

Northern Soul Scene Project

Petula Collier (PC) interviewed by Jason Mitchell (JM)

Date: 18th March 2020

JM: Press the record button on my machine to make sure we can all hear each other. Yes, good. Perfect. Okay, brilliant. So I've got a bit of a boomy voice so I have to try and make sure I don't boom over everyone.

PC: So I've got a loud voice myself. Oh, perfect.

JM: So we are on the 18th of March 2020. And I'm interviewing you and my name is Jason Mitchell. Could I ask you for your first name, please?

PC: Yeah, my name's Petula. That's PETULA.

JM: And your surname?

PC: Is Collier, COLLIER, but all my life I've been known as Spike SPIKE.

JM: Perfect and you've just made me realise I didn't ask Kevin a question, so, Spike any other names you've been known by.

PC: No, just everybody on the northern soul scene knows me as Spike.

JM: Perfect. And this is ... we're just stating this as a telephone interview, replacing our one to one interviews that we've set up because of everything that's going on. So it's for the Northern soul project. Where were you born?

PC: I was born on an RAF camp in Norfolk called Scottow, quite near Norwich, and my parents moved to the Spalding area in 1969 I believe.

JM: Could you spell that for me? Scotto? What was that?

PC: Yeah, SCOTTOW. It was an RAF base, it's since been shut.

JM: Okay.

PC: My dad was in the forces.

JM: And when were you born, if you don't mind me asking?

PC: In 1957.

JM: Perfect, excellent. And I say so this is, this is around the Northern soul project in Peterborough that we're doing with Jumped Up Theatre. So I'm going to ask you if you could just tell me a bit about your relationship, experience with northern soul.

PC: I got into soul music at quite a young age. I started attending youth club, there was youth clubs when we were young for young people to go and they had discos and a lot of these youth club discos, they play Tamla Motown, scar music, soul music, and I really liked it. We went to a youth club in Holbeach and I went with some friends who I knew later. We were all at school together because I transferred schools. My friend was Teresa Warner as was now Teresa Jackson, she was a year below me and her boyfriend at that time had learned to drive very young so he started transporting us around the country to soul dos. We all loved soul music, we loved dancing, we loved the atmosphere, meeting people and slowly as we got to know people we found that this was happening all around the country in the north particularly and we met people from around the country that we'd have never met because they were all interested in the same music and that was the bond that

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tied everyone together really was the love of music. For a lot of people, the love of dancing. The northern soul scene was quite strange, actually, because it was quite male dominated, the dancing and record collecting. People soon started really collecting rare records and most of the people that did that were male, there wasn't many female record collectors. Likewise, most of the people who were dancing, who were recognised as being amazing dancers were nearly all blokes. So it was a very male led scene but the longer it went on and the more involved you got with it, it just took over your life really. And then every weekend we were doing something, going somewhere, either locally or across the country and looking for soul things to go to where we could share our common interest. And you soon sort of started to get favourite records that you really loved the beat of and I think that was it, it was, it was like a secret society almost to begin with and it was something you thought your parents wouldn't have approved of, probably like they'd been into jazz or rock and roll or whatever and their parents didn't approve of that and we got into northern soul. I was one of the odd ones because my mum and dad used to come to quite a few venues. My dad had previously done doors in Peterborough and he'd worked for quite a few of the promoters and club people and so he came because my mum and dad have always had a huge interest in music and they all wanted to come and they both were dancers as well. So I was one of the few then whose parents choose to come with me, it never bothered me. They didn't come all the time just now and again they came. They had friends on the scene as well. And it was quite acceptable. So it was weird.

5:27

JM: When you, when you say, I'm just gonna take you back a bit just so I can get an idea of like, where we are. So you were born, you were born in the RAF base?

PC: Yeah.

JM: And then you say you move schools.

PC: Yeah.

JM: And then you talk about going out in the car with your friend who was very young. So first of all, where did you move from the RAF base to somewhere else?

PC: Yeah, well, my dad, we moved all around the country and I suppose that's what made me quite outgoing because I was always the new person at school and the thing about the soul scene was that it was so accepting of everybody, that it didn't really matter who you were, where you came from, what your background was about, it was all that common interest of music and dancing. So, for me, it was ideal because I was quite outgoing. I would stand and chat to anyone. We were all about 16/17 when we totally got into it, but previous to that when we've been going to youth clubs, we were like 14/15. So as the older ones could learn, learn to drive then we could start going further afield. Does that put it into context for you?

JM: Yes, that's good. So when you say 16/17, what clubs were you going to? Did you go to any of the big ones at that age?

PC: Yeah, I was going to Wigan by then so I was very lucky. When the northern soul scene took off in Peterborough, I got quite friendly

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with Dave Mindham, who ran the original East Anglian Soul Club which later changed its name to the Phoenix Soul Club. Because Ken Cox who had St Ives also wanted to be the East Anglian Soul Club so Dave Mindham would take a car full of us on a Saturday night up to Wigan so I was quite lucky. I helped Dave do the door. I would take money when people were coming in and do the stamps and issue memberships and things like that. That's how I got to know a lot of people.

