

# TOO MUCH TOO YOUNG

A novel by Steve Piper - foreword by Neville Staple

Steve Piper's novel is a bumpy ride on the ska train. All aboard and hold tight! Beginning in 1979, it latches on to the explosion of the 2 Tone movement; Jerry Dammers its engine driver. Britain's youth jumped on as it steamed through the cities; Coventry, Birmingham, London, Manchester... leaving no town or city untouched. Youth - best dressed in a style that lent hefty nods to Jamaican rude boys and original '69 skinheads with trimmings of early mod styling and post-punk energy. Decked out in Fred Perry polo shirts, sta-prest trousers, tasselled loafers and Dr. Marten boots, Harrington jackets, second hand suit jackets; three button of course (even better if they were tonik and all festooned with button badges of allegiance they gathered). The rudeboys; in the streets, on estates, in shopping centres, in parks, at bus stops, at gigs, smoking fags, snogging girls and quaffing from the occasional illicit bottle of cider.

This was the time when having cropped hair could get you suspended from school, at least, until it grew back.

Their soundtrack was a hybrid; quite naturally, a mix of heavyweight ska and reggae from Jamaica, the funk of '60s soul and the political anger of punk rock. What other sound could groups such as The Special AKA, The Selecter, The Beat, Madness, Bad Manners, The Bodysnatchers and Dexys Midnight Runners produce? Boasting ranks full of black, white, some older, some younger, male and female musicians, they all produced frenetic, hard edged, high octane dancefloor dynamite with a heavy bass heartbeat. 2 Tone caught the imagination of those who had been much too young to have enjoyed the punk boom that had gone before.

Set in parallel, alongside Margaret Thatcher's first term at the head of Britain's Conservative government, you are invited to see, hear, smell, touch those times; to ride along with those two young men as they negotiate high unemployment, a Royal wedding, strangled public services, leaving school, the aspirations of the new 'middle class', bank holiday day trips, the rise of the National Front, relationships and friendships and the very real threat of street violence.

Enjoy a unique journey into the heart of one of Britain's enduring movements; one that championed unity among its youth and left a legacy that continues to earn the respect of musicians and artists today.

Enjoy yourself; it's later than you think...

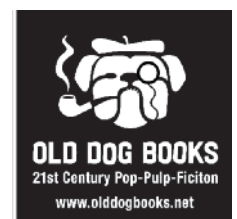
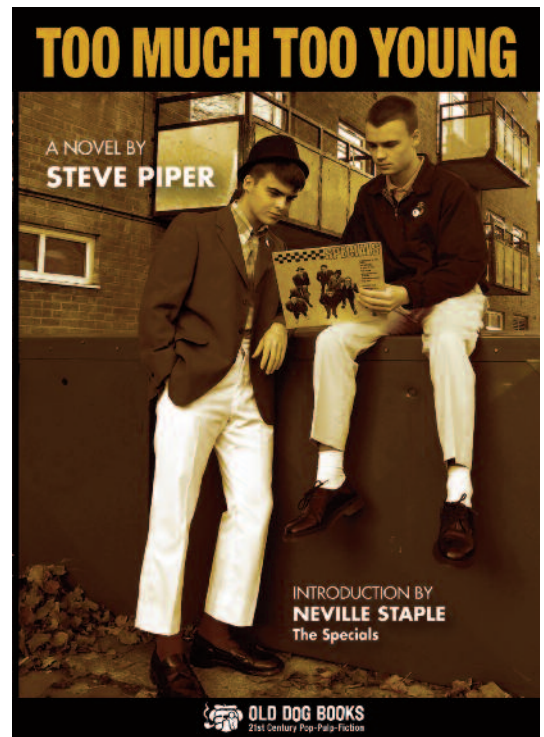
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## KEY SELLING POINTS:

- Foreword by Specials member and original rudeboy, Neville Staple
- An insight in to one of Britain's most enduring youth cultures and movements; 2 Tone and the rudeboys.
- Highlights the growth of right wing politics – The National Front and the lure it presented to some of Britain's disenfranchised, bitter youth.
- Encourages sociological discussion around class, race, political ideals, change in city landscapes, employment, among others.
- Billy Elliott in 2 Tone Tonik trousers



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## Steve Piper Biography

Steve Piper was born in Epping, 1969. By the time of his third birthday, his dad had left leaving Steve, his mother, Dot, and sister to get on with it.

