



NORTHERN VOICES

Northern Soul

A labour of love for writer-director Elaine Constantine, *Northern Soul*'s initially modest distribution was expanded significantly following critical acclaim and a passion-driven social media campaign. Voted film of the year by *NME*, it follows two young lads in the 1970s as they chase their dream of travelling to the USA, discovering the best in soul music and establishing themselves as top DJs on the Northern soul circuit.

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The characters in photographer Elaine Constantine's first feature are so narrowly focused on music that, aside from the inevitable link between the Northern Soul scene and specific fashions – high-waisted flared trousers, homemade tattoos – other popular culture passes them by. Which means that John (Elliot James Langridge) doesn't go to the pictures, so he misses out on the origins of the genre he inhabits by not catching Claude Whatham's *That'll Be the Day* (1973) – which beat George Lucas's *American Graffiti* to UK cinemas by a few months and remains the template for the mix of teenage rebellion, nostalgic tie-in soundtrack and historical recreation that *Northern Soul* sticks to very closely.

'I don't know if you've noticed,' says guru-like DJ Ray Henderson (James Lance), trying to get John to ditch his loose-cannon best friend Matt, 'but this is Northern Soul not northern arsehole.' Besides the music and displays of disco dancing (and proto-breakdance floor-spinning) that owe as much to the fight stylings of Bruce Lee (a onetime cha-cha champion) as the strutting of the Soul Train generation, the heart of the film is the relationship between more-or-less reasonable John and out-of-control Matt (Josh Whitehouse), which seems like a milky-tea echo of the Charlie and Johnny friendship of *Mean Streets* (1973).

Northern Soul isn't as explicitly gay as Isaac Julien's 1977-set *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), but housemates John and Matt have a lot of shirtless embraces, blazing rows and reconciliations. John gets an outside romance with Antonia Thomas's interesting if under-characterised nurse; when he shyly admits that he doesn't know any other Black people like her, she tells him that she doesn't either, since she's been marooned in a mostly white county by an American father. The laddish, aggressive, pill-popping Matt, meanwhile, is seemingly celibate, though he is instantly jealous when John becomes friendly with Sean (Jack Gordon), a cockney who is even more committed to Northern Soul than the locals and similarly doesn't have women in his life.

Early on, the film plays up John's teenage anger, both at his meek parents for letting a beloved grandfather (Ricky Tomlinson) die in a tyrannical old folks' home, and at an education system in which he is patronised by an uncaring teacher (Steve Coogan). A historical element that might prove baffling to contemporary audiences is that the hero can storm out of his CSE exams, instantly land a job in a biscuit factory and earn enough to support himself – grim and grinding at the time, this was a period of available jobs for the young unqualified. Sean bursts into the film – amusingly paranoid that every drug buyer is a possible undercover policeman, but ultimately proved correct in his worries – and crashes out, adding a variant accent and shaking up the scene. There's even a nostalgia here for non-lethal drug habits, though Sean cautions against injecting amphetamines rather than swallowing pills.

That'll Be the Day (loosely based on the teenage years of John Lennon) and *American Graffiti* end with their lead characters moving out of the bubble of their subculture, fated to become either a pop star (as shown in *That'll Be the Day's* sequel, *Stardust*) or a 'writer in California'. *Northern Soul* is smaller-scale: John might go on to be as big in Wigan as Ray Henderson, but mostly he gets through his angry patch (he even reconciles with his parents) and settles into his twenties without compromising his musical tastes.

Rather sweetly, this is a peculiarly English time-capsule of a film, suggesting that the Northern Soul scene meticulously recreated here (the end credits list dozens of folks who have lent their expertise to the project) is an Edenic eternal moment, like the Hundred Acre Wood or 221B Baker St.

