

Peter Mitchell: Nothing Lasts Forever

The Sir Yank's Heavy Disco, Harehills Avenue, Leeds, 1978

This colour photograph shows a pair of large, semi-detached Victorian houses in red brick with a crowd of about 30 Rastafari standing outside, photographed from the opposite side of the road on a sunny day.

Numerous cables run from the upper windows of the left-hand house over the thick garden hedge to large sound systems – stacks of speakers in wooden cases – on the wide pavement in front of the house. Some cables even go out of the edge of the frame, off to unseen speakers on the left. It looks like the beginnings or remains of a spider's web. A man wearing a crocheted cap in stripes of red gold and green leans out of one of the windows, as if giving instructions to someone below. One man is in the front garden, and four more are gathered on the steps by the open front door.

Another thirty or so Black men are on the pavement outside the house, most wearing large caps or knitted tams, with casual jackets or tops over jeans in subdued colours, brown or blue, with the occasional flash of a red or green cap. Some are watching the preparations, while others are chatting in small groups, one or two glancing towards the photographer across the street. There seems to be just one woman in the crowd, her back to us, wearing a white blouse and knitted tank top with brown flares and a red, black and yellow striped turban.

The cables connect the house to the four stacks of speakers facing out into the street, and visually connect it to the gathered people. There is a sense of preparation, and quiet excitement, radiating outwards from the house.

Harehills became a centre of the West Indian community in Leeds from the 1950s.

Sir Yank was a sound system owner known as 'the Boss Of Yorkshire Sounds', who also ran a record shop in central Leeds.