

THE MAIN INGREDIENT: Spinning Around: The Singles 1967-1975 (Label: Kent)

Written by Charles Waring

Saturday, 10 November 2007 07:10



In a heady purple patch between 1970 and 1976, this sweet-voiced New York harmony trio notched up sixteen smashes on Billboard's R&B chart. But despite their popularity Stateside, in the UK it was a different story and the group could only muster a solitary British chart entry with 'Just Don't Want To Be Lonely,' which reached the lower end of the Top 30 in 1974. This fact is almost certainly responsible for the conspicuous absence of Main Ingredient CDs in the racks of British record stores. Now, though, that lamentable situation has been remedied by Ace's reliable Kent imprint, which has released this fabulous 22-track singles retrospective that should both appease and please the group's UK fans. What makes this chronological collection exciting - and a cut above the many available US compilations - is the presence of the group's late-'60s RCA 45s when they were known as The Insiders (before this, the trio comprising Tony Silvester, Luther Simmons and Donald McPherson, called themselves The Poets). There are three Insiders' tracks here, of which the Impressions-influenced number, 'I'm Better Off Without You' from 1967, stands out. By 1969, when the group had morphed into the Main Ingredient, the harmonies were tighter and the arrangements slicker. 'You've Been My Inspiration' was the group's debut US hit in 1970, but it was preceded by several tasty chart flops - most notably, the superb 'Brotherly Love,' with its laudable message of racial unity. Just as fame beckoned, though, tragedy struck - singer, Donald McPherson, died of leukaemia in 1971 just shy of his 30th birthday. His death didn't halt the group's progress and with his replacement, Cuba Gooding, on board, in 1972 they scored their biggest hit with 'Everybody Plays The Fool.' The group's undoubted forte was for romantic ballads, which they rendered with sweet - but not sickly or cloying - harmonies. They could also handle uptempo material with style and aplomb too, as the driving 'Black Seeds Keep On Growing,' 'Happiness Is Around The Bend' and 'California My Way' all vividly demonstrate. Like fellow soft-soul harmonisers, Blue Magic, the Main Ingredient have been often overlooked and underrated in recent years. With any luck, though, this stunning compilation will help revive interest in one of soul's greatest harmony groups.

(CW) 5/5