

Author Q&A: Mark Hodkinson

THE LAST MAD SURGE OF YOUTH

(Pomona, £7.99)

The founder of Yorkshire music promotion and publishing company Pomona, Mark Hodkinson began his career as a regional journalist before penning a number of acclaimed books on music and football. *The Last Mad Surge of Youth* is his brilliant debut novel and tells the story of two music-obsessed childhood friends, John Barrett and David Carey, who form a band called Killing Stars.

What was the initial idea behind *The Last Mad Surge of Youth*?

I've been kicking around with writing fiction for years and it was the old adage of write about what you know. Although it's a very obvious and clichéd frame to write about pop music and growing up, I realised that within that I could put in lots of other issues. There's a lot more to it than just a straightforward narrative of a band forming and then someone turning into an alcoholic.

To what extent is the novel autobiographical?

It is quite autobiographical. I've been around bands and famous people for years, so I've got used to being with them and just kind of studying. So at record company meetings or accompanying the artist to interviews or gigs, I just watched and saw how it all worked. One thing that I'm proud of with the book is the authenticity.



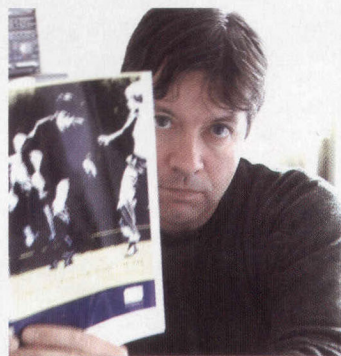
I don't think it's compromised at any point.

What did you envisage Killing Stars sounding like?

The nearest band to it would have probably been The Chameleons. The Chameleons was the first band that I properly interacted with where I actually saw them becoming big. I remember Mark Burgess, the singer, coming into the *Middleton Guardian* with a test pressing of their debut album and up until then I thought he just another scruffy Middleton kid. I went home with the album and, much like Killing Stars and John Barrett, it was just a complete summary of living in that town at that time. You could sense the brick dust between the grooves.

Throughout your teens and twenties you played in bands. Were you disappointed that you never made it?

I'm happy with the way that things worked out now. But for many years I wasn't and I think the bitterness that Carey has, I can sense that feeling. I remember when I was in The Monkey



Run and the Inspiral Carpets became successful with a very similar sound to us. It does cut you up. But then I realised that these things happen for a reason. I wasn't good enough as a player and good enough at all the other aspects that are required, but I could write so I focused on that.

Why did you decide to set up an independent publishing company?

I'd done years of journalism and I was getting offered manuscripts to proof read. The one that really turned it was the Boff Whalley one, the guy out of Chumbawumba, who'd done this book called *Footnote* that was fantastic. But I just knew everyone would think: "Chumbawumba: completely uncool." Therefore the book wouldn't get published. So we put that one out and then it just snowballed from there. I've only worked with writers and done books that I've really, really wanted to do.

What is the most rewarding aspect of running your own publishing house?

The highlight is always the same thing and that's the day when the books arrive from the printers. I always have a quiet hour with each book and it's almost pornographic this, but I look at it, feel it and think: "Well, that didn't exist until I thought: 'let's make it exist.'" I use that as the absolute bottom line because once it arrives you know you've got all the hassle of getting it reviewed and all the horrible boring admin bits which I really don't like.

RICHARD SMIRKE