Fact, Fiction, Faction, Friction.

IS NORTHERN SOUL DYING ON ITS FEET? BY IDRIS WALTERS

Sunday morning. Arriving in Nottingham: the West Midlands Soul Club was planning to cele-brate an All-Dayer that afternoon. The best All-Dayer in the country apparently; Soul kids from all

For instance: What is Northern Soul? How do you get into it? What are its folk heroes? What are its folk heroics? Who's into it? What does it sound like? Where is the dancing at? Who wears what and what do they run on? What is their act?

Is this some crazy recession phenomenon? Some cunning twist in the collective conscience? Some transmutation of the late Mod syndrome? Adolescence on ice? Background musak for some Living Youth Theatre?

Northern Soul ? A misnomer come to rationalise thousands of provincial kids grooving to a particular brand of soul music, the kind that Tamla Motown were churning out during the

just a myth? With media

That night, there was a radio scheduled on the national net. It was to be called "Northern Soul; Fact or Fiction?"

As if it mattered. The sun still comes

Nottingham. You'd think 'I Shot The Sherrif' would be a big number up

Riot at the Goose Fair. Nottingham has a healthy history of radical refo-rmist workers' politics: the Notting-ham mob has been notoriously mili-

Most of the worker Movements the Luddites and so on — passed this way to pick up reliable support.

But there are few monuments to prove it.

There are plenty of Friar Tuck restaurants, Little John bars and Robin Hood coffee joints.

Nottingham Castle sits on a granite plug in the surrounding limestone. And on the back of thousands of packets of cigarettes. Because between them Players and Boots -John and Jess — have a big stake in Nottingham's

future. Jess Boot, for instance, bought the university for the town.

Now it's full of wierdo's.

Northern Soul? Jess Boot and The

Chemists ? John Player and his Sons ? Ned Ludd and the Luddites

So. Arriving in Nottingham: with no food to be had anywhere, it being a Sunday lunchtime, and the fountain in

the Broadmarsh shopping centre (the Berlin wall) out of action. Nottingham has mainlined for the Great Decorative Tile Apolcalypse. Great Decorative 11e Apoicalypse. With its pedestrian subways, its city centre urban renewal cancer, with its textile industry taken over by immigrant populations, with D. H. Lawrence to its credit . . . and the best All-Dayer in the country . . and, at the imminent Goose Fair, the best mushy reas anywhere in the world mushy peas anywhere in the world.

musny peas anywhere in the world.

Lynne Osborne is sitting on the
Council House steps. That's where
everybody meets everybody else.

Between the lions. Sitting there you
can look over the square. Sitting there

you can be moved on by the police. Sitting there, you can watch Nottingham happen.

Any daughter, any sister, any town Any daughter, any sister, any lown. Lynne signs her letters with "Keep The Faith." Lynne is a civil servant during the week. Lynne works in a newsagent on a Sunday morning. Lynne is into Northern Soul. She'll be going to the All-Dayer at Mecca's Palais. But not until later,

Mecca's Palais. But not until later, when it's livened up a bit.

Lynne got into Northern Soul about a year ago. Someone gave her a Northern Soul record — 'The Joker' by Butch Baker — and she liked it, figured she'd like some more of it, so the started corner to rices where the started corner to rices are started corner to rices and the started corner to rices are started c she started going to places where she

checked out the dj's and "the sort of people who look like they might be into Northern Soul. "If they're going to an All-Dayer, they sort of wear vests and carry ADIDAS bags — we call them Wigan bags, but that's just our name for them — or just big bags."

What you got in that bag hanging there?

'Just a change of clothes.

"When we first started going — a bit fanatical about it — we used to change, say, three or four times. But now we probably only change once or

twice.
"The lads change a hell of a lot of times, they do really energetic dances.
"It gets hot."

So how do you spot a Northern Soul record if you didn't know you were

"A lot of them are old. It depends where you hear them.

"If you hear them on the wireless,

the di'll probably make a point of saying

it's a Northern Soul record.

