

Strange Tenants- Ska'd For Life (Blue Beat)

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Review by Cassie Hilditch

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Get out your bowler hats and shorten your guitar straps, rude boys and rude girls, as the Strange Tenants are back (again) with a collection of classics spanning 13 years.

From the sextet heralded as the Godfathers of Australian ska, 'Ska'd For Life' captures the '80s sound from the upbeat Something Like That to the reggae tainted Grey Skies.

All the hits-and-memories trademarks of a best-of album are here, as well as rare B-sides such as The Firm.

The opening tracks Soldier Boy and Ground Point Zero don't waste any time in expressing the anti-right wing sentiments of the Strange Tenants and the political statements continue with Hard Times covering issues of poverty and ignorance. However, the collection is also balanced with more lighthearted songs about relationships as with Something Like That.

There's no denying the quality of Hearn's vocals but unlike the Aussie hip-hop scene which prides itself on using the Australian accent to create a unique edge, Hearn almost mimics Terry Hall and Suggs' British drawl to a tee. One-Thirty epitomises these vocals with a One Step Beyond style echo effect.

The stand out track on this collection, Mr & Mrs, written by the lead guitarist Johnny Holmes, is also a favourite of Adelaide ska band The Seen who perform an impressive cover.

Two Steps Back also starts off promisingly with a strong and catchy horn section accompanied by crowd sing-a-long shouts but then fails to meet the anthemic anti-fascist drive throughout the rest of the song.

Overall this collection is a great find for any new member of the 'Tenants' army' or anyone keen on the blue beat sound of old skool ska as pioneered by The Specials or Madness. Note, however: what initially comes across as a lack of variety in comparison with the aforementioned bands is better interpreted, upon further listens, as distinctly true-blue fare despite the homophonic Hall/Suggs vocals.



Review: Andrew Beath

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What can I say? This isn't just a CD, it is a piece of Australian ska history. The Strange Tenants formed in 1981 and were extremely popular, for a ska band, before getting tired of touring in 1986. They have never really broken up, just got a lot quieter in recent years.

The CD is a combination of all songs of their first two EPs, 'Strange Tenants' and 'Take One Step', plus extra songs off singles and another EP. All up there are 13 tracks with a bit of variation in style. The Strange Tenants didn't borrow too heavily from foreign styles, so in the most part the sound is distinctive and original - a bit two-tone sounding at times but not consistently. It is hard to be critical of the album, but it could be that the slower pace of the older style ska will not suit some current ska fans. Personally, I think it will add to the diversity of any ska collection and is well worth the money.

Favourite track: Grey Skies

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