



Down In The Sewer (part two)

In this issue...

Ronnie's recollections..... 3

Back to Bassicks..... 5

N.I. More Heroes..... 7

Dead Choked..... 12

Soap box..... 15

Spice man..... 25

Getting it on..... 28

Waiting for the Meninblack in '77..... 38

The Finchley Boys..... 40

London Landmarks..... 47

Force nine gale..... 52



The **Burning Up Times**
Issue three part 2
September 2008

Down In The Sewer

Editorial
 Welcome to your second half of Issue Three!



Burning Up Times is published when it's ready. It is available free of charge from the website and you are free to distribute it to whoever you want. Issue three, Down In The Sewer part 2, September 2008. © Planet Earth
Editor: Gary Kent **Production Editor:** Dominic Pilgrim **Webmaster:** Ian Keiller
Special thanks to: Arturo Bassick, Jet Black, Mickey Bradley, Barry Cain, Garry Coward-Williams, Alan Edwards, Chris Gabrin, Ronnie Gurr, Martin Rushent, Sil Willcox and to Rats and Heroes combined. **Contributors:** Adrian Andrews, Paul Begg, David Boyd, Bry, Owen Carne, Claireinblack, Paul Cooklin, Joe Donnelly, Paul Gunter, Scott H, Glyn Havard, Alan Hillier, Steve Howard, Gary Kent, Simon Kent, Doug Kerr, Donald MacKay, Mark McKay, Davy McLaughlin, Graeme Mullan, Paul Munden, Ian Murdock, Adam Neil, Sean O'Neill, Paulinblack, Alan. Phillpot, Adam Pigeon, Spizz, Barry Spooner, Paul Wilkinson, Brian Young. Please accept our apologies to anyone we have inadvertently left out.

Ronnie's recollections

Writer Ronnie Gurr cut his teeth at NME and Record Mirror back in 1977. His love affair with music began when he arrived in London that April and found himself outside a Stranglers gig. JJ Burnel befriended him, but two years later, he found himself on his wrong side of the bass player... Donald MacKay got to grips with Ronnie's Stranglers recollections.



It was some strange quirk that the Edinburgh pub I'd arranged to meet Ronnie Gurr was now empty and boarded-up. "He's bound to think this is a set-up...." I call him and we quickly rearrange another venue.

Ronnie is dressed smart-casual and younger than I imagine. Nowadays he's also a music industry consultant. In his younger days, he published a fanzine called *Hanging Around* after first hearing Grip and reading a Stranglers gig review. A trip to London leads to opportunity:

"I was planning to hitch around Europe. I got on a bus to London – never been there before – it was Sunday. I went

to the Roundhouse. I just walked. I knew The Stranglers were playing, and I'd already booked a hostel somewhere in Tottenham Weir or somewhere... north London. This was before Rattus. It was about two o'clock – gig time was at five – so I sat on the steps, knackered from travelling. Suddenly The Stranglers came out so I asked for an autograph. JJ said: 'I'll not sign an autograph – but I'll buy you a cup of tea.' He took me across to the kebab shop over the road and bought me a cup of tea. We just got chatting."

"If you want to leave your rucksack in the dressing room,' he said, 'just come in.' So I did.

"The Roundhouse was an amazing experience – the most memorable gig. First on were The Jam – then Cherry Vanilla backed by The Police – and headlining were The Stranglers. The whole thing was just fantastic. They knew the tricks of musical dynamics, which a lot of punk bands stumbled on. They were a switch – they knew how to build tempo, excitement, change key – and blooter you with a rhythm section. Most punk bands had yet to discover that. I wasn't a journalist then. Maybe London journalists sneered at that?

"You can crash at our flat," JJ said after the gig.

"It was Wilko Johnson's flat in West End Lane. Billy Idol lived there. Over

and over we played a Rattus pre-release white label [NB. *One just sold on Ebay – with the word JONZ written on the back. Final price, £46 – Ed.*] and I'm thinking – my first time in London and here I am playing Rattus and spending the night with gorgeous young punk girls dressed in school uniforms!

"That night was a revelation. I'd gone to London in my denim flares ...

"I left for Holland and Germany after that and lived on bread, cheese and milk for two weeks. The Stranglers were due to play in Amsterdam, so I turned up one afternoon. Alan Edwards was there. He'd just flown in, and was staying at the best hotel in Amsterdam. His woman was Sheila Prophet, and they were about to have dinner with the band, with the record company paying. Sheila was Record Mirror's Reviews Editor. I said to her: 'I could be the man to save your paper!' I mentioned I wrote for a fanzine, which I hadn't yet.

"The gig was fantastic. But Amsterdam's bikers' bars were not – horrible and scary – Altamont proves having bikers as security is dangerous. But I discovered journalists get flown about, put up in the best hotels, and ate in the best restaurants. 'I'll have some of that!' I thought."

RONNIE RETURNED TO his Edinburgh home to work in a supermarket. There

he set-up his fanzine with two fellow shelf-stackers, after receiving a letter that June from Sheila Prophet asking him to do some live reviews. Freelancing for NME, he returned to London and stayed with Tony Parsons and Julie Burchill at their Crouch End flat – and never went to university. Ronnie recalls his Stranglers memories:

"There was no hint from the first single what this band could do – but Rattus really was extraordinary – it still is. There aren't many punk albums of that period you could put on continuously that would stand up. The press wrote they're Doorsy – and they weren't punk – and could play a bit. It stood continued listening. They came at the right time, and they were a punk band – listen to JJ's vocals. He may have improved later on, but back then you had to take them with a pinch of salt.

"They were also the first band to do two sell-out nights at The Nashville: they obviously had a good agent. Infrastructure was in place, and probably better balanced than Bernie Rhodes or Malcolm McLaren.

"I remember when The Stranglers played at Glasgow Apollo in October – they were lucky to get out alive. The bouncers just turned on them. Hugh had scraped the star sign off the dressing room door – and they took exception to that and there was an atmosphere. They had a room where they would take you for 'a doing' before they threw you out the back door. It became clear people were getting a kicking – things were being said from the stage. These bouncers were waiting for the band afterwards – but the band gave them the slip.

"So have The Stranglers been written out of punk history? If so – it's outrageous. But they had this bad relationship with some journalists – is that why? The

Stranglers played the bad boy card – and were labelled sexist by NME. So they became sexist – lived out the expectations. Taking smack probably wasn't a very punk thing to do, although in retrospect, we all know there was a lot of heroin floating around.

“It's the musicality; when you think of punk, your first thought isn't musicality. If they were writing about them being sexist, or writing about them being bad boys, or writing about them kidnapping they weren't writing about their musicality, which suited them at that point in time, I would guess. This is just a hypothesis. I wouldn't have thought that hypothesis, however, would have been lost on someone as smart as Alan Edwards in PR terms.

“If they were just written about as a punk rock band that played Doors covers they weren't getting any press. Frankly, they would have been in the same bag as Kilburn and the High Roads – and Dury had to reinvent himself. I guess they needed that other spin on what they did, because plainly they were the most musical of those bands and the most accomplished. But actually – sitting here and saying that now – that would have won you no friends and influence at the time! You can't hide that, 'cos that was self-evident but if that's what you made your touchstone... There's no question in my mind that they were, at that point in time, quintessentially a punk band.

RONNIE SAYS HE lost interest after the Battersea gig in 1978, despite the strippers. Writing about new up-and-coming bands for a well-known weekly music paper must have been a diversion, of sorts. He does, however, believe that if The Stranglers had split up and later

reformed, they would probably have come back at a much higher level. What? Like The Sex Pistols..?

“There's a thing – I have no desire to see the Pistols play. Saw them at Shepherd's Bush Empire last time and it was fucking rubbish. You may as well listen to the record – stick it on iTunes and change the running order. And Lydon is the very archetype of everything he once hated. If somebody asked me to write something about punk – it would be The Stranglers.

“I'm sure London based writers wouldn't. The Clash have kind of superseded them – maybe that's because they split up. And the Buzzcocks are a quintessential B-grade punk band. They also split but reformed, so there's never been a continuum, maybe that's something to do with it?

“If The Stranglers weren't a punk band- then The Jam weren't a punk band. And The Jam *were* a punk band at that time. And The Clash? The first album was, the second was Blue Oyster Cult and by Sandinista you didn't know what they were. That was a great thing – I still love the diversions. If being a punk band means slavishly being The New York Dolls – then they certainly weren't that.

“To me, punk is a period in time – a movement – a fashion. The Stranglers were at the heart of it – and that's my perspective – and they also opened a lot of doors. Even in Scotland – they were one of the first to go there. Their management took on The Skids – they had them as support band -- and JJ was going to produce their first album.”

Ronnie had little contact with the other Stranglers:

“Hugh I remember – I went round to his flat in Knightsbridge once. I knew him, but only vaguely, but I didn't particularly know Jet or Dave. I met the Finchley Boys but I can't remember their names – but there was one who looked a bit like JJ – one of the main ones. Almost Puerto Rican-looking – always wore a Harrington. He was pleasant enough. I don't know how many there ever were at any one time.”

And then Ronnie's relationship with his bassist pal suddenly took a downward slide. Two years on from meeting JJ at the Roundhouse for the first time, Ronnie's Record Mirror review of JJ's Euroman Cometh was published. He wasn't impressed with the LP – and JJ wasn't happy either:

“I thought Euroman was a lot of shite! I think I said it was indulgent – the kind of tosh only an established rock star would get away with. That was what he took exception to. I think I had a conversation and I said I wasn't going to write a glowing review just because it's a band I like – I'm a fucking critic! I've never felt the need to re-investigate this, frankly, because generally your first instincts are your right instincts.

“JJ said he'd do a feature, so I said – fair enough – I'll do a feature. Alan Edwards arranged for me to interview JJ in the pub near United Artists in Mortimer Street – I don't know its name. I went up and got chucked on the bus – and got taken to Hemel Hempstead, with some right fucking psychos. One of them had a cut tattooed across his neck. When I tried to get off I got thrown with such force against the window that the whole window came out. I knew then it was not worth struggling. JJ was on the bus.

“When we arrived I got taken round by these two morons. It was intimidating – don't engage in conversation – I hadn't yet read Hostage Techniques. They walked me round a field before being taken to the venue, a civic hall, one of those big 60s glass things.

“Then I was left backstage in a room without a window. With me was the moron with the cut tattoo. I'm sure he's a nice grandfather now but his employment prospects must have been hampered by having that tattoo.

“They were going to strip me bollock naked and tie me to a chair. Graciously – sort of – they gave me a can of beer before I was led out onto the stage. The support band Blood Donor were playing – so I turned round and threw the can at the moron's face and just legged it. The crowd, such as it was for the support band, parted and luckily I landed on my feet and just kept running.

“So I went down two flights of stairs and luckily, as I'd been escorted round Hemel Hempstead, I'd noticed where the police station was – round the corner from the hall. I ran – with a pursuit team behind – and made it to the police station. They took me back into the hall to get my belongings but they wouldn't charge anyone for abducting me. But they did say that if I was found in the Thames floating – at least we'll know who to go after.

“Record Mirror didn't stop writing about the band – but I know Alan Edwards got a letter from the editor saying that he wouldn't touch any of his other bands if that was how he was going to behave and set up journalists. And, of course, he denied he set it up, as he would do, saying, ‘It was all the turn's fault!’ All the time when his PR business hung on it, he didn't admit it!

Lurkers' bassist Arturo Bassick was inspired by JJ Burnel. He was also in the Grip video. **Alan Hillier** tracks him down for a chat.

Back to Bassicks



Tell us about when you first saw The Stranglers?

I'd been living in Carmarthen for a few months during 1976 and listening to John Peel playing the very few punk records that were out then. My mates in London told me they were

going to punk gigs and were getting into The Stranglers. When I came back to Wandsworth, I saw them at the Nashville. Chelsea were supporting with Billy Idol on guitar, and they split up after this gig. Must have been October-November 1976. I loved The Stranglers right away, I suppose because their sound was more accessible to someone like me who had been going to gigs since 1969. They had an edge. Me, Dave Treganna, (future Sham 69'er), Anne Poole, Steve Lees, and Sam Hall went to all their gigs round London – 36 times in 4 months – The Stranglers were MY band back then.

What are your memories of these early gigs?

The Finchley boys weren't there at early gigs, like at the Red Deer at Croydon. Sometimes there was only me and a

handful of people, but it soon took off when the album came out. It got big very quick. If you look at the video for Grip you will see me dancing in an old raincoat – I'm the one who goes right up to the camera – at the Hope & Anchor. It was an invited audience only. I had 10 pints over the road before the filming, but it was the free punch Jet Black concocted that really done me in! I was so pissed most of the time that I can't remember much. The maddest one was at the 100 Club – Dagenham Dave was there. He died soon after.

You recall the Finchley Boys?

I met Dennis, Pete Enter and Lester – the guy who shagged my sister who later went out with Toyah Wilcox. But because you [the Finchley Boys] were a real handy mob, we gave you a wide birth. Sometimes there were about 20 of you and you all wore American Forces uniform, Vietnam-style, and big American military vehicles. You'd all take acid and drive. Once they went to the cinema to see 'Apocalypse Now' dressed in the gear marching in like you were a real troop. Pete Enter used to drive Pinpoint in 1979 [Arturo's band after The Lurkers]. Last time I saw him was on the front of the daily papers being nicked for being involved in the David Martin affair [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/january/14/newsid_2530000/2530649.stm] – Lester was too I think – who worked for Hazel

O'Connor.* You too, and your brother Steve before he started swimming and lost a shedload of Sharon Tate!

What Stranglers track sums them up?

Down In The Sewer. They were great songwriters, they had a great feel too. JJ with that old green Precision bass and the amazing trebly sound that inspired loads of us budding bassists. He was THE punk bass player of the era along with Dee Dee Ramone.

What about these other bands – The Clash, et al.? Were you into them too?

As with most musical movements many bands spout one thing and mean another so for me The Clash were fakes – fakes who wrote good music but all that rebel chic, Red Brigade nonsense was as about as dangerous as the Monkees, who were also put together by business men. But at least they didn't make out they were an embryonic band rooting for the people, and interested in politics and change. At least the Pistols, who were also manufactured in many ways, said they were only in it for booze, birds and money. I always thought The Clash were humourless and po-faced compared to the Pistols. My fave groups of the early scene were The Ramones, The Damned, Johnny Moped, Wayne County, Wire, The Buzzcocks, The Prefects, but the worst were the Hammersmith Gorillas.

Do you remember any street gossip surrounding the JJ versus Simonon bass fracas outside Dingwall's? Was it a big deal, or not?

I wasn't aware of this much at the time – probably another publicity stunt dreamt



The Lurkers outside the Red Cow in 1977

up by their PR people.

What Stranglers records are in your collection?

Grip – which I got from Harlequin Record Shop in Hammersmith Broadway. I played it on the ancient radiogram we had at home which had a really heavy needle and played it non stop till black powder was coming off the vinyl. I wore it out in a week and had to buy another one. Funny enough after seeing them so many times and being really familiar with all the early material, my favourite was Black And White because all the songs were so new.

When did you stop seeing The Stranglers?

After The Rainbow gig with Climax Blues Band when Hugh wore the 'Fuck' T-shirt to get the band thrown off stage. I felt used – I wanted to hear their music that night not pay to see a publicity stunt to get loads of press. Alan Anger, the publicity agent, was laughing his head off that night but I was losing interest. I only saw them a few times after that. I was there at Ally Pally. We supported them when I was in 999 in 1990, but for me, Paul Roberts wasn't right.



How did you get into The Lurkers

I'd never played in a band before punk. I bought a Vox Clubman guitar when I was 16 and my brother showed me a few chords. He once played in a band that supported The Who when they were called the High Numbers around west London. I was going to loads of gigs in the early '70s – John Mayall at the Albert Hall was my first. Then at the Hobbits Garden in Wimbledon and the Fulham Greyhound. Also, Caravan, Audience, Chicken Shack, Rare Bird, Amazing Blondel – Genesis with Roxy Music supporting in 1971 – hundreds of others. Johnny Winter was my teenage guitar hero. When punk came along, it

didn't matter too much if you weren't a great player so I got asked to join The Lurkers by their manager Mike Stone of the Beggars Banquet record shop in North End Road in Fulham. I'd seen them 3 weeks before at the Roxy supporting The Jam – and I thought they were bad. Mike said they just need a new bass player. So they auditioned me – kicked Nigel Moore out because he looked like something out of the Eagles – and also because he thought punk was a joke. I played my first gig at the Hope & Anchor a few weeks later. I knew the Albion agency and so The Lurkers ended up getting quite a few gigs supporting The Stranglers.

Why did you leave in November 1977?

I wanted to go back to the guitar and started writing songs that were 'off the wall' for them. So after making the first 2 singles – Shadow and Freak Show – I left to form Pinpoint, who also worked with the Stranglers and 999 because of Albion.

With punk spilling into the mainstream, how did you see your future?

I didn't analyse things too much back then. I was just glad to leave my job, get pissed, get laid by posh birds and have a laugh avoiding responsibility as much as possible, bit like now really. I didn't know where the scene was going and didn't really care either, I was never ambitious – I didn't take it too seriously – I just wanted fun. Obviously if money had come along I wouldn't have turned it down but I was lazy but I didn't get the breaks other people did.

Are you still in touch with the rest of the band?

Esso [drums] is my best mate still. He's a writer with his first book due out called 'Gods Lonely Men'. He's also had plays at the Edinburgh Festival and some fringe stuff in London to great revues. He now goes under his real name, Pete Haynes. Nigel [bass] is doing a part time job and playing in a local covers band round the Ruislip area of London. Pete [guitar] doesn't play anymore. He looks after his mum and dad as a career after leaving the band in 1992. Howard [vocals] has not been seen or been in contact for 25 years, We don't know where he is. Plug [roadie] has worked for Beggars Banquet for 27 years and lives near their Wandsworth office.

What's the Pinpoint story – and would

you have done anything different?

I thought we were trying to be different. We were a bit left field. The worst thing we did was getting hooked up with Albion. We signed publishing, management and recording deals with them. Being naïve, I didn't realise you should keep these 3 things in separate camps back then. We didn't make a single until we'd been with them for a year, and they didn't try to break us whatsoever. They threw money at us in other areas, but it was only a few years later when I confronted them that they admitted we were signed as a tax loss for the money they'd made from The Stranglers. Music wise, I think we should have made our album right away with Vic Maile who done a great job on our 1st single 'Richmond'. Instead, we did it with Martin Rushent, who I hated. He'd just invested all this new micro composing technology and used us as his guinea pigs, so our album the same sounds like Human League's 'Dare'. I saw him at the Astoria a few years ago – he was with Hazel O'Connor. He didn't know me at first – it had been 25 years, I was pissed and I've also had a few pies over the years. I started going on about Pinpoint's album and then he twigged and made a rather hasty exit out of the dressing room. I think he – and Albion, ruined the band and we broke up after 4 gigs and one album. Some people love '3rd State'. You see it on Ebay.

What happened to the others?

Dave Allen loved all that shit Rushent used on us and actually became his engineer on Dare, and then The Cure and Neneh Cherry. I believe Hugh Griffiths is still running his own studio in SE London.

Official Lurkers site: www.thelurkers.co.uk

N.I. More Heroes

Graeme Mullan.

NORTHERN IRELAND in the '70s was in the grip of The Troubles. It meant by 1977 the area became a commercial and entertainment wasteland. Belfast was a virtual ghost town, nightlife was all but non-existent – a no-go zone: security gates effectively 'locked up' the City Centre after 6pm, and those in search of entertainment never strayed too far from their local community to avoid the danger and hassle of security checks and bomb scares – or worse, paramilitary violence.

The big bands of the day considered it not only commercial suicide to perform in Belfast, but also a possible life threatening experience, and inevitably avoided playing here. There was also a

separate Promotions Industry working within Northern Ireland; tours set up to cover the mainland had to mete out a deal with an individual promoter in Ulster, and were only a handful of venues that could cater for such acts to play. Add to this the problems involved in getting all their equipment across The Irish Sea, ferrying two or more articulated lorries full of equipment, was a costly affair and made the idea of playing Northern Ireland a very unattractive proposition to most acts. Northern Ireland's youth were deprived of live entertainment and could only read in the music press about what was happening or by what they saw on Top Of The Pops every Thursday night.

The emergence of Punk Rock changed all that. Unlike the mainland there were no record companies, rock svengalis or trendy clothes shops to cater for this emerging scene and all these new punks lived in real deprivation. A life of sectarian hatred and the highest unemployment rate in the U.K. – no prospects, no future – it was the perfect breeding ground for the punk scene to develop here. Not only was this an instantly accessible 'scene', as local bands formed and fanzines started up, but these bands also needed somewhere to play and through the DIY attitude attributed to punk, they sorted it out for themselves – booking hotels or clubs for private parties and hurriedly selling tickets an hour beforehand in the car-park.

One of the most highly regarded of the local bands ignited by Punk was Rudi. I contacted Brian Young, singer/guitarist and founder member, and

arranged to meet up for a coffee in a local cafe. He is still playing and currently fronts a rockabilly/punk outfit called The Sabrejets, but in recent years has also got together with some other 'local punk heroes' for a side project – 'Shame Academy' – playing 'special' one-off gigs, comprising a mix of classic Belfast punk with a few punk 'standards' thrown in for effect.

Brian: "Rudi were Belfast's first punk band and I even attended Stiff Little Fingers' first gig". He saw an advert for the gig and was initially attracted by the name – a Vibrator's song title – but on seeing the band that night he initially felt somewhat let down by the band's appearance, "all shoulder length hair, roll-neck sweaters and flares". However, their playing did impress him, as they ran through a collection of songs from the first Clash and Stranglers' albums. To test their 'punk' credentials Brian shouted out for a New York Dolls' song, Jake



duly responded by launching straight into 'Jet Boy'.