"There's a special programme on a
Wednesday night in Nottingham called 'Soul Over Nottingham' and Radio Luxembourg have just started doing a thing on Friday nights. "Soul is commercial. Northern Soul

isn't. Northern Soul is more rare.

"A lot of records are pressed (bootlegged). You get, like, a rare single that you can pay anything up to £80 for — I think that's the most I've ever heard, somebody paying £80 for a record, somebody in Sheffield, one of the dj's possibly — and you just

press it up.
"This record label, Black Magic, they'll press them up for you. And then it will probably sell for about 80p.

"The most I've ever paid for a single is £2.50. That was Cochise. That was

is £2.50. I hat was Cochise. I hat was a long while ago.
"But they don't play it very much these days, because, at these Northern Soul things, as soon as a record gets on general release, the dj's will probably stop playing it."

Lynne accepts the term 'Northern Soul' even though: "surprisingly enough, there are lots of Northern Soul Clubs down South.

"I think it's because it started off around Wigan and places like that. I mean, there was only about five towns for All-Nighters at one time one of em was Nottingham, actually."

An All-Nighter runs from 2.00am to

'They've had two in Nottingham recently. I mean they used to have one regularly about ten years ago, but that stopped — police, drugs, things like that — but they had the first All-Nighter for ages about two months

ago.
"That was the West Midlands Soul Club which isn't all that popular here. It wasn't very good apparently. People were going to sleep and there wasn't that much dancing.

"But they had one about two weeks ago — East Midlands Soul Club — and that was supposed to be really good. People were dancing all the time, you know, good records and everything.'
What do you run on?

"I'm not really an expert on . ."
Is there a lot of dope around?
"Yes there is. I will admit that. I read somewhere that it was supposed to be 99% of the records who experts." to be 99% of the people who go to All-Dayers / All-Nighters are on drugs. But personally speaking I'd say about 50%.

"They take barbs, blueys, things like that."

Who are the local folk heroes? "You get the good dancers . . . You want name dropping do you ?"

If you like.

"... the really good dancers, they've really gone now. About a year ago, or six months, you'd get really frantical dancers like Andy Gotthard.

"Andy's a good dancer but he doesn't take it seriously. A lot of people take it really seriously but Andy

people take it really seriously but Andy sort of messes about.

"A lot of them mess about now, rather than take it seriously."

Is it a question of stamina or . . .

"It is really. It's more acrobatics than dancing; backflops, spins, things like that, you know. There's no specific dance to do.

"We have a dencing competition at

"We have a dancing competition at every All-Dayer . . . I've been to about ten All-Dayers and at about eight of them it's been blokes who won

"Once there was a girl who won it. She was pretty good but personally I

think that Andy Gotthard should have

on it. He came second.
"He wins most of them really." What do you get for winning?
"About £25 for winning . . ." Enough for a single?

"And you get about £15 for coming coond and about £5 for coming third."
Nottingham has Selectadisc. Lynne

calls it: "the second best record shop in England." There are two more of them in competition (HMV and Rediffusion)

but Selecta has a reputation going for "It's very good. You can get any record...... They'll put it on order for

you."
They call it Selecta, for short.
They sprinkle dancefloors with talcum powder. The guys wear flat shoes.
"The lads always turn up in flat
shoes. And most of the girls. You get
the odd few that turn up in shoes that look like they've been erected, you

know.
"Sometimes the floors are sticky, so you just get the talcum powder out.

You go to a lot of these Northern Soul discos and they'll have notices up, like, 'No Talcum Powder', or one of the dj's will say, like, 'Who is it that's putting talcum powder down. .
Will you please stop it', or else you'll get somebody going around, checking

It's supposed to ruin the floor, get-

ting ground in, is how They see it.

It's £1 to get into an All-Dayer /
All-Nighter, £1.25 for non-members. Normally, you'd pay about 30p to get into The Palais, but They up it for the Northern Soul shows.

'I suppose it is a lot really. You can stay about eight hours." (All-Dayer).
You can get Northern Soul every
night in Nottingham, should you want

"Sometimes you get a bit fed up with it, so you start listening to others (types of music), but most people don't

"You always go back to Northern

Live shows ?

