



'Sent from Coventry'

By Richard Eddington

David Storey, a Cumbrian, joined Chrysalis Records in 1979 straight from university, and it became his responsibility to handle the Two Tone artwork. "At that time, Chrysalis was a very successful record company. The big groups such as Blondie had tended to be taken care of by the art director and senior designer. Then this scruffy band called The Specials were signed and were allocated to me, because nobody else in the company was particularly interested at that stage. So I was lucky enough to get involved with them right at the start." The Specials were quite a departure from the type of acts usually signed by Chrysalis. "The culture of the company was about big acts such as Rory Gallagher and Jethro Tull. The company was geared to that sort of material," says Storey. "Chrysalis hadn't signed any punk acts for example in the mid-Seventies, so there was a certain amount of excitement when Roy Eldridge won the bidding war to sign The Specials but not at a senior level. I was more or less left to do what I wanted along with John "Teflon" Sims. It was our job to make sense of Jerry Dammers' ideas. Jerry was really the art director and the brains behind the whole thing. The main elements of the little man, the chequered pattern and the layout of the Two Tone lettering were all Jerry's ideas. We drew them up properly for him." Storey's relationship with the band would prove to be a lasting one. "Having been

involved from the start, John and I were adopted by the band. Later, when all of a sudden money started pouring into the record company via the Special's sales, senior management wanted to put Two Tone under the wing of the art director. By then, however, we had really bonded with Jerry and he insisted that we continue to do his work (Storey continued to work with Jerry until 1986).

Storey's relationship with Dammers gives us a useful insight into Jerry's modus operandi. "You could never describe Jerry as pretentious and he would never intellectualise. In fact, he was more likely to do the reverse. He didn't want anyone to think that Two Tone was some kind of intellectual movement. At the same time, his art direction to people like John Sims, and myself was extremely specific. We very quickly picked up the 'unwritten' set of rules of what you could or couldn't do. For example, to start with we couldn't use colour photography. In fact, it was difficult to introduce any colour at all. Initially that was partly down to not having budgets for that sort of thing. But later there were such massive sales that budgets were no longer an issue. I remember we used to get daily sales sheets sent round Chrysalis, and a big hit in those days would be selling around 8000 copies a day. The Specials singles at their peak would be selling something like 70,000 copies a day. Money

was pouring in, but even at that point Jerry didn't want to do anything that appeared flash or unduly sophisticated or 'clever'. Jerry had a very good eye for design and would appreciate a beautifully crafted piece of artwork but more often than not he would ask us to "rough it up" by photocopying it a couple of times or by putting things out of focus."

Like many others, Storey witnessed at first hand Dammers' commitment to his vision. "He was also – in the nicest possible way – a complete nightmare to work with, he had such a clear idea of what he wanted to achieve that we would often end up doing things over and over again in a very obsessive way until he was happy. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred he was right though and when it came back from the printers it was spot on."

"Jerry Dammers was the genius behind Two Tone, he was the man that had the vision, and he also had the integrity and honesty. He fought very hard right to the end to maintain those values. He was the man who had the vision to bring on board all those other amazing bands. He was the genius that nurtured

them and advised them, and protected the integrity of the whole Two Tone ethos by working so closely with them. The other clever thing about the music was that it was a vehicle for getting across quite complicated political messages in a fun way, in a way that people could dance to."

Descriptions of Dammers's methods and behaviour by those who worked with him invariably include the word "honesty", "integrity", "driven" or even the phrase "benign dictator". What is universally agreed is that as far as the artistic stuff was concerned, Jerry nearly always got it right.

Dammers, meanwhile, pays tribute to his colleagues: "The Specials were a really unique combination of people. To find that combination, the balance of the different people, the different talents, it just doesn't come up very often."

Published by Independent Music Press © 2004