

*Keeping the Faith: a History of Northern Soul.* By Stephen Catterall, Keith Gildart. Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2020. 320 pp. ISBN 978-0-7190-9710-2, £80 (hardback).

This impressive new book provides a nuanced history of the everyday practices of northern soul while convincingly situating popular music as central to working-class self-identity and class identification in 1970s Britain. In so doing, it demonstrates the fresh insights into economic and social change that a focus on working-class leisure culture can yield for social historians of post-war Britain. This is achieved through Catterall and Gildart's focus on participants' voices, grounded in their intention to produce an 'unashamedly empathetic' history from below (p. 4). Such narratives, drawn from the scene's many specialist publications in the 1970s and 28 original oral history interviews, allow the authors to probe the relationship between northern soul and everyday life, generating fresh insights into recalled experiences and their emotional landscapes.

In this way, the monograph disrupts the historical orthodoxies of northern soul and its participants—periodizations, place, and issues of identity around gender and race—and, furthermore, brings to the fore emotive themes such as nostalgia, authenticity, belonging, and classed identity. Consequently, is it structured both chronologically and thematically. The first four chapters chronologically cover 1962–82 and chart the rise and the subsequent fragmentation and diversification of northern soul through a series of the scene's key locations and individuals.

Catterall and Gildart's portrayal of northern soul's 'tributaries' in the 1960s—presented in Chapter 1—counters the historical orthodoxy of mod culture's centrality which has hitherto elided the different ways in which the majority of women and 'others who were not involved in [mod's] most notable affiliations, codes and manifestations' (p. 18) experienced soul. Instead, the chapter highlights local specificity and the class solidarities of coal and cotton towns' youth cultures of the 1950s. Nonetheless, the authors are clear throughout that northern soul was just one of the multiplicity of music scenes that became central to post-war working-class feelings, experiences, and identities as previously theorised by Gildart<sup>1</sup>. Chapter 1 goes on to productively use personal testimonies to highlight how soul and, increasingly, 'rare soul' were experienced by individuals and groups, being enjoyed and shared in public and private spaces that ranged from youth centres and coffee bars to living rooms and bedrooms.

In Chapter 2, they use the 1970s club culture exemplified by Wolverhampton's Catacombs, the Torch in Stoke-on-Trent, and the Blackpool Mecca to interrogate northern soul's 'foundation myths'. While northern soul was being defined both locally and nationally 1972–6, they argue, this culture tapped into a 'social and cultural identity that acknowledged a sense of history, collectivism and a shared sense of a recent past' grounded in working-class northern identity (p. 53). Here Catterall and Gildart make excellent use of personal testimonies to drill down into the idiosyncratic ways that soul and 'rare soul' structured personal and social

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<sup>1</sup> Gildart, Keith. *Images of England Through Popular Music: Class, Youth and Rock 'n' Roll, 1955-1976.* Palgrave Macmillan. London. 2013.

identities within the broader picture of northern soul's past- and community-oriented discourse of 'togetherness' and 'keeping the faith'.

The two subsequent chapters build on this to unpick the processes by which deindustrialization inflected the coherence of soul identity, achieving the book's overarching aim of using popular culture to chart working-class experiences of social and economic change (pp. 11–12). Chapter 3 examines Wigan Casino, the enduring embodiment of northern soul in the popular consciousness and an ambivalent symbol for participants. The club presided over northern soul's rapid flourishing in the mid-1970s and the peak of the culture's popularity 1973–8, and Catterall and Gildart cite astonishing participation figures from the soul press: the club regularly drew 1,500 people each Saturday, had an estimated 120,000 members in 1977, and was a magnet for fans from across Britain (p. 88). In this chapter, they use fanzines and oral history testimony to portray the spaces and music of Wigan and the controversial practices and ambivalent feelings with which it was associated. Such sources also suggest a new periodization, contrary to the orthodoxy that Wigan's 1981 closure heralded the decline of northern soul; attendance was already falling by 1978–9 and smaller clubs were already closing.

