

PAUL MURPHY

AN INTERVIEW WITH LONDONS JAZZDANCE DON

Where were you born and what were the main clubs that you went to before becoming a DJ?

I was born in some backwater Essex shit hole. The usual mile upon mile of dreary bungalows, punctuated with Soviet style "New Towns" and the obligatory modern art fountain designed to make the town centre ideal as a wind tunnel as opposed to a space for "rest and play" as intended. Dull, dull, dull! One good thing though, the local Newsagent sold Blues & Soul magazine. Oh the excitement of finding that mag at the time! I also really loved Charlie Gilletts "Honky Tonk" Radio show then, which I listened to religiously. Charlie Gillett is probably the biggest influence on my musical taste ever and I soon found the best shop to buy my kind of music - Contempo's in the West End where B&S magazine was based. I also discovered that B&S editor, John Abbey, lived in the same area as me. A bit of hope on my rather narrow horizon. Around this time a new Disco opened near me called The Goldmine. Monday night was "Soul Night" and to make things even more exciting the club sparked a 1940's revival with a Jazz & Swing night on Fridays. Things were looking up! Friends used to come down from London to stay at my place for the Soul night, but the fact that they where all black, made me more noticeable to the local Teds and Nazi's, and after a few close shaves and Olympic speed sprints I thought "Fuck this for a game of soldiers, I'm off!" and promptly left for the Smoke. "I wanted to live!"

When did you start DJing and what lead you down the "Jazz" path?

When I moved nearer to London the only really good club for music near me was The Lacy Lady in Seven Kings, East London. The DJ was the same DJ who played the Soul and 1940's nights at the Goldmine (Chris Hill) and I got a job there collecting glasses. Young people came from all over the UK to the Lacy and you could wear what you liked without getting beaten up there and the music was really good. In those far off times, I should add that in most towns there were only Mecca Dance Halls that played very boring music to crowds that usually included psychopaths on some kind of day release scheme. They could be very dangerous if they perceived you to be "different". By this time I thought I might like to have a go at this DJing lark so I started playing at friends parties, mainly because I had a few more 45's than anyone else. I then hired out a local villains boozier for a night (pretty easy in that area, nearly everyone looked like an extra from a "Cockney Geezer" Brit flick) and I got Bob Jones to DJ. Bob was a really nice guy, a total music enthusiast, but one night for some reason he could nt

make it, so I had to DJ instead and I was hooked for good. There were many London DJs who played for a mostly black audience then, and naturally, they played the best music. A DJ I particularly remember was Mark Roman at Crackers. The Thursday night sessions Upstairs at Ronnie Scotts were also memorable, with dancers challenging each other, one on one, centre floor, which I'd never seen before. Benny Wilson (at Chaguaramas in Neal St) was another DJ who was very influential to me. I had a lot of boring office jobs at this time but I eventually got a goodun at United Artists Music and when they decided to throw out a lot their music library, I asked if I could have them... "Its just Jazz sonny, you won't like it!" they said. But I took them anyway, and found that I DID like it. Not long after this, the manager of UA died in front of me of a heart attack! "I gotta get outta this place" I thought, so I got a job at "Our Price", a cheap & cheerful chain, a bit like Lidl's, that just sold music! It was expanding at that time so jobs were easy to come by, even for me. Someone there noticed that I knew a bit about "The Black Music" so I was put in charge of Imports. Whilst there I met a customer called Ray who had been renting The Horseshoe Pub in Tottenham Crt Rd. It was one of those 1900's pubs, that had fallen on hard times and was crumbling to pieces. Ray thought I was a bit of a head and asked me to DJ there. It was a serious fire hazard but I thought "Perfect, I'll take it!" I had access to new US Import records so it was good to try things out to sell in the shop. Black teenagers found it hard getting into London clubs back then so when they discovered entrance was OK and I played good music, they checked it out. If they asked me for something, I made sure I got it but I liked to surprise them with my own tastes too.

Which of the many residencies that you held during the "Jazz Dance" heyday remains your favourite and why?

I liked them all, but I have a particular soft spot for The Horseshoe because it was the first with a real dedicated scene. The name Ray had come up with: JAFFAS, was well thought out (Jazz And Funk - Funk And Soul) and we put on live US acts such as Alphonse Mouzon, Jay Hoggard and The Heath Brothers. But it was around 8 years too early. Just as we were financially turning the corner along came another DJ who did the same thing in the same place on Saturday nights (without live acts of course, he was too stingy for that) and because he had a bit more money he could advertise and took our crowd which put us out of business. Bastard! I ended up working for him a year later too, I had to, I could'nt get anywhere else to play.



Paul Murphy with Electric Ballroom regulars in 1983 (Photo David Johnson)

There have been many DJ's that were influenced by you and followed your style (eg Gilles Peterson, Snowboy, Patrick Forge, Perry Louis) but you remain the "Jazz Dancers" all time Fav. How do you feel about that?

I absolutely loved that music and I love to see people have a good time dancing to what I think is interesting, different music. Its easy to play the latest "trend" as a DJ. The hard part is playing records that the audience has never heard before... when they DO hear it, and love it, it's so much more rewarding

During those legendary Jaffas days are there any particular dancers that you recall?.. Who were the main faces and best dancers?

Jerry Barry is the person I remember most for obvious reasons, and he's a very funny guy, always joking. All the other IDJ guys I remember too. Big Raymond, Perry Louis loads really. They were a big part of my life for a long time, and I hope I was a big part of their lives too.

Which of the US based live acts that you brought over were the most successful in terms of both ticket sales and performance?

The Heath Brothers where the most successful, we got our money back the first night. The second night was also a sell out so on the third night we said to the band "Have the night off, we haven't sold many tickets". I stood on the door that Sunday and gave money back to about 20 people. The Friday night was the night of the Brixton Riots and when we came out of the club there where hundreds of police, protecting the Stereo shops in Tottenham Crt Rd. One of them asked Percy Heath to "move along" and he said to the Chief Cop "Give those suckers jobs and you wouldn't have these riots!"

What are you up to these days?

Well I'm not at Afro Art Records any more, so I'm just taking my time and pondering what to do next. I'll think of something eventually!

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