

Music fans will lap up this superb novel

Review by **John Greenwood**

ANYONE remember the television show, 'Whatever Happened To The Likely Lads'?

Although it was a comedy (and a very good one) it always had a melancholy tone epitomised by a line in the theme tune which went "Now it's almost over, the days went by so fast/And the only thing to look forward to – is the past."

Boyhood friends Dave Carey and John Barrett, the central characters in Calder Valley author Mark Hodkinson's first novel, 'The Last Mad Surge Of Youth', face the same predicament.

Back in 1980 they were fresh-faced school-age alternative musicians, fired up by the rock revolution that punk rock brought with it in terms of attitude.

Hodkinson's story moves forward to the present day, telling how Carey left their embryo band Group X just before they inked a recording deal and became a local newspaper reporter, leaving the more confident Barrett who became a major star with the band, who were re-named Killing Stars.

In the present, a major headline-grabbing faux pas live on dinnertime television by a drunken Barrett brings the two back together after Carey is one of the few journalists going against the grain to write a supportive article.

But Carey can see through Barrett's facade and their uneasy relationship is reflected in the story of the band's rise. There's also a surprising twist in the tail near the end of the novel as the two come face-to-face at beaten-up Barrett's hospital bed.

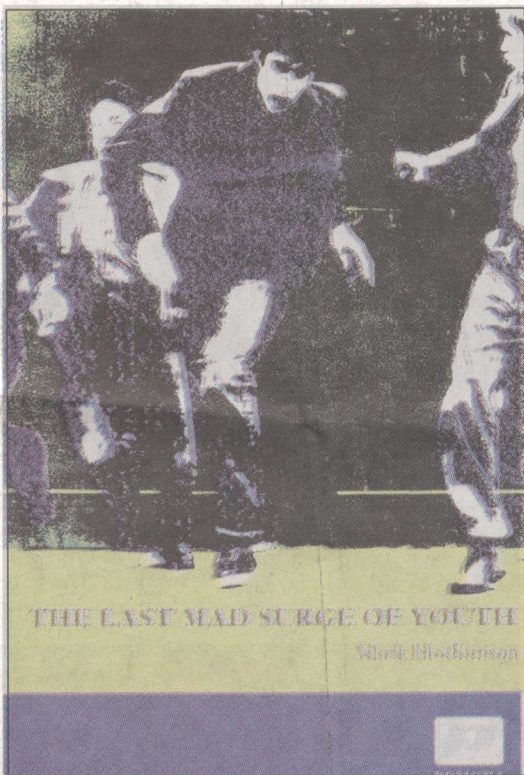
As an account of what drove bands, and their fans, in the early '80s onwards music scene, Hodkinson's book is right on the button. It is equally good as a dissection of a friendship betrayed – but there are things which bind Carey and Barrett together still.

Carey still reports on his home town patch and even Barrett realises his music was at its most vital when he drew his inspiration from it.

The accounts of their teenage years and northern town upbringing – friends they knew, certainties they had and family that shaped them – are superbly drawn by the author.

His narrative style, rapid-fire switches between the present and parts of the past, is also highly effective and, if you're reading it at bedtime, it will keep you up half the night as the urge to turn another page keeps coming.

This is a novel that music fans will lap up, but it is much more than that and has deservedly gained quality notices in national newspaper review columns. It crackles with lively dialogue and captures the flavour



Novel debut: Mark Hodkinson's 'The Last Mad Surge Of Youth' (Pomona Books)

of the late '70s and early '80s brilliantly.

Mark Hodkinson, who lives in Todmorden and whose music PR company was until recently based in Hebden Bridge, has several acclaimed music biographies and sports books to his credit.

Back in the day, he was a founding member of Rochdale agit-punk band Untermensch, whose track 'Ashfield Valley Headkick' still comes out fighting. They later evolved into the Monkey Run and he later played guitar for Hebden Bridge's own Last Peach.

His book about his Rochdale childhood and love of Rochdale Football Club, 'Believe The Sign', was very evocative and won very good notices. His first novel bears this stamp too. Highly recommended.

● The Last Mad Surge Of Youth is published by Pomona Books at £7.99. Locally it is available from the Border Bookshop, Todmorden, the Bookcase, Hebden Bridge, and Kelsall's in Littleborough. It is also available via Pomona's website