

Walter & Sabrina

Two Tales: The Twilight Of Walter & Sabrina

Danny Dark CD+Pbk

According to the sleeve notes, this is the final release from the duo of multi-instrumentalist Walter Cardew – son of the late composer Cornelius – and artist Stephen Moore, aka Sabrina. Moore's working identity – chosen because it's the most common name found on call girls' cards left in London phone boxes – says a lot about the universe they've conjured since their collaborative debut, 1994's *Walter & Sabrina Play Pop*, *Walter & Sabrina Play Classical*. It's a seedy underworld of prostitutes, degradation, unlikely encounters and prodigious sexual organs – like a 1950s Soho, imagined by Jean Genet and projected into an alternate present day where people still call each other "*mucky blighters*".

This vision is mediated through operatic sung-spoken vocals, performed by male sopranos and countertenors whose androgynous delivery adds an element of gender ambiguity, while the accompaniment for the two titular tales here brings the Walter & Sabrina project full circle: "Walter & Sabrina Play Classical, Tale One" is austere piano; "... Play Pop, Tale Two" is a synthetic concoction of guitar, saxophones and electronic beats. The two halves are separated by an instrumental that jumps from brittle and unappealing synthesizer to avant garde piano clusters to jaunty bop saxophone without much guiding logic. In fact, there's so little substance to the music that attention is inevitably thrown onto the libretto. That's where the project really comes unstuck.

Beginning as a meditation on the phallic properties of the cucumber and moving into a messy exegesis on copulation, the authors are no doubt striving to be transgressive. That it fails so spectacularly is largely due to awkward, pseudo-poetic lyrics, soggy with choice gobbets such as: "*So soon the oyster of love became a cockle of lust as The Female Genitalia 'pon female genitalia pumped the suck, flexing muscles keeping firm upon the Mickey Taking's Male Dong Thing.*" The only thing remotely shocking about this limply prurient art titillation is that grown men should devote so much energy to creating something so tiresomely devoid of charm.

Daniel Spicer