

The NU SOUL:

Growing up, Top of the Pops was an integral part of my musical heritage.

Like all kids we would wait for the charts to be announced on a Tuesday lunchtime and then watch TOTP on Thursday evening. In those formative years, when I couldn't afford to buy my own music, TOTP shone a bright light across the diversity and full spectrum of the late 60's and early '70's.

And it truly was diverse.

Everything from Deep Purple to The Osmonds, from Orchestral versions of TV show themes (Van der Valk) through to Novelty records ("Ah Shaddup you Face" -Joe Dolce if memory serves) was featured and it was impossible to predict what would make the coveted no1 slot.

So, from the age of Seven, I have vivid memories of what I liked and what I didn't, and I had a particular soft spot for Soul music.

I think it was the ease with which the protagonists carried out their labours, which included, sporting huge flared trousers and wide collars, co-ordinated dancing and spinning in an area no bigger than a postage stamp and crooning beautiful harmonies whilst smiling through a vivid array of white teeth and stage smiles, that attracted me to it, but the music always had the ability to make me want to move (I now know this to be Groove, but back then it seemed like Hypnotism), and many featured Guitars of all varieties, which naturally interested me enormously.

And of course, the Horns.... more of that later.....

By 1975, I was so steeped in the culture of Prog and Rock that I dismissed Radio fodder as beneath me, (aaah, such arrogance,) and yet when I did catch an occasional glimpse of a Northern Soul track, it quickly reminded me of why I loved Soul music so much, and much to the Chagrin of my 'Rocker' mates at the time I neglected to leave it behind completely.

Around the Spring of 2019 I started to think that maybe some of my old ideas for Soul songs could be resurrected and to that end, I started to compile possible inclusions.

I wanted examples of all the styles of Soul music that I had loved, from Cinematic type productions (Frankie Valli & the Four Seasons – The Night) through to the Joyful abandon of the " Love Train" by the O'Jays, from strange instrumentation (Whatever that is at the front of "Have you Seen Her" by the Chi-Lites) to sophisticated Orchestrations ("Betcha by Golly Wow" by The Stylistics) and finally, lots of Wah Guitar & Horns (Shaft!)

Ok, the Horns thing.

I don't know what it is that I love so much about Horn Sections, however simple the arrangements. I've taken a guess that in those aforementioned formative years, on the nights I could sit quietly enough beside my Dad to be allowed to watch the start of programmes like Columbo or Kojak, I found I was always in love with the musical scores. Sparse, and raw (I realise now that this would have been budget constraints for the MD), they seemed to bring the pictures to life, and I was always aware of them, and they always had Horns.

Billy Goldenberg was my favourite, and I could recognise his wonderful scores from the get go, the lone percussionist, the Timpani man and the Horn/String arrangements, I loved Bernado Segall as well, but Billys "Kojak Theme" was where it was at for me.

When I started working for Fishman as their European Ambassador, one of the products I was most impressed with was the TriplePlay MIDI guitar system.

I used it extensively on albums like Incorporation and Chemistry, but it never got a better work out than on this album.

Give me a MIDI guitar and a copy of Chris Heins Compact Horns and I'm good to go.

Finally, I enlisted the help of my eldest son Danny, who, blessed with the Pipes of an angel and brought up watching myself and my brother Neil on stage at various Festivals and shows over the years, was my first choice to get the feel of the backing vocals to be authentic to my vision. And he worked wonders.

Thanks Danny, I couldn't have made this without you....

Neil meanwhile, arranged and sang the BV's on "This Bitter Flame" - Thank You!

So here it is, my homage to one of the myriad different styles of music I love.

I was influenced by everything from The Walker Bros to the Jacksons, and from Frankie Valli to Smokey Robinson, and I think it shows.

On a technical note, the Capitol Chambers Plug-In from UAD got a proper battering during these sessions....

I hope you enjoy it.

Finally, this album is dedicated with love to my mum, Lila, who passed away in April this year.

She died from Corona virus or Covid 19 as it's more correctly called.

To be truthful, she probably wouldn't have seen the year out, she was elderly and suffering from a bastard variant of Alzheimers, but the virus took 8 of them in her Nursing home within a week, and she was one.

Of all the music I've made, this is the record she could have danced to, and God knows she used to love to dance.

Steve Fairclough.

May 2020.