"We've had nearly everybody here. We ve had nearly everybody here.
We've had George Macrea. We had
Wigan's Ovation at the last All-Dayer
actually. Everybody thinks they are a
bit over-rated. Nobody rates them
very high."

Lynne reads Blues and Soul.

'I had choice between the two,
Black Music and Blues and Soul, and "It's good for putting down what's on locally, what's on in most places.

They advertise every All-Dayer that's going in the country. That's why I get it. For the advertisements really." When Lynne started into Northern

Soul, she used to go to different towns, once or twice a month. "To Leicester, Derby . . . They have an All-Dayer in Derby every

month. It's not very good, but we used to go.
"We went to Blackpool once, on a

"We went to Blackpool once, on a special trip, to the Blackpool Mecca, Saturday night. That's very good."

Blackpool is the best place Lynne ever went to, but these days, she'd dig to make Cleethorpes.
"Cleethorpes All-Nighter — it doesn't sound fantastic, I know, but it is. Once a fortnight, and everybody goes — about 100 people from Nottingham go every time — come back and say how good it is. "The atmosphere is really good."

back and say how good it is.
"The atmosphere is really good." Lynne will be going to Cleethorpes. likely, yeah."
DJ's? What's their Act?

It depends

"There's a few like Eddie Taylor,



they're out there for the laughs really. They'll play a popular record and, then, they'll have a stupid half-hour, to sort of make a break, and they'll put things like Batman on and Magic

Roundabout, things like that.
"But at an All-Dayer, they take it very seriously. They just tell you what the record is."

An All-Daver lasts from lunchtime through the afternoon to about 11.00pm. The dancing competition goes down around 7.00pm.

Lynne and company don't plan on getting there till around 4.00pm because, "it doesn't liven up until teatime." teatime.

Why soul? Why Black soul? The Rolling Stones ?
"I don't like progressive music at

listen to it just to listen to it. "I like music to dance to, not to

A Mod thing?

"A Mod thing? Mods? What do you mean? Mods and rockers?... "Bit before my time.
"I know a lot of lads that are really

dressing smart, into the smart thing you know? But when they're going where specifically to dance, they

'Say that lot over there Lynne points out a bunch of Adidas bags moving across the square.

"Looks like they're going to the All-Dayer. They're not particularly smartly dressed are they? But if they weren't going there, they probably would be."

Whatever Northern Soul isn't,

Lynne like reggae ("especially if it's about three or four years old"), but she is not into "commercial soul."

It's for a younger audience, she

says.

You have to be 18 to get into an the same they have bars on All-Dayer, because they have bars on conventional opening times.

But it's cool to be late, so go for a drink to The Fountain.

The Fountain is virtually next door to Selectadisc, just around the corner from the square and the Council House steps.

Turns out they have a few Northern Turns out they have a few Northern Soul records on the jukebox (new, big, flashy, purple washlight, thin sound) and no food. Except crisps.

A lot of Lynne's friends come to The Fountain. She has to meet Key letter Detains the life.

later. Between the lions.

Back at the Council House steps, wai-

ting on Kev: Spotting types across the square people into Northern Soul or not. A few teds have been showing up lately, it would appear, wierdo's, wino's, all

You get dead pigeons in the water-features sometimes.

Lynne points out probables on their way to the Palais. Probables with their Adidas bags, probables with their wide trousers with pockets down the side trousers with pockets down the side of the thigh, probables with their flat shoes and the rest, probables with or without their "soul birds."

Lynne points out Denny, one of this afternoon's dj's, crossing the square towards Selecta and The Fountain. With his box of records and his low

Kev turns up to check things out. To find out when or if everyone is "going down." He mentions a big queue at The Palais.

"wouldn't be seen dead in a Lynne queue outside The Palais

So, hanging out, passing the time of afternoon: Lynne caught 'Tommy' at the cinema. She thought it was a good film. She didn't like the music much, but she dug the film. I ater she said that she liked Roger Daltrey because he "has a good body."

Kev elucidates on Nottingham Forest graffiti: "It used to be We Hate Pompey or We Hate Derby. Now it's just We Hate."