JM: For 16, is that just me, it feels I mean, especially in context of the time, was 16 or 17 quite young to be going to

PC: No, no, it was a lot, there were older people going in. To us they seemed really old. They were probably 19,20,21. But the majority of us who were younger in the 16/17 bracket, we were all there together because, you're probably looking at it in the social context of now. And now to, you know, youngsters would never think about the world was a completely different place then. And our parents had no issue with us going out as long as they knew where we were, who we were with and what we were doing, because it was seemed to be a much safer place. We were hitchhiking around the country at that age. You know, we wouldn't go on our own obviously, but two of us would think right we want to go to Cleethorpes tonight to a do and so we'd hitchhike to Cleethorpes, and it was never, there was no issue with it because you're judging it by today's times and everybody's so paranoid now about what happens in the world. Well, I think the media then hadn't, wasn't driving everything. So we were in fact, in a much safer environment. We were all quite sensible and streetwise, do you know what I mean?

JM: What was it? What did it feel like to go to that big event? I mean, obviously I'll come back to Peterborough but obviously....

PC: Yeah, well, the biggest events at that time were the Blackpool Mecca Wigan Casino and Cleethorpes Pier and Pavilion. Cleethorpes had two events on one night, you got a ticket and you could walk between the two events. One was the pier which later had some very bad storm damage and the other one was the Pavilion, the Winter Gardens, where you went into and it was much plusher. Going to Wigan for the first time, it's really hard to explain what the atmosphere was like. And when I watched the northern soul films, on TV about it, and documentaries and things, it's really hard to capture. That feeling as you walk through the door and the heat hits you of hundreds of people dancing. The beat of the music, the smell obviously of people close together. I mean don't get me wrong Wigan Casino was a dive it really was, the toilets flooded regularly it would be absolutely packed but it was the atmosphere of the place and that was one of the places that attracted some really, really good dancers. There was a bloke around then and who was I think very similar age to me, his name was Jethro Jones. We would go just to watch him dance and see what he was doing and pick up steps and then go home and practice them in front of the mirror so we could dance like him. The Winter Gardens at Cleethorpes was very lovely. That was like the cream of the crop sort of thing. So I think Peterborough, although you're going to go back to Peterborough, Peterborough was quite a big venue. It was one of the bigger ones with St Ives. At that time anyway, so although Wigan was bigger and more packed, we weren't overawed by it, we were just excited because we wanted to be where it was all going on sort of thing, you know.

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JM: So in in terms of the timeline, had the Wirrina opened, while Wigan was open but after The Torch closed.

PC: Yes, yeah. I can't remember what year the Wirrina opened in. Steph Blaney might be able to help you with that I can't remember, my memory's not as good as it was. But when the Wirrina opened, there was so much going on for us in the East Midlands then we really didn't need to travel very far to go to really good venues. We had Hinkley, Leicester, St Ives, as I've mentioned, there was St Neots so we could more or less do everything we wanted to quite locally. And when the Wirrina first started, they had a lot they brought acts over from America like the Exciters and people like that. So that was really good. They got quite a good reputation and they in fact started attracting people from around the country as well. So instead of people having to go up to Wigan to get the good music, they could come because Peterborough then started attracting good DJs and people wanted to come to Peterborough.

JM: Hmm. Is there any, in your time since has there been any other experience which has matched that feeling of walking into Wigan?

PC: Once, a couple of years ago, I went to the Blackpool weekender, the one that was at the Winter Gardens and I went in the downstairs room which is predominantly oldies, which I've you know, I've moved on since then, and I prefer a bit more modern soul music but the atmosphere when I went down there and I actually said to the people I was with, for anyone who'd never been to Wigan, that was probably the nearest thing I could relate to Wigan was going to the Blackpool Winter Gardens in the downstairs room, which holds I think 2,000 I was told, it's got balconies all the way around it. Not in layout or anything but atmosphere and people all wanting to dance and be involved. That's the nearest I can come to it. For music, the record music if you know what I mean, I've been to gigs that have been absolutely amazing. But that's a different thing altogether. That's not like going to an all-nighter, because the majority of gigs you go to, you can't dance at any way and they're not for dancing, they're for listening to a band or whatever.

JM: When you say it was male dominated, and all the dance moves, I mean, what was it as a female, I don't want to add anything to it but ...

PC: No, no.

JM: Did you, did you was there a sort of hierarchy in that? I mean, I mean, what was, first of all, what were your dancing talents, like?

PC: I was considered to be one of the better dancers. There were no female DJs at that time that I can remember not one. I later did DJ. So it was, you know, that's why I in my mind, it always seemed a very male dominated thing. Most of the people who were considered to be top dancers were male, the ones that all won the dancing competitions. I would say it was 75% male 25% women, sometimes higher. The people we looked to as being good dancers were nearly all men or you know, lads and whatever.

JM: Were you in the middle of the room, the front or the back? Or is that a myth?

15:02

PC: People did all sit in the same areas all the time.

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JM: But no, sorry, the thing about which was on the documentary I picked it up from, said that, you know, the better the dancer you were the nearer the front you were. Was that a?

