

## Northern Soul Scene Project

### Beverly Jones (BJ) interviewed by Nick Wood (NW) on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2020

NW: This is an interview with Beverly Jones at the Central Library in Peterborough as part of the Jumped Up Theatre project on Northern Soul. Beverly, can you tell us where you were born, please?

BJ: I was born in Doncaster.

NW: And do you mind telling us when?

BJ: I was born in July 1960.

NW: Thank you very much indeed. I wonder if we could start by me asking you if you could tell me what it felt like for you the first time you went to a Northern Soul night.

BJ: Well, I started going to the Northern Soul things at the youth club, really. Um, we had a youth club that was attached to our school. So that would have been the early '70s, probably '74, '75. And that's where I got introduced to the music, Northern Soul, that we...probably was Motown and old soul music at the time. So that's when I first started to hear it. And it was quite nice because it was a youth club that we could go to in the daytime as well, obviously at lunch times in the afternoons, and they had a room at the bottom that we called the soul hall and all the windows were painted out black. I think we all painted them, and we'd sit up on big benches and just listen to the music and dance. So that's where I first started to get into soul and Motown music. And from then I think the first all-nighter I would have gone to would have been at the Wirrina in Peterborough, and I would have been very young still, probably 15, and it would just have been very exciting to be going out at that time of night and being out all night in a room full of people, always busy dancing, people out in the hall in the, sort of, foyer selling records. Just met people from different parts of the country and made new friends, and just be part of this sort of sub-culture, I suppose. Different, and I just loved the music.

NW: When you were at home, getting ready to go out, what would be the clothes that you would select to go out on an evening like that?

BJ: Well, the clothes are quite special and in fact I do remember going to a market in Melton Mowbray with my mum, a Christmas market, and there's a store there that used to sell... obviously somebody was hand making them 'cause they're quite unique, so for the girls it would be, um, skirts - long skirts, down to your ankles that when you, sort of, danced and spun around would spin out. They mimicked the boys Brummie trousers, the big wide, wide flares in that they had high waist bands usually with various zips and buttons and things across. You'd probably wear a vest top because it gets hot when you're dancing, and you'd probably change three or four times a night - you would go into the bathrooms to wash, change, freshen up. The shoes were particularly special. They were granny sandals and you ordered them from Kays Catalogues, and they were the peep-hole ones that literally the grannies were wearing, but they had a leather sole so they were fantastic for shuffling, dancing and sliding around in. And that would really be it. And then you'd take everything in your little bag, usually badges sewn all over from different clubs you'd been to or belong to. And yeah, it was all part and part...parcel of what we wore. And for the chaps it was the same, vest tops or the Adidas tops and...or loose shirts, but they would wear the big wide trousers. And the beer mats that you used to get on a bar in the pubs, there was a trend of

having them, sort of, hanging on to, sort of, wipe your brow, mop the sweat off. So yeah, that was all part and parcel of it.

NW: What colour was your dress?

BJ: Well, the dress...the skirts, I remember having a navy blue one. And I think had a green one. The navy blue one had a light blue band with all the buttons and the zips on and navy blue, and the green was two-tone. I'm sure they came from a market stall in Melton Mowbray near Leicester. So somebody had obviously realised can't buy these things, they had to be made. And I had a friend, Polly, that I used to go to the all-nighters with as well, and she was very clever and she used to make us things.

NW: So you were all dressed up in yer skirt from the market at Melton Mowbray. How did you get from your house to the Werrina?

BJ: We must've got the bus into town. I don't really remember, 'cause I obviously was too young. I used to go with my uncle and he was only 18 months older than me. Um, so we would have got the bus into town, probably gone into town somewhere first, probably The Falcon. And there was also two pubs on the square - The Bell and Oak and The Grapevine. And they were very much souly pubs and that would be quite where people would meet before an event, and everybody just walked over to the Werrina. Um, the bus station was almost next to the Werrina anyway, in those days, so...and I don't suppose that we'd've got in late, so yeah, by bus I would imagine. We might've got a lift in, I might've got me dad...step-dad to drop me off occasionally, but generally we probably just got the bus into town. And then we went to other places, like Cleethorpes and Nottingham. Um, I've been on a coach that was organised, met people on Peterborough Square and we went from there, or older friends that had cars, or train to various venues, so... But I was quite young, so I didn't travel that far that often. And the furthest north I went was Cleethorpes.