Now it's just We Hate."

And Lynne comes up with the line
of the decade: "Pot smoking's for ierdo':

Big Dave wanders across the square, with his mate.

Now, Big Dave is a purist. He's a number and militant supporter of the Midlands Soul Club. This afternoon's performance is a West Midlands number.

Big Dave's Act is his purism.
"Going down?"

No. Big Dave wouldn't be seen alive at the West Midlands. It's all rubbish, he says. Because the dj's are always trying to lay records on the audience whereas, at the East Midlands they only play oldies, the genuine article.

But apparently, Big Dave is never satisfied. He's always moaning about something or other. Lynne is a member of both clubs.

Kev splits to pick up his car. And his bag

Anita turns up. She has to wait for Keith. They're both "going down." Anita's got her bag. Big Dave says that Northern Soul

Big Dave says that Northern Soul is five years old in Northigham.

Kev pulls his ragged black mini into the kerb, confers with Lynne, pulls out again to park it. Lynne will meet him outside the Gas Board, which is hard by The Palais.

So, going down: Once. Lynne says Kev got kicked in the face with an over-acrobatic backflop.

Kev's bag is a killer. White Adidas,

covered in commemorative soul stickers — "Keep The Faith," "The Torch," things like that.

You pay your money and you get your card — a Mecca Social Club Membership Certificate. The number on it says there are 898,127 other

The dance floor is half-empty, the action quiet. The Sound System is really bad, it rattles, it can't handle too much treble. The bass does what it has to do. But only just. The dancing is sparse, and merely functional.

The guys — with their shoulders hung slightly back, they soul shuffle sideways, from the knees, along the talcum powder, and back again, high waists, short hair, T-shirts, bowling shirts, wide trousers, thin belts, tery-lene, flannel — are the best dancers. This seems to be the Act: You have

I mis seems to be the Act: You have your bag with your changes, your talcum powder, your towel, your Polo mints, your Wrigley's. And you dance / socialise / dance / socialise / dance / socialise / dance / socialise / dance / socialise

Like that. You work up to the dancing competition, event of the

Dj Kevin makes no impression. Lynne has never seen him before, has no idea who he is. His profile is so low if he stood sideways, you'd think he'd gone home. He's playing record after record of, to the stranger's ear, Motownish soul.

The dancing competition, it appears, depends on the gate. If it's big enough, there'll be one; if it isn't, there won't.

The girls wear Fifties mood rig shirt-waisters, short sleeves, mid-calf skirtlengths. There is the odd born loser, trying to look gracefulish dancing on six inch stacked platforms.

Schoolboy hairdos.

But who's this? This styrofor

lesser spotted Ann Margret, glossy type with the lips and the age. It's the lady from Pye Disco Demand, here to PR Pye's nationwide dancing competition, here to check out

what to compile the next compilation from, slumming in the market. Pye are the leaders in the Exploit Northern Soul Act, For Legitimate Record Companies. They obviously have people working in the field (because they certainly aren't working with the kids).

Key, Lynne and Anita do more hanging out than dancing. Standing round the pile of Adidas bags.

But Keith is constantly on the floor Keith is a good dancer, dedicated

it, elastic legs for it, hair blown specially for it.

A hustled interview with Denny, today's

big dj:
Beneath the dancefloor, in a cafeteria, Northern Soul is the beat of constant and insistent. Gets to you

Denny wears jeans and a leather jacket like the first provincial mods were wearing mid-Sixties, like the Parisien streetkids were wearing before

He seemed to down-rap the whole

What is Northern Soul ? "Northern Soul, as such, doesn't exist. It's soul.

"Originally, the sound started with the Motown sounds, but now it's

almost funky, semi-funk sounds.
"It started off with rare records."
Big Dave says this place is rubbish because the dj's are away(pushing new records?

"Yeah. To a point. You stagnate if you stay with the old sounds. We get

you stay with the old sounds. We get people writing to us and saying that the old sounds are better.

"Which is true. I think they are. But you can't play the old sounds forever. If people come up and ask me for an old record, they might as well stay at home and listen to it.