His first musical memories are of his nan and grandad singing 'A Scottish Soldier' and 'Amazing Grace' around their home and his mum's meagre record collection; a Dr Hook 7" and Prince Buster's 'Al Capone' that he played to death, before he heard the early Nutty sound made by the boys from Camden Town, Madness, at 10 years old. This moment triggered a direction which led Steve into the fashions of Rudeboy, Modernist and Skinhead. Associations that included musical allegiances such as 2 Tone, original rhythm & blues, early soul, reggae, ska, punk and rock.

Always seeking adventure, stimulation and friendship throughout his childhood, Steve was a 'joiner' - always drawn to others company and gatherings; the more interesting, challenging and 'at odds' the company, the better. His wife insists that if Steve was a teenager in the present, he would be diagnosed with attention deficit and hyper activity disorder!

Dot met Al, they got married and the 'real estate' education began when the family moved on to a large council development in East London where Steve subliminally absorbed the sounds and influence of a multi-cultural and, sometimes, troubled community. Trouble was never far away and Steve and his cohorts were an incident, a minute or an action away from serious police involvement many times. Steve was lucky.

Steve is married with two grown up children. One is in a successful punk band the other, a budding journalist and activist.

He now lives in Chelmsford, Essex, where he works as a youth offending officer (I kid you not!). He spends his time lusting after old Ford classics, feeding his curiosity for rhythm & blues and the sounds of Jamaica, reading and writing. He is a boxing coach at a local club and can surf. He loves good shoes and writes for therapy.

His favourite book of all-time is Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol', which he and his daughter read together, every year, ensuring that they finish on Christmas Eve.



## Foreword for Too Much Too Young

When I hear stories about the 2Tone era, I get a sense of pride that I would never of thought about back then. We were there in the thick of things, beating the crap out of skinheads on a Wednesday night, then singing and partying with them on the weekend. We were infighting with ourselves in the band, behind the scenes, then coming together for the masses, with our mash up blend of ska, punk and reggae music. I used to hate it when old people said about the 50's or 60's, 'those were the days' but to rhaatid, those really were the days..! The 70's and 80's were the days of the youth. The days of the real hardcore subculture.

Occasionally, I do some talks for colleges and universities and I couldn't count how many times the students have asked me about my social awareness in the late 70's and early 80's. They especially single out 'Ghost Town' lyrics, as it was so apt, for a time where the UK was depressed and broke, unemployment was at record levels, Thatcher became the Anti-Christ, yet we were subjected to the biggest, lavish pomp of a royal wedding ever known to that generation of kids! It seems that, that was a period of time that was so significant. Politics were crap and harmful, riots were a regularity, caused predominantly by the ridiculous miss-use of some bomba claat vagrant law from ancient history, called 'SUS Law'. So apart from black youths like my friends, getting regular racist kickings and bullying, by Babylon's Jancro' [vulture police]; my white working class friends took a lot of shit too. So kids were listening more than kids have probably ever listened. Our music was fun, harsh, in your face - but tidy and so very relevant, with a real message in each song. Most of the songs were about me. They were about you. They were about your mates or your sister. I was a dad at 15. I did too much too young! I was a troublesome rudeboy, who got 'lock up' in borstal, who needed 'A Message..' We all did. We all had a 'stereotype uncle' or knew a 'Pearl' in the local cafe. But let me tell you, I blood claat loved it! Fighting, performing, spreading messages, getting in trouble. It was all about living. It was all about living through the crap of a dodgy Government system. We wasn't ready to back down. We was ready to fight. We united. The Specials - we gave you black and white, we gave you politics, social injustices. We gave you style. And a subculture of music that the kids today would never understand, or are only just tuning into. Mod, punk, reggae and ska all blended together like a fish and chips, with salt and vinegar!

The youth now have similar issues around them but they don't seem to notice like we did. We didn't twerk, we didn't gyrate or get our tits out. We were at a time for dressing up, looking hard, looking sharp, wearing better clothes than our parents. We danced and skanked and showed off our vinyl records. We'd spend our last pound towards shiny new loafers or sta-press trousers, rather than worry about having no job, or not knowing if mum could afford tomorrow's dinner. But most of all, we fought back against the system. With a punk attitude, with a skinhead toughness, with a mod suaveness, with a reggae togetherness. We were rudeboys and rudegirls; and we took no shit. I tell you man, those were the raas claat days.

**Neville Staple November 2015**

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