



Original Rude Boy: From Borstal to The Specials

Neville Staple, Tony McMahon

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The Specials' vocalist offers his inside take on the 2 Tone era, his experiences producing such bands as No Doubt and Rancid, and the current Specials reunion in this raucous and charming autobiography

The Specials were the undeniable leaders of new music in the late 1970s and 1980s and this chronicle tells their story and that of a musical era. In 1979, Thatcher's Britain was a country crippled by strikes, joblessness, and economic gloom, divided by race and class—and skanking to a new beat: 2 Tone. The unruly offspring of white boy punk and rude boy ska, the Specials burst on to the scene. On stage they were electric, and at the heart of this energy was the vocal chemistry of the ethereal Terry Hall and Jamaican rude boy Neville Staple. In 1961, five-year-old Neville was sent to England to live with his father, a man for whom discipline bordered on child abuse. As he recounts here, growing up black in the Midlands of the 1960s and 1970s wasn't easy, and his youth was marked by scuffles with skins, compulsive womanizing, and a life of crime that led from shoplifting to burglary and eventually prison. But throughout there was music, and Nev reveals how he became part of the most important band of the 1980s. He remembers sound system battles; the legendary 2 Tone tour with the Selecter, Madness, and Dexy's, and their clashes with white nationalist thugs. He recalls the band's increasing tensions and eventual split; his subsequent foray into bubblegum pop with Fun Boy Three; and a newfound fame in America as godfather to Third Wave ska bands. Finally he reflects on the Specials' reunion and how even now, 30 years later, they can't help tearing themselves apart.

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