With the burgeoning pub-rock and punk scene across the water, some bands braved the intimidating atmosphere Belfast evoked. Dr. Feelgood and Eddie And The Hot-Rods successfully played the Queens University in early 1977 and it wasn't long before the 'major' punk bands followed. The Clash were due to play at The Ulster Hall on 20th October 1977, as part of the 'Get Out Of Control' UK Tour. Had they done so, they would have been the first punk act playing in Northern Ireland. But it didn't go ahead, as the plug





was pulled hours before the doors opened. The reason? “Insurance problems.” A riot ensued between police, army and the hundreds of young, angry kids looking forward to a piece of the Punk action, the legend still fresh in local punk folk-lore, with Rudi immortalising the event in their song, ‘Cops’, with its police-aimed chant: “SS-RUC”. Mooted to be their debut on the Good Vibrations label, the furor of the night was bad enough for a decision not to release it. The local press didn’t help by

heralding it a ‘punk rock riot’ – compared to the usual sectarian violence witnessed daily on the streets of Ulster – another typical media over-reaction to Punk Rock. But it also helped galvanise the

new music scene, as youths from both sides of the political and religious divide realised they actually did have a common standpoint – Punk.

Two weeks later on 9th November, The Stranglers were due to play the same venue and tickets had sold. Belfast City Council learned from previous experience and cancelled the gig, citing the ubiquitous “insurance problems”. However, as with many other City Councils across the U.K., the fear factor generated by having these ‘nasty’ punk bands playing in their town may have contributed to the decision.

Terri Hooley of Good Vibrations Records, himself a veteran of concert promotion – including a two-day Punk and New Wave Festival, recalls the culling of the gig along with another off his own: “It may not have been solely down to the insurance policy that caused the gig to

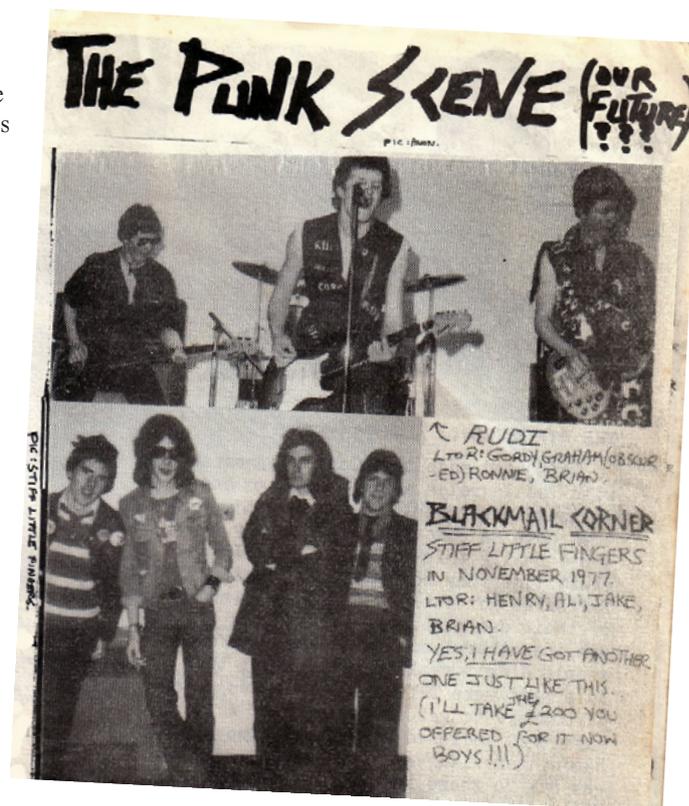
be cancelled. Or perhaps the promoter failed to pass a ‘brown envelope’ across the counter at City Hall.” Terri became aware of the effect of the brown envelope to aid the smooth passage of gigs when he visited the Council with an extracurricular payment. They said: “everything that could be done, would be done.” Suddenly all problems disappeared regarding insurance policies!

The Stranglers went on to play in Coleraine the following night, and so became the first ‘major’ punk act to perform in Northern Ireland. From 1977 through to the present, The Stranglers have returned to play The Province on numerous occasions and so have become the most regular return visitors of all the punk bands.

The New University of Ulster campus was the Coleraine venue, 70 miles from the capital. Few Belfast punks ventured that far for a gig for reasons already stated. Brian who was a fan of the band’s early releases – “Goodbye Toulouse is a killer track” – and an admirer of Hugh’s guitar style, was able to inform me that The Stranglers were officially “banned for life” from the University after the gig, although the actual details were unknown. The NUU ENTS later also banned Rudi, stating they “were worse than The Stranglers” (mighty praise indeed!!). Brian

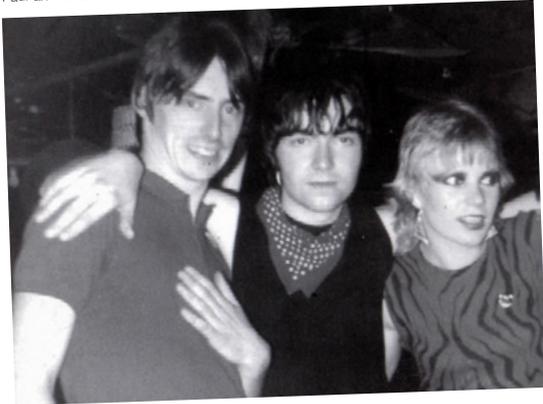
remained coy about this alleged punk rock behaviour, however the tag stuck as Time Out magazine in London often pre-fixed later articles about Rudi with ‘badly behaved punk rock teenagers from N.I.’ This is sternly disputed by Brian. In 1978 Rudi had left Northern Ireland to try and make it in London (eventually signing, much later and after a return to Belfast, with Paul Weller’s Jamming label), ironically missing many of the bands that did actually play here. But, when in the capital, they did try to catch a Stranglers’ gig. Brian, “We tried to see The Shakespearoes at The Red Cow in ‘78. Unfortunately it was a sell-out and we found ourselves left standing outside.

After managing to hear



Terry Hooley

Paul and Brian



the first couple of numbers, we decided a better option was to head to a pub for some beers". Typical Ulstermen!!

By the time Black And White was released, The Stranglers were preparing to play their first Belfast concert and on the 7th September 1978, the Ulster Hall opened it's doors to a sell-out crowd. Although this was part of the Pubs and Clubs Tour, the venue was one of Northern Ireland's premier showpieces – Led Zeppelin had debuted 'Stairway to Heaven' here and it also regularly hosts concerts from the Ulster Orchestra.

To see The Stranglers take this stage was truly amazing – Hugh in his obligatory long mac and leather choker, thrashing away on his Fender Telecaster, playing all the hits we had listened to avidly on our turntables at home. JJ stage left, biker jacket and Converse baseball boots, thumping away on his beloved Precision bass – pogoing and karate kicking his way throughout the set.

Jet and Dave situated behind – a pounding backbeat and keyboard runs perfectly supplementing the two front men. This is the first time I had seen the band live and it only went to cement my ever-growing interest in them. Situated in the balcony, I couldn't believe what I was

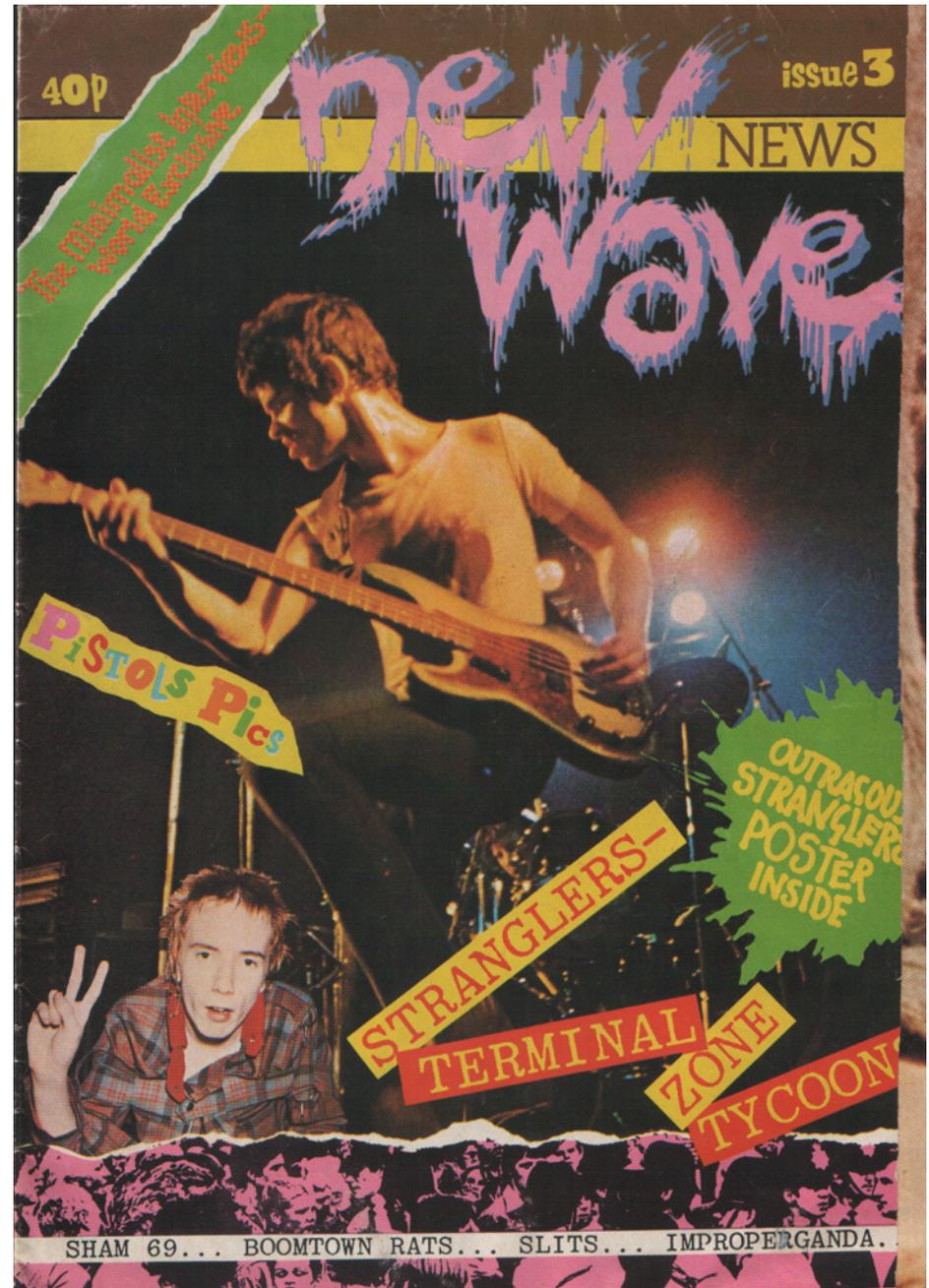
seeing – the crowd were going berserk, a mass of tightly packed, undulating heads – every single person, from the front of the hall to the back, were moving to the rhythm. People were jumping from the balcony, easily a twenty foot drop, down to the floor to join in the excitement and become part of the frenzied horde. By the final encore, about a hundred members of the audience were scaling the stage and had joined the band, as a bare-chested Burnel continued singing the closing number. As the house lights came up and we prepared to depart the hall, I couldn't help noticing the intricate plaster work all around the balcony was studded with holes where we all had punched the sides to the Strangler beat.

The next night the band once again played The North-West – this time playing a smaller venue in Portrush called Chester's (New Arcadia). They were supported by a local band from 'up the road', Derry's own – The Undertones. It has been reported that The Undertones boasted of 'blowing off' the headline act at this gig!! A fact that made its way back to the band, as Mickey Bradley recalled on his Radio Ulster Punk Show (After Midnight with Mickey Bradley – Thursday 0:00-01:00 92-95 FM).

When the newly reformed Undertones played a recent festival along with The Stranglers, a rather irate JJ cornered Mickey and Damian O'Neill about this statement. Well aware that JJ was a black-belt in karate, obviously had a long memory and not wanting to anger the man, Damian with a bit of quick thinking said:

"Oh, ...that was Sharkey" !!

Thanks to Terri Hooley and especially Brian Young, plus Sean and Joe for their excellent scans.



Stranglers

HANGING AROUND WITH THE SCHOOL-MEN



Us: Could you give us a brief history of how the band came together ?

Hugh: It all started with a band that came from Sweden about three years ago. The band came over from Sweden, right, and it was composed of two Americans, a Swede and me. We came to England to like get it together, because in Sweden it's really terrible for gigs. So we came to England and none of them had been there before, and it was really hard and we were like squatting. We were just starving. I had friends in London anyway, because that's where I come from, but they were like staying with my friends. It was difficult. It was a really hard grind, and one by one they got dispirited, you know, and one by one the others came in. First the drummer left and I met Jet. Then the other two guys left and there was just Jet and me. Then we ran into Jean in Guildford and we started writing songs. And then we had another guitarist who was Swedish, but he left after about eight months, and we decided to get keyboards

instead of another guitar. In fact we did a few gigs in London, with the guitarist, as the Stranglers. We did the Windsor Castle and I've met people who saw us there. We even did the Nashville. Our first gig with Dave was at Watchfield, which was the summer before last. July 75. But it was in late 74 that we were first known as the Stranglers.

Us : Are we going to hear any of the old songs again ?

Hugh: Well yeah. Like 'Mean to me' we did a take. We'd like other bands to hear it and see if anyone wants to record it, because it's quite commercial. But it's not really what we want to put out. And we did 'Choosy Suzy'. "Come on little baby let me take you out of your mind." And we did 'Princess of the street' which has come out superbly but we don't play it because it's a slow song. We want to save it as a single for later on in the year.

Us : How true is School-man ?

Hugh: There's quite a lot of truth in that song. Also there's a line in it, 'Use your imagination', because a lot of teachers run riot in their imagination. These sort of things do happen. You read it in the Sunday papers. It happens.

Us : On tour, what kind of reaction are you getting outside London ?

Hugh: We've met people who've never even heard of us before. They've just come because they've bought the single. When they hear those two songs they go berserk.

Us : What happened at Essex University when Jean was hit by a bottle ?

Hugh: At this point who should walk in but Jean, so...

Jean: Some provincial people reckon it's cool to chuck glasses and bottles. I think that's what they feel they've got to do to New Wave bands.



Us : What London dates have you got lined up ?

Hugh: There's one I've just heard about at the Roxy, but I don't know when it is. We're trying to do the Nashville, as well, because the Nashville crowd was a great crowd. We're topping the Roundhouse in April, 17th April. There might be a few other interesting things on the bill as well.

Us : Do we hear a clarinet, or a sax, in 'Grip' ?

Hugh: It's a sax played by a Welsh miner. It's an alto sax.

Us : 'Grip' has sold 30,000 copies so far. Does this mean we'll see you on Supersonic or Top of the Pops ?

Hugh: I don't think on Supersonic, but if the single climbs up into the 30's then they might use a film that we've made. We made this promo film of 'Grip' which we did at the Hope and Anchor, which is great. It's really seedy. It switches over to this fisheye lens half way through and it looks very weird. We all look like daleks or monsters with huge guitars.

Us : The LP then..You've got about seventeen tracks laid down. What's going to be weeded out ?

Hugh: Well some of the one's we did-we think we can do better versions, so they're gonna wait and generally speaking, it's the newer songs that are like that. Because things you've been playing a long time it gets into a pattern and you know the arrangement is all there. Some of the new songs however, we're still changing and adapting them. So we've left those, like 'Straighten out' and 'Something better change'. The older ones, like 'Sewer' will definately be on it, and 'Goodbye Toulouse' will definately be on it.

Us : Is the LP still going to be called 'Dead on Arrival' ?

Hugh: No, there's a lot of debate about the title.

Us : And any idea when it's going to come out ? It's been brought forward hasn't it ?

Hugh: Yeah, to April, beginning of April.

Us : Who writes what ?

Hugh: Well, we all contribute. We've all experienced a lot of time together.

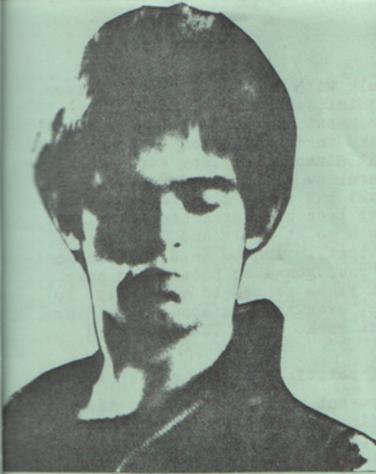
Us : Whoever sings a song seems to put a lot of personality into it and it seems as though they must have written the lyrics. For instance, Dave singing 'Peasant in a big shitty'...

Jean appears again...

Jean: In fact that's a typical example. I wrote all the lyrics on that. We shared so many experiences living together for eighteen months.

Hugh: Lyrics to songs, we all know what they mean.

Jean: You'll notice none of the songs are personal. They're not about, "I love you". They're about things we discuss. So many bands, when you see the copyright thing, it's got one name. I can't relate to that at all. A band's a band. As soon as the drummer puts his little feel to it, it becomes more of an entity. A band has a corporate identity. I don't reckon the glory should go to one individual.



Hugh leaves. Jean gets the good question...

Us : What do the Stranglers aim at, and in what direction will they develop ?

Jean: None of our songs are personal and they're just about everyday things, very mundane things. They're all viewed from a group point of view. We were all into swapping books around. I read Nostradamus and saw a thing about Toulouse. And I started reading up about Toulouse, because, being French, I..

Us : When did you come over to this country ?

Jean: No, I was born in Notting Hill.

Us : Just French parentage ?

Jean: Yeah. They live back in France now. Mum was a waitress, Dad was a cook.

Us : Back to the question, what direction are you going for ?

Jean: Well I'd hate to think we were just going purely into a showbiz thing, and just like titillating people, just to amuse people, just entertain them, because I've always considered Rock to be a bit more aware than that. I know from our point of view we've evolved in thinking that we've tried to steer away from any hype or anything that smells of hype. Brian James of the Damned, he's a good mate of mine, he said that when he started London SS, about two years, eighteen months ago, he was approached by a bloke called Bernie. Bernie said, "You gotta take on a political stance, boys," and Brian wasn't in to it. At least the Damned are an unpretentious pop band. They don't attempt to reflect or log what's happening. We try to log the times and reflect what's happening to us. But the Damned are worried about chicks in just their different way, in a New Wave way...We've been asked to do a few gigs with a few bands who are affiliated to the Communist Party, like Henry Cow, and we've turned it down. Because as far as I'm concerned the Communist Party in Western Europe is as conservative as the Tories. The only decent thing the Communist Party have done in the last five years, it has disassociated itself from the Supreme Soviet. That was the end of last year. The Italian, British and French Communist Parties disassociated themselves from Moscow, which is cool. Because as far as I'm concerned, if that's the spirit of Marx then they can keep it. I mean, the history of Russian imperialism, in the last fifteen years, has certainly been against the spirit of Karl Marx. I did a degree in economics so I know a few things about economic systems. I know what I'm into. I know what Hugh's into. And we're certainly not into Communism like that. Also people say that we're not committed, you know, commit yourself to a party, an allegiance. But why should we... I mean, there's nothing around. I hope we're helping to create an atmosphere which is conducive to..I mean I'd like to be part of a new party. But there's nothing which grabs my attention.

Us : So you don't vote ?

Jean: I have voted on voting day, yeah, and different ways each time. There's nothing which I can commit myself to. If you feel committed about something, bully for you, you must feel smugger than I do. I'd like to know these bands' real commitment. What is it ?



Jean: I had a very brief talk with Mick Jones of the Clash. I saw him rolling a joint, and I said, "Hey, I thought you guys were meant to be against all this. You've been represented in the Press as saying this." At least it says about Stranglers, 'They even smoke dope', I read somewhere. We do. Never before gigs, by the way. Always to just put us to sleep after gigs. But I said, "So you've been misrepresented." So he said, "Are you having a go at me ?" And I said, "No mate, but if you read that.." And he said, "It doesn't matter." I said, "If your gonna be honest and have credibility surely it makes sense, to me anyway, to have credibility and honesty the whole way up, even if it's about something poxy like smoking joints. I know all the bands smoke dope. The only band which doesn't smoke dope is the Vibrators.

Us : Will you develop the social comment and political side, in your songs ?

Jean: We're in a Rock and Roll group and we're not politicians. But, there's also nothing wrong with being unapathetic. I reckon the slogan, 'Apathy in the U.K.' is much more appropriate. But what do I do. Do I leave the Rock and Roll group to stand for Parliament, for an unknown party? Or do I just think about it and reflect it in a song, and log it, and help create an atmosphere conducive to other people being aware of it? How far do you take it ? I mean, if they were going to be honest and they were really spouting on about political things, then I'd like them to call my bluff and get involved in it the whole way, instead of Rocking and Rolling.

Us : Could you comment on the whole New Wave ?

Jean: It's interesting that you see a lot of guys like Mark P. looking really bored. I thought he was meant to be excited about the whole new scene.... There's been so much hype, with the New Wave, so much dishonesty, that the whole thing could just fold over, if people don't relax the hype. It will evolve on its own anyway. It's strong enough.

GET A GRIP ON YOURSELF (The Stranglers)

Didn't have the money round to buy a 'Morry Thou'
 Been around and seen a lot to shake me anyhow
 Begged and borrowed sometimes, I admit I even stole
 The worst crime that I ever did was playin' Rock and Roll

But the money's no good. Just get a grip on yourself
 But the money's no good. Just get a grip on yourself

Suffering convictions on a two-way stretch inside
 The air in here is pretty thin. I think I'll go outside
 Committed for insanity and crimes against the soul
 The worst crime that I ever did was play some Rock and Roll

But the money's no good. Just get a grip on yourself
 But the money's no good. Just get a grip on yourself.
 And you should know

Now I find from week to week the sentence sticking fast
 Turn the corner, rub my eyes and hope the world will last
 Stranger from another planet, welcome to our hole
 Just strap on your guitar and we'll play some Rock and Roll

But the money's no good. Just get a grip on yourself.

(C) 1977. April Music Ltd/Albion Music Ltd for the U.K. and Eire. Used by kind permission.



Dead Choked

His mum says he was never the same again: a Stranglers epiphany by **Gary Kent**

THERE ARE A THOUSAND better, hipper, neater cars than a 1963 Pontiac Tempest. Starsky and Hutch's gorgeous Gran Torino, for instance. And there must be a million songs more suitable to soundtrack a drive through London too – Mustang Sally, Roadrunner and anything remotely



Motown or James Brown would have worked. But at the tail-end of 1977, something else twists and shakes, rattles 'n' rolls. Strangles, even.

You're listening to Radio One...