PC: I'd never felt that. No. People tended to congregate in their groups from where they were from. So if you were looking for someone from Wisbech, you'd know what part of the room they'd be sitting in, and they generally dance in that area. Same with Boston. If you wanted to speak to someone from Boston, you knew what part of the room the Boston lot all sat and they would generally dance in that area. It might have been like that at Wigan but we never got involved in that. I do remember the likes of Jethro. They were always at the front. They were always at the front of weekend dancing. And they were quite revered, do you know what I mean? But in Peterborough, I don't really remember that happening in Peterborough. I think we were a bit more accepting, it was just people would dance where they wanted to dance, but people did sit in the same positions week in week out and had their areas to be in.

JM: Was a little bit territorial if you sat in someone else's area?

PC: No, I wouldn't say territorial, because if someone was new and sat in someone's area, the people who generally sat in that area would start talking to them. Because that was all part and parcel of it was the fact that every week you went out and you met new people, and I always say to people now, do you know, we did all this without mobile phones and satnav, you know, we went around, we went around the country without any satnav, hitchhiking generally, and without mobile phones, but we all knew that people who were going to Wigan always generally you met at the service stations on the motorway, and we would all meet up there and then off we'd all go, you know, and it was like, it just seems to me we were much more adventurous then. And as I say the world was a completely different place. We weren't all cocooned and

JM: Yeah. More so now. When you said it was like a secret society and it was something that your parents did because your parents, you know, might not have liked it. How did you feel in the fact that your parents were there? I mean, was it, was that weird or not?

PC: It was a bit odd, but I it was quite, All my friends really accepted them and they got to be as well known nearly as I was, and lots of people remember my mum and dad with really good memories and when my dad died lots of people from the soul scene got in touch and said, oh god, you know, really good memories of your dad. And you know, so that was a comfort to me. And like I said, they didn't come out all the time. But just now and again, they like to keep their monitoring. I think it was their way of monitoring me and knowing what was going on, even though I was very well behaved and didn't get involved in the drugs side of things at all. I know lots of people did but I chose not to. But I think, I think because both my parents had been involved in the jazz scene, and drugs were quite prevalent on the jazz scene in the 50s and 60s, I think they were very aware that people couldn't dance all night without some sort of stimulant.

JM: And was there, was there any pressure in terms of you know, obviously, I'm not particularly interested in the, in the drugs part of it but as a person who sort of went "No, no thank you very much. I don't want that" was there in any way

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PC: No, it was a completely, you've either got involved in it or you didn't. And I was quite fortunate in the majority of people I was very close to and in my social circle were not involved in the drugs scene so it was, there was no pressure on us at all. People who wanted to, did, people who didn't, didn't, you know, I didn't. I didn't feel any need to take drugs. The buzz from the music kept me awake and was my mental high if you know what I mean. I didn't feel any need to take a stimulant. I was just so excited to dance all night and hear different music all the time. So that was my natural high really, I never had any trouble keeping awake anyway, so

JM: Perfect. With you, with us bringing it sort of back down to Peterborough. It's like a test of memory what I'm going to ask you now, but if you were to close your eyes.

PC: My memory's not really that good, yeah.

20:04

JM: Could you take me through the sort of preparation of going out to the Wirrina in terms of and I mean quite a bit, so you'd get ready, be in your room. You'd be prepped. I don't know what it would be as sort of as you approached it so, if it's like almost like a painting a picture for someone who just sees the Wirrina now as a car park, unfortunately.

PC: Yeah, yeah.

JM: It'd be great if you could ...

PC: The Wirrina was in two things and when the soul scene was at its height in Peterborough, not only did we have the roller skating rink, but we had the ballroom as well and there was two lots of music going on, one in the roller skating rink and one in the ballroom, and you could go between the two and you paid one price. And you just went in and that was it. But what we used to do was, we would, there was a lot of preparation into going out because people were quite hard up then a few of us girls would make dresses to go out in or wear skirts because what we wanted to wear we couldn't buy in the shops because shops just didn't cater for us. So anyone who was half a dab hand with a needle was making skirts. A lot of the blokes had handmade trousers from a shop called Bogeys, which was in Skegness and then there was other companies that made them so we'd spend some of the week preparing an outfit, getting an outfit together and you couldn't just have one outfit because you were dancing all night you needed two or three changes of clothes, because some of the venues were quite hot. Peterborough was quite hot and you'd need to change your 'T' shirt or whatever and freshen up. So on a Friday or Saturday night you'd get ready to go out, you'd make sure your clothes were pressed. I used to knock around with a girl then called Lynette Griffiths. She emigrated to America later. She used to bring an iron with her every week, a little portable iron which she'd plug in, in the ladies because the Wirrina in the ballroom bit had a lady's dressing room almost separate from the toilets where it'd be full of girls all ironing clothes getting ready, you know, getting made up things like that, 'cos some of the people going were younger than us even and they were like 15/16 trying to sneak in, they would, they'd be in there because they'd come out with just normal clothe so their parents didn't know where they'd be going and they'd be in there getting changed into their northern soul skirts and putting makeup on

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and things like that. The older ones of us would be helping them you know, stuff like that so we'd choose all our outfits and make sure they were all ready for the weekend and then we'd get ready, go out and we'd sometimes go to a pub for a drink or whatever and we'd all meet in the same pub, and we'd go to the all-nighter together and then obviously once the music started, you'd dance and at eight o'clock when we went in. Do you want me to describe what the Wirrina was like then?

