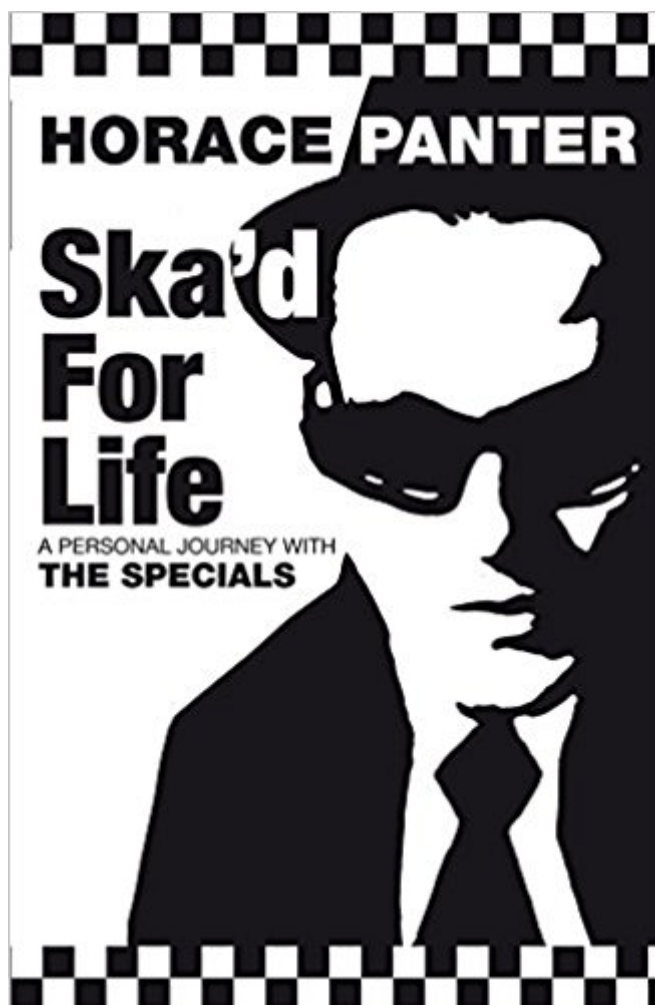


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# Ska'd For Life: A Personal Journey With The Specials



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Fascinating . . . a must read." *Mojo* "Contemporaneous diary keeping, a dry wit and impressive recall mean the sheer excitement of events shines through." *Q* magazine "The warmth and honesty of this book sets it a notch above others of its ilk. And as a lesson in what it's like to make it in the music game, it's essential reading." *Daily Sport*

Horace Panter is the former bass player with The Specials, General Public, and Specialbeat.

I was a big fan of the Specials in the day. Their first album, The Specials, has a magic that holds

even today - I've got a copy in my car right now even though I've played it hundreds of times over the years. Great songs and a unique production style that cuts against what's supposed to be done in a way that sets the record apart from everything else. I'd followed them in the music press through Trouser Press, NME and Melody Maker articles, but you don't see inside to what's really going on that way. When a band comes unglued, it's dangerous to read an account from just one member and think you understand things, but Horace (Gentleman) Panter writes what feels like a reasoned thoughtful story that admits some of his own mistakes and culpability in the situation. It's saddening when you think of the story - a group of idealistic guys in their early 20s - just out of boyhood for all intents and purposes - start a band and put every ounce of their beings into it. Within a 4-5 month period they rocket from obscurity to the covers of the music press. Their record company and management feel they have got to take advantage of the moment and book them into months of non-stop touring and media appearances on a schedule that gives no breaks - up until 3AM after the gig, wake up sleep deprived in time to catch a plane or bus somewhere else, interviews, sound checks, bad food, too much alcohol, back into unwashed stage clothes still damp with sweat from the previous night, gig, repeat. Under these circumstances the slightest annoyances start to rankle and the camaraderie of the band disintegrates, never to recover. It's a story that has happened to hundreds of great bands, but Panter tells it in a way that makes it feel far more human than most such stories. You almost feel the disappointment personally when their manager tells them that the day off they'd been looking forward to for weeks has been filled with a last minute gig. Panter doesn't come across as a guy on a star trip, but maybe that's because the story was written well after the fact and he'd had 20 plus years to decompress and return to normalcy. But in his writing voice, he seems well aware of the unreality of everything that was happening during those two or three meteoric years when the Specials were one of the top groups in the UK and critics faves around the world. All in all, one of the most enjoyable and thoughtful rock bios I've read, from a guy with a bookcase full of them.

Raised in the days of Ska, having danced at the youth club with my pork pie hat and narrow tie, I was very excited to read this book, especially after reading the other reviews. Unfortunately I don't agree with the other reviews at all, it seems like a teenagers diary, telling of the daily drudgery of touring and how great the band was live. While it was interesting reading about this part of life, enough is enough, about halfway through I was bored with it. What I really wanted to learn about was the personalities of the Specials, who said what to whom, was Neville as crazy as rumored, what did Horace think about Terry Hall, what did Jerry do to irritate everyone so much? Unfortunately

we never find out as it seems this book was written by Barry from Auf Weidesehn Pet. Likable and polite but ultimately boring. For example Horace sets the scene where he is at a party in the US and he see's a tall guy there who he realizes is David Burn. Horace being a huge fan then goes over to Burn, where they strike up a friendship and they end up sleeping with Banarama that night. Wouldn't that have been a great chapter? But no, in one paragraph Horace see's Burn and then decides not to bother him. Brilliant, absolutely riveting, you actually were more boring than my nan. While the book is OK, it could have been much more interesting. Having rubbed shoulders with the coolest members of music I expected some type of interaction with them other than "the Clash were cool, so was Jackson Brown, Billy Idol was not and the Jam were distant". An OK read, especially if you lived through the time but if ever I am lucky enough to meet David Burn or Horace I would be more than happy to go over and buy the man a beer and say thanks for the tunes.

This is a must-read for anyone into The Specials or the history of Two-tone. I really enjoyed the chapters focusing on the American scene (especially the parts having to do with the weird and mercurial Jerry Dammers; as well as having to support The Police with its prima donna bassist, Sting [real name--Gordon Sting]). Panter is a keen writer and story-teller and the subject is an awesome one. He even gets into the issue of Two-tone/Chrysalis trying to track down (for publishing royalty purposes) old Jamaican artistes who supplied the riffs for great songs like Gangsters and Too Much Too Young. It doesn't seem that Panter is too much of a drinker, but you can bet those Coventry lads liked to party, and can you blame them? But the book is more interesting than just a road trip diary--you should buy it and find out.

Now more than ever, the messages carried by the music of The Specials are pertinent. The economic strife that accompanied the original ska progenitors in Britain in the 1950s (and in the late 70s) is back again, and the need for the pure, danceable music like The Specials played is back too. This book takes a humorous look at life in an up-and-coming band and yet is tinged with the dread that happens when the downsides of the music industry rear their ugly heads. If you are a fan of The Specials or of Ska music, this book is a must-read. It is very well written, and in a conversational tone which makes it an easy read. Horace Panter is a wonderful story teller, and the stories and personalities represented in the book are highly entertaining.

This is a well written, honest, historical account that even the most un-ska'd will find interesting. I couldn't put it down. So glad that Mr. Panter kept track of what was happening around him. Highly

recommend!

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