[05:08.1]

NW: For people who never experienced this, and obviously can't experience it because the Werrina's no longer there, if you can remember stepping into the Werrina from the queue, what did you see? What was it like, if you could describe it to us in your mind's eye?

BJ: Well when you first went through, you would be in the, sort of, main foyer. And there must have been some sort of bar selling - it wasn't alcohol, but there must have been stuff you could get. I'm not sure if there's a bar or not, but certainly not alcohol. But that would be where all the lads would sit round and that's where they would sell records. And they would sit on the floor with the record boxes and, like, you know, some people didn't dance much. It would just be they'd go for the music, buying records. And then you'd walk through a little bit where the, sort of, toilets were and then you'd be into a big, big sort of dance hall, I suppose, and a stage, 'cause there were bands there, I've seen certain people there - can't remember all of them, but I know I've certainly seen The Exciters, um, I think...Junior Walker and the All Stars, I think, was there. So a lot of the American names of the time came. And it was just a big dance hall from what I can remember. Um, yeah.

NW: Was there the big...was it like a dance...you say it's like a dance hall where there were big velvet curtains, or...?

BJ: I do remember the big, big curtains because the win...I think there were windows on both sides, but obviously all drawn because it's night and it's dark and it's the atmosphere, so

actually, you probably don't see it. There'd be tables round the outside, big dance hall in the middle, carpet in between and then out through to the foyer, so you kind of go between the two, sort of... I didn't, sort of, collect records, I didn't really know much about them so I didn't really...wasn't interested in that bit. And then people would just, sort of, sit around in their groups. Most people would be dancing. And if you were chatting to somebody...I think the nice thing was there'd be people from...from Boston, Northampton, you know, you got to make friends with lots of groups of people. You've all got the same interests. Didn't really seem to be a lot of trouble, not that I remember anyway. You could be chatting and somebody'd just go, "Oh, I've gotta go. My record's on." And then they'd just go, mid-conversation, to dance. That was it. You know, it was...the music was the key for everybody.

NW: "My record's on?"

BJ: Well, it'd be their favourite record and it would just come on, and it'd be the one they liked to dance to and that's it, so they would just go mid-conversation straight out onto the dance floor and dance. That's it, lost in music. That's it.

NW: So what would you be when you said...if you said, "My record's on," can you remember what you would be going out for?

BJ: I was never very good with the names of records. There are things I like, um, I've got copies of now. I remember there was *Moonlight Music and You* - Laura Greene, I think - that would be one of my favourites, and *Ten Miles High*, David and the Giants, *There's something Wonderful*, which is a classic. Um, but then there was two scenes, there...there was the oldies - and I'm not sure if they had this at Peterborough but they did at St Ives at...where we used to go at Cambridge. There'd be an oldies room, which would be a lot more of the American black soul music from the '60s, maybe the '70s, and then there was a bit more where it became more of a shufflers...where it became a little bit more stompy music. And you'd get some that prefer one or the other. I liked both, but I did quite like the modern stuff. I remember more like The Exciters, dancing to theirs *Reaching to the Very Best*. You've got a whole room and the floor's vibrating, and everybody's just, you know, shuffling along in time. So there was kind of two styles of music. I think it evolved. That's probably the mid to late '70s, I think, when they probably were, you know...in other parts of the country it might've been more...more traditional, um, kind of music. I'm just trying to think...yeah, I...I didn't know...my uncle collected records so he was very good and he would know. I just know if I liked it, I didn't necessarily know what it was called or who sang it, so, yeah.

NW: I've not heard that before, and people I've talked to, shufflers or shuffling.

