

SKANKIN' 'ROUND THE WORLD

The International Ska Compilation Series



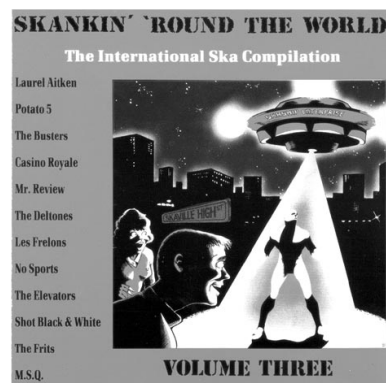
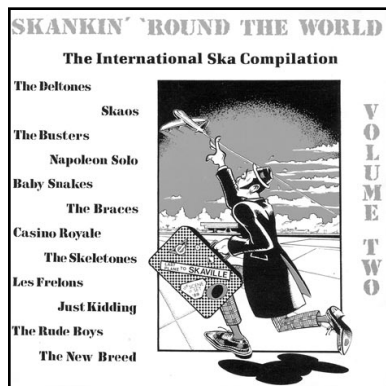
Very much in awe of this series' *Volume 1* (see HP6 p34), I simply had to hunt down as many as possible this time around. They're the orange classics synonymous with the UK's Unicorn mod label, and ethically you may know that as a business entity Unicorn had a reputation for shady controversy with their releases; not paying artists deserved royalties. So not to glorify that flaw or cloud the quality, this is a historically vital series in both a global sense, and to a degree an overlooked sense. Especially during a time when not too much ska was happening over here in the United States.

VOLUME TWO 1989

Lesser in a way this is a bit abstract, not as solid a collection upfront; meaning it's a little more subtle in the memorability department lacking much in-your-face cohesion. After all, #1 was a pretty hard act to follow. Begins with The Skeletones' put-down You make me wanna laugh, Skaos' Straight to your heart (also on Unicorn's *Catch This Beat* in '89). Particular choice cuts on *Volume 2* include the solid throb of Denmark's Napoleon Solo in I don't believe you, and The Braces' violin/piano-heavy instrumental Gypsy In My Soul. Later on Sweden's Baby Snakes start with an organ playing Amazing Grace fading into a western sing along drinking number called Whiskey Bar, then Aussie band Just Kidding does their anti-apartheid Watch the fires (off their Unicorn LP of the same name), until Les Frelons' french sax-driven Espresso takes over. Weaker songs on this are the sluggish reggae croon of The New Breed's Wanted, (which I could swear was on someone's answering machine at one point?) and the Deltones' Scream Jean / In Crowd. Cardiff's Rude Boys' live injection of their welsh Ska Fever and Casino Royale's self-titled anthem close the dozen out. Liner notes by oi boy Tim "Bilko" Wells of George Marshall's now legendary *Zoot!* skazine. Hey, who sold this back in Syracuse? Duration 40:59

VOLUME THREE 1989

The third installment of 1989's *International Ska Compilation* opens with The Busters' timeless anthem of Summertime, after which it turns depressing in tone, a bit more dark and somber than expected for a ska collection. Les Frelons (of France) give their "Les politiciens". Next up the mournful Teardrops shed by Germany's The Frits, Everyday Another day by Mr. Review, and the monotony theme continues with No Sports (So begins another) Fukkin' Week. Later on in the collection, there's literally a song by Shot Black & White called Day in, Day out. But I have to say the most exciting thing here for me was a track called "Rocksteady" by The Elevators (Not to be confused with the punky midwest U.S. band of the same name). Sure they can change their name, but the trademark saxophone gives it away every time – it's Saxa and Everett Morton, veterans from The English Beat! Tricky, tricky puzzle... This song and its players went on to tighten up and play it with the same name under the guise of The International Beat. Other positive notables include Laurel Aitken's Ska Locomotion and The Deltones' joyful Running Around. The final cut is a remake of the artist once known as Prince's hit, "Never Take the Place of your Man" covered in reggae style by London's Spider Johnson and the Potato 5. Alien artwork by abductee Steve Friel of the Skaship Enterprise. Unfortunately, no band contacts are listed in any of these; but they'd be outdated by now anyway. I was forced to go so far as to post order this one from Skanky 'Lil Foggo in Holland. Duration 41:45



