

RETURN OF THE MAJOR



Major back stage relaxing with a copy of Black Beat.

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In November 1982 legendary soul man 'Major Lance' returned to these shores to appear before a U.K. audience for the first time in 10 years. It was at the Torch, Stoke-on-Trent on 9th December 1972 when the 'Soul Major' last graced us with his presence and so it was to the 'potteries' that the man returned once again, on 14th November 1982 to make another legendary appearance, this time at Razamataz (formerly Jollies) and the Black Beat team was there to see how he got on.

On entering the club the first thing we noticed was how empty it was. We arrived at 1.30 pm so naturally assumed that as Major wasn't due on stage until 8 pm most people had planned on turning up later. Come 6 pm we realised that most people had gone to see him at Hinkley the night before! Razamataz is a large club with dance floors dotted about all over the place, some of which were obscured from the DJ's view thus I would have thought making it very difficult for the Jocks to keep a good floor going. However, on this occasion that was not a problem as there weren't enough people there anyway! DJ's on the day were Martin Ellis, Keith Minchull and Chris King playing mostly oldies - I won't go into detail as you've heard them all before anyway. As for atmosphere, well there wasn't any - if you were there you may think different but for the benefit of those who weren't there I must describe things as I found them. Having said that, some atmosphere did creep in as the time grew closer to the magical hour when the man was to take the stage.... and as he didn't take the stage until 8.45 pm it gave a chance for that shred of atmosphere to increase to a buzz. When Major finally did appear he went into a predictable but none-the-less great set of classics, all by now Norther Soul Anthems in their own right - 'Everybody Loves A Good Time', 'The Beat', 'Investigate', 'Monkey Time', 'Um,Um,Um, Ain't No Soul', 'Gypsy Woman' - all went down well with the crowd who by this time had crowded round the foot of the stage and were being dragged up on stage by Major at regular (too regular) intervals. Major also coped well with versions of 'I can't help myself', 'Get Ready', 'My Girl' and 'Move On Up' - they certainly added a new direction to his act if nothing else. Major's voice was still as clear and crisp as ever, his whispy vocals struggling to be heard over the band which I thought was too loud. After the show I slipped backstage for a few words with Major to find out what he's been doing for the last ten years.

KG: "Major, your past is pretty well documented but up until 1978 when you signed with Motown we hadn't heard much of you since the early 70's, so what made you go with Motown after all these years, had they never approached you before?"

ML: "Yer, well, Motown approached me back 65-66 and I always liked Motown, well not so much liked as respected, but I could never get the right deal out of them 'cause some of the things they were doing I admired and respected but some I didn't. From a business point of view I wanted some sort of control, a 'say so' in terms of my releases but that wasn't their policy at the time and I couldn't help respect that because of the success they were having but I can't put everything in someone else's hands and not at least have a voice in what's going on."

KG: "Well, that's how it was with Motown for a long time wasn't it?"
ML: "Yer and it took Motown a long time to change that and I think it was the Commodores that really broke that barrier."

KG: "You had an album out for Motown on SOUL called 'Major Lance - Now Arriving' and I thought considering that you were a new signing the album was fairly well promoted. I say that because in the past Motown have had a habit of signing new acts and leaving them to wait in the wings a bit but you seemed to get a good hard push straight away."

ML: "Yeah, well I signed with Gordy's sister, Gwen and she had this group then called High Energy so I was working with them, I didn't sign directly with Motown. Gwen and I are real good friends, in fact I've got some stuff ready to take to her now."

KG: "So do you think you got what you wanted out of Motown?"

ML: "Well I think I did in as much as it brought the name back. I didn't leave Motown with any animosity, it was just that at the time they had a lot of things going on, things that had to take priority over me. Maybe if I had been more patient things may have paid off but I had lots of things I wanted to do, writing and producing etc."

KG: "So you left Motown, what happened then?"

ML: "I'm now with this outfit called Ket-Family and I've got a single out with them now and an album that I think is coming out first of the New Year, and of course, we done an album up at Hinkley last night - we're gonna take three tracks from that together with five studio tracks to make up the album."

KG: "You've been around now for a long time, at least since 1963 when um um um um um brought you to the attention of British fans. Now you're certainly no less talented and probably more so than most but you've never had the recognition or chart success that you deserve. Why do you think this is, bad luck or a number of contributing factors?"

ML: "Well, it all depends what you mean by recognition. Take last night at Hinkley, it was packed out! But even if just ten people turned up I'd be happy. You see, in the music business there's enough room for everybody and I always look on the positive side of things, never the negative."

KG: "Yes, that's all very well but every singer looks for hit records and you've never had one, well certainly not in this country anyway."

ML: "Yer, right, but I don't think it's the people, I think it's me. You see, right now I'm going back into recording and while I've been over here I've watched what they're dancing to, ya know the beat and everything. So now I'm going to go back and write something in the same vein and maybe call it the 'Northern Dance'. You see it all depends on how much patience you have in order to better yourself, it's not the public, it's the artist themselves."

KG: "And you're happy to do that because by making a record to appeal to such a limited audience you're not going to make a lot of money. Surely you could make a disco record as other noted 60's artists such as Edwin Starr, Gene Chandler, Four Tops, have done and make money whilst also standing a chance of chart success."

ML: "Yer right, well the trouble with me is that I've always been doing a bit of this and a bit of that and never really settling down to do one thing and that's what I'm trying to do now. I've always enjoyed writing but I stopped and this is what I'm doing now, trying to get back into writing again. You see, I've got to have a challenge, if I've got a challenge I can deal with it."

KG: "You obviously enjoy performing in front of English audiences but we haven't seen you here since '73 and there are a lot of people who didn't, myself included, who have been waiting for you to come back and nine years is a long time, so why the big gap?"

ML: "Well, music trends change and you can never predict just which way they're gonna go. Soul faded away for a while but now it's coming back. So I thought the time was right for me to come back over."

KG: "You've got this new single out now on Ket-Family, does this mean we're going to see Major Lance getting down to some serious recording and maybe making a stab at the British Charts?"

ML: "Well, I want a different release over here than in the States. and now that I'm sitting down doing what I wanna do I think I can hit this market."

KG: "When will we see you over again?"

ML: "I'll be back in February '83 - two weeks this time."

KG: "Can I ask you, finally, if you have any regrets? Do you wish you'd been anything else besides a singer?"

ML: "No, I've enjoyed myself."

KG: "But are you not perhaps a little bitter because of your lack of apparent success?"

ML: "No, that's not me, you see I believe that everything that's happened is meant to happen. No matter what happens I believe you can turn it to your advantage."

KG: "Major Lance, thank you."

For those of you haven't heard Major's new single, it's called 'I Wanna Go Home'. Despite some great strings in the background, which blend well with Major's wispy vocals, I don't think it's nearly strong enough to make much impact except maybe on a local basis. It's very laid back-mid-tempo and well produced but anything he releases over here will have to be something really special to make a dent in the Charts. The Northern Scene can't support Major Lance forever and quite frankly, I think he deserves more than Okeh memories and a couple of Live Greatest Hit albums. My advice to Major is forget about trying to please the 60's stalwarts and go for mass appeal, make yourself some money and the acclaim you deserve 'cause you owe more to yourself than anybody else.

KEV GRIFFIN

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