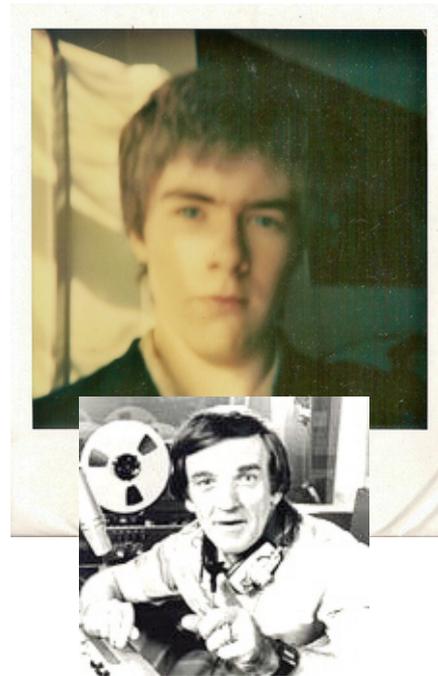
Dissecting the East End through Hackney Road, Dad steers the 16 feet long Yank and joins the wide one-way. It purrs softly doing a serene 14 miles to the gallon at best – 14 gallons to the mile at worst. The only thing green about it is the paintwork.

At Great Eastern Street, the throttle opens up – Dad's pedal to the metal – and unleashes four colossal cylinders of Michigan's finest machinery, zooming off like Thunderbird 2 out of Tracey Island to leave the rest standing in the aftershock.

Mum's done her Saturday overtime and we're about to collect her, International Rescue-style, from her Hatton Garden workplace. Dad wants to be home in time for the wrestling on World Of Sport.

It's a hazy afternoon; a balmy breeze blows in as chrome fins devour white lines beyond the hood. Past fly-blown flats and factories, past Company's House, past the Glue Pot pub, approaching Old Street roundabout. Back to the future, almost.

Excited, I sink into the vinyl seat, piped and striped in beige, brown and white, like a deckchair, but the size of a park bench. The chrome knobs of the radio glisten as Alan 'Fluff' Freeman bleats his transatlantic disc-jockey drawl, playing muzak for the masses.



Crack! Bum-de-dum-de-dum...

We hit Old Street, and there's a sonic collision from the speakers. From West End to East via a skinny chrome spike comes this jagged, eerie, odd, provocative and abrasive tune to make my heart jolt and my breath go cold all at once. The BBC's fluffy ball of fun and easy-going middle-of-the-road rawkanrawl suddenly turns nasty, and, in my naïve mind, I'm drawn into this dangerous psychotic, psychedelic dream. I'm intrigued as the hairs on my nape tingle erect and my heart continues to palpitate like a piston at full pelt.

We stop at a red. What is this? Who are they? How did I know I'd be sucked in with a cymbal ride, grabbed by a pernicious bass, pinned back by a scratchy guitar and lost and locked in space in piss-freezing fear? How did I know I'd be hooked on this unknown classic, this

rapturous noise with the vamping, echoing organ vibing away like the abominable, disfigured Dr. Phibes? Vocals mangling vowels into submissive venom-fodder as the chorus reverberates mantra-like, cult-like, gang-like. Rhythmically clawing and chivvying like Cruella de Ville, scaring the shit like Count Dracula, and luring like the Siren. Sinister, turned to ten.

Golden Lane lights switch to green. Oblivious to my plight, Dad calmly palms the shiny grey wheel past the junctions of Goswell Road and the chicane at St. John Street as I sink two sweaty fist-shaped concaves into the American deckchair.

'...that's a track called Dead Ringer off the forthcoming Stranglers' album No More Heroes. You're listening to Radio One.'

"Productivity? Credibility? Impossibility?" Add indelibility to that. So why can I recall the infinite detail of Dead Ringer's radio debut? Perhaps it's because everyone knows where they were when Kennedy was shot; when the second plane collided with the Twin Towers; when those flashing blue lights throbbed out of the TV and lit up Diana's mauled Mercedes; when the basso-voiced RAI-UNO newsreader tells Italy of 'la morte di Elvis Presley...'

I am here. I always was. Such is the impact of pivotal events: aspic-like grey stuff unconsciously files and cryogenically fixes and what's left is a Formaldehyde feeling – a carbon copy locked in time and pickled in brine – and the resultant synaesthetic recall. I was on a grassy knoll, lying in a Silver Cross pram, a scaled down Thunderbird 2, watching Kennedy go by.

The Pontiac and I share the same year of launch, but it's fourteen years later when The Stranglers enter with Dead Ringer ringing out loud and proud, and proud of being poor. By rights it should

have been one of the richer relations in the world of high-definition, low-fi anthems like Anarchy In The UK, God Save The Queen or Pretty Vacant? Or White Riot? Or even Peaches? This is 1977 ferfuxaxe!

Up until now, my personal vinyl consumption never veered far from the charts up, and by that it's Bowie with Sound And Vision, Heatwave and Boogie Nights, ELO with Telephone Line, ELP fanfaring the common man, Showaddywaddy who were Under The Moon Of Love, Donna Summer feeling her love, David Soul who didn't want me to give up on him, The Eagles welcoming to the Californian Hotel, Joe Tex not Bumping No More With No Big Fat Woman and Andrew Gold's Lonely Boy. Glorious pop platters courtesy of Roach's Records in Church Lane, Leytonstone –and Sidney Gold's in the High Road in a dire emergency – and all those conkeroonie stringer Sex Pistols 45's, as well as Peaches. And yet, Dead Ringer gets the gong.

The Stranglers are to blame. Mum says I was never the same again and three decades later her opinion hasn't changed. When I say I'm off to Roach's, she asks me to get her a copy of 'When A Child Is Born'. Urgh! But when Johnny Mathis sings, it's Mum he sings to. I've nothing against the crooked-jawed crooner, but all the same I stick a spanner in the happy family engine.

"Do you know he's a queer?" I quip. "Just like Russell Harty and Larry Grayson." My parents hate Larry Grayson with a passion. "Queer..." Dad would growl.

"No he's not – Johnny Mathis is lovely. Why do you have to say things like that?"

"Okay – did you still want me to get that Elton John one – 'Don't Go Breaking My Heart'?"



"Please. If they've still got it."

"Well, Elton's queer too – and Kiki Dee."

I wasn't likely to win 'Best Son of '77'. But something better had changed, or so I thought. Things I once thought were cool were cool no longer. Clothes I let my Mum buy for me were distinctly uncool, no jacket required, unless, of course, it had ripped pockets and lapels with a splash of badges. My once guinea pig hairstyle and centre-parting was cut short, first with Mum's pinking shears and later with Dad's Stanley knife.

Fringes were out – flares too – replaced by quasi-drainpipes and holy, scribbled-on jeans. Jerseys out – ripped T-shirts in. I was proud of being poor. I was also looking forward to this forthcoming album called No More Heroes.

ME AND GOLDY HAVE a five-a-side football match after school at the Michael Sobell Centre.

The piss-splashed 253 bus pitches up at Cambridge Heath Road and we scramble on out of the cold winter's night. On the top deck, I get out my two-year old Philips portable cassette player from my Adidas

bag. I got it from Crescent Cameras in the High Road in 1975 and it cost £19.75. It also had a history of chewing my favourite tapes up. Dad's previous dexterity in splicing Super-8 home movies of Italian beaches and Spanish bull-fights came into good use when he put right my snagged cassette of 'A Day At The Races' by deftly editing the tangled, mangled ferrous oxide at the end. 'Teo Torriatte (Let Us Cling Together)' gains a hop, skip and a jump – 'Tie Your Mother Down' too on the other side, but I can't complain. Goldy takes a chance and pulls from out of his trench coat pocket a brand new tape of No More Heroes.

"Stick it on," he says, reaching over to close the tape compartment and whack up the volume, all with one hand, as he wipes the steamy window with the other. "He should go in goal tonight – a dark-skinned Peter Bonetti."

First track – I Feel Like A Wog – is in full swing by the time our West Indian conductor is standing over us with his ticket machine at the ready and hand held out. He's not amused, particularly as he is doing one of the shitty jobs Hugh sings of in the song. The other passengers give me the eyes, everyone can hear, and, bar me, everyone is black. Goldy's safe, he's in between, and thankfully six foot something. "Definitely in goal – if we ever reach Holloway..." I daren't turn the tape down or off, so I freeze and wait patiently for Side One to succumb to the ravenous tape heads. Nothing happens. So unreliable, eh?

That Saturday, I have my very own cassette to gamble a spin round the capstan mechanism – and it's full of excitement and danger. I wonder at the economy of information on the tape's





inner – no clues to The Stranglers’ identity are revealed. Back in the summer with Peaches, it comes in a nondescript plain white sleeve, with just the band logo for visuals. With the Pistols splashed on the tabloids, it is a mimed Bowie performance that catches my eyes, and also some unknown mystery band...

Watching Crescent Camera’s colour televisions, mesmerised by the duplicitous channels and drowned out by the traffic, I strain to lip-read through a quarter inch of plate glass. The down-beat, cool as fuck singer with jet black hair, green bass guitar and tight blue jeans almost swallows the microphone. Panning down, the shot reveals a pair of bright red bovver boots, and I want them. Even earlier than that, there are more signs. But I’m no good at playing Cluedo – Play-do, yes. Andrew Arendell flings a well-thumbed music rag

at me, folded at the album reviews

“Read that Stranglers review. It’s a great album – Rattus Norve...”

A serious bout of book chucking revelry breaks out around me, leaving me distracted and the article unread. And if you are reading this, Andy, I have to apologise in advance – but I distinctly recall how you pronounced ‘Norvegicus’ with a hard ‘g’. So instead of sounding like norvejicus... I know, it’s sad to hold that thought for more than 30 years, but Andy, please don’t think of it as a slight. Just be happy you are in my thoughts every time I say ‘Norvegicus’! After all, you were in good company – Hugh mispronounced ‘clitoris’ in Peaches!

Such is my year zero, and just like my Philips cassette player, we can bravely fast forward, Tardis-like, to the tail end of 1977 when family life takes a turn for the worse, thanks to the Pontiac driver tuned into London Weekend Television downstairs. One minute, I’m minding my own business playing 45’s, well one 45 double A-side called Straighten Out, and then next, my bedroom door explodes wide open. In storms Dad, ex-Parachute Regiment Sergeant, fist-waving and finger-poking.

Old soldiers never die...

“Turn that fucking shit off!” He screams out. “You don’t have to play it over and over again forty times, do ya?”

I daren’t answer back – I can’t. My throat is boa-constricted by the same hands that studiously and quietly and meticulously and lovingly mended my Queen tape.

Neither they – nor Bowie, ELP or ELO – ever evoked such wrath, provoked such anger and caused such a reaction. The wrestling’s on – in my room – and Dad’s Mick McManus, Giant Haystacks, Kendo Nagasaki and Big Daddy rolled into one.

I’m in a half-nelson at first, but I manage to escape to swing out a well-aimed forearm smash across his muscular chest. He’s down for the count and I am elated. No – I’m dreaming. He’s back down the stairs to rejoin the real thing. It has to be said, you should never like the same music your parents like. And they must never like the music you like. No parental approval means it’s... damn good!

Saturday night, with nowhere to go, I venture downstairs and step over leftovers from the latest friendly fire: congealed gravy up the wall and cabbage on the floor. They’re watching different tellies in separate rooms. But probably the same programme. The great upstairs never felt so good: door shut, lights off, cans on, and drowned in sound till dawn. As I thump away Jet Black-style with Mum’s old knitting needles on an orange cushion drum kit, I dream of getting the call one day from the band.

‘Can you stand in for us? Sure, no problem...’ I pluck a JJ bass guitar with my Bullworker too, just in case they need a Charles Atlas-style strongman to play a Dead Ringer bass line. Or a jumper crocheted.

Sunday’s Top 20 is all ice-picks and Elmyra. The following day in school, the years above and below talk Stranglers talk. Even the goody-two-shoes prefects with steel-frame glasses and hairstyles modelled on Bamber Gascoigne and Trevor Francis who are more at home listening to the grown-up, sad old dated rock of Status Quo, Deep Purple and Rush. Me and Goldy race back to spin our Stranglers collection, knock out JJ leg-cocks while I amble along like JJ – not that I know how he walks – but I just do.

But not everyone in the southpaw grammar appreciates The Stranglers. English teacher and ‘School Mam’ –

Sweaty Betty – appears to be simmering away quietly as we walk in. Something’s eating her up. She’s seething. Fuming, verging on a Vesuvius eruption. Her cow eyes dart, her top lip quivers. Perspiration appears under her nose – a fatal attraction combined with her American Tan tights and the folds of her brown corduroy skirt. ‘Sixteen and sixteen make thirty-two...’ Suddenly she jerks into action, holding aloft what appears to be my English exercise book.

“Whose is this?”

“It should say on the front, Miss.” That’s me in for it.

“Kent – get up here and explain what you have done to your book. It’s absolutely covered in marker pen.”

“That’s The Stranglers, Miss.”

“What?”

“The Stranglers’ logo.”

“Kent – will you get a grip on yourself?”

How was she to know? The worst lapsus linguae imaginable – but what a coincidence, eh? Christmas comes early for 4W as the class descends into helpless, freeform laughter. I perform a JJ leg-cock, after all, it’s what Monsieur Burnel would have done – but the lady is not amused. Neither my artwork nor actions escape impunity as I receive 50 lines – none of them are speed – plus after school detention. She got me good – all over the Parquet flooring.

The real choker was Goldy being at The Stranglers’ gig at the Hope & Anchor that night, minus me.

“Now you know why no one came to see us two years ago...”

And that night in Upper Street is where my school pal is preserved in acetate – pickled in vinyl – calling out the second ‘rubbish’ at the end of ‘Tits’. I say – Go Buddy Go!

When two Stranglers fans meet, they're gonna talk Stranglers, so you may as well let them get on with it. So that's what we did. Mates Donald MacKay and David Boyd chew the fat. the full transcript follow, get a mug of tea and a torch...We supply the

Soap box

DON

Punk had a huge impact - it blew the cobwebs away.

DAVE

It was on the back of the Sex Pistols. A lot of the stuff that John Peel played at that time was really obscure material, because he was so into it. He was the pioneer of the radio from the point of view of introducing punk. The Stranglers were part of this new scene.

DON

John Peel pissed off his own audience because a lot of them didn't like punk. Nowadays a radio DJ you wouldn't be allowed to do that, but he did it because he found this new music so exciting. The Ramones was the first punk stuff he played. A lot of people seem to think that the BBC had a thing against The Stranglers but at the start that wasn't true. The BBC was probably one of the main reasons The Stranglers got

popular because of people like John Peel playing them throughout the whole of 1977. They were also on Radio 1 In

Concert shortly after Rattus came out.

DAVE

They got a lot of publicity from appearing on Top Of The Pops and they also got on a lot of children's programmes, e.g., the video of 5 Minutes was show on Tiswas (ITV). They did get a lot of publicity and probably more than the other punk bands.

DON

The Stranglers were a top chart

band at that time cos they were having hit singles and they attracted quite a wide audience. It wasn't a pure punk audience. A lot of punky types liked them but they were quite crossover.

DAVE

I would say the breakthrough single was Peaches; it wasn't a punk record and the lyrics were, for those days, quite risqué and had to be changed for radio play. That record in particular brought them to a



bigger audience, whereas Grip kind of came and went - it charted at 44 - but the follow up single Peaches was the one that made them well known.

DON

What about the withdrawn Peaches blackmail sleeve? Were you aware of that at the time? They pulled it cos the lettering was too much like the Sex Pistols' logo. It's now worth about £600. It's the rarest Stranglers sleeve, and it's also one of the rarest punk single sleeves, which is why it's worth so much.

DAVE

No, I wasn't aware of it at the time.

DON

Peaches was then released without a picture sleeve, it had a plain white paper die-cut sleeve.

DAVE

I've got one with a peach on it...

DON

That's the re-issued sleeve, which came quite a bit later, well after it had been a hit. Peaches was the first time I ever heard The Stranglers, I never heard Grip as a single, so you must have been into John Peel quite a bit more than I was early on. I used to listen to Alan Freeman's Rock Show on Radio 1 on

Saturday afternoons, and even he played The Stranglers on occasion. He played Goodbye Toulouse and Hanging Around, tracks like that. He had the rock album chart and he used to go, "Stranglers IV Rattus Norvegicus." Even the name of the album was really strange; it was an intriguing title. You thought, "What's that?" It wasn't obvious like "The Yes Album." At that time I didn't know anything about them, apart from some vague idea that they were a "punk band".

DAVE

It was an adventurous title, a breed of rat, and why was it IV? Nobody quite understood that. On first hearing the album on John Peel the record wasn't out yet, so we didn't know what the Rattus cover would be like. When it first came out I actually wasn't sure which one was Hugh Cornwell and which one was Jean Jacques Burnel - the album cover never spelt out who was who. Obviously you came to it but originally you didn't know.

DON

There was an air of mystery attached to the album. Even when you first heard Rattus it was hard to tell who was singing what, although you knew the voices were kind of different. I remember listening to Rattus and also No More Heroes and thinking... cos even Dave Greenfield's singing didn't

sound that different to Hugh and JJ...there was a kind of mystique around it, it wasn't explained, I think it was deliberately obscure.

DAVE

The lyrics weren't on the first two album covers. One of my favourite tracks was Ugly and at first we couldn't make out a word of it! The Stranglers were kind of cutting edge from the point of view that they were seen as bad boys, as was the punk scene in general on the back of the Sex Pistols. A lot of parents weren't too keen on this and whilst The Stranglers weren't "punk" over a longer period, at this stage they were a punk band. We were aware of Rattus coming out thanks to John Peel, so we were waiting for it to be released. We got it more or less on day of release. It was the album that changed our lives, and it still remains my favourite because it changed the direction of where I went musically.

DON

What was it like hearing it for the first time?

DAVE

It was fantastic, we knew some of the tracks by that time, not them all, but it still had a tremendous impact. Sometimes, straight through, it was just one after the other. Funnily enough, I regarded Peaches as the most boring of the tracks,



I've never been a great fan of that song although the lyrics were great. The tracks Goodbye Toulouse, London Lady and Hanging Around will live with me forever. That album is just so well put together, the cover, everything about it, it's just a classic.

Following the City Hall gig we played Rattus all the time, it was never off the turntable. We played it incessantly; we didn't ever want to reach for a different album. Another album that was out that we were quite fond of was the first Clash album (which followed

the White Riot single), and The Vibrators also had a good album, Pure Mania. But the difference with these bands was that the playing of their instruments wasn't as good, and the tunes weren't as good. They were very fast paced tunes using a similar "three chord wonder" approach, whereas The Stranglers' album had tunes that were much more thought out. Looking back, these songs were written in 1975/76 as soft rock tunes. There was no bandwagon to jump on then! If you listen to the first Clash album and listen to Rattus, Rattus is a far more lasting, tuneful album. In later years, The Clash became much more professional on albums like London Calling. I went to see The Clash at the Apollo on 25/10/77 (their first gig in Glasgow) and they were very, very noisy. They were just strumming guitars very hard, with extreme jumping around, but were nothing like as powerful as The Stranglers on stage from the point of view of the playing of the instruments and the way they delivered the songs.

DON

The Stranglers had been around for two or three years learning their craft. They were older and knew what they were doing. They were also doing their own thing musically, playing what they wanted to play, whether the audience liked it or not,

and that is why Rattus is so fucking great - it's a no compromise record. OK they might have speeded up some tunes to suit the times, but as a band they were the finished article, even on their first album.

DAVE

Their first album is far more mature.

DON

It also helped that they had a decent producer who knew what he was doing. If you listen to Rattus now it still sounds brilliant. The first Clash album doesn't sound as good.

DAVE

You've also got to remember, at this stage the Sex Pistols were a bit of a myth. They didn't actually have an album out. Never Mind The Bollocks hadn't been released while they were touring and in the end it was almost a compilation album! They were a mystery in that people hadn't really heard much material from them, but they had this aura of going around causing complete bedlam. The Stranglers, to some extent, were tarred with that same brush while actually going round playing tunes that had far more depth to them.

DON

What about Choosey Susie? It was hard to find and was going second-hand for about £10,

which was a lot of money at the time; 10,000 rarities being held onto by fans! It took me about three years to even hear the damn thing! In those days it could be quite a hunt to find the record you wanted.

DAVE

The free single with Rattus - yeah we got that, with Peasant in the Big Shitty also on it. That's two more tracks! Peasant

in the Big Shitty was played at the City Hall gig. I don't remember ever hearing Choosey Susie live in the early days.

DON

After the City Hall gig did more punk bands come to Glasgow?

DAVE

There was a scene building up in Glasgow. There was still a bit of a student music scene (due to the Uni. gig venues), but it was mainly a working class scene, it was a housing scheme scene.

DON

The Sex Pistols' early hangers on like the Bromley Contingent weren't exactly working class - it was more of a pose, a fashion statement.

DAVE

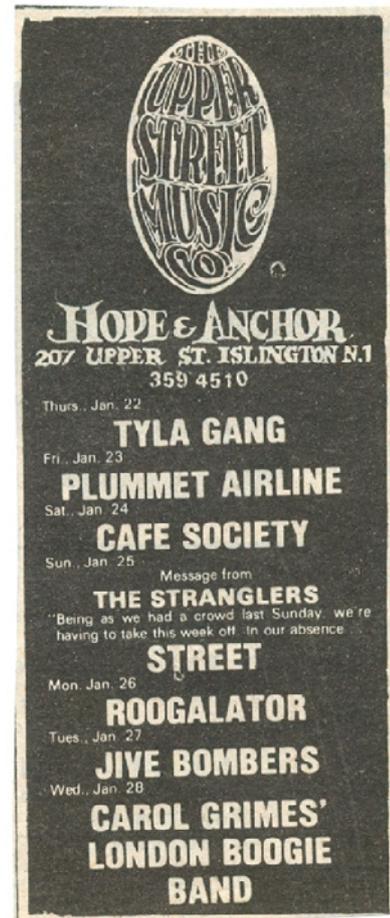
There was a much rawer support for The Stranglers in Glasgow, and even in those days there was a loyalty there.

DON

"Glasgow is the centre of Stranglermania" was a claim made in Strangled magazine. Because they were the first name punk band that arrived in Glasgow they got this loyal support, which they never lost for years.

DAVE

Absolutely. As the gigs developed, particularly into



the Black and White era, I remember having to queue at 9 o'clock in the morning for two hours at the Apollo to get tickets for the gig. Because of the demand they actually put on an extra night at the Apollo, which was much, much bigger than the City Hall.