JM: Yeah, I want to know what it feels like. I'm walking up to the Wirrina and what am I hearing and smelling and seeing?

PC: Right, as you walked up to the Wirrina, the car park would be very busy, there'd be groups of people standing in the car park all talking to each other, greeting each other. People from Northampton, Leicester, all around the East Midlands would all come to Peterborough and you'd go in at one time, I'll describe you one time rather than you'd go in through the ballroom entrance which was the old Gildenburgh then, you'd go in through that entrance and it was very plush then because they used to have bands on for like older group people. So you'd go in, it was all very plush and then usually there's a dive for the toilets because everybody wanted to get ready. And then you'd go through into the ballroom and the ballroom was lovely. There'd be a few chairs around the outside, a lot of the time and tables, but sometimes people sat on the floor if there wasn't enough seats in. And then I seem to remember, there was a door on the left or something on the left that you went through into another corridor area, and then through into the roller skating rink that was much more basic in there. It was like going into a sports gymnasium and that had seating that pulled out, wooden seating like bleacher seating or where it was all stacked and you could go walk the steps and sit at the top and watch the dances or you could sit down the bottom and chat to people. That'd be a disco set up one end of the roller skating rink, and there'd be a disco set up on the stage in the ballroom. One would be playing one sort of music and one would be playing maybe one would be playing sounds that were from Wigan with DJs who were more into that sort of music and the other one would be playing more what was considered then newer music so stuff from Cleethorpes, Blackpool, Mecca, stuff like that. So that was the setup. And then as DJs changed and people had their favourite DJs, you would move rooms as the DJ moved rooms or if you wanted to stay in for the next slot you'd stay in. Has that given you a sort of bit of a feel? It was very dark as well in especially in the roller skating rink, it was quite dark.

JM: So I'm just going to go over a few of the things. So my first thing is you've got how did you distinguish between all the different sounds because you've got things going off in all rooms?

25:58

PC: You couldn't hear one room when you were in the other room. There were dividing walls between it so the ballroom which was the old Gildenburgh, that was in there was a corridor between the two so when you were in the roller skating rink, I suppose because it's not down there, you can't relate to what it was like. Yeah, so you couldn't hear the music. If you were in the ballroom, you couldn't hear what was going on in the roller skating rink.

JM: But as you're walking through, did you kind of guess, would you kind of guess like one rhythm and another rhythm and then like ...?

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PC: Yeah, as you went through the room into the next room, then you could start picking up on the sounds in the other room. So yeah, of course, I forgot that we're talking about a venue that's no longer there, like so many venues now.

JM: Which pub did you go to?

PC: It depended, we sometimes met in the Bell and Oak, which is where McDonald's is now on the square. There wasn't that many pubs in the town centre, in the city centre then in Peterborough so we were quite limited where we'd go, sometimes we met in the Bull & Swan because that was quite near to the venue.

JM: When you say ... so like the kids, you know they all went to the Wirrina. Was there, I mean, half the population of Peterborough must be missing on these evenings.

PC: Although there was a lot of people there from Peterborough, there was, I mean, at its peak there were probably over 1,000 people there, if not more, on a Saturday or Friday night. A lot of the people came from away. So like I say, there would be four or five car loads from Hinkley, four or five car loads from Leicester, from St. Ives, from St Neots, it's the people who all lived out in the villages and also then it was very much finding out about where these venues were, because we didn't have the internet then so it's all word of mouth. No, everybody sort of let people know. We would do the old traditional telephone and ring people up and say, oh, so and so's on tonight or this weekend, shall we go, you know. So, once clubs got established, the Wirrina was one of the more established ones at one time. It was unregulated. So everybody knew that Saturday in that month it was on so everybody would congregate there.

JM: Hmm, what was your favourite DJ?

PC: I loved ... at the time I had two favourite DJs. I love the bloke called John Vincent. And I also loved the DJ from Stamford called Poke whose name's Blair Hayden. He DJ'd at Cleethorpes and he was one of the DJs I used to travel to go and see DJ because I really liked his spots.

JM: Blair Hayden?

PC: Yeah, Blair Heyden. Poke. Yeah, he still DJ's now and I think John Vincent does actually. I'm not so sure he's still not about. Soul Sam was quite a big DJ on the scene then and he still is.

JM: For you ... what was it about the DJs that

PC: Their choice of music. Blair was bringing through a lot of new sounds then. Some of them stuck to what was seen to be safe floor fillers, so they would play old sounds that they knew would fill the floor with dancers, but some of the DJs started looking for new sounds to play to keep fresh music coming through all the time. And Poke Blair worked for Soul Bowl in King's Lynn which was owned by Ian Anderson, I think his name was. He sent Poke to America a lot to troll for records, to look through warehouses, junk shops to find new sounds to bring through to this country so Poke was seen to be a very, sort of a DJ who was going to break new sounds all the time. So he would play stuff that you'd never heard before and that for me was

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quite exciting because I wanted to hear things that I'd never heard before and be what I used to say them was quite musically challenging. You know, I like to think I was listening to new stuff to keep fresh.

