

Album of the Month May 2007

Too Much Two Tone – Ska Classics CO112

The Two Tone movement started in the late 1970s and was mainly a fusion of punk, ska and pop, with many of the bands coming from the West Midlands. Ska originated in Jamaica in the late 1950s, combining elements of Caribbean and American Jazz and rhythm + blues, with a fast tempo, thumping bassline and strong brass element. Rocksteady was a successor to ska, again originating in Jamaica, but with less brass and more varied bassline. Punk started in the mid 1970s in the UK with fast hard music often with political lyrics and expression of rebellion.

The 2Tone label was set up by Jerry Dammers of the **Specials** and the name referred to the black and white outfits and the unity between black and white cultures at a time when racial tensions were high.

The Special AKA

The band was originally called **The Coventry Specials** before renaming themselves **The Special AKA**. **Terry Hall** was the front man, and two others in the band were **Roddy Radiation** on lead guitar and **Sir Horace Gentleman** on bass guitar. Their first No1 hit for the 2Tone label was *Too Much Too Young* which had controversial lyrics. *Ghost Town* also reached No1 in 1981. After this the band split and vocalist **Terry Hall** formed two bands, firstly **Fun Boy Three** and later **The Colourfield**. In 1990 various members joined members of **The Beat** from Birmingham (who had one single on 2Tone *Tears Of A Clown/Ranking Full Stop*) to form **The Special Beat** who toured and sang a mix of **Specials** and **Beat** songs.

Madness

Formed in 1976 and joined by vocalist **Suggs** in 1978. Their first single in 1979 was *The Prince* which was a tribute to Jamaican Ska musician **Prince Buster**. Following this they had 21 top 20 hits.

The Selecter

Pauline Black, the vocalist in this band, used to dress as a man in order to get the band into gigs. Their hits included *On My Radio*, *Three Minute Hero*, *The Whisper* and *Missing Words*. Along with **The Beat** their songs often included toasting – talking or chanting over a tune, which was precursor to rapping. After they split **Pauline Black** went into acting on TV, in theatre and in film.

The Bodysnatchers

Seven piece ska/rocksteady all girl outfit from London who formed in 1979. They were fronted by vocalist **Rhoda Dakar** who later joined **The Special AKA**. They often supported **The Selecter** on tour. Their biggest hit was *Let's Do Rocksteady* which reached No18 in 1980.

The Higsons

This band formed in 1980 in Norwich and was fronted by **Charlie Higson**. Rumour has it that **John Peel** was so amazed that anyone in Norwich was making music that he invited them to do a session for his radio show.

The Swinging Cats

Formed in Coventry in 1979 and released their first single *Mantovani* in 1980 with the first 20,000 being sold at 50p. After they split various members joined **The Special AKA** and **The Colourfield**.

The Friday Club

This was a seven piece from Scarborough who played a blend of soul and jazz funk. They often supported **Madness** on tour.

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