DON

Strangled magazine created a sense of loyalty because it was the fans' magazine and it told you stuff you couldn't read anywhere else, and it showed you that the band had other interests...it was amazing.

DAVE

The first one was photocopied and stapled together. We ordered it via mail order. It came out every two or three months. I got them all.

DON

They'll be worth a few bob now! After Peaches, Something Better Change came out as a single (22/7/77). It was a long hot summer and Peaches and SBC seemed to be on the airwaves all bloody summer! These singles were played a lot on the radio - I remember Kid Jensen played Peaches and Go Buddy Go all the time. Then SBC came along and that reinforced The Stranglers' emergence as a band who were more than a flash in the pan.

DAVE

SBC had the additional track

Straighten Out (Double A-side), so these were two more strong songs - it wasn't a throwaway B-side. Straighten Out had quite a lot of airplay as well on John Peel.

DON

I never actually heard Straighten Out on daytime Radio 1. They treated SBC as the main song and it was played on daytime radio a lot.

DAVE

SBC had definite punk connotations lyrically and was probably their first "punk" song.

DON

That song was around in early 1977 cos it was on the first John Peel session in March 1977.

DAVE

Even in those days people were surprised that Hanging Around wasn't a single.

DON

Back then, bands didn't release many singles off an album, which is probably why Hanging Around remained an album track only. One of the great things about punk was that people released great singles without necessarily putting them on an album, and often they were marketed as "not on the album." The Stranglers had the free single with Rattus, and also Go Buddy Go, Straighten

Out, 5 Minutes, and more! White Riot wasn't on the first Clash album, and Ian Dury kept Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll off his debut album! I remember being particularly pissed off with the Sex Pistols cos some of their early singles were advertised in the music papers as "will not be on the album." This was a marketing ploy, though later they probably had to put them on the album because they didn't have enough material to fill it! The 7" single came into its own at that time. In the seventies, before punk, when you bought a single it was in a white paper die cut sleeve, or standard record company logo sleeve. There were virtually no picture covers - punk brought the picture cover to life, as an important part of the record.

DAVE

Also, before punk the singles market had died a death,

these bands (Yes, Zeppelin etc.) didn't release singles, they were all album driven, "serious album bands." The singles charts were dominated by complete rubbish.

DON

I didn't buy the first Stranglers singles partly cos I hadn't yet been converted by going to the gig. I liked them, but I was no longer a singles buyer, as I was more into heavy rock music at the time, so I was more into albums. I hadn't heard Rattus though! I went back and bought the singles later, after my first gig late in 77.

DAVE

We certainly bought them as they came out cos we were waiting on the day of release.

DON

SBC was a hit but didn't have as big an impact as No More

Heroes (released 16/9/77), which I think had the biggest impact of any early Stranglers single. An absolute classic single.

DAVE

No More Heroes got a huge amount of airplay and was on TOTP. This was the appearance where JJ was suggesting that one of them had broken wind, by waving a newspaper behind someone's arse! Or was it dry ice?! It was seen as a punk anthem. Again I don't think it is a hugely punk track. It's a very good example of how The Stranglers differentiated themselves from other bands, because, if you listened to the other punk bands, none of them could play a tune like No More Heroes, none of them could do the guitar solos, none of them could really sing it the way The Stranglers sang it. That was a clear differentiation that we picked up on, that the tunes that The Stranglers were delivering were quality - the

other punk bands just weren't at that standard.

DON

Go Buddy Go on TOTP was the first time I'd ever seen them on TV.

DAVE

My lasting memory of their appearance was JJ played the lead guitar and Hugh played the bass.

DON

They were on TOTP a lot.

DAVE

A lot of bands on TOTP mimed and it was seen as acceptable, whereas The Stranglers were clearly seen to mime, so they were taking the mick out of that. I don't think the BBC necessarily liked that but that's what they did.

DON

Even though punk was becoming really big, it was ignored by the Old Grey Whistle Test, which was the "serious" music programme of the time. It took a long, long time before any punk band came on, and that was The Adverts, of all people, who weren't a particularly good band. However, it's interesting to see that, even though The Stranglers were obviously a quality band, Bob Harris and people like that didn't see punk as real music. They must have thought it was merely a fad!

DAVE

Bob Harris defined the Boring Old Fart of the time!

DON

Whereas John Peel was adventurous and moved his musical taste on, people like Bob Harris stayed exactly where they were and, to this day, he's still playing on the radio the same bloody boring stuff! It also reinforces the importance at that time of the 7" single, because that's what catapulted these bands onto TOTP.

DAVE

We used to look forward to seeing TOTP every week. They also used to have a band on every second week if their single was still rising up the charts, so if The Stranglers charted in the Top 40 you knew they were likely going to be on again in a fortnight's time.

DON

...often with a different TV studio appearance (no Stranglers videos were shown on TOTP until 5 Minutes, released 27/1/78). TOTP had this policy of putting on a certain number of new chart entries, so this policy really forced them to put on new bands, and that's how the punk bands all got on there (except The Clash of course!), and daytime Radio 1 was playing them as chart music.

DAVE

I would say of the punk bands The Stranglers were on the most.

DON

And this is another reason why they got really popular. People like me, who at that time never had any conception that the band would ever play anywhere near where I lived or I would ever get to see them, importantly still saw them on TOTP, as did just about every other teenager in the country! So I still knew who they were, heard them and luckily they did come to my home town to play and that was that!

DAVE

And they were good on TOTP. OK they sometimes took the piss, but other times they did play the song straight, and they looked exciting, they were interesting to watch.

DON

It was the time before the pop video was commonplace.

DAVE

Bands used to go on and mime to a backing track on TOTP, you rarely saw anyone on video in 1977.

DON

The No More Heroes single was a turning point.



DAVE

That's when they became commercial

DON

It's pretty incredible that they released Rattus and No More Heroes within 5 months of each other! This reinforced their position as a band that had arrived.

DAVE

They recorded some of No More Heroes at the same time as Rattus.

DON

Some people don't rate No More Heroes but I think it's a very strong album. There are a couple of tracks on the second side that I'm not overly keen on

DAVE

It's a very strong album. Some people would criticise English Towns but I think it's a great track, if you actually listen to the lyrics and get into what they are talking about, it's great.

DON

I think that track sounds a bit weak. Even though some of No More Heroes album was recorded at the same time as Rattus it's got a different sound.

DAVE

My pal felt Rattus had a sound of its own, and he couldn't get his head round the fact that



they could have put School Mam or English Towns on Rattus. I personally don't think Rattus was built to create a particular sound, and having since read Song By Song, it's reinforced my view that the band actually could have put some of the No More Heroes songs on Rattus, and they would have fitted in.

DON

Some of No More Heroes could have gone on Rattus but other tracks like Dead Ringer and Bring on the Nubiles had a more psychedelic sound, and the synths changed the sound too. Even songs like No More Heroes were slightly more sophisticated in their sound.

DAVE

Some of them, but School Mam could have gone on Rattus instead of Down in the Sewer. Something Better Change could have gone on Rattus.

DON

Yes, and I Feel Like A Wog also.

DAVE

That song is also interesting because of the connotations of that song. It's an anti-racial song, and people weren't PC in those days. It was played on the radio back then but I don't think a song of that nature would get any airplay nowadays. It was a very good opening album track. The single No More Heroes was the defining change, that was the really big hit following Peaches; that was where they really started to establish themselves.

DON

Their first B-side, In The Shadows, what did you think of that?

DAVE

On first listening we thought it was crap!

DON

That sounded like a filler, a throwaway B-side. I didn't like it when I first heard it on the single.

DAVE

No, at the time you've got remember that No More Heroes was such a great, great record. And we were absolutely astonished 8 months later when Black and White came out and In The Shadows was on it! When we bought Black and White - we put a pre-order in for that - when

I took out the inner sleeve and discovered it, I said, "In The Shadows is on it!" My pal said "What?!" We couldn't believe it, but once you'd heard it as an album track it really had a bit of power to it, and I actually rather like it now. Now I think it's great!

DON

This shows how you could never have predicted how The Stranglers were going to change, because Rattus and No More Heroes weren't that different, pretty much fitting in with the punk scene at that time...

DAVE

I think they used punk to get a bit of fame and get their albums out. However, I don't think they ever wanted to be spat at, they never really wanted that scene.

DON

You can argue til the cows come home about who really started punk, but The Stranglers only got a record deal because they were seen as a punk band (or could be loosely seen as such). They would have continued to struggle to get a record deal cos they just didn't fit into the pre-punk era music scene. They were real misfits and, as Hugh suggested later, that would have been an appropriate alternative band name. This is not to suggest that they didn't influence other bands that ended

up getting signed before them!

DAVE

They got a record deal on the back of the Sex Pistols and punk coming along.

DON

But if you had been in their position I think you would have gone along with it.

DAVE

Course you would have...

DON

But, then In The Shadows was the first inkling that there was something else going on...

DAVE

...there was more to it.

DON

... but at the time you didn't recognise it, you just thought, that's a crappy B-side!

DAVE

They didn't have the depth of Black and White at that stage, they didn't yet make that change in direction.

DON

Over the years there developed this thing that every time a Stranglers album came out you didn't know what the fuck it was going to sound like, but it always turned out to be really good.

DAVE

Like on The Raven, the track

Meninblack. I also remember the first time hearing don't Bring Harry and thinking, what the hell is that all about?!

DON

It's a bit annoying that nowadays a lot of kids only know The Stranglers for Golden Brown; they don't realise that they were once seen as a punk band. Golden Brown is a double-edged sword; although it saved their career it's overshadowed everything else they've done.

DAVE

Following that in 78 Black and White came out. You had to pre-order Black and White to get the free single.

DON

Black and White was the last sort of punky album they did, though it was also moving away from punk.

DAVE

Old Codger and the free white single tracks were fab.

DON



I do remember certain people knocked them at the time, saying they weren't punk rock. A lot of the punks were so fucking narrow minded, they wouldn't move away to anything that wasn't punk.

DAVE

A lot of the punks that went to see The Stranglers also went to see bands like The Clash and Sham 69 (very big in Glasgow) and The Stranglers were part of that scene. The punks didn't focus solely on The Stranglers, whereas my pal and I tended to focus on The Stranglers as the driving force, to us they weren't just another band.

DON

After 1977, the hard core Stranglers fans stayed with them and the "punks" didn't like them any more. But it shows they were seen as a punk band during 1977.

DAVE

...for the first two albums. Rise of the Robots for example ain't exactly punk.

DON

Do you think it was Black and White that created the division?

DAVE

One side is Hugh and the other side is JJ.

DON

Do you think it was people

moving away from punk in general or did they start to believe the press that The Stranglers weren't punks?

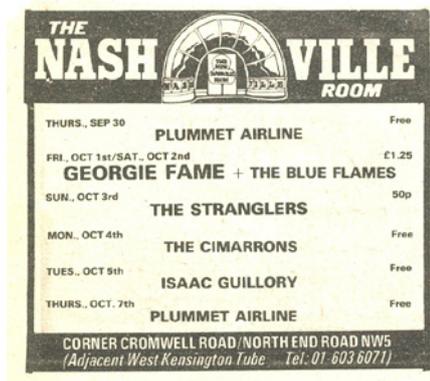
DAVE

Black and White didn't produce a major hit single, although it did have Nice 'n' Sleazy, which wasn't that big a hit, and neither was Tank/Walk on By. These singles could never be seen as punk.

They were moving away from punk and I was happy to go with them because of everything about them. The music was far superior to the other punk bands, the lyrics were very different - everything was different. They could play their instruments, the band had character, they were intelligent. Whereas if you turn to Sham 69, they were just a bunch of arseholes! The first time I saw the band live I didn't know all their material. The second time had the big build up, the whole anticipation of it, I knew all the stuff and it was fucking amazing,

DON

Their live performance was so immediate, the sound was phenomenal, with JJ's bass and Dave's keyboards prominent. In fact Dave Greenfield's keyboards have never sounded the same since they were nicked! They used to play No More Heroes like the record! They never did after that.



DAVE

Dave's swirling organ! The other thing that was different in 77 with Rattus and No More Heroes is they weren't albums that were written to order, like Black and White and beyond. The material over those two albums had been written mainly in 1975-76. JJ wrote Go Buddy Go when he was 15 or so. The two albums consisted mainly of the material that the band was gigging about in the London area, so there was a rawness about those two albums that was never repeated.

DON

The albums reflected what the band wanted to do, the songs were their own songs, in their own style (albeit slightly speeded up in some cases). People used to levy this lazy comparison with the Doors because Dave Greenfield played this Light My Fire type solo on Walk On By, but that was

only one song (and it was a rearranged cover version!). But the rest of their stuff is nothing like The Doors! Any influences only come through to a mild degree, and they certainly never blatantly copied other bands' styles. That's why Rattus sounds so brilliant because it was one of the first, what you might call, punk albums because nobody was playing anything like their stuff at the time. Later on, most of the new bands simply copied the Clash! And that's what became the "punk" sound. So people would then go, "You're not a punk band" if they didn't sound like The Clash! They put on the uniform of a style already created, whereas The Stranglers created their own style, way before that.

DAVE

Correct. I felt at the time that The Clash in 1977 weren't really very good, and live they were very poor in comparison to The Stranglers. Recently a Joe Strummer film has come out, and there was that TV show Seven Ages of Rock: the punk episode - The Stranglers don't get a mention in either!

DON

Why have they been written out of punk history?

DAVE

I can't see a film about Hugh Cornwell. So why does Joe

Strummer get one? Joe Strummer has written far less decent material than Hugh Cornwell has. Why is it? It's because The Clash, for some reason, were given a seal of approval for later albums like London Calling, but they were never in a million years as good live as The Stranglers.

DON

The reason I think The Clash get all this credibility is because the NME loved them and it was more for their politics than anything else. However, having seen that Joe Strummer movie, it's clear that part of his image was contrived because, as it shows in the documentary, Joe Strummer was basically a hippy who turned himself into a punk to become famous. Now that doesn't really tie in with the whole idea of what The Clash were meant to be about. In fact The Clash were put together by Bernie Rhodes - they were like a boy band, brought together partly because of their looks! Paul Simonon couldn't play the bass at all when he was brought in! The Clash were also very good at posing for stylised photographs, a real bunch of posers! I got really pissed off when they came over to Northern Ireland the time their gig was cancelled. They spent the afternoon posing in front of barbed wire and soldiers as if they had some relevance to the political situation there,

when in fact they were really just a bunch of tourists! They then swanned off to their 5 Star hotel!

DAVE

Manufactured. None of them could play very well!

DON

It was the same with Sid Vicious being brought into the Sex Pistols because he looked the part, even though he couldn't play the bass - that's what you call a boy band approach! Malcolm McLaren put the band together. In contrast, The Stranglers formed and started writing and gigging without outside intervention. The DIY ethic! The Stranglers fell foul of the NME because of their stance of actually admitting to liking women for biological reasons! They were also erroneously labelled racist for daring to utter the word Wog. The NME just didn't like them, and part of that was perhaps down to JJ beating up a journalist.

DAVE

...and kidnapping a journalist and tying him to the Eiffel Tower...

DON

A publicity stunt. But The Clash had been idolised and eulogised because of their left wing stance that the NME supported. I remember reading Sounds, which was

"my" paper, cos Sounds was a music paper. NME was a political paper that was more interested in the lyrics than the music. OK, Joe Strummer's lyrics are interesting, but very political, whereas The Stranglers were not political in the party political sense. The Stranglers were interesting to me because they were writing about their own experiences and ideas about things that were relevant to them. They weren't constrained by political dogma. And obviously their music was extremely enjoyable, original and challenging as they strove to break new ground. I don't think The Clash were that musically innovative. They ended up having more in common with the Rolling Stones as a stadium band in the US!

DAVE

The Stranglers did however produce a political double A-side single in Shah Shah a Go Go / Bear Cage. The lyrics of Shah Shah are very pertinent today, they were lyrics that were looking forward, "We shall see, we shall see", everything about it has come true.

DON

Do you ever hear any commentators discussing Shah Shah a Go Go nowadays?!

DAVE

You never hear it on the radio either. Nobody talks about The Stranglers; they're

not associated with the punk scene like The Clash. It's unfortunate.

DON

Did you dress up as a punk? I never did.

DAVE

No I never dressed up. I said, "I'm not going to wear that!"

DON

Probably one of the differences with the audience in Glasgow was it was hardcore; people believed in punk.

DAVE

I was 20, I was in a job, earning money, slightly older than the average fan at the gig, who would be 17ish, and most of them probably weren't earning any money. As the band progressed following the No More Heroes tour they were still a dangerous band to follow, but the danger was part of the excitement. The Stranglers kept a hardcore audience in Glasgow who realised they were quality.

DON

Do you think they had an influence on local bands at the time? The Skids recently admitted their influence.

DAVE

I'd have thought they would be an influence, though I don't have any evidence. I think probably, unfortunately, more

people were more influenced by The Clash on the basis that they couldn't play their instruments well, so it was easier to play Clash type songs than the more complex Stranglers stuff. Also, The Clash were a bit younger. The Stranglers were more mature! Hugh was in his late 20s and Jet well into his 30s!

DON

I had no idea at the time that Jet was so much older - they hid that well, I was gobsmacked when the No Mercy book in the 90s revealed his true age! Age wasn't an issue to me. Also a lot of people don't like to admit liking The Stranglers. It's not cool nowadays to name-check them.

DAVE

They became untrendy later, but they were very trendy in 77 with the first two albums, they became less trendy because they started writing stuff that was much more interesting, darker and much better played than just the 3 minute bang bang type of thing. The influence bands like The Clash had was on people that couldn't play the guitar, formed a band and just rattled it out as a noise.

DON

So those people would see The Clash more as an influence?

DAVE

I think they were more likely to be an influence than The Stranglers were.

DON

Who came to play in Glasgow after The Stranglers?

DAVE

The Clash, the Pistols never got there, the Skids...

DON

Being banned from playing, the Sex Pistols were unable to deliver that live impact of a gig, because once you've seen a band play in the flesh it makes a hell of a difference from the audience perspective. This is why, having toured before many



other bands, The Stranglers were very much seen as a punk band in the eyes of everyone who went to see them. Their history before 77 was unknown to most, and as far as Rattus goes, it was definitely viewed at the time as a punk album.

DON

Even Squeeze were lumped in with and marketed as "New Wave."

DAVE

They called it punk at first - in 77 punk hard core were people with safety pins through their cheeks. Then the term New Wave came along - New Wave was trying to soften punk. Even Squeeze used New Wave to break through. New Wave was softer.

DON

So there were quite a few nutters at your first gig?

DAVE

Absolute nutters!

DON

It wasn't just people posing.

DAVE

We stayed at the bar! We'd never have gone to the front! It was the drive of the

excitement of the band and the quality of Rattus that kept us moving with the band. If you'd actually looked at the people that turned out at the gig you'd have said "Hmmm, not sure about that." In those days you didn't have riots at concerts!

DON

So if The Stranglers had been mediocre live, that would have been it?

DAVE

They'd have had to be really crap because Rattus was so good! If we'd gone to see London I'd have walked away.

DON

Do you remember after the No More Heroes tour John Peel playing a recording of the Roundhouse gig? And he played about 45 minutes of it on the radio in FM stereo - I taped it. That's what you call John Peel supporting the band. That's what became the London Ladies bootleg (minus the first track No More Heroes). That vinyl bootleg LP cost a lot of money at the time. Then there were the two John Peel sessions.

DAVE

Absolutely, the Roundhouse on Peel was a legendary thing. John Peel was a huge supporter of The Stranglers.

DON

People say the BBC never did

anything...some people say John Peel never liked The Stranglers!

DAVE

John Peel was the man that actually made The Stranglers, he was the pioneer of punk and the pioneer of bands like The Stranglers.

DON

He just played what he liked, even when Black and White came out he played a full side of it on air.

DAVE

I think John Peel probably drifted when things like The Raven came out. He liked new bands, breakthrough bands.

DON

Celia & the Mutations - Mony Mony (July 77) and You Better Believe Me (Oct 77). Were you aware of these singles at the time?

DAVE

Yes, I knew at the time of release that the backing band was The Stranglers, but I think that was through Strangled informing us. I couldn't be sure if John Peel played them. I bought them with picture sleeves.

DON

They were both re-issued later by SIS - that's when I first heard them. Personally, I had never heard of these singles

during 1977.

DAVE

In many ways Jet's the man because he formed the band, and even drove them around in his ice cream van!

DON

He and Hugh were the two main guys. Jet was more like the business brains and kept them going financially in the early days. Hugh was the creative, musical leader at the start. It's like their first gig at the Hope 'n' Anchor in 1976, when they played to one guy! Nobody knew who they were and they said we're not going to start until somebody comes in to watch. One guy came in, they pulled a seat over for him, bought him a pint and the guy watched it, loved it and brought his mates the following week! But they were out there doing it.

DAVE

I don't think that can happen these days.

DON

Nowadays everything is marketed towards a particular type of audience, and bands can't release something without the record company saying how they're going to handle it, and what kind of music they want bands to record. It's boring as fuck - all the bands sound the bloody same...

Spice man

Alan Edwards was the Stranglers publicity guru from 1975. Based at Albion's office in Wandsworth, he sexed up stories to make column inches in a competitive punk market: he also initiated Strangled magazine.

From a squat in Covent Garden in the late 70s, Alan Edwards ran Modern Publicity before joining Ian Grant managing Big Country and The Cult. These days, he employs 60 staff at his Outside Organisation – handling publicity for the biggest stars in show business – and the Spice Girls.

Mantheylovetohate posed Stranglers questions to the PR guru his former Modern colleague, Barry Cain, describes as: “the most sincere, and unwittingly, the shrewdest man in the music business.”

How did you first get into PR? It was under Keith Altham, wasn't it?

That's right. I went to review The Who at Bingley Hall in Stafford. Keith offered me a job in PR, which was £25 a week. It sounded good then!

You were good friends with Ian Grant. How did you first meet him?

I met him when I was at school. Ian used to organise gigs on the South Coast and I was a regular attendee.

You formed Modern Publicity. Did working with some of the major bands of the era help you to get out on your own?

Absolutely, I had a brilliant training from Keith Altham and the experience gained through working on a massive rock act like The Who helped enormously.

When did you start working with The Stranglers?

Ian got me hired by Albion Agency – I think they'd just changed their name from the Guildford Stranglers. It must have been around 1975.

