

## **I'M COM'UN HOME IN THE MORN'UN**

### **MPF Exhibition Text by Elaine Constantine**

It was the early nineties and I had recently moved to London to try to push my photography career along. The Face Magazine had asked me if I could cover night clubs in general, ahead of any more meaty commissions they might offer in future. I got the call to shoot pictures at the 100 Club, a venue that stayed open all night and where they played rare American 60's and 70's soul 45s (aka northern soul).

I was very intrigued. I'd been on that scene myself up until a few years before and was curious to see where it had gone in the meantime. I remember going down those stairs into that dark basement and seeing those shadowy figures moving energetically in sync with each other; it all came back to me in an instant and made me slightly hesitant.

It was obvious the scene had gone further underground, the crowd older, little new blood, the records more obscure and the attitude on the dancefloor as fierce as ever. Could I really take pictures in this place? As I suspected it would, the blast from my first flash altered the atmosphere. I braved it to shoot a few more from different angles but things felt worse with each blinding shot. The relief I felt when I heard the familiar opening bars of 'This Won't Change' by Lester Tipton, a fast, raw, jerky yet tender sound. I pushed the camera bag under a chair and got lost dancing in the shadows until morning. The feeling of being some kind of

culture vulture had left me gradually with each record.

I soon became a regular again, travelling to different venues around the country. I started taking photos at other all-nighters and true to my evangelical tendencies I made a decision to try and depict the scene using moving image. Basically, I felt I should make a documentary of the now dwindling northern soul scene for posterity.

However, once I looked at the results I felt the images lacked something. Those packed-out dancefloors I'd melded into at age 16 were far less populated. The extreme aerobics and the unstoppable energy of teens and twenty somethings en-masse had been replaced by a handful of 30- to 40-year-olds; even if the DJ and vinyl worship was still in evidence, most of the interesting extremes I associated with this scene had disappeared. This was the moment I decided to depict this scene as a fictional film set in its heyday. Fifteen years later this idea would be realized and become my debut feature film, 'Northern Soul'.

These images were forgotten about and it wasn't until I showed them to Martin Parr recently that I realised they did have atmosphere and that the ritualized aerobic pleasure they depicted, kept alive by a dwindling hardcore, were worthy subject matter in their own right.

Elaine Constantine 2024