"I'm there to play records that."

can't hear anywhere else.
"'A dj's got to have bootlegs, white labels, emidiscs. You can't exist without them. Ian Levine was the last bastion of that business, but he's sold out now."
The scene in Nottingham?

"It used to be big, around "0. There used to be more people from Nottingham than anywhere else that used to go to the All-Nighters.
"But it's dropped off a bit. It's what you're brought up to really. They're (the kids) just looking for something different!

"A lot of them don't know what they're doing, what the records are, who they're by or anything.

"It's just a sound to them." But

The crowds make a record popular. Normally you try and play a popular record if you're going to try to break a new sound because you know that's going to clear the floor anyway. They won't dance to a record they don't know, not here, not here.

"At Blackpool Mecca they will. But they've been brought up to it here. Perhaps that's our fault for playing the same ones all the time.'

Today, Denny is just playing oldies.

"Pye has improved a lot since Dave Godin took over. The person they had before was just a joke. They ought to be shot for what they've done to Northern Soul.

"They ruined it to my point of view. Denny doesn't normally come to The Palais.

"Fridays I do the Brit at Trent Bridge, and then Saturdays an All-Nighter usually, Sundays I just doss around in the pub and in the week I'm usually working away."

Denny goes on to put down Ian Levine, The Blackpool Mecca, Tony Cummings, bootleg records.

He puts a ten year tag on Northern

Soul and relates it firmly back to the

Mod scenes in the sixties.

"That's where it started from.

Down London they went on to progressive stuff and funky stuff.

"They used to have All-Nighters in Nottingham a long time ago — at The Dungeon, The Beachcomber, till they got shut down through drugs. "The drug scene is nothing new, it's just that the drug squad is clamping

Denny also has a downer on dancing competitions

'It's a farce really. People come here to enjoy themselves not to watch

other people dancing for money. That's all it is, money and prestige.
"The only dancing competition that I enjoyed was at The Torch. A lad I knew won it. The dancing there wa absolutely superb.'

Now you get very few back-flops, few acrobats. This is a (Blackpool)







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Mecca sort of dance they do now. The style of dancing has changed over the

"There used to be two distinct styles

Wigan and Mecca — for different records. When it's done well, the

Mecca dance is quite good.

"The boys have always been better dancers than the girls on the Northern

Denny diffuses.

"The records I've got, I don't play at home. I play Jefferson Airplane, stuff like that.

"These kids have got a completely limited outlook — If they don't hear it at an All-Nighter, they don't know it. I'd say it was pathetic really. What sort of an outlook is that? I've not heard that before, I don't like it.

To dance to a record properly you've got to know it, especially nowadays when you get so many

nowadays when you get so many breaks in it.

"At All-Dayers, you get a lot of people clearing the floor, but at All-Nighters, where you get a lot of people doped up, it's easier to break new

records.
"There is no atmosphere here at all. "There is no atmosphere here at all. I've been falling asleep. If I go to an All-Nighter, I can sit down and talk to people from all over, Rotherham, Gloucester, Doncaster, Sheffield — you judge how good an All-Nighter is

by how far people come to see it.
"We used to go regularly to Wigan,
80 or 90 miles; Cleethorpes — we were
there the other week, and that's 80

"I go to buy and sell records. If I'm not buying and selling I don't enjoy

Denny is down on promoters too. "The money they're making out of

There ought to be a law against it." While you don't seem to get a lot of trouble at All-Dayers: "You should see some of the people that go to All-Nighters . . . you get some right villains.

Northern Soul isn't like it was : :

To listen to Denny and Lynne you get the impression that the whole scene has degenerated into a new regime.

That auto-nostalgia for better days has set in. That the dancing isn't what it was. And so on. The music spread thinner by the record companies and the bootleggers.

So. Jawing with the gang, at a table: there's Lynne, Kev, Anita and another guy who brought his own ham sandwiches and handed them round.

