

Down to Earth

This issue a quick run down on the Down To Earth label which was a small Chicago label run by Burgess and Walter Gardner between 1970 and 1973. It rang alongside Lamaar, which was its sister label. I was prompted in large part by a recent thread on the soul-source e-forum which started off with a discussion thread about the recently in demand track by the Kings of Soul, it then got a number of us thinking about all of the other credible sides on the label – and surprisingly for some perhaps, most of the label's output is good quality. So here they are with brief reviews:

70

DUSHONS 'YOU BETTER THINK IT OVER/ TAKE THESE CHAINS (FROM MY HEART)'

The label bows in with this classic old style northern sound which also got a much rarer release on Golden Gate records. Penned by Burgess Gardner and another old favourite Chuck Bernard the song has a classic combo of guitar, clunking piano and horn blasts playing off of each other to create a hard edged almost Detroit type hard hitting sound. The girls meanwhile plead with a former boyfriend to think it over and come back to them. Flip is a dreary ballad.

71

THE CHYMES 'MY BABY'S GONE AWAY/ WHERE I COME FROM'

This is a nice Vietnam song taken at a crossover pace. So you have a soldier returning from war and guess what – his baby's gone away. Some real nice harmonies and despite an unusual structure to the tune, it is well sung by the plaintiff male lead. Flip is an instrumental. The group comprised three brothers David, James and Victor Martin. David was lead and went onto write and produce a number of fine records, and record as a solo artist "You're mighty right" on Rekord being an excellent lilting mid 70s side.

72

CHIMES "THE BEGINNING OF MY LIFE/ COMING CHANGES"

Actually the same group as the last record, and another nice sound, this time more up-tempo with a jangly rhythm, and more good male harmonies. Once more we are in cross over territory, but this one is probably fast enough to garner action in more discerning northern rooms. Flip is this time the instrumental of the top side. This group recorded for a series of labels including Lamarr – masquerading as the Star-Tells, Margie, and Teako. Meanwhile the group on O'Keh with the same name were a female group.

73

GENERAL CROOK 'GIMME SOME PART 1/ PART 2'

Crook was from Mississippi originally and served as the label's biggest artist and on the strength of this side alone it is easy to see why. A very good funk classic with tight rhythm and driving beat (from the label's in house band The Soul Crusaders) with bass guitar and horns, and Crook using every cliché he can muster. Crook went on to record successfully for Wand – both singles and an elusive album. In the 80s he became a producer.

74

GENERAL CROOK 'DO IT FOR ME/ TELL HER'

The follow up release is more good quality funk, this time with a rawer production, and somewhat slower. By now the veteran Bunky Shepperd was on board, as the record is one of those that proudly proclaims it to be 'Bunky's Pick'. The string section is a particularly effective addition to this tune – not an instrument you always associate with funk. Flip is a nice ballad with a gentle lilting beat – very Chicago sounding, even if this time the strings are a little over produced.

75

GENERAL CROOK 'WHAT I'M GETTING NOW AND WHAT I'M USED TO AIN'T THE SAME/GET OVER'

Continuing his style as a ballad singer this is another nice record. If you like things like Robert Dobyne 'Spent a lot of years' on Kwanza, you'll probably like this, though the General's complaints about his lady's lack of performance is quite amusing. Nice female support along the way adds to this song. The flip sees a return to up-tempo funk and is another good example of that genre, though slightly marred by electric guitars.

76

IMPALAS 'THINK IT OVER GIRL/INST'

By now the group soul sound was on the wane, as this veteran group bought in by Bunky Shepperd deliver us some fine sweet soul balladry, no doubt cashing in on the success of groups like the Delfonics. A nice sound with a twinkling beat and an expressive male lead.

77

GENERAL CROOK 'WHAT TIME IT IS/PART 2'

A minor hit for the label on a self penned song with a strong social message predicting impending doom due to urban deprivation, pollution etc. With a hypnotic rhythm and some unusual instrumentation Crook notes that "Presidents just keep on talking, The Congress just keeps on baulking" – some would say it was ever that way.

78

DANNY BELL 'CALL ON ME/YOU'RE WRONG ABOUT ME'

A dreamy ballad with a falsetto lead singer as Danny offers his services to all and sundry. Flip has a rather dramatic intro before breaking into another ballad in a similar style, this time set at a slightly faster pace, and on balance probably just about the better song. By now we are in 1973, and Danny



had a couple of subsequent attempts at recording which sank without trace, and in one case is actually quite rare – but not that good.

78

KINGS OF SOUL 'GIRL WHAT HAVE YOU DONE/IS YOUR LOVE FOR ME'

A classic case of label misnumbering with two releases with the same number – perhaps this explains the rarity of the issues of this release. From the writing team of Young-Adams-Pryor the A side is actually a good driving 60s style beater with a Stax style feel, dismissed as 'rubbish' to me by a top DJ, who should know better; it's certainly not that. The B side of course is the side that has proven popular on the northern scene in the last couple of years, and issues with the B side remain elusive. Anyway with that Down To Earth bowed out, a great 'little label', well worthy of your attention.

Price wise apart from an issue of Kings of Soul, and the Dushons, everything else on this label is easily obtainable.

Finally a couple of observations from the last issue:

The track listing for the **Sy Hightower LP** mentioned by both Eddie Hubbard and Sean Chapman is as follows... 'Go back baby/Go back baby Added strings/I've been thinking/Go on to your new love/I wonder why/Wild Love'. Sy did release another LP but by all accounts it is nowhere near as good.

Keith Rylatt's excellent look at the **Knight Brothers** reminded me of just how timeless some of their sides are – I mean 'Temptation 'bout to get me' and 'Tried so hard to please her' – every home should have these stored next to the record player. Keith touches on their final release 'Stay in school (Don't be a drop out)' to give it its full title – which is actually a side that cashed in on the James Brown 'Don't be a drop out' theme.

Finally Soul Sam's reviews and **Luv N Haight** – in his enthusiasm for the review Sam neglected to tell us that the singers are actually veteran duo Mosely & Johnson under a pseudonym – or dare I say it 'covered up' – perhaps for one of the reasons hinted at by Sam in his article!

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