VOLUME FOUR 1990

Completing my own set a few years and 3 nations later, it's hard not to think the best things come to those who wait. Or in this case, actively seek them out. I won't just give this a positive review because I had been missing it so long. Four is likely the best, starting out with the Italian band The Mobsters Steppin' Out and Blue Chateau's Nightmare (the German band also had a similar sinister dark-dealing Steps in the Alley on *Volume 1*). Next it's No Sports with "this is a song about feelings" called Love Song (off their 1989 Unicorn debut *King Ska*) and The Riffs' Oh how we laughed. Part four of *The International Ska Compilation* is much heavier on the older Jamaican ska roots-respect tip with performers like Laurel Aitken, Derrick Morgan and The Skatalites all having tracks here. Cover illustration again by Steve Friel, depicts musicians singing to tourists as they're coming off a ship in port. Could this be a nod to The Laurel Aitken band? His song, (I love you yes I do) shows a vibrant and flexible-voiced Aitken, whereas Derrick Morgan's In My Heart showcases his own soulful sixties tone. The Skatalites' classic Big Trombone was recorded live at the legendary July 1983 reunion gig at the Blue Monk Jazz Gallery in Jamaica, with Lord Tanamo on vocal duty (Half of this show came out on Roir in 1990; the whole session was later released on their explosive and full 2CD *Stretching Out* again in 1998). Another surprise were the American bands returning once more since *Volume 1*: NYC's Toasters' instrumental T-Time (off the *This Gun for Hire* album 1990), and California's Dance Hall Crashers' self-titled *Old Record* anthem (complete with trademark dual femme vocal). Other notables from that side of the globe are The Liquidators' slower thought-provoking ode to the history of western civilization and photographic media in their Black & White pictures, and Australia's Just Kidding returns with a happy Girl called Sunshine. This one closes out with a bouncy number, the hyper keyboard frenzy of OK Les Boys by France's Tchiky Monky. International indeed; I found this in Toronto discounted at Record Peddler's liquidation sale. Duration 41:47

VOLUME FIVE 1990

Interesting. *Volume 5* is actually very strong but you might not think so at first glance. Machtoc opens with the sax-powered First Time and The Deltones croon through their version of the (Gaylettes'?) sixties rocksteady Silent River Runs Deep, both bands from the UK. Australians The Latenotes' doomy yet solid [and rude] stomper, Yeah Alright ("her tender touch when I wake up in the morning, love the way she sticks her tongue in my mouth when I'm yawning", or "ya don't need makeup baby, you need a plastic surgeon") adds attitude. Also from down under is Skapa, whose Ska Polka really isn't a polka at all, but a hypnotic dub instrumental just shy of a full six minutes. Not failing to mention Orange County CA's Gangbusters' No Fun [later redone by John Roy's Unsteady] and a bit lesser Riches to Rags courtesy The Liquidators. The Speakeazy (UK) finishes the job with their anti-violence dancefloor pounding apocalyptic We need Enid. Especially spooky because of the guilt-ridden Spy Eye track The things I feel (from Italy), responsible for many a sleepless night. Similarly, Strange Fruit also contributes their super mellow Over the border. A tremendous series pairing bigger name bands with smaller ones. I got these final dozen tracks of the series in May of 2000. This has some songs a throwback to my early ska days, a couple of these cuts were put on the ten copies of the DPK/JAV ska mix tape in summer '95. Anyone remember? Martin? Kate? Nah. Duration 47:16

Music from this era impresses me. Unicorn's existence was limited to five years (1986-1991), during which time they issued nearly 50 ska releases – mostly from bands on these compilations. This sparked a late 80s resurgence of British bands. Label founder and scofflaw Mark Johnson fled London and then went into hiding in Turkey because he, not unlike Al Capone himself, was guilty of tax evasion. By then another UK-based label Dojo Limited picked up and put out the immortal series on compact disc format – in 1996 they also went under. Under the first volume has since been reissued on another label, with a colorized aeroplan Skaville Airways on the cover and an orange boilerplate. (M.I.L. Multimedia LLC, PO Box 866, N. Bergen, NJ 0747 USA; who also reissued The Toasters' [Celluloid/Skaloid] *Skaboom & Thrill me Up 2 fer 1* called *Ska Killers*) ■

