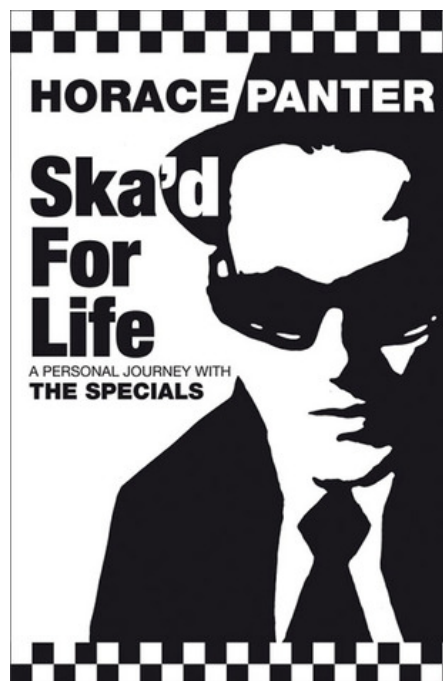




Ska'd for Life: A Personal Journey with The Specials

Horace Panter

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As a bass player with The Specials in his second-hand suit and pork pie hat, Horace was a member of one of the most innovative and exciting bands to come snarling out of the punk era. Founded by Jerry Dammers, their fusion of punk, reggae, and ska created a new musical fashion—spearheaded by their own Two Tone record label—that stood for unity and racial harmony in a polarized society. This musical odyssey with The Specials moves from their early days on Coventry's punk circuit, to their chart-storming success with singles like *Too Much Too Young* and the eerily prescient *Ghost Town*, released as the race riots of 1982 saw Toxteth and Brixton go up in flames. Written with wry humor, this affectionate look at a band whose sublime music remains influential today is a must for all fans of The Specials.

Ska'd for Life: A Personal Journey with The Specials Details

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From Reader Review Ska'd for Life: A Personal Journey with The Specials for online ebook

Greenockian says

A decent read giving some insight into one of the best bands to come out of England and definitely the best thing to ever come out of Coventry!

Barry Hammond says

The bass player for the band that gave us: A Message To You,Rudy, Ghost Town, Blank Expression, Monkey Man, and Nite Klub, and many more goes down memory lane to give the story of this great ska band as he lived it. Humorous, scary, sad, frustrating and touching by turns it's the story of a great band imploding under its own self-created pressures and the portrait of an era. Great stuff! - BH.

Ian Wood says

A few years ago on being asked for any New Years Resolutions on Jools Holland's Annual Hootenanny Phil Jupitus answered to 'get the band back together' he went on to say 'it might be difficult as he wasn't actually in The Specials'. Phil has, however, contributed in his own way by writing the foreword of the memoirs of Sir Horace Panter Gentleman 'Ska'd For Life'.

An apt title if there ever was one as The Specials Ska'd the lives of not only bass player extraordinaire Panter but also fans Phil Jupitus and myself to name but two. The Specials informed my politics, I was against racism before I really knew what it was and in fact before I met anyone whom was coloured, coming from quite a leafy English suburb. They informed by dress, I still wear a black suit, Ben Sherman button down and even a Crombie overcoat when the weather is inclement. Most of all The Specials informed my musical taste, a peculiar blend of Ska and Punk which was my first love and what I return to time after time.

Over the last thirty years I've read allot about The Specials and the Two Tone bands and although this doesn't really add anything to the story it is great to hear it first hand from someone who was there rather than watching on, which I was doing myself. The stories reverberate with a freshness particularly in the parts of the book which were taken directly from the tour journal Horace kept throughout the American and Japanese tours which ultimately led to the break up of the band.

Horace's account is well written and the book expertly paced, it is the greatest book on The Specials I've ever read, it was however difficult to finish as I had to keep getting up and moving to the Black and White decked LP's I played whilst reading this book. Now that the band are indeed reforming maybe Horace will get to write a sequel 'Dawning of a New Era' anyone?

C M says

The Specials are the quintessential ska band of the 1970s-1980s: edgy, multiracial, political, swinging. Together with Madness and, to a lesser extent, The Selecter, The Specials introduced ska music to the white working and middle class. Horace Panter (aka Sir Horace Gentleman), the bass player in the original band, describes the meteoric rise of the band, from a fairly random collection of musicians in the industrial town of Coventry in the West Midlands to a music sensation in Europe and beyond. As so many other bands, particularly loose collections of individual musicians, The Specials couldn't deal with the success and slowly but steadily imploded. While Panter tries to give as neutral an account as possible, mostly based on diaries and hazy memories, he undoubtedly introduces his own biases. Overall, Ska'd for Life does not really go much beyond the usual band biographies. I enjoyed the insight into the blooming British ska scene of the late 1970s/early 1980s the most interesting, as it was then that the skinhead movement split and ska returned to its multicultural roots.