Irene turns up. Wrigleys all round. Irene says she's been to Cleethorpes a few times and that compared to that,

a few times and that compared to that, Nottingham is a load of old rubbish. There is speculation as to whether the hot dancers will turn up — Andy Gotthard and another guy called Kev. This other Kev, apparently, is not so good. It's just that he likes being photographed. You only have to say the word, Camera, to him and he'll Act up something crazy.

up something crazy.

Denny's oldies penetrate the cafeteria from the dancefloor above.

cafeteria from the dancefloor above. There is talk about being ripped off from all directions, about the differences between All-Dayers and All-Nighters, about whether All-Dayers are kids' play. They would prefer to have to pay £2.50 for a single as long as it's going to stay zera, but more and more they

to stay rare, but, more and more, they are in danger of shelling out £5.00 for something that they aren't told will be on general release at 60p in the time it takes to get changed.

The vigilance of the bootleggers and the legitimate record companies have

combined to produce a new regime — over provision, Northern Soul for idiots, trans-Atlantic high finance.

Back on the floor: the dancing has livened up a little, the bar is soon to open. The dancing competition is scheduled for 7.00pm. scheduled for 7.00p

There are one or two backflops here and there.

and there.

A big part of the Act seems to be the Leaping Into Action trip, from a lounging position on a pile of Adidas bags, after a floorclearer, and on recognition of the opening bars of a popular sound.

recognition of the opening bars of a popular sound.

It has the same energy you hear on 'Get Your Ya Ya's Out,' at the start of 'Midnight Rambler,' when Keith Richard just can't restrain his getting into the chordal riff down there.

Irene is still raving about Cleethorpes. They don't even steal your bags here. At Cleethorpes there are road blocks to set up to bust the kids before they get into town. Cleethorpes is

heavy.

With ten minutes to competition

guys look healthy, athletic.
Like school sportsday was being held in a dance hall.

Kev does a change, and then his Act, briefly.

Keith is still dancing, hasn't

stopped.

With a character called Nig.

Anita says that Nig doesn't do anything particularly spectacular but

he has stamina. If he's enjoying him-self, he can go on for hours. He seems to be enjoying himself,

grinning from ear to ear there.

Bar opens.

Some of this dancing is formula, like

Charlie Foxx used to do.

A concession is selling badges, a rag called Hot Buttered Soul, singles and soul packs (10 singles for £1) of stuff

they can't sell any other way.

Kev, Anita and Nig have changed.

There seems to be a lot of tattoos around. Sometimes the music sounds

a little like the Four Tops.

Finally, the dancing competition:

Organised from the stage with Butlins-like condescension, the girls

dance first, then the guys.

A knot of disinterested judges, including Denny, pick a final eight and then a final three

The winner is chosen by audience approval guesswork. The judges make their selections by touching people on

site.
Keith doesn't make the final eight.
Nor does Nig. Nor Irene.
Nig says that the guy who came second should have won easy. He's been known to dance up walls and across the ceiling (at The Brit), he's that good. He just didn't want to win. So he rolled out his low profile and stuck to the shuffle.
For some reason, acrobatics are

For some reason, acrobatics are banned from dancing competitions. So the people who can't dance too good get a chance tow in?

The winner was a little girl in a white

shirt-waister, a pageboy hairdo and a She took home £25 and a T-shirt.

Northern Soul is a name for a youth cult based on dancing to old rare American soul records.

At its best, it is street class, street

status and dedicated energy.

At its worst, it has been robbed. Robbed by the bootleggers, the record companies, the promoters, the media. And as such, is dying off.

Is dead, even. Is dead, even.

The mystique and the mythology have become blurred with false archetypes. At first flattered by outside interest, the Northern Soul scene is nostalgic for its conspiratorial heyday. A national extension of the same Mod interest in dancing, dope and rare soul. Northern Soul need only exist if

soul, Northern Soul need only exist if you want it to. Putting on the Soul. The musicians who make the reco-rdings might as well be on another planet. They probably are by now.

While turning on to oldie souldies might seem to some like dry humping a dirty picture, there's nothing to

allenge. The kids aren't trying to change nothing.

> Keep The Faith. I'll keep it with mine.
> Northern Soul? Fact and fiction.