You also knew the Bromley Contingent (Sex Pistols equivalent of the Finchley Boys)?

I knew Billy Idol vaguely through school, and my girlfriend worked in a café in Covent Garden called Tuttons with Siouxsie Sioux.

Did any of The Stranglers resent your friendship with them?

Maybe a little bit with Billy, but I don't remember it being an issue.

With press hunger for the most outrageous stories, did The Stranglers' behaviour help the publicity machine?

Yes, their behaviour added column inches,



but it still needed to be pushed hard. My experience with The Who etc. helped me get into the more mainstream areas of the media.

One of the most publicised controversial events of the early punk era was the Sex Pistols' Bill Grundy furore. Would your job have been made easier if the Stranglers had had an equivalent?

No, it might have been counter productive and distracted from the quality of the music.

What were the biggest turning points in the struggle to publicise The Stranglers?

We set ourselves a strategy for consistent and constructive publicity, not a big band approach like the Pistols, so there was no specific turning point.

To what extent were stories exaggerated to make them more inviting to the sensationalist tabloid press?

The stories weren't exactly under played, but essentially all of them had a basis of fact.

Were you working with other bands at the time?

The Buzzcocks, Johnny Thunders & The Heartbreakers and Blondie

You must have organised the Rattus launch at the Water Rat pub in King's Road with the rodent-themed menu, like Ratatouille. Do you recall that event?

Only a distant memory to be honest. Good fun – more pub rock in vibe than punk rock.

Was Strangled fanzine a good PR tool?

I saw it more as PR positioning and Tony [Moon] was looking at it as more of fanzine I think.

Did you envisage SIS running for 20 years & Strangled reaching 50 or so issues?

To be honest we weren't looking that far ahead. After all, the whole punk scene was new and we were partly making it up as we went along.

It seems that whilst the band were overseas, the publicity machine kept ticking over with reports of Hell's Angels in Amsterdam, riots in Portugal, police chases in Australia & feminist protests in the States. How important was it to keep the band's name in the papers while they were away?

It was vital to keep the bands profile good all the time as it was a competitive situation with lots of wannabe punk bands trying to steal a bit of the Stranglers deserved glory. Also, some of the stories were so amazing they just had to see the light of day!

In November 1977, a press beano at the legendary Paradiso Club in Amsterdam went ahead. Did the antics at the gigs overstep the mark?

It was driven by the Amsterdam Hell's Angels and did get a bit scary especially for me when one of them put a gun to my head to play Russian roulette with me! I admit I was a bit nervous but I quickly got a grip on myself. I don't think the band had much alternative but to go with the flow that night! It was an amazing night –



THE STRANGLERS are: HUGH CORNWELL, guitar and vocals, DAVE GREENFIELD, keyboards, JEAN JACQUES BURNEL, bass and vocals, JET BLACK, drums. **THE STRANGLERS aren't** like anybody else - new wave or otherwise. Their unique blend of keyboards and guitars create a sound quite unlike any of the other so called 'new' bands.

THE STRANGLERS were: The Guildford STRANGLERS. They were formed in Spring 1975, and spent their formative months in and around Guildford. Even at this stage they were playing songs such as 'Sometimes' and 'Hanging Around'. In December 1975 the band signed with Albion, the agency who organised their first gigs, and soon after THE STRANGLERS made their first London appearances when they supported Alberto Y Los Trios Paranoias at The Nashville. THE STRANGLERS weren't immediately acceptable to everyone, and the group were booed off at many of their gigs.

THE STRANGLERS have had a good year in 1977, but the real success story started in 1976. After Christmas gigs at The Nashville the band gigned solidly, and in the early Summer they got their real first break supporting Patti Smith at The Roundhouse. Events moved quickly after this, and it was not long before they attracted record company interest. A couple more support concerts with Patti Smith and an extensive UK pub/club tour consolidated THE STRANGLERS already large following. In December 1976 the band signed with United Artists Records, and not long after they released 'GRIP/ LONDON LADY' (UP 36211) as their first single. 'Grip' made the lower end of the charts, and despite a Music Week mix up when the record was mysteriously left off the chart completely, it remained there for seven weeks.

THE STRANGLERS haven't had it all their own way, and despite the fact that 'GRIP' was a hit, they continued to work hard. Most of the shows were run of the mill club dates such as The Roxy, but the support gigs at The Roundhouse (with the Pink Fairies) and The Rainbow (with The Climax Blues Band) were important milestones. The latter of the two caused a major uproar when the group were 'turned off' by the GLC, who objected to a t-shirt Hugh was wearing. THE STRANGLERS did something in the region of 275 gigs in 1976 alone, probably more than the rest of the 'new wave' bands put together.

THE STRANGLERS story is one of the real 'success' stories of 1977. Their debut album 'Rattus Norvegicus'/STRANGLERS IV' (UAG 30045) entered the BMRB charts at number four (an unprecedented high entry for a new band), and subsequently remained in the top ten for twenty one weeks on the trot. The two follow up singles 'PEACHES/GO BUDDY GO' (UP 36248) and 'SOMETHING BETTER CHANGE/STRAIGHTEN OUT' both enjoyed top ten success. In the autumn THE STRANGLERS put out the title track of their forthcoming album 'NO MORE HEROES' as a single, and it was an instant hit. What with the success of the single and with the enormous advance sales figures, it was no surprise when the album rocketed up the charts reaching number two within weeks of its release. The phenomenal impact made on the charts by 'HEROES' (it went silver within days of its release) established THE STRANGLERS once and for all as the only 'major' act to emerge in 1977, or for that matter the preceding 5 years. 'HEROES' lifted THE STRANGLERS out of the pack of promising/sensational/up and coming new bands, and into the big league.

THE STRANGLERS story isn't one that ends here. With a massive UK tour climaxing with five nights at The Roundhouse (breaking records set by the Who and Stones) and with songs for the third album already taking shape it has only just started.

THE STRANGLERS will be big in America (where 'RATTUS NORVEGICUS' sold around 50,000, resulting in the signing of a deal with A & M Records), and a great many other places too. Already Europe has fallen, nation by nation, in the advance of Britain's first serious threat to Euro rock in ten years.

THE STRANGLERS won't become just another big band. Already they are showing that they are capable of constant change and revision of their ideas/material, and that they will not stagnate. The group are also determined to remain a 'People's band' in the true sense of the word, and they do not envisage a time when they might lose contact with their real fans. Not two weeks after appearing in front of some 10,000 people at The Roundhouse THE STRANGLERS appeared in a dingy London pub called the Hope & Anchor, which can accommodate no more than a couple of hundred people.

Further fax: JET BLACK is 39, JET was the owner of a fleet of ice cream vans before joining THE STRANGLERS. HUGH CORNWELL is 27. HUGH was a research scientist in Sweden with a degree in biochemistry before joining THE STRANGLERS. JEAN JACQUES BURNEL is 24. JEAN is a black belt in Karate and was thinking of taking a teaching job in Japan before joining THE STRANGLERS, he also has a degree in Economics. DAVE GREENFIELD is 26.

For further details please contact:

ALAN EDWARDS
Publicist
29 James Street,
London WC2.
01-836 7147

JUDITH RILEY
United Artists Press Officer
37-41 Mortimer Street,
London W.1.
01-636 1655

maybe not 'nice' but definitely 'sleazy'! It caused a lot of controversy and made the centre pages of one tabloid – 'Always The Sun'! But at the time, I remember waiting 'Five Minutes' and deciding it wasn't safe to be 'Hanging Around' here! A good time to 'Walk On By' shall we say...

How quickly did the punk phenomenon become yesterday's news rather than today's headlines?

The excitement wore off media wise after 2 or 3 years, but The Stranglers were already moving into the mainstream so this wasn't much of a concern regarding their PR.

After the band allegedly kidnapped and attacked Ronnie Gurr, Deanne Pearson and Jon Savage, surely many potential reviewers were put off criticising the band?

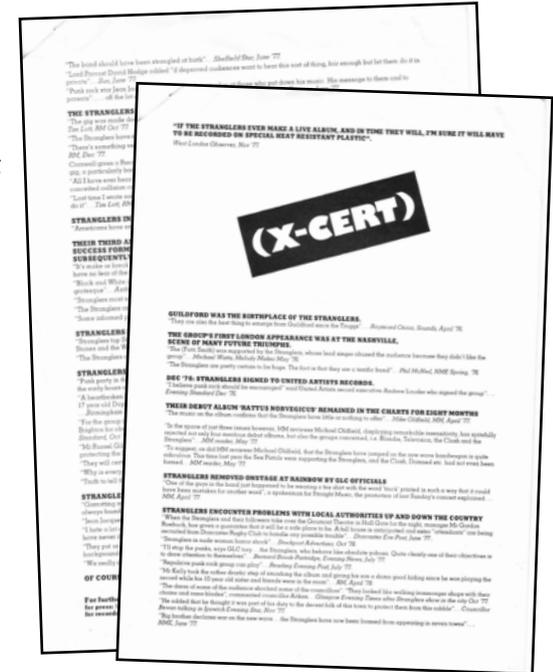
It didn't make much difference. It all added to the myth – although I wasn't aware in advance and wouldn't have knowingly contributed to this approach to media relations!

In retrospect, was physically attacking key journalists the worst possible career move in the long run?

I'm not sure how much it hindered the band as they weren't exactly media darlings, but it was regrettable for sure.

Do you have any recollections of 1978's launch party for Black & White in Iceland?

Bizarre – endless drink. Icelanders mainly female. A journalist from The Times who



was paralytic and ended up not being allowed to board the flight home. Geezers and geysers, alcohol and LSD landscapes

Did the band's sensational refusal to play the Rock Goes To College gig in '78 make them pariahs for the BBC?

I honestly can't remember the repercussions of the bands actions.

When did you stop doing the publicity for the Stranglers & why?

I stopped doing their PR in the mid-Eighties but I can't recall the reason why. Maybe it was because my partner Ian wasn't involved in the management anymore? There was no dramatic end. It just ran out of steam.

Thanks to Alan, and his PA, Sarah.

GETTING IT / ON.

Record producer Martin Rushent laid down The Stranglers' urgent live sound for three hugely successful albums – and then walked out. Gary Kent tracked down the man once referred to as “the fifth Strangler”

Martin Rushent has enjoyed an illustrious career. Cutting his teeth in studio engineering, he turned producer and sonically snared a newly-signed Stranglers for their top-selling albums, *Rattus Norvegicus*, *No More Heroes* and *Black And White*. In a prolific 15-month epoch that spawned six Top 20 hits – including *Peaches*, *Something Better Change*, *No More Heroes* and *Five Minutes* – it seemed like a pop marriage made in heaven. Even as early as 1977, JJ Burnel admitted to NME: “They all knock us, but they all want to use our producer.”

But as 1978 drew to a close, the relationship floundered on the new material. Dismissing their songs, Rushent walked out on The Stranglers never to return. “They were losing the plot...”

Neither Hugh nor JJ have uttered a good word about him since. The band went on to record their fanciful *Raven* and *Meninblack* albums with TW's old in-house engineer Alan Winstanley. Meanwhile, Rushent built a state-of-the-art recording studio at his Berkshire sprawl costing over a million. It was at Genetic Sound he focused on electronic music, recording Pete Shelley, Visage and a newly reshuffled Human League: *Dare* took a year to nail, but resulted in unmitigated commercial success for Sheffield's electro

avant-garde outfit with Sound Of The Crowd, *Love Action*, *Open Your Heart* and No. 1 hit, *Don't You Want Me?*. Championing the remix album, Rushent reworked the tracks into *Love And Dancing* in 1982, also receiving a BRIT award that year for Best British Producer. In the *Dare* follow-up, he exits and songs get mothballed. Like The Stranglers, Human League never managed to repeat the success they enjoyed with Martin Rushent in the chair. But is he *prima donna* or musical prodigy?

Back in wintry 2005, I arranged numerous interviews with the man and his tight schedule, and each got apologetically postponed. Topping it all, when the final date seemed like it's going ahead on an arctic Sunday my car dumped a pool of black engine oil on my snow-swept driveway.

I might have been forgiven for fearing this as the curse of the *Meninblack* – the song, incidentally, that became the last straw at Eden in '78. Perhaps my car was losing the plot? Or was it me?

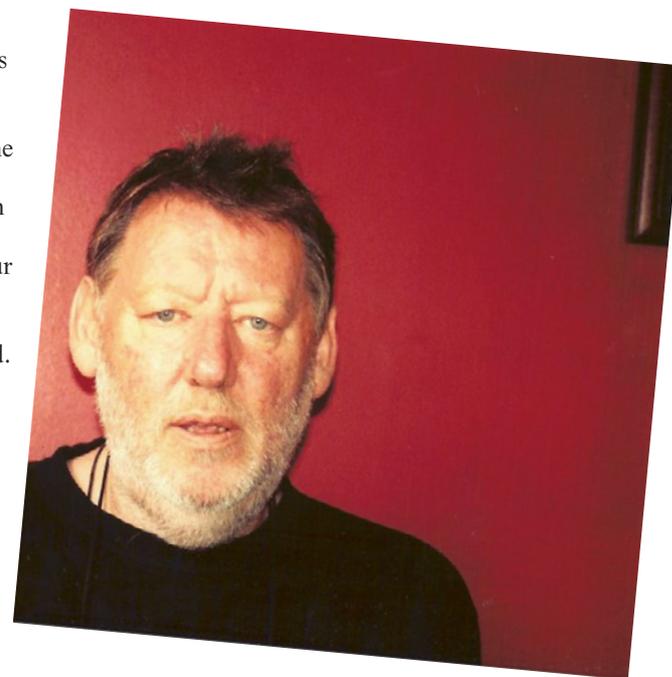
Two years later, enthused by the Issue 3 theme, I email Rushent, but receive no reply. Googling reveals his MySpace to which I send a message right away, expecting nothing. I'm shocked when I see a reply in my inbox, and the following Sunday, I am in Berkshire, carbon footprinting with road atlas, Canon

EOS and Dictaphone.

Martin's leafy hamlet has two pubs and I pull up by the first as he calls up my mobile, and directs me to the other one where he's at. I spot him standing outside in summer shorts and sandals and black T-shirt – in honour of the *Meninblack*? I park up round the back and he's already inside getting served.

“What'll you have?” he asks, with hand outstretched. “Sunday lunch is great here – you've come a long way... and I insist.” This warm, larger-than-life character has a passion split between high-octane dance music, and wife Ceri and his family. Opinionated at times and animated, particularly on the subject of The Stranglers – where he refuses to accept a sans-Hugh line-up. He's also a bon vivant who loves his local: “bloody good pub this, and they have bands here too.” We sup West Berkshire's finest Good Old Boy ale and Martin sparks up a Camel, or 20. Post-interview he is once more insistent, and invites me back to his angular, rented home next door to a construction site where his previous abode once existed. Upstairs in his £12,000 home recording studio – “cost a lot less than Genetics – and it's a lot better,” we sit in office chairs as he plays a catchy self-penned Leaguesque pop song with Ceri on vocals. Other work in progress includes remixing *Dare* in time for Christmas, and he conjures up mixing desk monitor remixes of *These Are The Things That Dreams Are Made Of*.

“What do you think?” he asks, “you're



my market research, I won't be offended. I won't kick your head in, honest.”

The room is searing and rammed with outboard racks. Martin's spiritual home allows him to be Merlinesque as he darts at the disc drives to the right, flicks faders and clicks icons up on the widescreen monitor, magicking clean four-to-the-floor beats to yesteryear's electronica. Production-wise, they are all flawless, even the monitor mixes. We then escape to the garden where polishes off a bottle of red with a cigar. But it's in Martin's red-walled country pub, the sound man in Martin first appears: as I set up the mic, he grabs the recorder while suggesting the superior Audiotraks alternative and switches off voice-activation and checks for levels.

“Testing... testing... one, two... Okay, that should work. Where d'ya wanna start?”



Where did you grow up and what music were you into?

In the 1950's, in Enfield, Middlesex. I was born in 1948. The first music I was really aware of was Elvis, Buddy Holly, Cliff Richard & the Shadows, Everly Brothers, Connie Francis, all that mid to late 50's stuff. But I was also into Frank Sinatra and all the big bands because my dad played a lot of that stuff. It gave me a really good musical grounding I think, because it was a mixture of quality, quite complex stuff of the big bands and rock 'n' roll. As I got older – The Beatles, Stones, Kinks, Small Faces – Tamla Motown was a massive influence on me – Marvin Gaye, Otis Redding, Bob & Earl...

And you wanted to get into the studio yourself?

I was in a band when I was at school and

then I got a job in a chemical place and I hated it – it was all very corporate. I gave that up and I said to my dad that I wanna be in the music business. So he said I should come and work for him first as a second-hand car salesman in Tottenham, north London. I learned a lot from that before I got a job as a trainee sound engineer at Advision. I started off as a tape-op and went from there. Several years later as an engineer, I became pretty damn good at it. Advision engineers were the best sound engineers of all time, really. I became one of the first freelance engineers because so many people wanted to work with me; they couldn't get into Advision, so they'd say come and do an album at Olympic or wherever. I engineered for countless people like T Rex, Yes, the cast of Jesus Christ Superstar, ELP, it goes on and on.

What was Marc Bolan like?

He was an incredibly talented bloke. When we did Get It On, we turned up at the studio – I was engineering, Tony Visconti was producing – all the band was there, and I said right, what we doing? Marc goes: I don't know. I haven't written anything. Give me ten minutes and I'll write something. And he came up with the riff, worked the band up for an hour, got an arrangement sorted out, gave a guide vocal to it, the chorus came, got the track down, spent fifteen minutes writing the lyrics, sang it, and the following day we got the cellos in and stuff, I mean the guy just poured out with it.

Going into a studio without a song doesn't work for most bands, does it?

It does if you're a brilliant writer like Marc Bolan – he was special.

Did you hang out with him?

In the studio, not hanging out outside, no. We got to know each other really well, but the thing is, when you're working in the studio for hours and hours you get very close indeed. It's not like a working relationship because you're making music together, you're partying together, there's loads of booze, loads of marijuana and goodness knows what else. If you don't have that atmosphere in the studio then it's not going to communicate through the music. Most people who wanna listen to that music want to have a good time, so if you have a shit time making it, it's gonna come out the other end.

GETTING A GRIP.

How did you come to produce The Stranglers?

I did a lot of engineering work with Shirley Bassey, and the guy who eventually took over in charge of production was the managing director of United Artists Records, Martin Davis, who offered me a job. He said: come and join the A&R department, and I said to him I was getting fed up with engineering after five, maybe six years of it and I've got a lot more to offer. So I got this job with UA working and met Andrew Lauder who to me, was the greatest A&R guy ever. He had incredibly good taste and could spot a hit band from forty miles. But – by his own admission, the studio was a completely alien world to him. He didn't really understand what went on. He knew a good band when he heard them and he knew a good tune but getting it from there onto vinyl – he didn't know how the fuck to do it. So the plan was he could find the acts and I could produce them. The very first day I went in there, he said: let me show you the things I'm sort of a bit interested in at the moment and he played me a demo of 'Grip'. I went: fucking hell, that's really good. Who are they? He said: The Stranglers – you've heard of this underground movement called Punk – well they're not really a Punk band but on the peripheries of it. I said it doesn't fucking matter what they are called, that tracks is fucking amazing. What are they like live? I said. And they were even better. But Andrew was umming and arring over The Stranglers. He was frightened that if he signed them, the label would be seen as not the real Punk label and we'd missed that boat. A lot of press were saying they're just a rock band who was trying to jump on

the bandwagon. They're the Doors MkII – quite a lot of derogatory stuff being spouted out.

Wasn't there some truth in that?

Well I hadn't seen a proper Punk band at that time. I mean, the thing about working in a studio all of the time is that you don't get out much, you know? I'd heard about Punk, and I'd heard the Sex Pistols, I'd heard of the Damned – that was another thing I got involved in. But I hadn't seen any of them.

Why TW?

During this period, I heard a tape of a band who had recorded at TW and it sounded good. It was a bit rough, but the sound was good. The band was called Trickster, a standard rock band of the time, but there was just something about the sound I thought was really good.

Who did TW belong to – and what did the initials stand for?

Fucked if I know! It was owned by a couple of guys who had a launderette upstairs and a little music shop. I think one of them was into music, so they made money on the launderette and built a little studio. I mean – I knew them – I met them loads of times but I can't remember their fucking names. It ain't there no more – it's all been redeveloped. I was heading that way to do something or other, and the whole building has gone.

The Stranglers recorded their 1975 demos at the same studio...

Yeah – but I didn't know that at the time. That was really ironic. No one had ever

told me their original demos were done there. It was really weird I'd picked the same studio.

Did you see them play live first?

Andrew then dragged me down the Red Cow in Hammersmith to see them and I was just blown away. I said to him: this band are unbelievable! The energy coming from that stage was phenomenal. The bass player's just unique – and I couldn't figure out how Dave could play the keyboard and drink a can of Special Brew at the same time, and still get this noise coming out was mind-blowing. So me and Andrew met the following morning and I said: sign 'em – I'm telling you, just sign 'em! If it all goes tits up, it's not just your fault, it's mine as well. But I'm telling you, sign 'em! They could be the most successful band we've signed to date without a doubt. No question. He said: well, where are you gonna record them? I said: I'm gonna take them to that TW Studios. He said: Well have you checked it out yet? I said: No, I don't need to. That is the perfect sound. But before I took The Stranglers in there, I did a little project down there and it went really well. I met Alan Winstanley there...

At the time he was TW's in-house engineer, wasn't he?

Yeah, young guy. Very relaxed, did whatever I asked him to do and no ego on him and we got on really well. Nice guy to work with.

Alan Tarney's name also pops up at TW. Did he work there?

Don't know. I think he was involved in the first project I did there. Alan would know.

And Doug Bennett?

Oh yes – a young lad engineering at Olympic Studios. Such a sweet guy, about 25. Brilliant engineer. We couldn't get into TW to mix Peaches, so we did it at Olympic with Doug and we needed it quickly.

For the single or the album?

Whichever ended up on the album

It's the same mix?

Same mix. We had a wonderful time mixing Peaches. We were all sat there with huge fucking grins because it was going to be a smash. Sometimes you can hear a song and make it and know you're on a winner. It's great, you know? So you go the extra mile for it. Peaches is the one I remember.