BJ: Shuffling? Yeah, very fast, you'd 'ave to watch YouTube to see it, but you'll see, there's the Northern Soul dancers as we know it that almost looks like you're just, sort of, sliding along slower, and a little bit drunk-looking, almost. But then there is a bit more of a powerful shuffle and you just have to pick the tunes, and you'll see it's a different...different thing. So, probably incorporates most things because you still slide and you still turn and do...do the sort of acrobatics that go with it. But not...not that I did, I couldn't do those. And it's probably mostly the men that seem to do them anyway, then. But yeah, there was, kind of, two styles - there'll be...you might get people telling you they like the oldies room or the shuffly thing, it'd be a different kind of music. And venues across the country always had their own, sort of, the last record that they always played and it became like THE anthem, and I cannot for the life of me remember what we did at Peterborough, but it was long after

the night was all over, which is probably one of the most popular across the country because it's you know, the words resonate. What it was at that point that they would play was as the all-nighters were closing in the morning.

[09:57.0]

NW: I've got the impression that it was very much about the dancing. It wasn't necessarily about dating or...everybody danced, it didn't seem...it doesn't seem to me that it was like a traditional kind of nightclub where the girls dance round handbags and the boys stood round the outside. So was everybody dancing?

BJ: Yeah, the majority, I would say, you know, probably 90 per cent of people go to dance. Maybe some didn't, they just liked to listen to the music or sell records, but even then they would come in from the other, sort of, the hallway where they're selling the records and dance. So they do and I think the nice thing was, and certainly for men, what was...what was different is you just danced on your own. We didn't dance as a pair, um, or a partner, you just danced. Then if you knocked into people, which happened quite a lot, because you literally, sort of, you know, sort of listened to your music in a way it was always fine. It was just, "Sorry, I'm alone." Just move away a little bit. But I think that's why I liked it because you...you just...you got up and danced on your own, that was it. It didn't matter. And for men that must've been great that they didn't have to have a female partner to dance with. Um, so, yeah.

NW: So you went to the Wirrina here, and what other venues did you go to around the area?

BJ: Um, St Ivo...St Ivo, the recreation centre there, they had a big hall there...club that'd been built there, so we went there. I've been to Cleethorpes - think it was...don't know what it was called at Cleethorpes, whether it was the Winter Gardens - but Cleethorpes, and Nottingham. But Nottingham used to be an all-dayer that we used to go to. So we would do the all-nighter here, and then travel up to go to Nottingham for an all-dayer the next day.

NW: St Ives, what was the venue like there?

BJ: That was a big modern, sort of, sports hall, and that's all I can remember. That had two rooms, I know it definitely had two rooms. I think it was a very big venue. Um, so I don't know when that was built, but I think it was fairly new, so '60s, '70s when it was built.

NW: How would you get there?

BJ: Either with an older person, um, there was a group that had a car, um, I don't know if I'd have got a train down or whether there was ever a coach down, but I went down with a group of friends and somebody had a car. Went there quite a few times, that was quite a good one. But quite often there would be a coach put on or something. I'm sure when we went to Cleethorpes it was organised. I don't know who organised them. And you just all paid and off you went.

NW: How did you keep going if you've done an all-night at the Wirrina, and then you went to Nottingham?

BJ: Not very well. Probably sleep on the way. Um, I don't know, I think you were young. And, you know, I don't think I could've done it that often because I was very young, but, um, I think, yeah, it wouldn't be something you'd repeat on a regular basis. I certainly wouldn't have done, so I think I probably only went three or four times up to Nottingham, so, just for

the difference, so... And whether it was always an all-nighter and all-dayer I don't know, but I know I've certainly done an all-dayer, and I've done it once where I've done both, so... But there were people that, you know, amphetamines were big on the scene, but, no, not for me, I think, um, you know.

NW: So what would you do? Would you stop for breakfast somewhere?

BJ: Well, I used to work in a cafe in Peterborough called The Mini Fryer. It's not there anymore now. And sometimes when I've worked on an all-nighter I would go to work there on a Sunday anyway, and I just let everybody in for breakfast. Knickerbocker glories and burgers. So, um, yeah. But, you know, I was probably only 15, 16 and I'd left Peterborough by 17 so I wasn't there that long. Um, when I came home I'd still been...been to them, and I'd been to some as I've been older to kind of...it's nice to see the people, but it was a great part of my youth but it wasn't my whole life.

