The Fascist Groove Thing
A History of Thatcher’s Britain in 21 Mixtapes

Hugh Hodges
Preface: Dick Lucas • Foreword: Boff Whalley

The Fascist Groove Thing had many names: Thatcherism, monetarism, neoliberalism, individualism, militarism, nationalism, racism, and anti-unionism for a start. Popular music in Britain responded to this monster either by pretending it didn’t exist or by throwing every weapon it could muster at it. This book collects five hundred interesting songs that addressed one alarming feature of Thatcher’s Britain or another: the notional mixtape “Whistling in the Dark,” for example, consists of songs about Thatcher’s war on the trade unions; “Shopkeepers Arise!” comprises songs about consumerism and the rise of so-called popular capitalism. The chapters that follow each mixtape reconstruct the arguments these songs were having with Thatcher’s version of Britain (and, sometimes, with each other). The arguments are often polemical, frequently vitriolic, always riotous; they are an alternative account of the decade. This account mattered at the time because popular music said things that other media were unwilling or unable to say: when Thatcher dragged the country into a completely unnecessary war in the South Atlantic, for example, the TV news and the national newspapers dutifully cheered or kept quiet, so popular music provided a crucial national forum for critical dissent. These songs still matter today because they are a documentary record of that dissent. The Fascist Groove Thing’s been running the show for forty years now, and we’re forgetting that it wasn’t inevitable that it should turn out this way.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Hugh Hodges has written extensively on African and West Indian music, poetry, and fiction, including essays on Fela Kuti, Lord Kitchener, and Bob Marley. Linton Kwesi Johnson praised his book Soon Come as “extremely engaging and an important, original scholarly work.” He currently teaches at Trent University, Ontario, where his research focuses on cultural resistance in its many forms, and his band the Red Finks remains hopelessly obscure.

Dick Lucas is a writer and visual artist, and the vocalist for three iconic punk bands: Subhumans, Citizen Fish, and Culture Shock. He is also the founder of independent punk label Bluurg Records.

Boff Whalley is a writer and musician, and a founding member of Chumbawamba. He is also an avid fell runner, the subject of his book Run Wild. His most recent musical project is Commoners Choir, a “strange yet open and inclusive choir that meets in Leeds.” The choir’s most recent release is United Kingdom, which Folk Radio praises as “an exhilarating display of rousing natural togetherness, of pride and of passion.

ACCOLADES

“It’s not often that reading history books works best with a soundtrack playing simultaneously, but Hugh Hodges has succeeded in evoking both the noises and the feel of a tumultuous 1980s. Proving that pop music is the historian’s friend, he has here recovered those who help us best make sense of a scary, precarious, and exciting world.”

“Very interesting and timely indeed.”
—Anne Clark, spoken word poet, The Smallest Act of Kindness