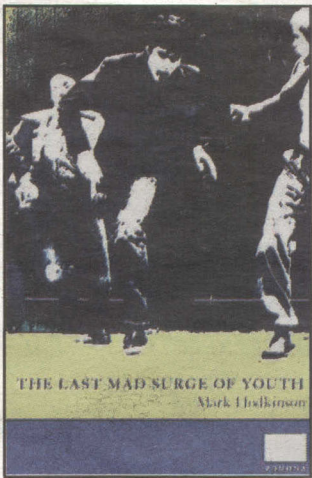


Mark Hodkinson
'The last mad surge of youth'



This excellent and well-written book is about the feeling, common to many of us, that "there must be more to life than this".

Ever had the feeling you were meant to do something special and that you deserved more?

The twist here is that the main character, Barrett, has done something special — he took his band Killing Stars from the bedroom to the world stage, fame and fortune. The only trouble is, those days are gone and Barrett is wallowing in self deceit, pity and vodka until his wife and his old mate from school, Carey, point out that he only feels like the rest of us. The difference is that he's had the success and got the wealth that everyone else craves.

The first two thirds or so of the book splits its time between the present day and the early 1980s, when Maggie Thatcher ruled the world and punk ruled the airwaves.

For anyone interested in the music business it's a fascinating account of how things work, from a world-weary and cynical standpoint. The author has worked in music PR for some years and knows his stuff — it makes you wonder who he's talking about.

The band sets off full of idealism — even playing instruments properly was for posers — but gradually gets sucked into the machine, firstly realising it's important to play and have tunes, then ditching friends who can't help them get to the top.

Reflecting on his glory days, Barrett — who despite his flaws is a likeable bloke — is depressed by the whole process of fame, particularly the desperation in people's eyes when they meet a "star" as if meeting someone with fame will make a difference to their lives.

While Barrett has been conquering the world, Carey, a local newspaper journalist (and again, the author has experience of local newspapers, which shows) who wants to be an author has been left to brood, with his only chance of fame coming when he's asked to write Barrett's life story.

The last third of the book gradually moves to the present and is more thoughtful. There's a love angle, too, and Hodkinson does the neat trick of having the same episode described by two separate characters at different parts of the book, making it hard to spot by being slightly devious.

It's well written and Hodkinson has a fine eye for human behaviour and characters.

An engrossing book as much about the human condition as it is about a fallen rock star.

"The last mad surge of youth" by Mark Hodkinson is published by Pomona Books; £7.99, ISBN 978-1904590200.