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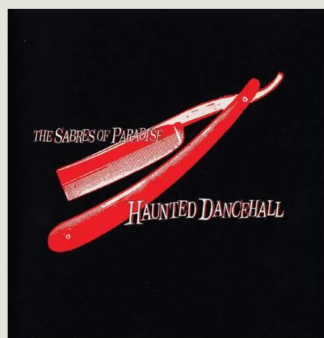
THE

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THE SABRES OF PARADISE

HAUNTED DANCEHALL

(WARP, 1994)

There must be countless people who, in the mid-1990s, embarked on a fruitless search through the nation's bookshops for James Woodbourne's *Haunted Dancehall*, the novel that supposedly inspired the album of that name by The Sabres Of Paradise. The emphasis is on "supposedly" because the book, like the Illuminati or the Zionist conspiracy to control the world's wealth and media, simply doesn't exist.

The tantalising prose chronicled the nocturnal adventures of our protagonist, one Nicky McGuire, deep in the underbelly of a London recognisable to anyone whose long nights have been characterised by altered states of consciousness. However, the book was a trick of the imagination by the album's creators, upon which they hung the concept for a fictional soundtrack.

Of course, the notion of soundtracks to films that existed purely in the minds of their composers was nothing new – see ex-Bad Seed Barry Adamson's *Moss Side Story* – but the idea of a soundtrack to a fictional book was virgin territory.

Driven by the conceit behind the collection of music contained within *Haunted Dancehall*'s 14 tracks – where techno collides with rockabilly, calypso, reggae and electronica – this is an album that captures London's ability to enthrall and appal in equal measure; a city where wits and guile are needed for survival.

Curiously, for a record involving the late producer and DJ Andrew Weatherall, *Haunted Dancehall* is a stark and glacial album. It moves away from the low-end warmth that characterises much of his work, to create a mood of claustrophobia and dread born from a lack of sleep and security.

Indeed, the coldness that permeates the album is entirely in keeping with the aural story that unfolds across this epic journey, and *Haunted Dancehall*'s greatest strength is the ability to transmit mental images to illustrate the instrumental music within it.

Here the wah-wah guitar and heavy beats of *Theme* conjure up images of 70s cop shows. Elsewhere, *Wilnot* – based on the central riff from Wilmoth Houdini's 1931 calypso classic *Black But Sweet* – transcends the original's roots to become a swaggering dub monster worthy of an afterhours shebeen. Meanwhile, *Tow Truck* could be Ennio Morricone's guitarist Pino Rucher engaging in a rumble with Lee 'Scratch' Perry in some Soho back alley.

Intelligent, evocative and highly creative, this is music to be savoured right down to its final bleep. Do what Nicky McGuire does at the end of sleeve notes: step inside the *Haunted Dancehall* and feel its force.

JULIAN MARSZALEK



HAVE A CIGAR

Saluting the scene's supporting crew

Straight to the top:
Nigel 'Skippy' Monk.



2020 PRETTY VACANT

Veteran roadie **Skippy Monk** has become a 21st century Bob Geldof in order to help colleagues through Covid crisis.

In his 33 years as a lighting roadie, Nigel 'Skippy' Monk has seen many changes but nothing like the change forced upon the live music industry by the novel coronavirus.

"What's better today is that there's more training, whereas we just fell into [crew work]," he reflects, having started himself by using his role as a quantity surveyor to jump into vans and help out at gigs. "Although that doesn't mean common sense is any better! Watching the amount of hours people work is more of a priority now."

That all seems somewhat irrelevant when there's almost no work to be had, with almost every gig house in the world shut, every tour postponed and the real threat of many venues never reopening. That's why Monk adapted the idea of a charity show to help the offstage staff who are struggling.

The resulting event, 2020 Pretty Vacant, will see bands across all genres performing across two locations – LH3 Studios in London and Production Park Studios in Wakefield. Four stages will mimic standard setups from a small club to a stadium, and instead of focusing purely on the artists,

cameras will show remote audiences how many other roles are being played out during a performance, and help shine a light on who the crew members are, what they do and how they do it. The artists (which at time of writing remained to be confirmed) will all perform cover versions as another way of demonstrating how the business only works through shared influence and cooperation.

Monk took inspiration from an event in Ireland where the stage was set up so that the empty audience area was the backdrop to the performance. "It was quite powerful," he says. "They raised €400,000 [£357,430] and I thought, 'We're not doing anything here.' I got quite riled about it. I rang a few industry people and asked if they'd give their time for free. I never had one door slammed in my face."

In the 1980s the Live Aid project changed mastermind Bob Geldof's life and Monk is aware that he's changing too. "I've realised that to get anything done you go to the top and tell them what you want." **MK**

Find full details at www.2020prettyvacant.uk.

"To get anything done you have to go straight to the top."

PROG IN BRIEF

Abel Ganz hold their annual Christmas charity event at the Drygate Brewery, Glasgow, on December 7. They'll be joined by **Wobbler** on the night, which aims to raise funds for cancer and Huntingdon's research. www.abelganz.com



Sanguine Hum (left) return with *A Trace Of Memory*, which is available for pre-order from October 2 via Bandcamp. The seven-track record features Joff Winks, Matt Baber and Brad Waissman with Paul Mallyon and Andrew Booker.