30:29

JM: So the Wirrina ... how long that relationship with Wirrina, when did it ... how long did you go there for?

PC: Right up to when it closed. I can't even remember when it closed, but I went to, I can't think that I missed an event there. From when it opened to when it closed.

JM: How many events do you think?

PC Oh, lots, hundreds, hundreds. I mean, we were going out then, regularly Friday night, we'd go to an all-nighter. Saturday, we would try and be in Peterborough for the Posh match because we'd go to Posh if Posh were playing at home. We'd go up to Woollies, they had a cafe upstairs then. We'd go up to Woollies cafe and have tea and crumpets or whatever. Then we'd go to the football in the afternoon, we'd go to an all-nighter on the Saturday night and then we'd look for somewhere on a Sunday for an all-dayer or for a Sunday and that was usually Nottingham Palais. We'd usually drive over to Nottingham Palais then for Sunday afternoon session, and that went on to about 10 o'clock at night on a Sunday. And then we'd go off to college on a Monday.

JM: Where to college? Where was that?

PC: I was at Wisbech Isle of Ely by then. So by then I was in my 20s.

JM: And apart from being asleep at college, what else were you doing?

PC: I was doing display and advertising, I was doing window dressing and advertising.

JM: Did you go into that?

PC: Yes, I did. I ended up spending 10 years doing that and then I joined the civil service

JM: And, and, and did you ... has your relationship with northern soul continued throughout that?

PC: Yes, I still ... I still have very, very close friends who I met there and still keep in contact with and see regularly. I still regularly go to things. I pick my events now what I want to go to. I don't go to all-nighters anymore, but I do still go to things that end at 2.00/3.00 in the morning. I do occasionally go to an oldies event if I like the DJs or want to catch up with people more than anything. It's more for a social thing for me to see friends I haven't seen for a while and I do go to a couple of modern events and my friend, Steven Jackson, who married Teresa Warner who I was at school with, he DJs still as Steve J. And he still plays in Peterborough at the Caliente Club. So I do attend the Caliente Club, which is now on in Peterborough.

JM: Where's that?

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PC: Over at Paston.

PC: You know, if you go to Sainsbury's and you go over the roundabouts there and there's the Caliente Club. It's in the little Paston shopping centre. There's a chip shop near it and shop I think.

JM: And after the Wirrina, anywhere else have you been, what other venues in Peterborough that you went to? The Fleet or ...?

PC: Yeah, went to The Fleet and The Grove where they had events on at The Grove, which is now the Italian Community Centre, I believe. Yeah. And we went to, I went to The Fleet for many years after when The Fleet took over. We used to go to an event as well down in a cellar under a church in the town centre just at the back of Barclays Bank, and I can't remember what it was called. But Steph Blaney might remember that. There was this little soul club there, and I don't think it was called ... I just can't remember what the name of it was. It was in an old church building, you know where the ... is it the Premier Inn or whatever, it is in Peterborough? Just at the back of there, there was a church and in the centre of that there was a soul club there for a little while. And there was also things on over in Stanground. I know a lot of the people who are my contemporaries who lived in Peterborough, so I didn't live in Peterborough, I lived out in one of the villages. My contemporaries, who were from Peterborough, they went to a lot of things that were held in Stanground, there was like Stanground youth club and things like that.

JM: So at The Fleet what ... describe a bit about The Fleet and what happened there.

PC: At The Fleet that was sort of your few years later now. So at The Fleet they ... trying to think who ran The Fleet now, can't think who ran that. That was a much smaller venue than the Wirrina. I think at one time there was so much going on that attendance dropped off because people couldn't attend every event sort of thing. And I think, because I think The Fleet's still going now, although I rarely go to The Fleet. I do know the people that run it still. And they're old friends of mine as well. And that's still running once every couple of months I think, as Caliente does, that runs once every couple of months. So I think a lot of the scene for Peterborough has gone a bit more underground sort of thing and smaller numbers because there's also an event at the post office club, not the post office. Is it the rail? Yeah, it is the post office club. There's an event there now and again, and that's called, is that Soul Ole or something? That's on every now and again as well. So I do still go to those events just to catch up with people and see what they're all up to.

35:55

JM: And is there, is there, is there a difference, is there a divide maybe there's not, between a newer batch of people who've taken up to northern soul and the older group, if you don't mind me sort of expressing it in that way. I mean, do those events happen together or are they, are they, are they separate?