Would you say your production was like a fifth instrument? I mean, if someone else produced Peaches, would it still have been a hit?

I don't know. No one ever knows. I mean – a big decision is made by a myriad of little ones, depending on the problems you encounter. So as long as you make all the decisions correctly, then the big decision is going to work. So I must have made all the right little decisions because the record came out and everyone loved it. It's still used to this day. Now, somebody else might have done it and made all the right decision and it may not have sounded like my version. So – in answer to your question – the answer is... I don't know!

What was your first impression of TW Studio?



Trident board

A bit of a dump, really. Very simple gear – a little Trident board, can't remember what model... 3M I think it was, 24 track.

What's a Trident board?

A Trident Mixing Console – a very cheap one. The basic one. The EQ was like 'treble, middle and bass' – that's all it had. 3M 24 track, I think it was

3M.

Recording Grip, what was your brief as a producer?

Grip and a B side. What did we do for the B side? London Lady, that's right. Andrew and I had talked about. He said: look – we don't want a big production job on this. We just want to capture them the way they are. I said: I absolutely agree with you. You know, I just wanna capture that live spirit and the sound that they make.

How did that first session go?

It all went fine. There was a discussion about... I got Hugh to double track the guitar on Grip which he didn't like. He said they only had one guitar in the band, so there should only be one guitar. I said we're just gonna have to get a bigger guitar sound. I mean Hugh was one of the best guitarists I ever worked with – his lead guitar was stunning. It just didn't sound like anyone else. I mean, most guitarists I'd worked with up until then were either bordering on Eric Clapton or Jeff Beck, or whatever. Hugh sounded like a more like a modern, more manic, wild Hank Marvin. Melodic, nothing flash, but he was a great rhythm player. He just bashed away at it. So we eventually got a bigger guitar sound between us by using a couple of mics and put it out stereo to make it sound broader so he only ever had to play one guitar on everything else we did. So we did Grip which snuck into the Top 50.

Apparently it should have achieved a higher place had sales not been accredited to another artist?

Yeah, and all that bollocks... not

involved... don't know what happened.

I read that your plan was to record Grip and let Alan Winstanley produce the album?

No, no. Andrew said: we need something out quick, go back in. Do it, let's get it out. Keep the market interested. Right – there's a record out by The Stranglers on a major label – let's go back in, that sort of concept. It was more a marketing thing than anything else. The big one was doing the album.

Rattus was going to be called Dead On Arrival, wasn't it?

Oh was it? I never knew that! If I'd been told that I would have said that's crap. Andrew was probably more involved at that level. I mean, he was great, he protected me from anything that wasn't relevant to what I was doing which was basically making a record. What it was gonna be called, freebies, whether it was gonna be see-thru



Martin in 1981

plastic or picture disc or whatever, I wasn't involved with that. My job was making music and mixing the tunes and finishing the record.

What were you writing on the TW master tapes?

Just 'The Stranglers 1st album'.

How long after Grip did you record Rattus?

Don't know but it was cold! We had to get the heaters into the control room. Christ it was fucking cold.

Cold might have affected Dave's organ... Was it problematic?

Of course. Dave had a Hammond L100 and a Clavichord. Couple of the keys on the Clavichord didn't work, so that may have been the decider about what key the songs were in! The big problem was when the Mini-Moog turned up, trying to keep fucking thing in tune. It was a pain in the arse. At the time I hated synthesizers. I arrived and saw the Moog there and thought: Oh no! 'Cos I had worked with them before, on Jeff Wayne's stuff, War of the Worlds and all that. In those days, it was analogue. There were no digital clocks. They were analogue oscillators. Any number of things would affect them, quirks in the system, ghosts in the machine, Gremlins, anything, they just wouldn't stay in tune. Even making the Human League, I was using a Roland synthesizer programmed from the Micro-Composer we bought before, and it did it all the time. Before every take you'd have to tune the whole thing up. Fucking nightmare.

How did the session go?

I said to Hugh: we've solved the guitar thing, so we'll get the big guitar sound and play everything just the once – exactly how he would playing live. Sing a guide vocal, if the guide vocals are good, we'll use them. If not you'll have to do them again. I seem to remember, 50% of the time we used the guide vocal as it had all the energy, you know? And you do three takes of each song, and that's it. You don't do anymore than that, and then we pick the best one of the three.

Was that because of time constraints?

No – just so we didn't get into studioitis. You know, doing the same song fifty times until you kick the guts out of it to make it perfect is all an illusion. The main thing is capturing the spirit and the energy. If there's a couple of bummers in it, no one's gonna fucking notice because you're rolling with the track. It's gonna sound so great they won't even notice that you've dropped a beat or whatever. As it happened, they virtually played them perfectly every time. Sometimes it was hard to pick. Like, fucking hell, here's three takes – they're all blistering – how do you pick one? I can remember tossing a coin with Alan several times and saying: which one do we use? Urgh, dunno. They've gone for a beer round the pub. Okay let's toss a coin. Okay, is it one or two? Right, it's one. Now toss between one and three. Okay, it's three. We're using three. I mean, they were all so good. They were the tightest band I ever took in the studio. They were shit hot.

How did you find them as people?

Jet Black was one of the nicest blokes I

ever met. And a brilliant drummer. His contribution to The Stranglers is just not recognised. He was a rock solid drummer with a very light touch but laid the groove down. He wasn't one of those drummers who were 'all arms' – Jet made it the least work he could physically, but got a great noise. So he could play all night. Jet was a bit of a Charlie Watts, really. I rate him up in that sort of class. He must have some sort of jazz background almost certainly – just his style of playing. He was a very light player and a from a jazz background, laying the groove, keeps going all night...

His snare sounds a little heavier on the Heroes sessions, and the band sounded heavier too – was that a conscious decision?

No. Maybe Jet decided to give it a bit more. We'd already recorded half the second album in the Rattus sessions. We'd just carried on recording, so all we had to do top up No More Heroes, which I still love to this day. And Something Better Change is Jean Jacques' nadir. The best thing he ever did. There was more equipment.. the sound was great.

SOUND / OF THE / CROWD .

Dagenham Dave was thrown out of the Rattus session, wasn't he?

Dagenham Dave died didn't he? And they wrote the tune about him. I loved that tune. Dag Dave was a nice guy. But instead of sitting there quietly, behaving himself, he was started being disruptive, getting in the way and getting very loud. So I said to him: mate – you got to leave now. And then someone took him out. I was being a bit of an arsehole. I've always been like

that. If things started getting out of hand I could be really fucking aggressive. I could be a real fucking arsehole. I'd go: you lot – out now... I probably did it all the time. We're making a record, you need a nice relaxed party atmosphere but you are there to come out with a record.

Do you remember the Finchley Boys there too?

They were gentlemen. They were a bit wild, but we all were. I never felt like I wished they weren't there, and they're in my way. They added to the whole vibe of the thing. I can't remember any individual Finchley Boy, I remember them en mass. There was no more than 3 or 4 at any one time, but they all seemed like fun guys. They were respectful. I remember if I said: right, we're doing a take, can we all sit down and be quiet, the whole room went quiet. So they seemed like a good crowd to me. They must be really old now, with kids. Well, tell the Finchley Boys I send my love and have fond memories of them.

I know one of them – Alan Hillier – will be well chuffed.

Well, tell Alan to send me an email or something. Come and see me after all these years.

Did you hang out with any of the band?

Only Hugh sometimes. We'd walk up the road to see a band. I used to hang out a bit with Dave and his wife round their place and have something to eat and stuff. I've never got too close to any band I've ever worked with, whether that's a flaw in me or professionalism at work without realising it? You become very close in the

studio. The last thing you need to do out of hours was go out with them because you're hanging out with them most of the day. My job was to make their dream a reality.

BEING . BURNEL - ED /

JJ's bass really cuts through on all those 1977-78 tracks, but not so much after that?

Never got it again. That's what I don't understand. Alan Winstanley sat beside me through three albums and knew how to get Jean Jacques bass sound. He knew the technique of how it had to be done...

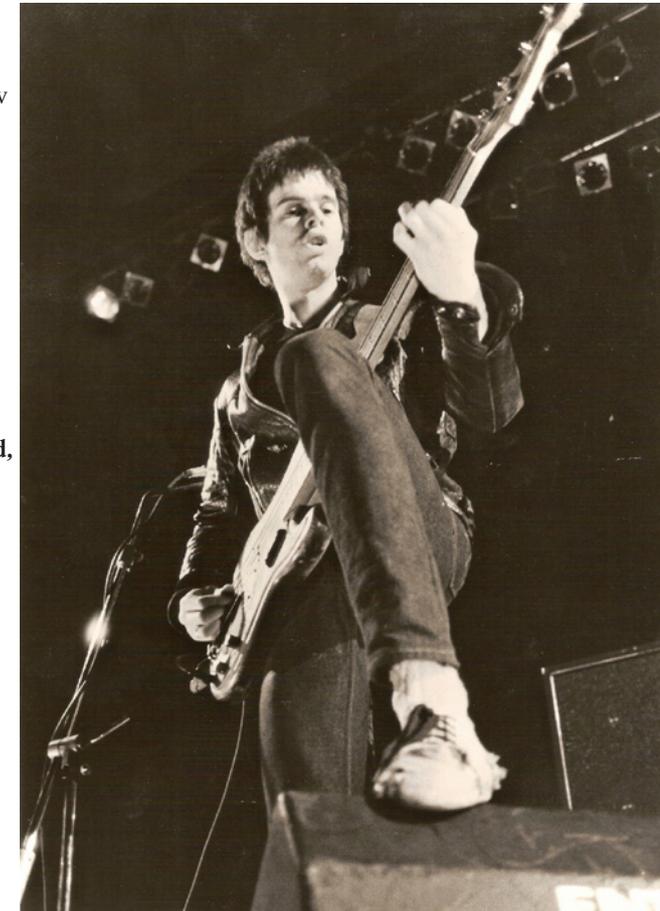
Can you remember the set-up?

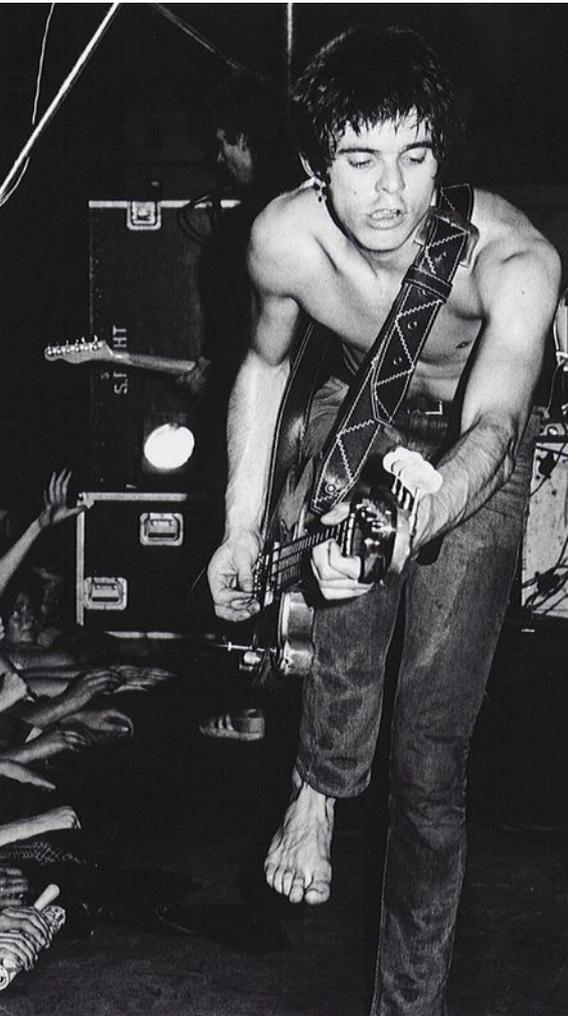
No. I can't remember how I did it. There was a formula how to get Jean Jacques bass to sound like that on record. And yet on Raven, he failed, he forgot it, yet he knew what had to be done.

JJ wasn't pleased with the bass sound, was he? He called you up at home complaining?

He was displeased with everything. I'll treat JJ as a separate bit when I come to him. Moving on from Jet – Dave Greenfield, lovely guy. Bit odd, really. Into Black Magic and odd things, very nice guy, lovely bloke. In his fur coat, pipe, very quiet and just got on with what he had to do. He liked jokes. Got on very well with him. Hugh? Got on brilliantly with Hugh. Lovely guy, funny. Quite serious too, when he needed to be,

and easy to work with. Those three were all easy to work with. JJ... Well, we all had big egos in those days. I mean we were burgeoning rock stars and famous record producers. We were young, we had money in our pockets – not lots, but a lot more than most people our age. We had birds chasing us, you know, it was all that old bollocks. But there's egos and there's egos. He was just a pain in the fucking arse. Great bass player: if you ask me for a professional evaluation of him – fantastic bass player – original sound, great bass player. One of the best I've ever worked





with. As a bloke? I didn't like him at all – and I don't think he liked me very much either! I mean, he did everything he could to make anyone's life difficult. Fucked me off, pissed me off. His attitude pissed me off. Nothing was ever right, I don't know what his problem was. Even when Rattus was huge and No More Heroes

was huge, he was still fucking moaning it was all rubbish – that I didn't know what I was doing, that I never captured The Stranglers sound properly. Oh shut up, Jean. Just shut the fuck up.

But the early sound was great.

Well, I thought I knew what I was doing. I did the best I could. Everyone else was happy. The only person that was never happy was Jean. I mean, Nice 'n' Sleazy, they were in America at the time. I sent those mixes over of Nice 'n' Sleazy and he said it's not right, you're gonna have to mix it with me there. So I flew all the way over to New York, remixed it, brought it back and I just let them get on with it.

Why did you fly to New York? You could have said, fuck off...

Yeah, the record company said: well, you'd better go. I thought: have a week in New York, practically an evenings work and run around with a few mates. I do remember saying to Jean, if I come to New York, I'll be out there for a week, you know, you got to allow for the fact that the first day I gotta book us into the studio, the second day... the following day you may not be happy about the fourth day... so I'm likely to be out there the entire week, so you're paying for it all. That's the way your deal works. So are you sure about this? Because otherwise it's gonna cost you £3,000 or whatever the bill is gonna be, and is it worth it for the minor changes which you think are essential?

What were the minor changes?

Can't fucking remember!

The bass sound maybe?

Yeah I think it was the bass. Ha! And also, he felt the synthesizer solo was too loud. So anyway, I went out there and did the best I possibly could, got it back to England and everybody in England said the TW mix was better. And that's what went out – not the American mix. I think Jean was basically insecure and he had to make his mark on everything.

He was the one speaking, but was he speaking on behalf of the band and acting in their best interests?

I don't know. Maybe he was. Maybe he felt he was. A lot of arrogant, insecure people, they think they're doing the right thing. In fact, they're convinced of it and the fact they might be acting for the wrong motives never occurs to them. That's part of being arrogant, innit? You never question yourself.

So when you did the Sleazy remix, were the rest of the band there?

Oh yeah. There's a very funny story which I'm not sure I should tell you. Maybe you've already heard it, about the bird in the booth?

Who was she?

I don't know. Some slag JJ pulled... you know the story then?

You mean the tape of JJ doing the dirty deed in the studio?

Yes, and she had a period! And his comment at the end of it afterwards was: my God – it's like World War 3 in here! [LOL] And she responded by saying: Is that it, JJ? I heard you were a bit good at this. Is that it? Yeah babe, he says and he

walked back into the control room with a Cheshire Cat grin and goes: How's the mix going? So we played him the tape!

What happened next?

Well, the girl walked in about thirty seconds into the tape while he was still critically listening, and she heard her own voice. She knew exactly, and she started laughing and looked at me and said: did you tape that? I went: yeah. She thought it was hysterical. But then JJ said: Stop the tape, stop the tape now. Gimme the tape, gimme the tape. Martin, that was a real bummer thing to do. I said: It wasn't my idea – it was Hugh's. Everyone was denying it was their idea. Hugh went: no, it was Jet's idea. He never knew whose idea it was. Gimme that tape, he said, and smashed it up with his boot. But what I didn't know, and none of us knew, was the little Tape Op working with us was running two fucking machines!

Who was he?

I dunno. Can't remember his name. He was a little young lad. Suddenly it's all over the NME gossip page about a tape circulating in London of Jean Jacques performing – and under par! So Jean phoned me up and said: you bastard. I said: Jean – it's nothing to do with me. As far as I'm concerned there was one tape and you crushed it up under your boot, and that's it. If there was another one made it, was without my knowledge. He said: you bastard – how could you do it? I said: I didn't do it, Jean. It was sweet revenge.

There's quite a lot of friction between you and JJ. Why was that?

The Stranglers were in the top two or three acts I ever worked with in my career, and I had a wonderful time with them and great memories. Jet was such a laugh. And for 95% of the time I got on great with Jean and we had a right crack. But sometimes he could be a right pain in the fucking bum. I don't hold it against him. I've seen him several times since and he's matured and he's quite a decent person. He was just a young dude, you know. Trying to adjust to things that were happening that was a bit mind-boggling when suddenly you're elevated to superstardom.

Fans didn't always know who was singing what on the first two albums. Hugh told me once he blames your production for that. What do you think?

Well, Hugh sang most of the songs – I think he's wrong. I can tell Hugh Cornwell and Jean Jacques a mile off – I don't really know how to respond to that. I mean, when it's Hugh singing, it's really good – and when it's JJ, it's alright. I mean, how can you compare Bitching with Hanging Around – in terms of writing styles, vocal performance..? It's totally different. I mean, I stopped working with The Stranglers suddenly. Overnight I said I'm not doing it anymore. I think they were a bit pissed off that I suddenly said I'm not doing it anymore. I made three or four albums with them and for some reason they think I'm... well, that doesn't bother me. What concerns me is why they should think badly of me. I think because we were supposed to go to Paris to make a record and I decided I didn't wanna do it. And that would have turned out to be The Raven. I sort of had a bit of a problem with JJ's behaviour at the record company. Inasmuch as he had misbehaved very

badly with a young lady. It fucked me off because it happened to be my secretary. I didn't take very kindly to that.

Behaved badly..?

Yeah – he made sexual advances to her which were refused. I'm not suggesting, well, he wouldn't take no for an answer for quite some period of time which caused her a severe degree of stress during subsequent meetings. It fucked me off as it wasn't very professional... there are limits. Also I'd been thinking I'm running out of steam with The Stranglers. I couldn't think of any new things to do. I detected that they were running out of steam a bit in the writing department. All the original songs they'd written as street people, they'd run out of. Now they were writing songs as pop stars and it wasn't the same. And the thought of being in Paris with Jean Jacques for three months or whatever it was gonna be just didn't appeal. Plus, I was starting to get into electronic music at that point in time – I was talking to Visage, I was talking to Joy Division – and doing another Stranglers album when I didn't have any new ideas and I didn't feel I had anything to contribute... I suddenly got up one morning and said I didn't want to do this record. They've got Alan. Alan knows everything they've ever done. I phoned Ian Grant and said I'm not doing it, I don't think I should be doing this album. I've made the decision.

What was his response?

He said they're gonna be really fucked off. I went: yeah, but I'm telling you, Ian – it's the best thing. He said: now you've put it that way, you're right. But they're still gonna be fucked off. I went: okay. But it was the right thing to do. I really felt I didn't have anything to contribute.



Had you heard any new tracks they were coming up with?

No. I hadn't heard a thing. I don't think... I might be talking out of turn here, but I reckon a lot of them were written in the studio. You know with little ideas they've got on the road rather than having the songs all ready to go. I don't blame them, it's just the way the business works sometimes. At the moment, my son is in 'Does It Offend You, Yeah?' – a modern electro-rock type of band, incredibly good, but I'm watching the pressure that he's been under to write. The advice I give him is: put your foot down and demand the time you need to do all you need to do

to get it right. I think The Stranglers had been touring constant.

You already recorded Euroman. Was that at TW?

No – all different studios. Whenever Jean was free he'd say: can we try and get a session in this week for Euroman?

So JJ still wanted you for these early 1979 sessions?

He did then. Then they go and talk to me like shit!

You had other work?

Jean was always jealous of me working with other bands. I remember when we we're doing No More Heroes... or might have been still Rattus... somewhere in between the two – and we were having a chat at TW during a break, and he said: do you know, Martin? The Doors producer never worked with anyone else but the Doors. I went: Well, if you're gonna do that, you're gonna have to make me a member of the band, so I get a slice of everything. He said: Oh, I'm not sure we can do that. I said: I've got family to keep. At the time, the Buzzcocks were coming up on the horizon, and he knew I was thinking about producing them. I went: look – I'm either a Strangler, in the fullest sense of the word – but I'm the studio Strangler – or I'm a freelance record producer – and I work with who the fuck I like. But what you can't have are these services for nothing.

You didn't want them to record In The Shadows.

No.

Were there any Stranglers songs that didn't make an album?

No, I can't remember one song that got binned. I might be wrong.

Was there a song called Little Choirboys that was recorded during Black & White?

No. I don't remember that one.

How did Black & White compare to the others?

