

Mp3 Bigger Thomas - Resisting Success



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Ska, reggae, calypsoul. Skalypsoul, if you will... 8 MP3 Songs ROCK: Ska, WORLD: Reggae Details: 16 years and still kicking!! Bigger Thomas continues to keep crowds moving and grooving to their patented version of reggae skalypsoul with a heavy dose of trad and two-tone ska thrown in for good measure. Best known for their upbeat ska-pop song "Ska in My Pocket" they now play a diverse style encompassing ska, reggae, calypso, punk, african and latin rhythms. Below is a history of the band. Enjoy!

EARLY DAYS - 1988 Steve Parker and Marc Wasserman founded the band during the summer of 1988 after meeting at Rutgers University and discovering a shared love of 60's and 70's reggae and ska and of British Two-Tone bands like The English Beat, The Specials, Bad Manners and The Selecter. After writing and recording ska and reggae songs in Marc's apartment they put up flyers around New Brunswick, NJ. Within a matter of days they had a full band and began rehearsing in Marc's living room that summer. Taking the name Panic! (from the The Smiths song and as a description of their live sound) the original line-up featured Parker and Wasserman on guitar and bass respectively along with singer Roger Apollon Jr, toaster Ken "Miggy" Gayle, drummer Jim Cooper, trumpeter Kevin Shields and saxophonist Steve Meicke. The band took the Rutgers and New Brunswick music scene by storm that fall playing their first gig as an opener for the NY Citizens at a show before a sold out crowd in September of 1988. As word of their incendiary live show spread the band quickly found itself playing in front of larger and larger audiences during late 1988 and early 1989. This line-up recorded a 3 song demo featuring a nascent version of "Ska in My Pocket" that is still considered the definitive recording by many fans. It was also during this time that the band came up with their distinctive "Mr Two-Tone" logo which they use to this day. Gayle left the band soon after their first few gigs that fall and Sean Moore joined as an additional trumpet and horn player.

MAKING WAVES - 1989 The band soon became a mainstay at City Gardens in

Trenton, NJ regularly playing as opener for bands as diverse as Yellowman, HR from Bad Brains, De La Soul, Bad Manners, Burning Spear and Bim Skala Bim. As word about the band spread invitations to play in New York came in and Panic! found itself playing with NYC SKA bands on the Moon Record label including The Toasters, NY Citizens, Skadanks and Skinnerbox. In the late 1980's and early 90's there was a thriving original music scene at the Jersey Shore fueled by new music radio station WHTG-FM and the band was soon playing regularly at shore hot spots including the Green Parrot in Neptune, NJ, and the Fastlane and world famous Stone Pony in Asbury Park (where they opened for reggae superstar Jimmy Cliff). It was during a battle of the bands competition at the Green Parrot in the fall of 1989 that the band gained a larger following at the shore. The competition drew large crowds and after a very close final covered by WHTG-FM and The Asbury Park Press the band won by a point-and-a-half. The band used the first prize of 40 hours of free studio recording time to record and mix what would become their first self-titled LP (this was when bands still made records!!). During the recording process in the fall of 1989 and early 1990 the band received a cease and desist letter from the lawyer of a Virginia Beach, VA cover band called Panic. After several nameless weeks and arguments the band renamed themselves Bigger Thomas (after the protagonist of the novel "Native Son" by Richard Wright). Wasserman had been reading the novel in a class and offered it as a suggestion which his bandmates approved. THE RED ALBUM - 1990 Bigger Thomas released their 9 song, self-titled LP (known as the "Red Album" because of its color) in the spring of 1990 on Exclamation Point Records. The band celebrated with gigs all over the east coast and started playing regularly in New York, Washington DC (with The Now and Johnny Quest), Philadelphia (with Public Service and Ruder Than You) and Albany, NY where they developed a rabid following at clubs like the QE2 and Bogey's. The also ventured up to Toronto that fall. The band were invited to be a part of the Moon Records live recording NYC SKA LIVE which also featured The Toasters, NY Citizens, Skadanks and others. Originally slated to be both a video and record (like the 2Tone record and video "Dance Craze") only a record was released. The band's live recordings of "Moving" and "Ska in My Pocket" were electric and the live audience added to the ambience. But the best was yet to come. In December of that year as ska frenzy finally hit the US, Bigger Thomas was invited to open a sold out show at The Ritz for The Special Beat (a reformed ska supergroup including Ranking Roger, Neville Staples, Horace Panter and John Bradbury). The show, along with an interview on the BBC gave the band an even wider audience in the US and the UK. As 1990 came to a close the band

continued to play out live averaging 10-12 shows a month.

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