NW: I was interested as to whether you had been since you're older, because I know there is still a scene isn't there?

BJ: Yeah, and I've been once to The Fleet to a couple of dos and one up at Peterborough at The Cresset, and it's nice to see people that you know. It's...it's amazing to see people still having the passion for music and getting up and dancing. Slightly different when they've got no hair and you're not sure who they are, and you 'ave to sit down halfway through now. But, you know, it's still nice that there's that sense of...that...that still means something to them. And in fact, oh, what's his name – BBC2 radio presenter - Paul...O'Grady, still does The Best of Northern Soul on a Sunday, he does a couple of tunes, two or three, on a Sunday evening, and I still have a quick shuffle around the kitchen [*chuckles*] while I'm cooking dinner. So I still like it but I wouldn't want to be, you know, it's not the only type of music I like in places that I would go. I wouldn't want to be back there full time. It was great at the time, but it was as much about the friendships and the music and having that bit of freedom, and I suppose doing something a little bit different as in, you know...I don't...I'm not sure my mother always knew...I think 'cause I went with my uncle she just thought he'd always look after me and it'd be fine. We just got in and parted company as soon as we got there anyway. He and his friends, I had mine. And he did, he always looked after me. I knew if I'd got a problem he's always there. But I don't know, they didn't...it just seemed to be a very friendly scene. I'm sure there were problems, and I know there were drugs, but overall I never felt unsafe.

NW: Can you remember the friends that you used to go with?

[14:58.8]

BJ: Can remember a couple of them. There's a girl, her name is Spike, but her name was Petunia I think. And her parents even came a couple of times. She lived out at Whaplode and...so that's when...there's a girl called Polly, a chap called Leon. There was a guy called Danny, who was a brilliant spinner and dancer. People that we would meet there from Peterborough, quite a lot from Spalding we used to be quite friendly with, and Boston. There was Maggie and Gray from Boston, there's a group of them there. There were some twins, Rob and Fred. And then there was a chap called Vaughan from Spalding and he was a very good dancer as well. So you'd just meet up with different people. And then school, there'd be a lot from the Stanground side, but a lot went to the youth clubs and we used to go to Whittlesey a lot, they had a good youth club as well, you know. I'm not sure how many of

them went to the all-nighters - obviously Smudge Smith, people like that, then you had Paul Donnelly. And a lot of them got into, sort of, DJ-ing and doing music and then I think carried it on at The Fleet and things like that when the Wirrina finished anyway, and DJ'd around, so... But they were a little bit older but they seemed a lot older then. That...that sort of four or five age, you know, three – probably wasn't even that old. Seemed a lot older, so...

NW: Did you go to The Fleet?

BJ: Yep, bin to The Fleet, but - and been to The Fleet recently as well, which was quite nice, so, um...but the Wirrina is the bit I remember the most, probably because it was first place I went to, you know, other than the youth club, and, as I say, it probably 'ad the biggest impact on me, so...

NW: Can...what can you remember about Cleethorpes? Can you tell us something about the venue there, or...?

BJ: I can't remember much at all. I think there was a couple of lads who were from Northampton, um, and I don't remember much at all. They were pretty much very similar, a lot of the venues, as in dance halls, clubs, things like that. So, um, I don't remember too much. I'm sure we went on a coach, but other than that I don't really remember too much about that one, so...it was a long time ago. But yeah, probably just a bit dance hall again. I don't...I don't...not a particularly modern one, I don't think. I'm...I'm thinking a bit more of a traditional looking place from what I can remember. And it used to be like cloakrooms, a bar area, you know the usuals. But, I say, I don't remember it that well.

NW: Was it on the seafront?

BJ: I can't even remember that. I can't even remember where it was. I think I went there with Polly and a couple of friends from Northampton, and I don't remember. I probably would have been 15, 16 at the oldest 'cause I'd left Peterborough by 17. So...

NW: If you had to tell me what the main things are that you remember from Northern Soul, what would they be?

BJ: Great music, friendships and a sense of freedom.

NW: Thank you very much.

[17:57.5]