PC: No, as far as I'm aware, I think that newcomers and younger people are welcomed with open arms. It's not like it was when we first went. When we first went there was someone who was 20 would not have spoken to someone like me who was seen to be a young person, you know, so

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young. They didn't really socialise with us that much because we were seen to be the upstarts then, even though they'd only been in the music scene a few years more than us. It was quite ... there was a pecking order in that way. I think there is more of a divide now on the soul same, even in Peterborough with people who are listening to the older music and people are listening to newer soul music. And that is more of a divide than the age thing. I don't think I, I haven't consciously noticed the age thing. In fact, you know, by seeing younger people come in, I always make it my, my sort of thing to go and speak to them and find out how they got into it. And mostly it's because their parents have been into it. And they just love the music. They like the camaraderie of it. And they like the fact that you can dance, it's still very much a person dances on their own. And it's an expression of your inner feelings on your own. And you're not seen to be different because you're dancing on your own. I can remember when I was quite young, going into a proper nightclub, really weirdly one in Stamford, it was the old Riverside and I went with a female friend, and I'd only ever been out dancing to northern soul things or youth club and so I'd always danced on my own. I'd never danced with a young lad or anything like that. We went to The Riverside for a night, and two blokes came up and asked us to dance. And I looked at one of them, I was quite horrified and I said, "Oh, no, no, thanks, I've never danced with a bloke" and he just turned round and "What are you then, a lesbian?" And I was like, I couldn't believe it because I've never danced with a bloke and my friend had to explain to me that in other societies, people dance together. And I was like, really, you know, because we'd always danced individually. Nobody ever danced with a partner at a northern soul thing. It just wasn't that sort of thing. Everybody was there in their own world, but in that bigger circle as well, if you know what I mean, sharing the fact that we all wanted to dance to that music and make our own expression to it.

39:00

JM: Did you ... I mean, obviously, I don't want to pry too much into your personal life. But did you? I mean, did you meet people there? I mean, did you ever go with someone? And then ...

PC: Yes, yeah, I had boyfriends on the scene, yeah.

JM: But then you just basically met them and dance separately.

PC: Yes. Yes. Has anyone not said this before then?

JM: We're kind of I've sort of seen it and intimated it, but yeah, no, I don't like in terms of like, the minutiae of you know, I was with this fella or I was with this lady and we went together. So you basically turn up and what would happen?

PC: Yeah, you'd turn up together, and you'd sit together and chat together. And then when a record came on, whether if one of you liked it, only one of you got up. If both of you liked it, both of you got up, but you wouldn't dance together and then you'd sit down and carry on. And it ... you might dance near each other even but sometimes you didn't even dance near each other. If you found ... my thing for me because I was a dancer, and I'm very good at keeping beat, I struggled with anyone who couldn't keep a beat. So if I danced with someone and they weren't keeping beat, it soon threw me off and I had to move where I was dancing or turn my back and dance the other way. And I think everybody dancing individually there was never an issue

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with that, nobody got offended or anything like that, you know. It's just how things were. But no, couples never danced together. They sat together, they chatted together, and they moved around in circles of friends together and, you know, so most of the boys I dated or men I dated then weren't from Peterborough, or where I lived anyway, so they would have come with their friends, and I perhaps would have gone with my friends. We'd have met up at the venue, gone into the venue together, been together, in the venue, danced separately, left the venue and said our goodbyes, and then we could meet up a week or so later.

JM: What was your specialised ... what was your most ... like the move that you went here we go this is the one?

PC: I was spinning, I loved spinning. I used to make skirts that's were full circle skirts so when you spun they came right out like a saucer.

JM: Was how many spins like roughly?

PC: Oh, I don't know, six or eight, yeah. Going round. I'm sure you've looked at some video of northern soul dancing. There was shuffling, I really liked shuffling as well that when I was fitter, I could shuffle for you know, four and a half minutes no sweat, but I'll be struggling to do it now without giving myself a heart attack! But yeah, and you noticed as well when you were dancing certain people had certain moves. There was a lad I remember used to come to Peterborough all the time. His name was Chick. He was from Bedford and he did a lot of stepping moves. A lot of people did a lot sliding moves with their feet. This is hence why people need talc and leather soled shoes. So they would slide and glide across the floor on talc. When Chick danced his moves were more stepping moves, he was a very small bloke, but he was very bouncy. And his dancing was completely unique. You know, I never saw anyone dance like him, but I wanted to dance like him. So I would watch his feet and how he did it and then I would go home and practice and then I would start introducing little steps into my slide ins or a technique and that and that's really how most of us picked up dancing. We would look at someone who we thought, yeah, that person can really move and they're moving in beat with the music and they're ... they feel like they're part of that music. They you know, they feel like they're so immersed in it, that they're portraying what that music means to you and then I would want to be like that, you know, I would think yeah, that's how I feel about that music too. And I want to be as good as them so people look at me. Luckily I was.

JM: So the dancing was like, I mean, it was, clearly there was some sort of similar moves, similar feet moves, but it was basically you made your own style.

PC: Yes. Yeah. I mean, as things went on people ... there is a technique to northern soul dancing, there's no way around that. But people added their own little twiddly bits if you know what I mean into it, and then as acrobatics became more common, because initially there wasn't much acrobatics, you know, like backdrops and frontdrops, spinning even. It was more just you slide in and step in and gliding. But later on once Jethro Jones and people like that started doing backdrops and people saw this acrobatics, the world went acrobatic crazy then. But of course, a lot of the people couldn't do the acrobatics in beat to the music. There was only certain people who

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could really take that, you know, do it so well. So, and even some of the girls did acrobatics as well. There was girls doing, you know, front drop spins, backdrops, full splits, so I did used to do the full splits. That was one of my little party tricks at the time. You know, you do the full splits go down on one hand and use that hand to bounce you back up sort of thing and so you had to be really fit to do it. We must have all been as fit as butcher's dogs then, going back then because when you're dancing for like six or eight hours...

