of Monday morning.

"Va Va was the all-nighter on a Friday," he remembers.

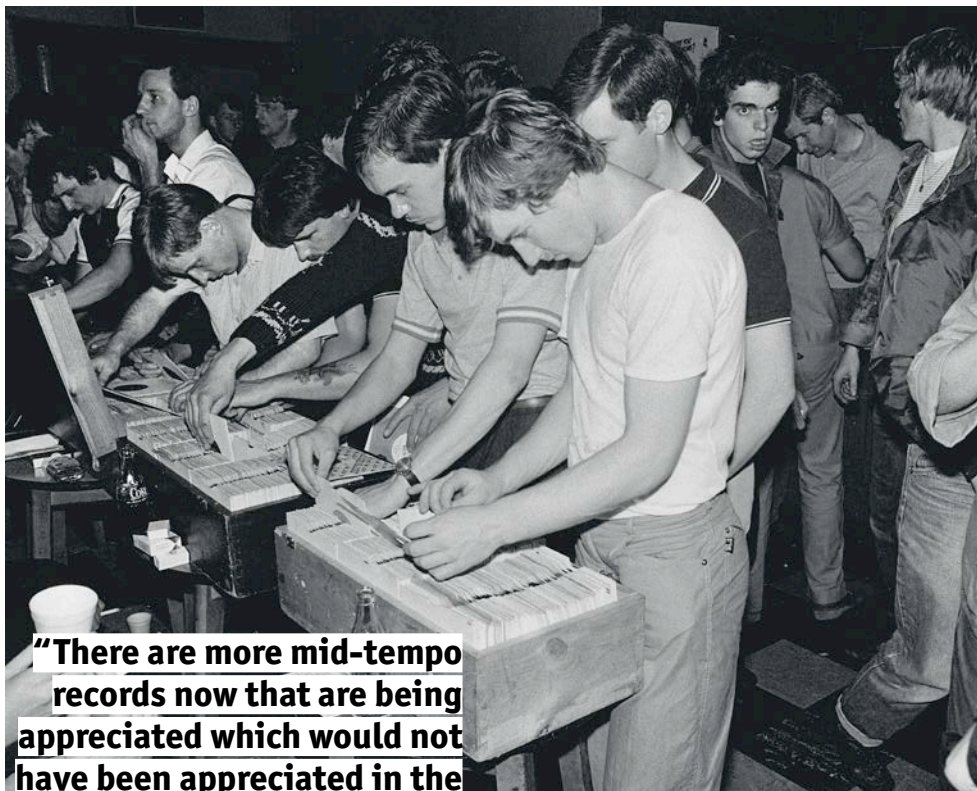
"The Casino was the all-nighter on Saturday. The Mecca in Blackpool and Kings Hall in Stoke would do an all-day Sunday. We'd go there from 12 till midnight, then end up at someone's house after."

One of the DJs at Va Va's was Richard Searling, a record collector and soul fan from Bolton. Along with Ian Dewhirst, Ian Levine, Russ Winstanley and a few others, he was one of the biggest DJs on the scene at the time.

"I ended up getting a job by an importer of American music in Manchester called Global Records," says Richard, who still DJs today. "This was in early 1973. My boss had access to warehouses in America and he used to send us over to get any records we thought would sell in the UK."

Back then, says Richard, the ethos of DJing was hooked around the exclusivity and rarity of the records. Your goal was to get hold of the original pressing of a soul tune. Once you had it, you'd "cover it up" so that no one would know what it was while you were playing.

"Back then being a DJ was all about the ownership thing," agrees Ian Dewhirst. "One of the big record dealers, I remember, was Brian '45' Phillips. He was the ex-DJ from the Twisted Wheel. He knew what we were looking for and he'd promote lists full of great, obscure, unknown Detroit records that, at that time, were priced around 25p."



"There are more mid-tempo records now that are being appreciated which would not have been appreciated in the halcyon days of 1972 to 1978 because in those days it was all 100-miles-an-hour stuff."
RICHARD SEARLING

FINDING "THAT BEAT"

Steven Holloway is a soul DJ who started playing Northern soul music in Accrington in the mid-1970s under the name DJ Pip.

"My brother went to the Torch and he started coming back with records in about 1972, so that was my introduction to it," he says. "By the early 1970s, Motown had started going funkier — and in the south the Mods started following that sound — but in the north we wanted to stick to the early Motown sound. We liked the faster beat because it was better to dance to."





"We used to go every week. I remember the heat when you walked in. You were off your head to start and it was so intense. There would be condensation dripping off the ceiling." MARTIN CLOUGH

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, a lot of small independent labels in America were bringing out Motown-style records to try and tap into the success of the Detroit label. Poor distribution and lack of demand for this music in the US meant that many of these 45s didn't sell and were stacked in huge warehouses, left to gather dust.

"We weren't looking for particular artists at the time — it was just about finding that beat," says Richard. "Even popular artists of the day had B-sides that fit the right sound for us to dance to."

