

Dedicated followers of the Motor City sound have long bowed at the aural altar of Fortune Records, the elusive imprint responsible for introducing the atmospheric sounds of Nolan Strong, Andre Williams, Nathaniel Mayer -- and so many, many more -- to the world. Corralled in a crude cinder block building on Third Avenue in the rough-and-tumble Cass Corridor, Fortune's Hi-Q Record Mart lured music lovers and musicians of all stripes and colors, many of whom found themselves participating in impromptu recording sessions in the notorious dirt-floored "back room" that served as a studio.

"Fortune was almost like a movie," recalls singer, songwriter and soon-to-be multi instrumentalist Melvin Davis. Despite the fact that his double-sided Fortune floor-filler "Playboy (Don't You Play in School)" b/w "I Won't Be Your Fool" had faltered when label owners Jack and Devora Brown took an unexpected vacation in the summer of '62, Davis returned to Third Avenue that fall with a crack band to wax the frenetic soul rocker "I Won't Come Crawling Back to You."

"Jack liked to just sit in the front and just rock, you know? And Devora, if she wasn't writing a song, she wasn't back there either. And if their son Don wasn't there to run the controls, than I ran them. We got the mix by moving the instruments around: 'Move the piano back, turn the drums around the other way -- now *that* sounds good!' Then I'd go in and push the button and run in and count it off. When it was over I'd run back and cut the machine off, spin it back and see what it sounded like. Oh, they were characters, each one of them. Jack was cool: "*Jack! What time are we gonna get to the gig?*" 'Awww, don't worry about it.' That was his favorite phrase. '*Jack! We're gonna be late!*' 'Don't worry about it.' That was it: 'Don't worry about it.' It

was great."

Davis's band - which would soon include future Motown super star David Ruffin - was already populated by heavy hitters, most notably guitarists Cornelius Grant and Clyde Wilson. Within a few short years, Grant would become the long-time music director for the Temptations while Wilson changed his name to Steve Mancha and started a career as one of Detroit's most storied soul singers. The proceedings were anchored solidly by legendary Fortune house drummer Butch Vaden - who also laid down the beat on Nolan Strong's "Mind Over Matter" and Nathaniel Mayer's "Leave Me Alone."

"Butch had a good groove," Davis, a drummer himself, remembers fondly. "He had a lot of excitement in his playing. His symbol crash was right on, his pick-up was short and purposeful; he was all the way into it. He and Nick Malamas, a Greek sax player, did all these black gigs with us and they were just completely comfortable."

Before Davis could record a B-side, he took up an offer from KE KE Records and "I Won't Come Crawling Back to You" was banished to a forty-seven year hibernation, save for serving as an audition tape for his stint at Groovesville Records, where he penned hits for J.J. Barnes (including the ever-popular "Chains of Love"), Steve Mancha and himself.

KE KE and Groovesville, like Fortune (and later D-Town, Labeat and Northern) would be but brief stops in Davis's dizzying tour of legendary local imprints. The first, in 1961, had been Jack Pot, from which we draw our influential flip side, "I Don't Want You." As much

rock 'n' roll as it is R&B, this genre-defying slice of garage soul so inspired Nathaniel Mayer that he lifted the song's chorus - word for word, note for note - for his own aforementioned "Leave Me Alone," released by Fortune the following year.

"I shared with many people and they shared with me," details Davis of Detroit's freewheeling early sixties scene. "It was just an exchange; of ideas, of energy, of spirit. A lot of people were out there struggling with their little instruments and cardboard suitcases and I was one of 'em. But the opportunities to express your ideas were here in little studios like Fortune and Jack Pot and so many more."

Davis's career as one of Detroit's premier musical renaissance men would come to include long-standing associations with everyone from Johnnie Mae Matthews to the Miracles to the MC5, and he's still writing, recording and tearing up stages to this day. These dynamic gems represent a long lost highlight of an astounding career in the Motor City's musical history. Now slap this wax on the turntable and dig the true sound of Detroit!