Nigeyb says

Horace Panter aka Sir Horace Gentleman was the bass player with, and a founder member of, The Specials. Jerry Dammers lead the band and the Two Tone record label which, with its marvellous fusion of punk, reggae and ska, kickstarted the late 1970s ska revival in the UK.

Horace vividly describes his life before The Specials, the band's formation, their meteoric rise to the top of the charts, and their equally swift disintegration.

This clear-eyed recollection of life in The Specials is a marvellous read. It also operates as a cautionary tale for any would-be rock star. Horace's description of the band's first American tour sounds like hell on earth, despite playing some good shows. Overall it's hard to escape the conclusion that being in a successful band is not something anyone with a normal disposition should covet. That said, what Horace also conveys is the magic and exhilaration of playing live music, and of course playing in The Specials meant playing some of the finest music of their era.

A great band, and a very interesting and enjoyable book.

4/5

D.M. says

I took a break from a big pile of classic lit to read this, in an attempt to soothe my benumbed brain after The Way of All Flesh. While it did the job, there were times this book could just as well have been written by Samuel Butler anyway!

Horace Panter (aka Sir Horace Gentleman) was the bassist for UK ska outfit The Specials for their brief existence. While he was present for all the shows from the band's inception all the way to their disintegration, as well as playing on both proper albums and the staff-reduced third album, his memoir reads as though he were an 'imbedded' journalist.

It's understandable that, after 20 years, Panter's memories would be a bit faded and have to rely on his scrapbooks and memorabilia to fill in the pictures. However, from reading the excerpts from his contemporary travel journals, it's clear the book would've gained little from a clearer memory: he's just too vague about everything except the most ridiculous details (how much things cost, what he bought in what shops, where/why/how he got each guitar).

If you're looking for dirt on the band (e.g., if lead singer Terry Hall actually WAS having a fling with Go-

Gospixie Jane Weidlin), you'll have to wait like me for Jerry or Terry to write theirs (don't hold your breath). If you'd like to know some minutiae -- or the occasional bit of trivia (Specials' first US tour was with The Police!) -- about the short and tempestuous life of one of the most influential 'scene' bands of the last few decades, then this is the place.

Strangely, this book probably only got published at all due to the bizarre European fascination with 'celebrity' (or even pseudo-celebrity) bios/autobios; in the States, this would have to have been self-published, if ever at all.

Thomas says

Each genre usually has that one (possibly two) person/band that sits atop the mountain... Bob Marley for reggae, Motorhead for metal, Vanilla Ice for rap (wait, what?!), and for ska it's definitely The Specials. Having owned a bass and played in my fair share of bands -- how couldn't I be inspired and intimidated by Horace's playing and crazed stage presence?

Just to hear some classic stories on the start and rise of 2-Tone to the band being on the top of the charts but having to bust chairs backstage so they can make some clubs (for weapons) to use to get out of a hairy gig inside a bullring in Spain? Definitely a great read with that dry English wit and self-deprecating humor you would expect.

(Weird and freaky timing: The Specials' drummer, John Bradbury, passed away and the next day I got to page 63 when Horace mentions John joining the band. A few pages later there's a mention of almost backing over Lemmy with a van who was taking a squirt against the club's wall and he'd just died the day before as well. Then David Bowie is mentioned being in the crowd at one of their shows and he died out of nowhere as well. A few bittersweet moments, for sure.)

"If the bass and drums are solid and rocking, the track is going to be great anyway." - preach Horace, preach!
(Just don't preach about that bootleg version of Scientology that you got into at one point)

Kurt Gottschalk says

The story of the Specials has been the poprock story I was most fascinated with of all the ones I don't know. Despite a short life and a limited output, they're a band that I have always really believed in. Their disintegration seemed heartbreaking to me, even though I knew nothing but the vaguest of gossip about it.

Someone close to the Specials camp (which seems a contentious one and I didn't ask him if I could use his name) assured me that Panter's memoir is a balanced one—as opposed to some tellings that have appeared online, including some by other band members. And I have to say, Sir Horace does come across as a gentleman in his book about his time with the band. He doesn't particularly have any axes to grind and he doesn't seem hung up on proving his worth as a one-time star. (If not quite stateside, the band was very much a star outfit in Europe.) As a rockstar memoir, the book is very evenhanded, not at all vindictive, not overly clever, not overly anything, really.

