

<http://www.scannerzine.com/tvpartys2009.htm>

SPECIALS, THE - 30th Anniversary Tour {*Blink TV/MVD*} One of the very first records I ever bought back in 1980 when I was just 11, was the 'Too Much Too Young' EP. I vaguely remember the SPECIALS playing the Ipswich Gaumont around that time too, but due to my tender years, my folks wouldn't let me attend and I never did get to see the band live. Zoom forward something like 26 years, I'm in New Zealand and the band announces a reunion tour. The very night they play their only NZ show, I'm on a flight back to the UK! So I missed out once again - at least until this DVD appeared. I'd heard all about how good the reunion shows were so, writhing with envy, had consoled myself in the fact it wasn't *really* the SPECIALS as founder and musical maestro Jerry Dammers abstained from participation.

Recorded live at Wolverhampton Civic in 2009 with a multi-camera crew, the opening bars of 'Enjoy Yourself' signalled the hairs on the back of my neck to stand up and not stop skanking until 'You're Wondering Now' closed the gig. Highlights? 'Do The Dog' is an electrifying, bombastic set opener, 'Gangsters' had so much flesh-tingling subversion about it that it should be illegal, a hyper 'Monkey Man' that Neville Staple dedicated to the bouncers, the perfect segue from 'Stereotypes' into 'Man At C&A', and the majestic pairing of 'A Message To You Rudy' and 'Do Nothing'. Oddly, it was 'Too Much Too Young' and 'Ghost Town' that didn't quite convince; the former lacked the unbridled energy of the version on the EP mentioned above and the latter lacked the mesmerising chill of the single.

The band members are in stunning form too. Neville Staple never stops moving while Terry Hall drops some significant one-liners throughout, best of all prior to 'Friday Night, Saturday Morning' stating: "You can take the boy outta the West Midlands..." and "Gonna have a big Pina Colada and find a can of hairspray," before 'Concrete Jungle'. And the man that has filled Dammers' Dr. Martens? A noble effort on his part and even I'll confess, Dammers wasn't really missed. The actual editing of the footage is excellent. There's so much movement from the multiple cameras (be it directly over drummer John Bradbury's head, in the crowd, or wedged between two monitors looking up at Hall to name but three) it's breath-taking, while the sound is crystal clear and pumping.

The only extra is a 20 minute documentary that traces early rehearsals where, in the absence of Dammers, bassist Horace Panter appears to have taken over as 'musical co-ordinator' while Bradbury certainly comes over as the band's personality. It progresses onto feature stage rehearsals, merchandise and a few fawning fans - both old and new.

Negatives? Of the actual gig, it's almost faultless but I was disappointed that 'Why?' wasn't played. The packaging is pretty poor; there's no indication of where the gig was recorded (you have to wait for the credits for that) or who is in the band (kinda vital given there's no Dammers). As an artefact of the reformation shows, this will be a cherished reminder for those who attended the shows (lucky fuckers! Envious?? Moi?? Surely not!). For those poor souls who didn't attend for whatever reason, it's both a revelation and a kick in the guts! Reformed bands are never, ever supposed to be THIS good!! (31.01.11)