Didn't like it. I liked Sweden, Toiler On The Sea and Nice 'n' Sleazy. Toiler to me, was Hugh's follow-up to Down In The

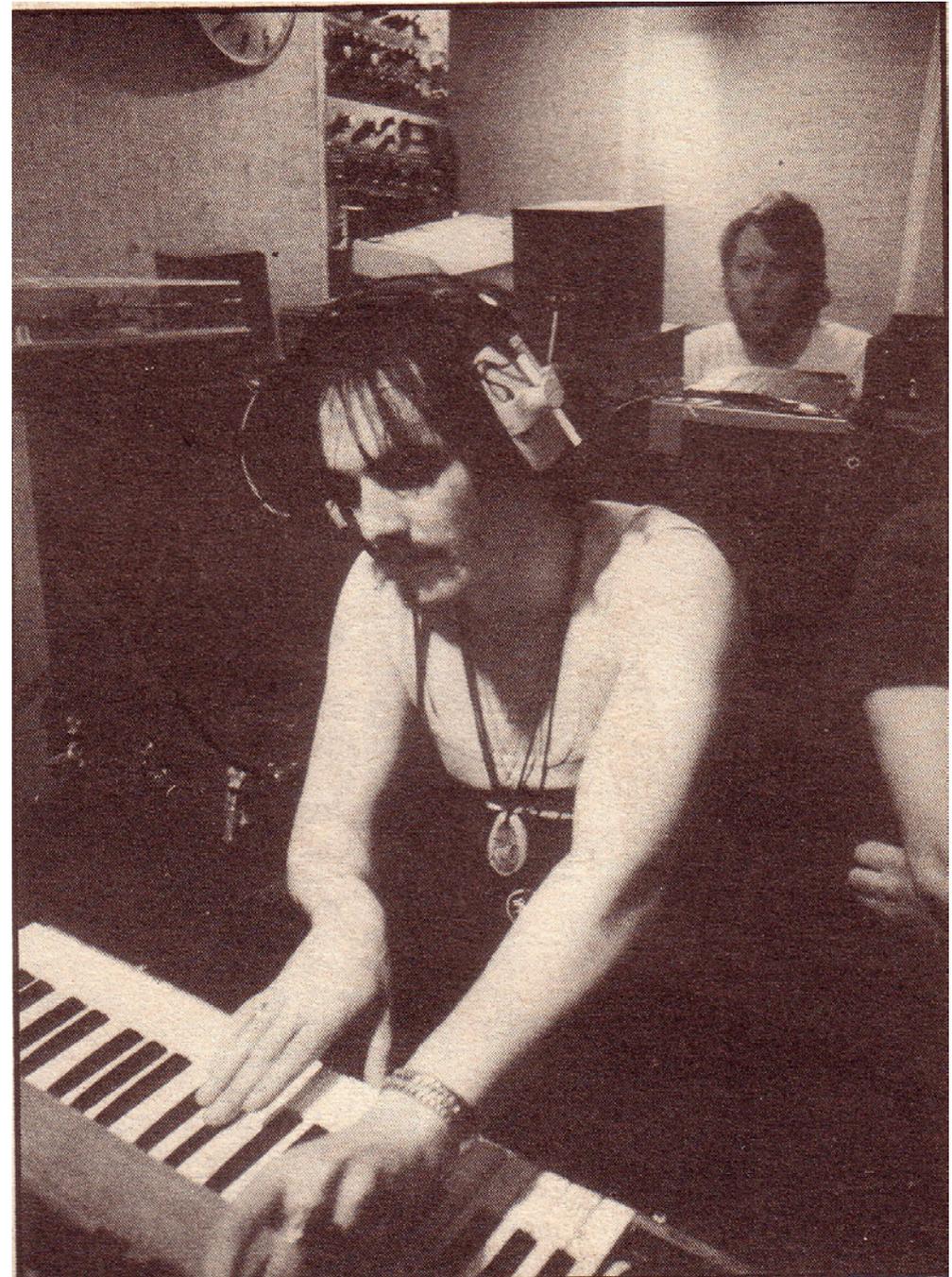
Sewer. Big epic tune. Loved it. Sweden I liked because Hugh had told me about touring Sweden and finding it boring and I could relate to that 'cos I thought it was crap too.

You went on to mix Live (X-Cert)?

It was a bad idea, a management idea. The demand for The Stranglers at that time was huge. Best thing since sliced bread. They said we'll do three nights at the Roundhouse. What they should have done is one night at a massive venue and brought 'em all in. Can you imagine keep playing at the same venue – it's like work. So I was asked to record it live, and the band was pissed off, everybody was pissed off. Crap vocals, the recording was shit, everyone was in a bad mood, the band didn't wanna do it, I didn't wanna do it, it wasn't my idea. I did the best I could. The whole thing was a bodge, I hated the thing. Write this down: 'Martin Rushent hates X-Certs and should never have been released. It wasn't my decision.' But lurking somewhere in the vaults are much better live recordings of The Stranglers but I don't know where they are. Maybe EMI have them? I know there's a very early live recording of them at the Red Cow – I don't know where the fuck that is.

Who else came down to TW?

Lew Lewis came down, and George Melly – he was great. I really like him and he was really up for it. We all got very drunk – Lew Lewis got completely drunk. Lew turned up with two bottles of Jack Daniels and necked the lot over 4 or 5 hours. We put him on a train back to Canvey Island or wherever he lived then, and apparently he ended up in Bristol, in a siding. We put him on the fucking train



to Southend or wherever, and we thought: Yeah, yeah – he's on the train, he's fine now. He must have got off and walked – I mean, you have to go to Paddington to get a train to Bristol, so fuck knows what he did. Chas de Whalley too. I haven't seen him for years. He used to hang around a lot. He was a big Stranglers fan. Chas really put Jean Jacques nose out of joint. When No More Heroes came out and just exploded, he said – Martin, can I do an interview with you about your work with The Stranglers and stuff? I said: well yeah, okay. Came out the following week with a picture of me and the banner headline – The fifth Strangler. Can you imagine how Jean Jacques Burnel reacted? He went: Martin, how could you do that? I said I didn't do anything. I did an interview and I didn't write the article or the headline.

That's a really good headline!

Yeah – and that will really fuck him off! I got to give him this – he always said: I am never gonna stop doing The Stranglers. And he never has.

Could you foresee Hugh leaving The Stranglers?

When I heard Hugh had left, to me that was it. True, I saw Jean and Hugh fighting, particularly on the road. I remember at the Roundhouse having to separate them as they were just about to do a gig – during the sound check. Fucked if I know what they were rowing about, but I went up to them and said: Guys, guys – and got in between them and they looked at me and said: Fuck off, it's got nothing to do with you. I said: Okay, just don't hit one another, you got a show to do tonight. So it didn't come as a surprise cos I just thought Hugh had had enough, you know?

But The Stranglers without Hugh just ain't...

What about The Stranglers without JJ?

Nope.

Or Dave?

Is Dave still in it? No.

And Jet?

Jet is still playing? He must be... how old?

Sixty-nine.

Wow. Nope. If one of them is not there, then to me they're not The Stranglers. Despite all the conflabs and diversity of style and different directions pulling and all that – that's what makes them great. And if you take one of them out then you're left with something incomplete. Like a jigsaw with a piece missing. It's just not The Stranglers for me and that's it. I don't want a different Stranglers – I want The Stranglers. I've never knocked them all for carrying on – that's great. I've never seen them without Hugh, and I won't go because I know I'll be disappointed because I want to see Hugh slashing away, you know? Hugh can do a lot worse than rejoin The Stranglers, frankly. There was some talk about six, nine months ago about me possibly doing something with Hugh, which I'd like to do – which never came to anything. I've heard his material – it's nice, but he'd be much better off with The Stranglers.

How did that come about?

I did an album with Hazel O'Connor recently – she lives in Ireland now and

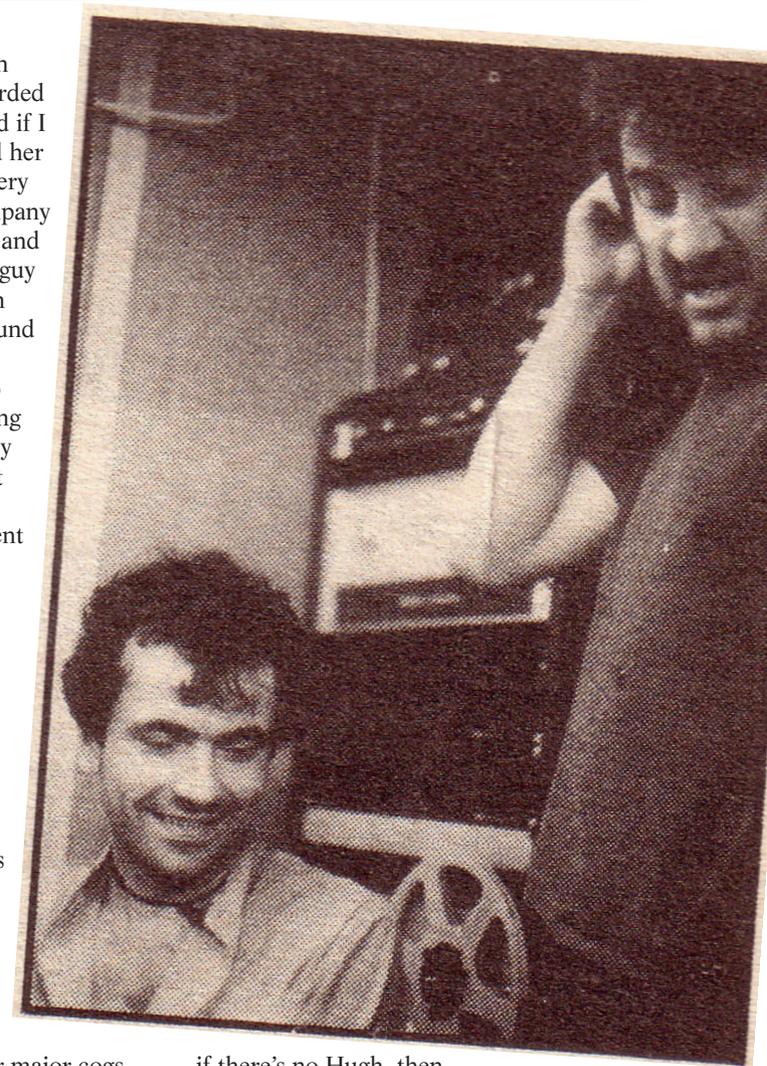
well-in with all the top Irish musicians – and she'd recorded the backing track and asked if I would do the overdubs and her vocals and mix it. It was very successful. The record company was called Invisible Hands and the guy who owns it, a big guy called Charlie is mates with Hugh's label. It drifted around and there were mutterings, but I kept getting invites to see Hugh, saying he's playing in Birmingham tonight – my diary doesn't work like that – and it sort of fizzled out because I never actually went to a gig. And I'm not even sure Hugh knew about it. Maybe it was get them in a room and see how it goes.

Would you go see The Stranglers now?

I will never go and see The Stranglers unless Hugh is there. I'd listen to his songs – if Jean Jacques Burnel or Dave Greenfield did a solo album I'd listen to them. But I'm not listening to anything by The Stranglers because I'm afraid it's The Stranglers with one of their major cogs missing – it's like watching a film with all the best bits missing. The same if Jean Jacques wasn't in it.

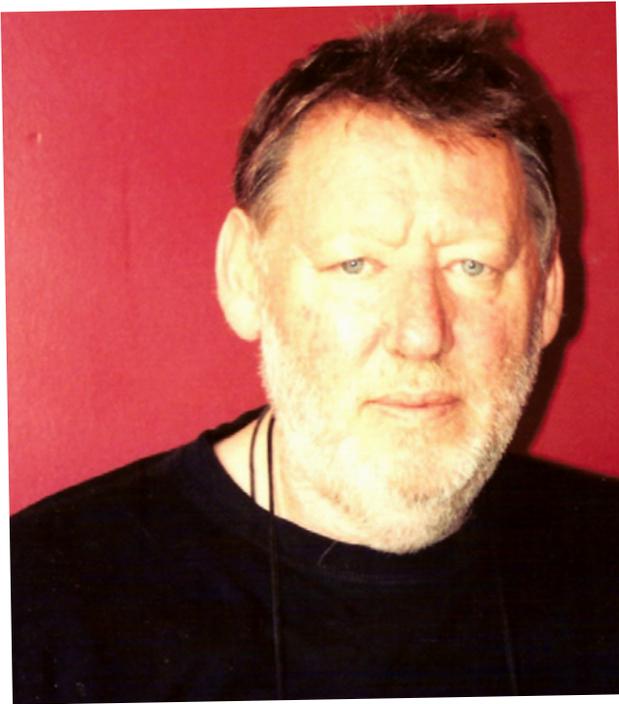
What about producing The Stranglers again?

If Hugh rejoined The Stranglers – and there's some good songs – I'd do it! I might just go and do another album. But



if there's no Hugh, then... 'cos I'm sure all the angles with Jean, I'm sure we're all grown up now – and we'd probably do a wicked album. But if there's no Hugh... but anyway, it's like revisiting the past. We can't be what we were in the late '70's. We can't be that again. That's what we were then and to try and go back and recreate that vibe... I'm 58.

But you now produce modern music –



I'm working on of 'These Are The Things...'. I'd be very interested in hearing what your opinion... I like to appeal to a bunch of people who've never heard it. I play a DJ set with a Human League song I've remixed and the kids go: wow, wicked tune, never heard of it.

Like the Richard X remix?

Yeah, he mashed up my remix and earned me 20 grand, thank you very much! I'll play it to you. I've not finished it. You won't offend me, you're market research. I won't kick your head in, honest!

and you DJ at raves too?

Yeah, a very different vibe! I also did Euroman Cometh with Jean using beatbox machines and that was very interesting. So it probably wouldn't sound like the '70's Stranglers, it would sound like the 21st century Stranglers. As a sound engineer, I really like technology and synthesizers, hence the Human League. I tell you what I would like to do. I'd like to remix Rattus Norvegicus because I'd like to give it a new slant. I'd like new beats on it, electronic. I feel that a new generation could be drawn to it.

How could that happen?

If EMI agreed to it. I mean, I have all the masters of Dare and I'm steadily remixing all the masters. In fact I'll play you a remix

Old technology was time-consuming – like the Roland Micro-Composer on Dare? It was a very accredited computer which was dedicated to the job. Really, it was a work of a genius, the Roland guys or whoever designed it clearly knew what they were doing, but it was totally time-consuming. You wanted to make one musical note and you'd have to enter as two-digit values – the pitch information, the velocity, the length of the note, and within that time, how long you want that sound to last for, called the gate time. So you had four numbers you would have to enter to create a note. So you can imagine how long it took to enter [sings keyboard riff to Love Action]. Some considerable time.

So studioitis must have crept in?

No, because I would disappear to my house, sing all my ideas into something like that... [Dictaphone] and capture the spontaneity there and then. And then we'd spend days recreating the spontaneity!

You're busy even nowadays, but do you ever consider retirement?

Nope. Well, we've all got to go sometime – with my lifestyle I should be fucking dead by now. I didn't expect to make 50. I smoked like a trooper all my life, drank like a pig, took loads of drugs and goodness knows what else. I never slept. From the age of 18 until I reached 35, I don't suppose I averaged much more than a couple of hours sleep a night. I didn't really try cocaine until I was in semi-retirement. So when my first marriage broke up I became really bad. I became a single dad with three kids and working in a studio didn't really fit in. I'm back in it now and it's all going really well. I learned a lot, and found there was a life outside of the studio. So from 18 years old I was in a studio 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year – and every 4 years it was 366. So then it was like: oh, there's this thing called the telly! This is good, I like this. And the pub – you can go and have a drink and meet people – excellent! Cooking, oh I like that. I was so single-minded for the first part of my life – all I did was make records. Yeah – I loved it, but then I discovered all these other things – and I love them too!

So what makes a producer great?

Just sheer genius, really!

View Martin's video tour of his studio [HERE](#)

JJ Burnel on "behaving badly..."

Martin Rushent clearly doesn't have very fond memories of JJ Burnel, judging by the interview. Some of his stories concerning JJ were quite close to the bone, so we at Burning Up Times felt it only fair to run some of the more lurid stories past JJ, as his reputation may have been called in to question (ie, to save our arse). JJ enjoyed the interview, calling it "a cracking read". He was happy for us to publish it in full, but wanted to share his angle on some of Martin Rushent's recollections...

"Just a couple of things regarding [the] Rushent [interview]. I think he has been slightly disingenuous or maybe it's just that 30 years have gone and 'the truth is changed by the memories we have'.

"Firstly regarding his 'secretary'. What he didn't mention, and what he might not have known that we knew at the time, was that we knew he was knocking her off. So there was a bit of horseplay involving her.

"Secondly, he didn't mention the fact that he kindly loaned me his car to drive down to the South of France at Christmas. Unfortunately I wrote it off about 30 minutes into France. He was quite pissed off! I don't think he forgave me for that; it was his pride and joy. We still have a letter he wrote... V funny.

"Thirdly, we were actually recording The Men In Black at his studio and he said that he couldn't get into it and was tired so we said to him to take the rest of the day off and we carried on without him and proceeded to make, arguably, our best album ever, The Raven, without him.

"Fourthly, he seems to imply that Hugh wrote the best songs, or that Hugh sang his songs, either of which is untrue. Admittedly, I agree Hugh had the better voice, but some songs that I wrote the lyrics for, like Goodbye Toulouse and most of Hanging Around, were sung by him. Also the epics like Toller on the Sea, which I wrote every note for, or the Raven which I wrote music AND lyrics for and Down in the Sewer (music) he seems to think were written by Hugh.

"For years I've allowed Hugh to let people think that he did everything or the majority and he's actually fuelled this with his book and frankly it's time for another opinion to be heard. Subsequent events and records speak for themselves. Remember the person who walked out on OUR band is now trying to bask in the glory of what we've achieved subsequently even to the extent of changing his logo to ours. Pathetic.

"AMEN."

Waiting for the Meninblack in '77

Alan Hillier asks John Robb, Goldblade singer and author of 'Punk Rock – An Oral History' all about Punk and The Stranglers.

Blackpool, Lancashire. Summer 1977. John Robb has sat his 'O' Levels – but he's nonplussed about his future for he knew "the world is fucked and music is crap." Suddenly music changed all that: "I knew about punk pretty early," he says. "I knew what the music sounded like from the way the groups looked. You'd see these bands looking mean and economic in their photos so you kinda knew that was how the music was going to be... and I was waiting for something." His first Punk gig was The Stranglers at Lancaster University.

Having grown up on 1970's glam rock gods such as Slade, Sweet, T-Rex, David Bowie and Mott The Hoople, John sums up the jump: "It wasn't too much of a

transition to Punk, to be honest!"

When did you first hear about the Punk movement?

In the music papers. Some kid at school turned up with New Rose by The Damned and that seemed amazing. It looked so home made: records up until then had been in expensive looking colour bags, and this was something that looked attainable, something that you could have a go at. That was very powerful. Someone else turned up with a copy of Sniffin' Glue and the idea that you could create your own media was just a strong. Punk was something our generation was waiting for whether it was in London – where you had the groups on the doorstep – or Blackpool, where you read about it from a distance. We still felt as involved and got our own bands and did our own fanzines. We got the message about creating your own culture very, very quickly... that DIY thing was so inspirational. Every week something turned up, a great new single, another cool looking band, another attempt to form our own band... we knew nothing about it and we tried to make music with no idea how to do it. We thought tuning up was putting the machine heads in a row. Somehow out of our naivety we worked something out. We didn't buy our punk gear from hip shops. We bought it from Oxfam, de-mob suits, stuff like that. I think punk in the north was quite a different scene than it was in the south. It was dangerous enough just walking down the street with short hair!

When did you actually hear the word 'Punk' as a description of this new genre.

In 1976. I know the term had been around for a good few years before then but the first time I really remember seeing it banded about was in the music press in 1976.

Apart from New Rose, what else were you listening to?

In Blackpool there was nowhere to hang out, so we'd end up at this skating rink where they played Northern Soul all night whilst the mad kids would whizz round kicking people with their skates, blood on the ice. The rest of us would skulk around the café. They played a mini punk section in the middle of all this Northern Soul – The Ramones, New Rose and Anarchy In The UK. That's all there was to play at the time!

What about your favourite Punk band?

I don't have a favourite, there's so much I like about each band even if it's completely different in each case...

Did you consider yourself a Punk?

Yeah, but without any of the constraints that people have. It's a great scene and the music and all the other stuff that comes with it make it the most 'full-on' rock 'n' roll experience. For me, it's the music, the style, the politics, the community, everything. It's the pinnacle of pop culture.



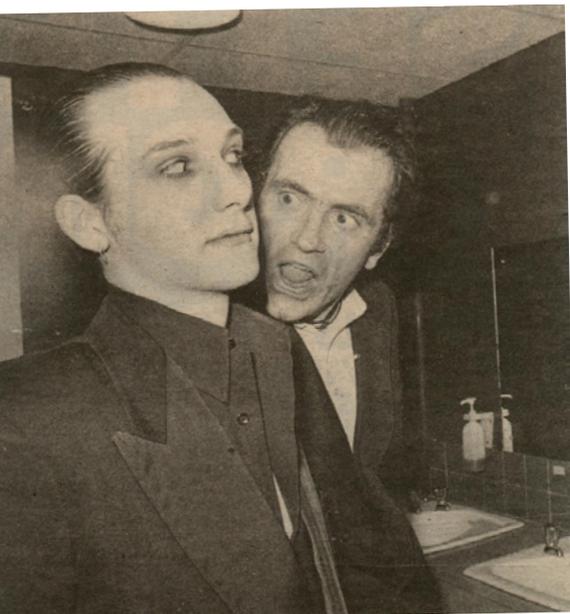
John Robb

Punk influenced your life quite a bit!

I think I felt a lot of the same sort of things before punk – it just sharpened a lot of that stuff up. It gave me the chance to do what I wanted with my life, which was amazing.

What happened when you first heard The Stranglers?

I was completely blown away! The weirdest thing is I still get the same



BROTHER JOHN'S TOP STRANGLERS TUNES

Peasant In The Big Shitty
Down In The Sewer
Peaches
School Mam
Straighten Out
Relentless
Sometimes
Toiler On The Sea
5 Minutes
Turn The Centuries, Turn
Ugly
No More Heroes
Nice 'n' Sleazy

feeling when I hear them now. You never get bored of listening to them, the songs still have a mystery to them, a dark power and a reckless excitement. It was the sound that really blew me away, that bass. the oily vocals, the keyboards, the way it was psychedelic but also far more aggressive than the other Punk bands. When you listened to Rattus it made you feel grubby, dirty and sleazy. The Stranglers were the grubbiest band ever. In fact, just looking at the Rattus sleeve was enough – they were the weirdest looking band. Burnel and Greenfield looked weird at the front, and lurking in the background was Hugh Cornwell – psychotic-looking, while Jet looked plain surly. It's still one of my favourite band photos, complementing the music perfectly; oily, sleazy, dark and dangerous – and yet, really cool. The stranglers also wrote amazing songs, everything was so damn catchy. Each song was a killer and with 'Sewer' at the end, it was mind-blowing. Me and my brother used to listen to that one track over and

over, lifting up the needle to take it back to the beginning and once again, get lost in their dirty lowlife tales of London sewer rat survival. It doesn't get much better than that...

What was your first Punk gig?