While Wigan ushered northern soul onto the national and international stage, simultaneously its commercialization and the 'wiganisation' of northern soul itself were seen by insiders to have 'undermined [the scene's] integrity' (p. 91). Chapter 4 traces the wider scene's story of ambivalence and division in parallel to Wigan Casino's. It explores the internal and external challenges encountered by northern soul in the late 1970s and the culture's fragmentation.

The second half of the book turns in earnest to themes concerning the social experience of northern soul. Here the polyphonic approach is particularly strong as it allows the authors to represent and theorise various contingent, heterogeneous, and highly personal meanings the soul scene held, and indeed continues to hold, for participants. The Introduction and Conclusion highlight that this project 'does not aim for definitiveness' and constitutes *a* rather than *the* history of the scene (pp. 3, 276). The chapter on locality (Chapter 6) and the one on gender, race, and sexuality (Chapter 7) combine to open up some of the 'many worlds' (p. 239) which individual fans inhabited within and against the overarching 'framing of northern soul through particular working-class tropes, identities and associated cultures' (p. 175) and working-class culture's associated gender roles and racial dynamics.

Chapter 6 shows that the linking of northern soul to a working-class both real and imagined had always been complicated. Indeed, Chapter 7 shows that northern soul adopted the language of class, politics, and race as a 'subcultural identification' rather than a commitment to agitate or organise (p. 216). It ambitiously tackles 'race, gender, sexuality and the politics of northern soul' through personal testimonies. This project could be expanded into a monograph in itself, in which the authors might shed further valuable light on recollections of the relationship between the new politics of liberation and working-class identity. Through personal testimonies, the chapter teases out ambivalence across a range of issues: northern soul's whiteness, exploitation of Black music and depoliticized use of Black power symbols; and gender roles,

sexuality, and women's distinct experiences of the scene. Several themes introduced in Chapters 6 and 7 in particular deserve focused attention from future work: Northern soul in Scotland's industrial areas, and its distinct chronology and identity (pp. 178, 200); the striking personal testimonies of Black working-class Britons involved in the scene (p. 193) compared to the apparently broader tendency of Black teenagers to find belonging elsewhere, e.g. funk or reggae/ska (p. 213); and LGBTQ+ identities within the scene (pp. 235–6).

Chapter 5 paves the way for this exploration by presenting testimonies that show us how DJs and fans experienced northern soul and performed within it, from their entry points to the scene to their daily routines to all-dayers and allnighters. In so doing, the chapter offers further insights into the formation, maintenance, and negotiation of the scene's strong sense of identity: feelings of belonging, a complex relationship with authenticity, conflict over elitism, and controversies around recordings and drug use. Rather than concurring with commentators who claim bootlegging and amphetamines undermined northern soul, Catterall and Gildart show drug use was not promulgated by 'those propagating the scene' and, in fact, many icons of northern soul consistently condemned it (p.167). Instead, amphetamines emerged as a particularly complex component of the scene which helped maintain its identity alongside love of the music and adoration for the DJs: although it was used to legitimise policing and the closure of clubs, it also sustained fans through all-nighters and facilitated conversation

The final chapter returns in earnest to one of the book's central themes: reminiscence, and northern soul's status as a retrospective, curated, and much-mythologized scene continuing internationally to this day.

In sum, Catterall and Gildart successfully present a nuanced picture of the heterogeneous everyday practices and rituals of northern soul in the 1970s. They indeed deliver on the aim of writing an unapologetically empathetic history from below, and persuasively using this case study to consider how to tell a story of working-class identity which focuses on leisure and pleasure rather than the traditional area of employment. It is an expansive contribution to the ongoing work by social historians of modern Britain and members of the Subcultures Network — including the authors — to take working-class leisure and identity seriously as categories of analysis for social change.

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