In 1973 — when Wigan Casino first opened — tunes such as Richie Adams' 'I Can't Escape From You', The Salvadores' 'Stick By Me Baby' and Bobby Paris' 'Night Owl' summed up what was going on. And a big part of the scene were the drugs that fuelled it — mainly speed, or over-the-counter sold (or stolen) amphetamines that helped fire all-night dancing. But by the mid-late 1970s, says Ian Dewhirst, the Northern soul sound was changing. "Ian Levine and Colin Curtis at Blackpool Mecca were the trail-blazers for establishing more contemporary 1970s releases alongside the traditional Northern soul stompers from the 1960s," says Ian. "The newer tracks Levine and Curtis were championing were christened 'modern soul'. We were playing cuts from brand new US import albums often way before anyone else. It wouldn't be unusual to hear Gil Scott-Heron's 'The Bottle', Earth, Wind & Fire's 'Happy Feeling' and The Miracles' 'Overture' alongside the 1960s stuff every week. Eventually Levine went too far down the disco route and alienated a lot of the audience, which probably explained why he ended up playing at Heaven in London by the 1980s." The Wigan Casino closed in 1981. By that time Ian Dewhirst was living in America. In the late-1980s, he moved back to the UK.

One night, he ended up at "a club called Shoom". "When I first stepped into Shoom, it reminded me of the Central in Leeds from the Northern soul days," says Ian. "Just like the Central, the heat was unbearable and there was sweat dripping off the ceiling and the bpm of the music was pretty much the same bpm as Northern soul."

STILL VIBRANT

The beginning of Northern soul is a part of history but, says Richard Searling, the music itself isn't something confined to "dinosaur status".

According to Richard, who still plays regularly at "soul

weekenders" all over the world, there's lots of new DJs coming through.

"There's still lots of undiscovered records," says Richard.

"'Naughty Boy', by Jackie Day, was one found in quantity recently, stashed in a collector's basement in the US. But, more to the point, there are more mid-tempo records now that are being appreciated which would not have been appreciated in the halcyon days of 1972 to 1978 because in those days it was all 100-miles-an-hour stuff."

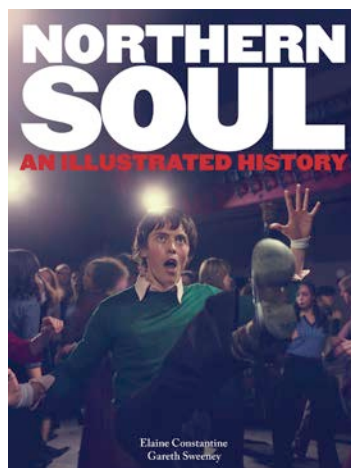
According to DJ Andy Smith — who DJed with Portishead in the 1990s — the reason Northern soul is having a resurgence is because of the "backlash" against "computer-made music". What people are starting to look for, says Andy, is the kind of quality you get in a Northern soul song, tied in with the rarity of the production.

But it's not just a nostalgia thing, insists Elaine Constantine, who lives in London and regularly goes to the monthly Northern soul do at the capital's 100 Club.

"Look at that Pharrell Williams tune 'Happy'," she says.

"The success of that shows there's still a thirst for this kind of music. That's basically four beats to the bar with an uplifting, positive vocal. It's a tune you can properly dance to."

• *The movie Northern Soul is out now in cinemas; the book Northern Soul: An Illustrated History (Ebury Press, £20) is also out now, and Northern Soul: The Soundtrack is available through Harmless Records.*



10 SOUL JAMS

Richard Searling sums up where the UK soul scene is at now, in 10 tunes...



01. Philip Mitchell 'I'm So Happy' (US Atlantic 45)

"Instantly recognisable, uplifting and soulful."

02. Bobby Womack 'Home Is Where The Heart Is' (US Columbia/UK CBS 45)

"The greatest soul singer who ever lived? Telling it like it is with raw power and intensity."

03. The Ivorys 'Please Stay' (US Wand/Despenza 45)

"Right from the off this one grabs you — never made it big in the '70s, its time has come now though!"

04. Wade Flemons 'Jeanette' (US Ramsel 45)

"Original member of Earth Wind & Fire, and this was his song to his girl, Jeanette Hutchinson from The Emotions."

05. Gladys Knight 'If You Ever Get Your Hands On Love' (UK Motown 45)

"Recorded in 1968 but never put out at the time. Now available in the Motown Sevens box-set, this has all the hallmarks of a Detroit 1960s Northern soul dancer."

06. Sam Dees 'Lonely For You Baby' (US SSS International 45)

"Super rare and super popular — this mesmerising mid-tempo thumper brought one of the world's greatest songwriters into the Northern soul Hall of Fame."

07. Ritchie Adams 'I Can't Escape From You' (US Congress 45)

"Like many, sung by a white guy — what a record! Inspired by Marvin's 'Can I Get A Witness' this New York 1965 recording is a sure-fire dancefloor packer!"

08. Rita & the Tiaras 'Gone With The Wind Is My Love' (US Dore 45)

"One of my legendary 'cover-ups' from 1978, this sizzling piece of femme West Coast Northern soul is now more popular than ever."

09. Jackie Wilson 'Because Of You' (US Brunswick 45)

"A great example of a brilliant 1970s track being adopted by the predominantly 1960s-orientated scene."

10. Jonathan Capree 'Gonna Build Me A Mountain' (US Oxbow 45)

"One I wish I owned! An incredible new discovery which will be as big as anything from the last 40 years!"