JM: It's like a marathon.

PC: Yeah. Oh, it was like a marathon and we were ... the majority of us as all weighed about seven stone wet through, you know, because we were out every weekend, three or four times a weekend dancing. Then there were the other people who went who just went to collect records. I mean, I've got a friend and I'm sure he won't mind me mentioning him Johnny Cockrell. He was from Wisbech. We were at college together and we got into it at a similar time. And he's been going to all-nighters and soul dos ever since we were 16/17. And he has never danced, never danced. All he wants to do is listen to the music. So there was people who just went to listen and watch, people who went to collect records because that was their interest and people who went to dance.

45:35

JM: Oh, that's quite interesting because I always assumed with my limited knowledge that people collecting and swapping and buying records, were doing that alongside dancing and enjoying the, you know, the music.

PC: Some did, there were some that did, but some people just went to collect records and didn't get involved in the dancing at all. They loved the music, but they wouldn't dance to it and they just wanted to collect and swap records and things like that. There were some who were over, Cliff Steel was one, Steve J was one. They were both DJs who collected swaps and danced. And then there was people like my friend Johnny, who just wanted to go and listen and watch.

JM: Any, any names, like were they weirdly enough, were they called anything like ...?

PC: No, that was a name ... there was a disrespectful name for people who we perceived, who just come to watch and they were called divs in those days. And they were not people who were involved in the soul scene but people who were not ... we perceived them not to be fashionable. Yeah, not, not to be involved in the scene. People like Johnny who came and listened and watched. He was there week and week out. He was never perceived to be a div. Do you know what I mean, he was always Johnny, he likes watching and chatting and collecting, you know, collecting music and whatever. But there was a group later more it's really funny because I read Jethro Jones's autobiography. And it was quite funny reading how he perceived my age group or my when we went to be divs. Because we were the new people coming through and I suppose we that time, perceived these younger ones who were behind us and these would be what was then the 13/14 year olds, we perceived them to be divs and once they started coming through we were like, "Here they come, you know" and by then, you see, we were the ones who were older and we were revered. It's quite funny how many people I know from then who say to me, oh God, I reme3333mber you because you know, I was two or three years younger than you and I remember you going and you were like The Untouchables for us. We never saw

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ourselves like that but other people, the younger ones saw us like that. And I've even had someone stop me recently and say to me, you know what, meeting you and talking to you about your passion for music actually inspired me to become a DJ. Oh, wow. And I was really I thought, wow, you know. And he said, my love of music comes, you know, quite influenced by you and how you treated me when I was younger, and I had no idea. I ... I ... this person had been so influenced, you know what I mean, I was like, wow, but just another kid to me who I just spoke to and you know about music.

JM: You said you did do some DJing?

PC: I did. Yeah, I did DJ at St Ives a few times. But it was very unusual for women to DJ very, it's more common now. There's more women DJs now, but at that time in the 80s, 90s, there were very, very few, mainly because I think a lot of it, not many women collected records. It was mostly males who were collecting records. I did collect records. Now I've still got my collection. But yeah, not a lot of people collected records because a lot of it was very price restricted. And we were the girls who were spending their money on clothes. So you know what I mean, you know, five pound for a record's a lot of money then.

JM: Yeah. What's your ... what's your prize record?

PC: I couldn't tell you but I'll bet you my friend Rupert could tell me but I couldn't because he's been through my record box recently and just laughed and said I might have known you'd have one of them or whatever, you know. But at the time I just collected records that I liked and so if I saw one I was out, I'd pick it up and there was a few specialist record shops that would order you stuff in then, and Andy's Records in Peterborough was quite a good place to get stuff from. So yeah, 'cos Andy's was at Broad Street then.

50:15

JM: And so if you're, if you were ... really difficult question, but if you were to think about that, the memories of it, how would you, you know, it's formed a massive part of your life, hasn't it?

PC: Oh, yeah, yeah.

JM: And what would be the words that kind of you would express that?

PC: I feel very, very lucky to grow up when I did and have that influence in my life. I feel young people today don't know anything about living like we did. And I'm so pleased that I grew up in that era, and I still have the friends I have then. And a lot of those friendships became friendships for life. And I, the only thing I can equate it to in more modern times is the rave scene. I say to people, northern soul with the prerunner of the rave scene really, as I presume like the jazz scene would have been our scene. Do you know what I mean? But I feel very, very lucky to have been part of that, had heard so much amazing music that now has become fashionable on adverts on TV and I listened to things and go, bloody hell, a northern soul song, there must be someone in their marketing department, do you know what I mean? Must be an old northern souler or whatever. But I do, I think it was an amazing time to grow up and we had so much to do. We were just spoilt for choice. We really were, you know, we could pick and choose where we went to, who we went with, what we did you know, and we all knew each other. Even if you

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didn't know someone personally, if you were out shopping in Peterborough and you saw someone and you'd know by the way they dressed whether they were into soul music or not, because we all had like a ... it was almost like a, you know, uniform sort of thing. The girls all wore long circle skirts, the blokes all had trousers with pockets down the side. Even down to the shoes, you can even tell someone who was in almost plain clothes, but if they had a pair of polyvelts on, 'cos we all had polyvelts for dancing in then, you'd know, you'd think oh yeah, they're a souler, and you'd give each other a bit of a nod. Do you know what I mean, even if you didn't know that person?

