PEOPLE UNITE
MISTY IN ROOTS AND THE RUTS

Created in the 1970s by the local African-Caribbean community, People Unite brought music, community development and activism together in Southall. It provided support for the unemployed and homeless, and created opportunities for cultural expression and social gatherings. A derelict building was renovated by the collective of volunteers into a recording studio, rehearsal rooms, emergency spaces for the homeless, and a purpose built kitchen. Poko, the lead singer from Southall-based reggae band Misty in Roots explains that '[local] people…helped set up the organisation, the Caribbean youth, individuals like Derek, Chelsea Manson, members of Misty in Roots – we recognised that we needed to help mothers (and some fathers) with child care so they could go and work'.

Inspired by the centre, Misty in Roots set up their own record label People Unite, which fostered legendary recording collaborations, such as *In A Rut* (1979) by the local punk band, The Ruts. The music of both Misty in Roots and The Ruts was championed by the legendary and influential DJ John Peel, who brought their songs to a wider audience. People Unite were instrumental in organising musical events. However, after a music festival they mounted in Southall Park in 1978, which attracted thousands of people, the local council banned all musical events in the park and replaced them with an annual funfair. During the uprisings of 1979, the centre was used by local people as a central meeting point, but users were quickly forced to vacate the premises, including Blair Peach who was later killed. The centre was boarded up, and the recording studios, equipment and instruments were destroyed by the police. Poko states that 'the damage meant that the building had to be destroyed – many users were attacked, including Clarence Baker – manager of Misty, [who] had to be hospitalised [and went] into a coma after the beatings. There is now a care home in its place, but it remains strong in the memory of the local people because there remained a strong sense of unity. A lot of Asian youth found a kinship to the spirit of resistance that is there in reggae and a spate of Asian-run reggae sound systems came into being'.

The Rock Against Racism movement had been established in 1976, with musicians from different cultures and musical styles performing together in concerts to oppose racism. In July 1979, they organised a benefit 'Southall Kids are Innocent' at The Rainbow in Finsbury Park, North London, with The Clash, The Pop Group, Pete Townsend, The Members, The Enchanters, Aswad and Misty in Roots.

People Unite was an important part of the cultural history of Southall, when music and activism met in a tangible way.

Shakila Taranum Maan, film-maker



