



Eli "Paperboy" Reed (right) only has about 4,000 rare soul, R&B and gospel singles.

## Music Feature

### Reed's rebellion

Beantown threat reclaiming classic soul  
|By Tim Perlich

**ELI "PAPERBOY" REED AND THE TRUE LOVES** at the Horseshoe (370 Queen West), Wednesday (July 9), 9 pm. \$15, advance \$12.50. 416-870-8000.

When you consider which artists have broken out with a throwback soul concept – Joss Stone, Corinne Bailey Rae, Amy Winehouse and more recently James Hunter – they don't really share an approach, look or specific sound. Yet they're all British. And with Alice Russell and Baby Charles and Kathrin deBoer waiting in the wings, we haven't heard the last from the UK.

There hasn't been much of a response from this side of the Atlantic. Neither July Black nor Sharon Jones is proving to be a dominant force.

Unlikely as it may seem, the Yank upstart with the best shot at beating the Brits at their own retro soul game is a cocky 24-year-old hustler in a sharkskin suit from Brookline, Massachusetts, known in Beantown's coffee shops and corner pubs as Eli "Paperboy" Reed.

He's not overly impressed with the current UK wave and is determined to restore some pride in the domestic product. "This whole British thing that's happening with soul music is kinda weird," says Reed before a show in Cleveland. "I mean, it's awesome that those UK artists have latched onto the sound, but we've got to get our due.

"After we play Toronto, we're heading to Europe to play the festival circuit. I'm really excited about the idea of bringing real American soul music over there à la the Stax/Volt tour of 67, to show the world that the British aren't the only people who can do soul music right."

For all the references to Winehouse's *Back To Black* album that keep popping up in reviews of Reed's recent *Roll With You* (Q Division) disc, he doesn't seem overly concerned about the comparisons. Just don't call him retro.

"Amy Winehouse provides listeners who don't know much about R&B and soul with some context for what we do. People who like Amy Winehouse may not know about Wilson Pickett, but they might hear one of our songs and, because it sounds similar to *Back To Black*, they'll check out one of our shows. She definitely took the music to a new place, and I give Mark Ronson a lot of credit for that. I liked her record. It's not more or less valid than what we do, just different.

"As far as the retro thing goes, as much as I love what James Hunter is doing, that's retro. I mean, I'm 24, and all the guys in my band are in their 20s. We're excited to be playing the music we love. It's definitely influenced by 60s soul, but onstage we're more like a punk rock band."


Where Reed has an edge on the competition is in his deep knowledge of soul music and its origins. Our conversation just prior to his SXSW 2008 showcase at Club de Ville in Austin quickly turned to recent obscure record finds. After just a few minutes of back-and-forth collector's banter, it was clear that Reed knows his shit like most musicians and weekend hobbyists don't.

Home-schooled in classic country, blues, R&B and gospel music by his journalist father, by 13, Reed was blowing blues harp and busking for bills to feed his vinyl habit.

What struck me about seeing the charismatic Reed onstage in Austin was how much of his animated performing style is informed by the gospel greats of the golden era. His ability to work a crowd (and himself) into a sweat doesn't come across on the studio recording.

“Gospel is probably what I listen to most right now. Those quartet sing-ers, guys like R.H. Harris who founded the Soul Stirrers, Johnny Jones with the Swanee Quintet and Ira Tucker Sr. of the Dixie Hummingbirds, continue to inspire me.”

### **Audio Clips**

Eli "Paperboy" Reed explains how meeting Chicago soul great Mitty Collier led to a brief career in gospel music: 

Evidently, the similarities between Reed's showstopper Take My Love With You and the Swanee Quintet's gospel rave-up Take the Lord With You are not coincidental: 

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