JM: And what sort and what has northern soul made you like? How has it made you the person you are, what bits of it have ... ?

PC: I think it's made me very accepting of other people from other backgrounds because had I grown up in the village I'd grown up in, grew up in, and had no exposure to northern soul, I would never have met a miner. And a lot of the blokes when the miners' strike was on, a lot of the lads who we knew from the soul scene were miners from Chesterfield and Mansfield and Nottingham. So we knew about what was happening to them. We weren't just seeing the news and getting fed what the news wanted to tell us we were getting first-hand experience from our friends who were working down coal mines. And it just ... you just met people from so many different walks of life. You know, you just became a lot more I think accepting of people. The one thing I will say was, is, there was a few black lads and girls, not many and that always surprised me because it's a basically black driven music.

JM: Yeah.

PC: But there wasn't many, but you knew them who they were, who they were. And obviously, then there wasn't many disabled people, because a lot of it was dancing, maybe they felt they couldn't. I don't remember seeing, although I do now when I go to venues, I see disabled people now, but I put that down to a lot of them through age or wherever. In those days, it just didn't ... you just didn't see many people.

JM: Yeah, and it's, and it's also very difficult in it because obviously, it's very easy for people to staple gun on a social structure that we have now into the past and say ...

PC: This is it, because places weren't that accessible then. Then because there wasn't the law down. I mean, like Wigan casino you had to go up loads of steps, or down load of steps. Do you know what I mean? And to get to balcony it was all steps. There was no lifts or anything like that. So I suppose then there wasn't the laws in place for those people to be, for it to be that inclusive. But I do think it made me more tolerant and see people from every walk of life. It didn't and also people ... it didn't matter whether you had a pound in your purse or £50 in your purse, people all tried to help each other out and ...

55:21

JM: Yeah,

PC: Always seem to be there for the common interest the one thing I will say is it was very, very rare you saw any trouble. There was never fighting, never anything like that not at Peterborough and locally because it was the common interest of the music, that people were

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there for, so there was ... because there was no bar either. So nobody was drunk. You know, all these things went off we only had soft drinks all night. There was no licencing.

JM: Yeah.

PC: So that is what leads to a lot of problems is drinking but there was no drinking at northern things because the bars were all shut because we were after hours. You know.

JM: Perfect. Well, that's been brilliant. That's really, really good.

PC: I hope you got everything you need. If you need anything else, please let me know. And I'll let ...

JM: Kate.

PC: Judy ...

JM: Yeah.

PC: Have loads of photos 'cos I was one of the few people at that time that had a camera.

JM: Oh fab.

PC: Andy Mackie and I used to take lots of photos. He had a camera as well. So I can, most people can tell ... can you remember so and so from Peterborough or wherever I go? Yeah, I've got a photo from somewhere and I'll provide them and usually I was pretty good then. I wrote on the back who it was and when it was, so I can go right back into the '70s of where we were, what we were doing and even out in the car parks afterwards, you know. So if you need anything, any more information, just get in touch.

JM: Thank you. I'm just going to just do two things. Obviously I sent you ... there was an oral history Participation Agreement Form.

PC: Yeah.

JM: Which normally we would sign.

PC: Yeah.

JM: But obviously I sent you that, and just at the end of it, I just have to bring your attention to the Oral History Project Recording Agreement.

PC: Yeah, that's fine.

JM: That's fine. So it's just making it clear that the intention is for this to go to the archive.

PC: Yeah, that's fine.

JM: And, and any, any other things around that would be around the possibility that we've had to change the format. So what I think I'm going to discuss with Kate is just once we've done the interview, at some point, if you could find a way of signing those forms, and either scanning and sending them to me, that'd be perfect.

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PC: Yeah, okay. If I ... yeah, I'm pretty sure I've still got your email.

JM: Yeah. But yeah, that's brilliant. I'll just sort of do a lovely sum up, but that's brilliant. we've, we've 57 minutes of just chatting. It's been great.

PC: Oh, brilliant. Thanks, I hope I've been at good as everybody else.

JM: Yeah, it's just, it's just fascinating for me just to listen. So please take care.

PC: I hope you don't mind me asking, how old are you then?

JM: Oh, I am 53.

PC: Oh, right, so you're 10 years younger than me.

JM: Yeah.

PC: I'm 63.

JM: So I sort of ... well, I didn't miss it obviously. I just for me it and my recollections of this is ... I'm just gonna turn that recorder off.