Kim Newman, *Sight and Sound*, January 2015

NORTHERN SOUL

Directed by: Elaine Constantine
©: Stubborn Heart Films (Heart of Soul Productions) Limited
Executive Producers: Henry Normal, Kevin Loader, Robbie Little, Kevin Phelan, Marco Santucci, Richard Searling
Produced by: Debbie Gray
Producers: Julian Gleek, Edward A. Crozier
Line Producer: Alan Graves
Associate Producer: Baby Cow Productions
Production Co-ordinator: Leanne Fairbrother
Production Accountants: Pamela Holt, Peter Kane
Unit Manager: Wes Rashid
Location Manager: Mark Wilson
Post-production Supervisor: Tom Jones
Action Unit Director: Neil Finnighan
1st Assistant Director: Mick Ward
Additional 1st Assistant Director: Tom White
2nd Assistant Director: Jan Zalar
Crowd Assistant Director: James Adkin
3rd Assistant Director: Henry Gordon
Additional 3rd Assistant Director: John Turner
Script Supervisor: Lucy Ward
Casting Director: Manuel Puro
Written by: Elaine Constantine
Script Consultant: David Baugnon
Script Development: Sara Olley, Frank Carson, David S. Rielley, Tim Black
Director of Photography: Simon Tindall
1st Assistant Camera: Paul Dain
2nd Assistant Camera: Sean Beasley
Gaffer: Paul Benson
Grip: Jon Head
EPK & Stills Photography: Rob Baker Ashton, Tom Griffith
Visual Effects Artist: Martin Waller, Amelia Cullern, Marcus Millichope
Editor: Stephen Haren
On-line Post House: Dirty Looks
On-line Editor: Gareth Bishop
Assistant Editor: Mark McKenny
Editing Consultant: Justine Wright
Post-production: Splice
Production Designer: Robin Brown
Art Director: Paul Frost
Prop Master: Nick Thomas
Construction Managers: Neil Cudworth, John Foster
Costume Designer: Adam Howe, Yvonne Duckett
Make-up Supervisors: Christina Corway, Lynda Darragh
Hair and Make-up Design: Ruth Brophy
Graphic Design & Titles: About Creative, David Ward
Colourist: John Claude
Music Supervisor: Gary Welch, Ady Croasdell
Music Editor: Sven Taits
Northern Soul Music Consultant: Butch
Dance Club Director: Fran Franklin, Paul Sadot
Northwest Dance Club Director: Brent Howarth
Sound Design: Jon Olive
Sound Supervisor: Sven Taits
Sound Recordist: Craig Rihoy
Re-recording Mixer: Sven Taits
Dialogue Editor: Sven Taits
ADR Recordist: Jon Olive

ADR Editor: Sven Taits
Foley Artist: Jack Stew
Foley Mixer: Phil Jenkins
Sound Post-production: Riptic Sound
Stunt Co-ordinator/Action Unit Director: Neil Finnighan
Northern Soul Record Consultants: Joel Maslin, Pete Hulatt, Ian Clarke, Peter Widdison, Ian Guy (Taffi), Ady Lupton, Mick Smith
Publicity: Amy Wright, Jo Houlcroft
Digital Intermediate Producer: Anna Odell

Cast

Elliot James Langridge (*John*)
Josh Whitehouse (*Matt*)
Antonia Thomas (*Angela*)
Jack Gordon (*Sean*)
James Lance (*DJ Ray Henderson*)
Christian McKay (*John's dad*)
Lisa Stansfield (*John's mum*)
Ricky Tomlinson (*John's grandad*)
John Thomson (*Terry*)
Steve Coogan (*Mr Banks*)
Rob Baker Ashton (*undercover copper*)
Emily Aston (*Marie*)
James Rhodes-Baxter (*Baz*)
Owen Phillips-Bolton (*Fuzz*)
Dylan Brown (*Daz*)
Frank Carson (*Frank*)
Patrick Fryer (*Angela's ex*)
Daniel Coll (*Yarwood*)
Kate Coogan (*Linda*)
Martin Coogan (*Fred*)
Mary Joanna Coogan (*undercover girl*)
Earl Coogan, Lenny Coogan (*children in street*)
Ashley Taylor Dawson (*Paul*)
Alex Esmail (*Stee*)
Michael Farell (*village yob*)
Lois Feltell (*Rita*)
Tom Garside (*undercover copper*)
Claire Garvey (*Betty*)
Ben Hindley (*Ben*)
Brent Howarth (*casino bouncer*)
Ethan Howarth (*Mouse*)
Joseph Marshall (*DJ Joe Marsh*)
Lewis Morris (*Phil*)
Danny Ormerod (*Lee*)
Danny Paton (*Danny*)
Fred Ritchie (*Bruiser*)
Carlo Santucci (*child at window*)
Mark Sheals (*Leeds bouncer*)
Simon Smithies (*copper*)
Matthew J. Staton (*street record seller*)
Kirsten Varley (*Ray's girlfriend*)
James Whitehead (*record dealer*)
Jordan Wilson (*Monkey*)
Madison Wilson (*child in street*)

UK 2014©
102 mins

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