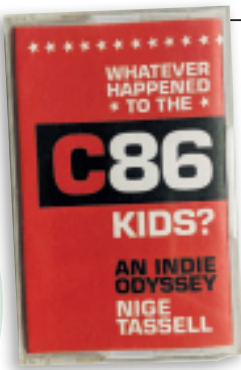


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# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE C86 KIDS?

BY NIGE TASSELL - NINE EIGHT BOOKS

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I'M NOT SURE IF I'VE JUST SEEN THE BEST BAND IN THE WORLD OR THE WORST

Rob McKahey, Stump's drummer, remembers meeting Mark E Smith backstage at a Fall gig in 1987: "He said to me, "Oh, I don't mind Stump." It was like getting a knighthood. Or being inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame." It was the only valediction Rob needed and meant more than any amount of record sales. It's one of countless fantastic anecdotes in Tassell's entertaining - and at times incredibly poignant - account of all 22 bands that featured on the NME's legendary tape. C86 "the tape" sold over 40,000 copies, spawned C86 "the scene" and arguably gave birth to "indie".

It became a byword for a certain type of be-cardiganed band but the music on the tape really represented two different scenes. The jingle-jangle bands whose 60s sounds owed as much to The Byrds as to the Velvet Underground: Primal Scream, The Mighty Lemon Drops, The Soup Dragons and The Bodines. The harsher, scratchier sounds as represented by Ron Johnson Records: Big Flame, A Witness, The Scrubs and the aforementioned Stump. Between these two stools were The Wedding Present, Half Man Half Biscuit, The Pastels and McCarthy. Reflecting on the tape's legacy, for many the only regret is that they didn't chose a stronger track for the compilation.



Unsurprisingly John Peel looms large: "Without John Peel, you'd have nothing," remembers Mighty Mighty's singer Russell Burton, "except a thousand unsold singles under your bed." Peter Ellen from the Mackenzies says that, "No one had two brass farthings to rub together and it was doing Peel sessions that gave bands money to pay studio fees to record records."

It's the story of fanzines, flexi discs and indie labels. Creation's Alan McGee went to see Bogshed play. "I'm not sure if I've just seen the best band in the world or the worst," he said offering to sign them. Most bands would have jumped at the offer but not Bogshed, "they turned him down because they didn't like the other bands on his roster."

Some of the bands are still going strong (Primal Scream, Half Man Half Biscuit and The Wedding Present) and for others C86 was a career high before going on to careers as shopkeepers, teachers, actors, driving instructors, novelists, scientists and cartoonists. Sadly, not all 95 musicians who played on the tape are still alive: Stump's Mick Lynch, Shop Assistants' Alex Taylor and others passed before their time. Tassell takes the reader on an exhilarating journey but he does so with humour, affection and great empathy. Press play: "Here she comes again, with vodka in her veins."