It gets bogged down a bit by lengthy reprints of tour diaries he kept at the time, but it is the best accounting we have of the implosion of Two-Tone idealism. (Panter himself says that Jerry Dammers' book will be even better, if he ever writes it.) Well worth reading for anyone who cares about one of the greatest and quickest burning flames of post-punk Britain. It's also worth a bit of time to find Dammers' Spatial AKA Arkestra on

YouTube. Their Jools Holland appearance is fantastic. And if I might be so bold, a bit more of my thinking about the greatest band to ever stare racism in the face can be found at:
<http://brooklynrail.org/2015/03/music...>

Richard says

Three and a half stars really. It's a book of two halves - the glorious get together and the slow dull separation

But fuck they were cool

-

Donovan Foote says

Bass playing painters... well, Horace Panter and Paul Simonon both—I expect there are loads more... Being a painter that plays bass, seems like I should have dug this a bit more than I did. At moments I really liked this book, but for the most part it was just an enjoyable read. "Just" isn't really needed—it was an enjoyable, quick read. What I think is most remarkable about the book, is Panter's willingness to expose a younger, more naive version of himself. There are two large portions of the book devoted to his journal entries from the Specials American and Japanese tours. He interjects here and there, but let's his 20-year-old self speak—I wouldn't want to do that! It's interesting, in that it give a real sense of what those tours were like on a nearly day-to-day basis. Something you wouldn't get looking back on it 20 years later and generalizing.

As a painter, as a bass player, as a rude boy—this was a good read.

Peter O'Connor says

As there are few chronicles of this curious little subculture (it never really hit Australia until Madness began to chart and even then it was a completely different animal) so this account from one of the guys at ground zero is refreshing and really seems to convey the rise and rise of one of the great influential bands of the punk/post punk era. They largely come across as naughty kids in a candy store as they hit the road and conquer America all the while enjoying notoriety on their home shores. Punky guitars, horns, ska and sharp suits - what's not to love?

Kate Riley says

Brilliant! As a lover of the Specials at the time and now, this was a 'must read' book for me. Horace Gentleman Panter relays the story from his point of view. I enjoyed it very much. Thanks Horace!

Paul Smith says

The 2 Tone era, sandwiched as it was between punks on one side and New Romantics on the other, has had

an effect on popular culture far outstretching its relatively short lifespan. The Specials were an interesting band operating during this interesting period, and Panter's engaging biography of the band tells their story very well.

The band were of course astonishingly political, but the relaxed, friendly narrative deals with the issues of the day and how the band tackled them in a non-patronising and level-headed manner. It has been claimed elsewhere that 2 Tone was the only working class youth culture. This seems like a difficult thing to prove, but the way Panter puts across the disillusionment and anger felt by inner city youth at the time is sobering indeed when read in the context of the current less-than-rosy social outlook. Ghost Town was number one in the UK at the same time as the riots in Brixton, Toxteth, Handsworth and Tottenham, and captured the mood to an almost eerie extent. It's sounding a bit eerie again at the moment, too.

But anyway. This is a good honest biography of a good honest band, and I enjoyed it very much.

Bill says

As many of my friends on GoodReads may have noticed I do enjoy the odd music related autobiography/biography and this is certainly no exception. Horace's book is very well written very funny and very insightful. I would go so far as to say it comes close to my favourite music biog of all time (no not a Bowie one!); "Diary Of A Rock 'n' Roll Star" by Ian Hunter.

"Ska'd For Life" should be read by anyone in a band, especially if you're just starting out, anyone who loves music and obviously anyone who is a big fan of the Specials.

There were the usual poignant and laugh out loud moments and having not known much about Horace Panter (or may I call him Alice Pinter) before reading this (well other than knowing he played bass guitar for the Specials) I now find it hard not to like him.

So then, great bloke, great book and why the hell have you not read it yet?

Justin Simpson says

What a neat book. I received this as a gift and even as a big fan of all movements of ska, I had no idea this even existed. Horace Panter, famed bass player of the legendary skinhead / new wave British ska revival band the Specials pens his experiences in the band beginning with him deciding to learn the bass all the way to the breakup of the Specials and a short "where are they now". While the book goes into some detail about his personal life (the entire thing is written from his perspective - often transcribed entries from his journals of the time) the stories within are more of a biography and brief history of the Specials and not so much an autobiography of Panter, himself, which was nice. Panter isn't a poetic writer by any means, but he tells his story raw and straight to the point, shining light on both the high times of the band as well as the low times. I would've liked more insight to the writing and stories behind the Specials' famed tunes, but I suppose that wouldn't have worked well with the approach this book has taken. Probably not very interesting to a casual ska fan, but for the die-hard it's certainly worth a quick read (it's a fairly short book).