The Stranglers at Lancaster University, sometime 1977-78. It was pretty lairy, lots of punch ups between the rival towns of Blackpool, Preston and Morecambe. The band were amazing- the next day I swear about 15 groups formed in Blackpool as a result of that gig. It seemed like everyone was learning bass because of JJ, and to this day, you will meet people who picked up the bass because of him; he revolutionised the instrument, taking it from the back to the front of a bands sound. The gig was great. The violence wasn't implied. It was real, and there was a proper sense of excitement. The crowd was a right rum mixture of punks, bikers, drugheads and every gangbanger in the area...

Had quite an affect on you then!?

It blew me away! I loved Punk and I loved The Stranglers' psychedelic twist. I loved their tunes – I'm with Pete Waterman on this one – The Stranglers wrote songs as good as The Beatles. They wrote great pop songs so effortlessly, and opened up possibilities for everyone's musical side, making everyone I knew want to be in band.

What was the Stranglers track that kicked it all off for you?

Grip got me interested. Rattus was amazing for all the reasons above. I guess the song that really kicked it off was Sometimes – as soon as it came on, I was

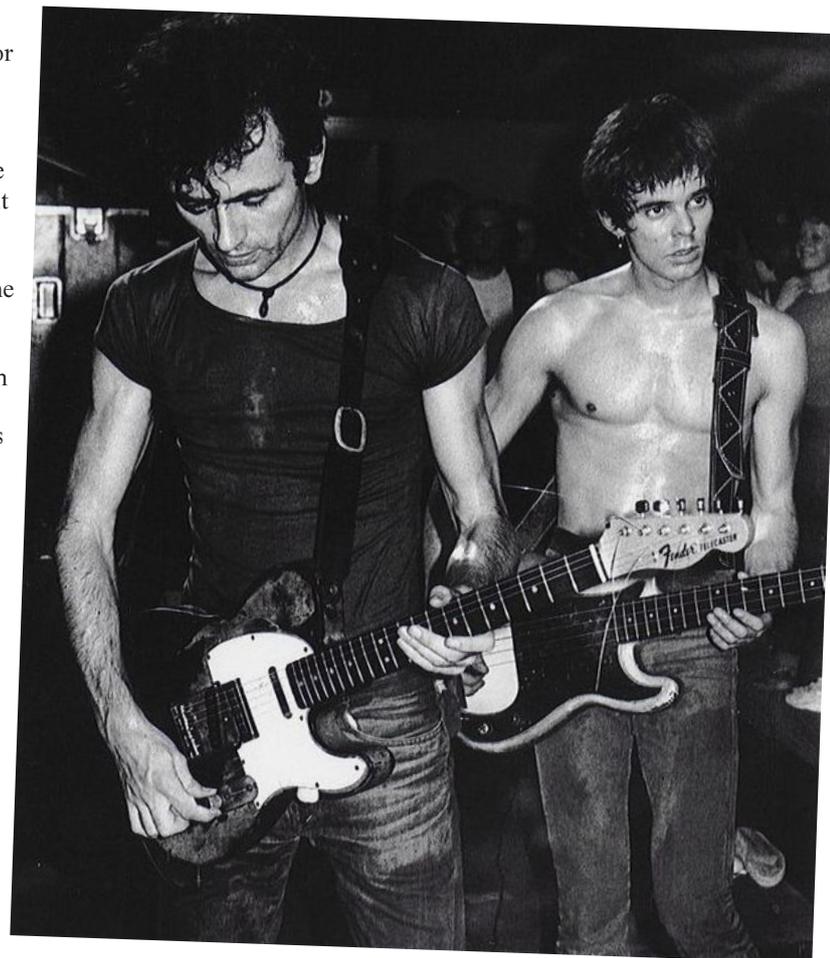
hooked, hooked for life. Here's why: the running bass line and the sheer malevolence of the song. Hugh sings it perfectly – it's not pleasant listening at all, and that's the whole point. The mean-ness of the lyrics is couched in a fantastic melody that at first sounds monosyllabic. but is really catchy and Dave is really brilliant on keyboards on this one. There's that killer chord change too – making it one of the greatest album starters and still one of my favourite Strangler songs ever. They really need to get it back in their set.

Peaches and Go Buddy Go too – Peaches had the best song intro. It's positively NASTY... the best bass sound from the best bass player. Hugh's snarling tongue-in-cheek snipes. His delivery is absolutely perfect, and it's so damn funny, the way he says 'bizness'. It still cracks me up after all these years. It really is a fantastically put together piece of music. Of course, sat on the other side is Go Buddy Go – a great slice of rock 'n' roll. The production on these records is amazing – they still sound switchblade sharp after all these years. I've listened to

them so many time but they still sound so exciting.

How do these tracks compare in Punk's hierarchy?

At the top, for sheer invention, aggression and song writing nous – and for that sound, every instrument was a lead instrument, everyone seemed to be playing something brilliant and twisted. The invention was awesome and the lyrics dark, with that morbid sense of humour.



The Finchley Boys

Questions posed By Owen Carne

Answers supplied by Alan A Hillier, Finchley Boy

When did you first discover the Punk phenomenon?

The first time I ever remember hearing the word 'Punk' combined with the word 'Rock' was sometime in early 1975 when a guy I was working with called Alan Swaysland (who was a part time DJ) used the phrase. The beginning of 76 was a weird time and we all had a kind of retro 40s thing going on with leather jackets and chinos a la Tommy Jordache (the cocky rebel played by Nick Nolte in the smash TV series of 76 Rich Man Poor Man). It was a good look.

The first Punk track I ever heard was 'New Rose' which I heard on the day of its release in October 76. I remember being with Dennis, Graham and some of the other Boys at my Dads house and thinking "Fuckin hell.....I like this....I like this a lot" I remember that we played it over and over again doing my old man's nut in to the point that he stuck his head around the living room door and sarcastically said with a smile: "It's ok but it will never replace music".

Who was the first Punk band that you saw and where?

I remember going to see bands like The Heavy Metal Kids who I believe were at the very fundamental roots of the beginning of punk in UK (and if you ever saw one of their gigs in 75 you would know what I mean) but the unambiguous

answer to that question must be The Stranglers at the Torrington in North Finchley on 14th November 1976

You seemed to enjoy intimidating bands like the Damned when they played locally. Was this deliberate to 'test' their bottle or was it just your way of enjoying yourselves?

We loved going to gigs and I think you are referring to the Damned gig at Manor Hill School which I will cover in another question. We did like getting amongst it at any gig. The whole thing was so new, exciting and vibrant and any of the 'good' bands were well worth watching.

Had you heard much about the Stranglers before first seeing them?

Not at all.

You have to remember that when we met them at the Torrington they didn't even have a record contract and the only time you could have known about them or heard their music was if you had seen them live. There was a weird 'buzz' about this new phenomenon called punk and I just remember seeing a 'flyer' for the Torrington gig when I was sitting on a bus coming down from Barnet and something just clicked inside my head and I knew in an instant that I just had to be at that gig.

Were there any other bands that the Finchleys would go to see or did your loyalty forbid it?



The Finchleys invade The Damned's stage at Manor Hill

Well, I suppose there really was a P.P (Pre-Punk) and an A.P.....yea you worked that one out all by yourself didn't you? And in some respects everything that we knew P.P. changed overnight but I had always liked bands like Alex Harvey (who lived in Finchley) and the Heavy Metal Kids. The Damned were a favorite of mine right from the start and funnily enough I saw the Stranglers and the Damned for the first time in the same week (Not a bad week was it!!!) The Torrington gig was on Sunday 14th November 1976 then the following Friday I saw the Damned at Manor Hill School in Finchley. My youngest brother John was in the third year at Manor Hill School at that time. This gig was amazing and ended in total chaos and a complete stage invasion which seemed perfect at the time. My little brother loved telling his mates how his big

brothers 'gang' had trashed the Damned gig and played on their instruments..... In fact, he was actually at this gig and it wasn't long before we took him along to some of those early Strangler gigs, so he could possibly lay claim to have been one of the youngest Stranglers fans getting in to 'away' gigs back in 77, but to answer the question.....the Stranglers were our band and they took complete precedence.

Is it true that you all came to the Torrington gig in normal clothes & then changed once you were in the venue? Was this due to the venue's dress code?

No. That is not true at all and I have always wondered how that rumor started (Can we just blame Jon Savage!!!!!!). Before they turned the Torrington into a fucking desperately needed Starbucks and the legendary gig venue at the back into



The Torrington back bar in its latter day incarnation. Says Al: "The bar still is exactly where it always was.....When I first saw the Stranglers I was stood at the far right of the bar by the pillar, the band were playing where the chairs are to the right of the bar."

a restaurant called the 'Three Oceans' there were two ways of getting into the band room. One way was from the side entrance in Lodge lane and the other was through double doors at the back of the pub. On the night we first saw them we came through the pub doors and straight into the gig. The toilets were immediately to the left (Before you entered the band room) down stairs and I don't remember anyone disappearing to the bogs to get all 'Punked Up'. We were all skinny young lads wearing cap sleeve T Shirts and this rumor could have come about because from the very beginning of the gig we went fucking apeshit and started ripping at each others cloths so we never came out of the gig looking the same as we went in..... Funnily enough I have the most vivid recollection of going through those doors

and looking immediately to my left only to make direct eye contact with JJ and Hugh who were leaning against the back wall looking gaunt and nervous. For some reason the whole gig is remembered in my mind in total monochrome black and white without a trace of colour.

How quickly did you realise that this band were something out of the ordinary?

It took fucking ages.....about one tenth of a nano second.

By the time Dave's keyboard intro to Grip had finished I knew that this band was the one I had been waiting for. The sensation was almost indescribable but if you have ever received an unexpected mild electric shock that went on for an hour and a half you might get the idea. It was an almost perfect moment and to some

extent there was almost a feeling of deja vu and I don't remember thinking that the songs we were hearing were unknown, they had an almost timeless familiarity right from the first moment.

The other amazing thing was that we just instinctively went totally fucking berserk and seemed to know exactly what we should do, just like baby birds who eventually have to throw themselves out of the nest and hope that they will fly..It really was like thattotally Incredible and when we jumped up on stage and got amongst the band for the very first timewe flew. Oh yes.... we flew alright.

When did the band start referring to you as the Finchley Boys (or Finchley Freds initially)? Did Hugh give you the name?

To be honest I don't remember ever being referred to as a Finchley Fred.....I certainly never heard anyone use that expression to my face....ever.

We were the Finchley Boys instantaneously. Maybe that's because the Finchley Boys had lived before in an earlier incarnation back in the sixties. The sixties Finchley Boys were a bit of a tasty mob by all accounts and I have read of some of their antics because the Kinks told of battles with them and the 'Mussies' from Muswell Hill and there were some vicious incidents which involved brutal kickings and the odd stabbing. The Kinks always maintained that they were from Muswell Hill, but whatever they say, Ray and Dave Davies were born and lived at 6 Denmark Terrace N2, which is in East Finchley not Muswell Hill.

How soon after your first gig at the Torrington did you start traveling around to see them?

Straight away.....We just couldn't get enough. We did all the London gigs at all costs but in the beginning traveling to distant gigs was confined mostly to the weekend gigs and those weekday gigs that were doable 'there and back' in one night. We didn't give a fuck if we got back to London at 6am, we just started doing more and more and going further and further. It just seemed so natural.

Your normal mode of transport to gigs was ROD the transit. Who owned it?

This was Dennis's van.

R.O.D. was the first three letters of the registration number (Not some twee name that we invented for it). It was a light grey twin wheel based Transit Van and it felt like an unsinkable battleship. I loved it and looks were very deceiving because although it looked a bit rough on the outside the bonnet (by October 77) concealed a brand new Factory Ford engine and that scruffy old battle bus could shift like shit off the proverbial shovel.

Rumour has it that, if you were stuck for transport, cars were occasionally 'borrowed' from the Finchley area only to return later that night. Care to elaborate?

I demand to see my lawyer.

To the outsider, the Finchleys could appear to be the band's private army. Was it more accurate to say that you were just looking after your mates who just happened to be in the band?

Not really.....If they would have been our mates before being in the Stranglers then that might be true. The truth is that when we met them they were not our

JJ and Dennis at Bracknell Sports Centre

mates and they were not well known or famous at all so it was easier for us to become friends with them on a genuine basis because at the outset we had nothing to gain from being with them other than the fact that we instantly loved the sound that they were making.....they realised that aswell and knew that our input was not based on the fact that they were a famous band who we were latching on to. What we did was instinctive and totally genuine and they knew that and they responded to us in the same way..It was genuine mutual respect which is always the best basis for any relationship.

How much violence was there at gigs during that early period? How would you compare it to a football match in the Seventies?

Football matches in the seventies were very, very dangerous places to be at. Organised gang violence was endemic and prearranged battles with rival fans were encouraged and the big London firms were at the absolute peak of their viciousness. I can't honestly remember going to a match back in those days where there was no significant violence and I am ashamed to say that we all played some small part in that scene..but it was simply the thing to do, you were either in.....or you were out.....that was your choice and that was just the way it was.

I suppose a lot of the 'violence' at the early punk gigs could be described as boisterous or over excited behavior. Looked at from the perspective of the venue staff or the hired security I suppose it seemed a lot more violent than it actually was but there were so many more opportunities for it to kick off especially when people began gobbing, pogoing or throwing beer around. The bouncers used

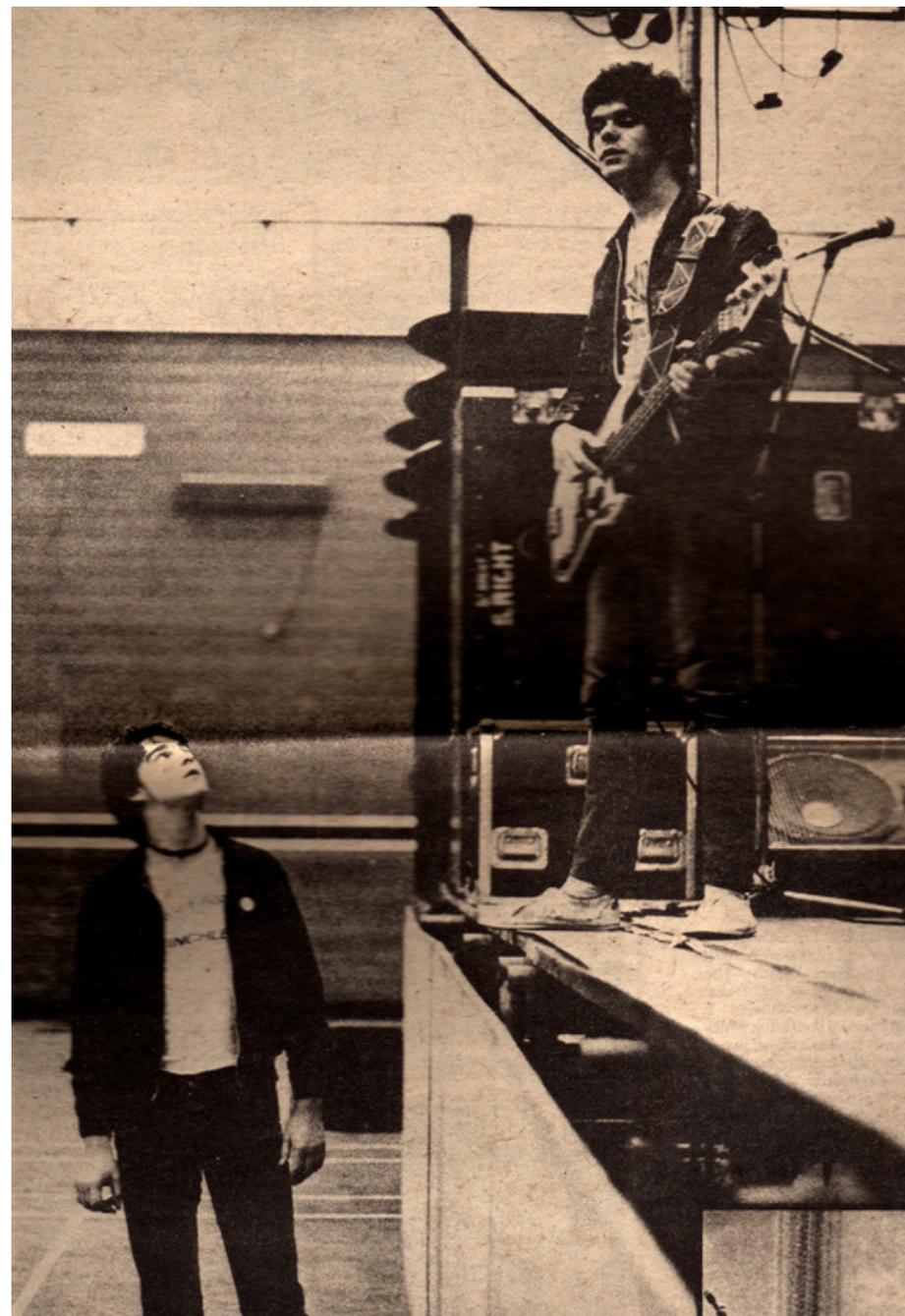
to get very jumpy and often their heavy handed tactics were instigated out of fear, but some of them were just fucking vicious thugs and we had many run ins with them because of that.

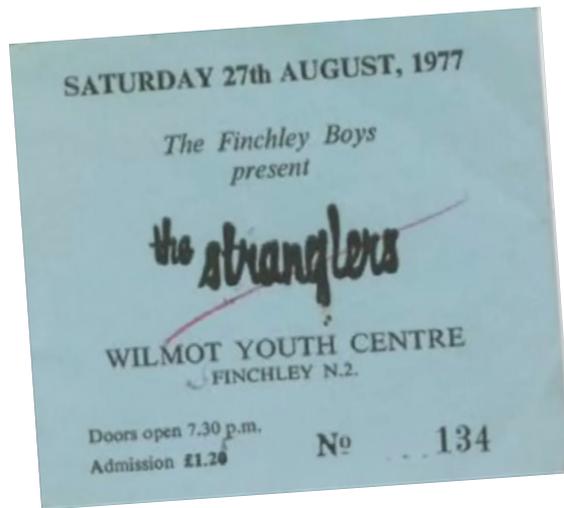
Was the FBs part in the violence purely defensive or was it a pack mentality?

There is no doubt that we were a 'pack' in the fullest sense of the word and we needed to be, we were targets for anyone and everyone, we were out there on the streets getting to venues and we needed to stick together to a man, but our violence was always totally defensive or retaliatory. I cannot remember one single occasion when we could have been rightly accused of instigating any unnecessary agro (I don't think the Stranglers would have appreciated that). There was so much potential and provocation at all the early gigs and we would have been crazy to have done so. Our actions were always reactionary, but when we were attacked we were fucking ruthless in our retribution and if anyone wanted to harm the band, the equipment or harm us we would fuck them up, tout suite in true Finchley Boy style.

Many people will have spotted the Manchester United Red Devil tattoos on some of the FBs arms. Surely Finchley is Arsenal or Spurs territory?

That always disappointed me. Back in 1974/75 most the Finchley Boys were either Arsenal or Tottenham although we never let those allegiances divide us. As far as I can remember Dennis was always a mad Man Utd fan (I'm not sure why that was) and he was instrumental in the creation of the London based 'Cockney Reds' which saw the defection of





many of the boys away from London clubs to Man Utd. This outfit became legendary in Manchester and London and attracted some serious nutters who were at the forefront of the Manchester gang culture.

At the end of 75 and the beginning of 76 football violence was at its peak (as I have already mentioned) and there was the distinct possibility that we might have to meet up and do battle against each other. I remember a game against Man Utd sometime in 1976 where the Utd boys went on the rampage at White Hart Lane and actually managed to turn a London bus over on its side and there were running street battles before and after that game and I knew for sure that Dennis and Leigh Bull, Leigh (Arthur) Brown, Pete Sharpe and others were down there and heavily involved.

I was running with the Tottenham Boys and I was grateful that we never crossed paths on that day...Thankfully by the time the punk movement came along and we were more involved with the Stranglers our time was spent back as a united squad and football went on the back burner..... although Dennis is still a mad Man Utd

fan to this day..

Who suggested that the band play a gig at the Herbert Wilmot Youth Centre on Hugh's birthday in 77?

I'm not really sure who's idea it was but we all played in a legendary football team who (at that time) were called Wilmot Ajax FC. We had had a few previous incarnations but had been banned from the league a few times and we kept resurfacing under new pseudonyms.

We played most of our games fucked up with amyl nitrate coursing through our veins (and various other stimulants) and whilst the opposition were sucking on oranges at half time we were having a few Marlboro's, the odd spliff and a bottle of Holstein pils that were always buried behind the goal in the mud (to keep them cool).

(Don't do that at home kids!!!!!!!)

The idea was to raise some much needed dosh to buy us some new kit and get the Stanley Road pitch some new nets and generally put some cash into the coffers of our local youth club (The Wilmot) which we had all been a part of since it opened in the late sixties.

Any particular memories of that gig?

Absolutely.....The queue to get into the Wilmot gig snaked for hundreds of yards right down the side of Merry Millers factory (A commercial bakery) and way down the 'walks'. At one stage I was doing a stint on the door opposite the kitchens and this great big geezer started moaning about having to wait to get in , he was dressed like a 50's teddy boy and stated getting threatening and was saying that he had a gun on him (which he did) enough was enough with this cunt so we

just gave him a few slaps and kicked him out and after all his threatening bullshit with his gun and everything he just went like a cowardly pussy...which was a bit disappointing

We banned all of the press, which totally pissed them all off and we kept a special watch out for photographers who were also banned. This raised the profile of this gig and to a large extent may be responsible for some undeniable animosity from some journos who just could not seem to get over the fact that we despised the main stream press and wanted nothing to do with them. This gig was for 'us' and there is no doubt in my mind that they never really forgave us for our total rejection of them (Check the BBC Seven Ages of Rock)

The line up was fantastic. First up were some peripheral Finchley Boys playing in the opening band who were called 'Dust' Tommy Taylor (Guitar) John Harnetty (Drums), Simon Brown (Guitar) who was Leigh (Arthur) Browns little brother, then 'London' and the 'Drones', it was absolutely packed solid. A brilliant gig..... with not a dopey hack in sight.

It seems that journalists had the wrong idea about your dedication to the band. Julie Burchill described you as a 'coterie of homosexual youths' and Tony Parsons wrote a caption to a picture of Dennis Marks looking up to JJ on stage suggesting it was a case of hero worship. Why do you think you were portrayed in this way?

"A Coterie of Homosexual youths" Really???

I bet she couldn't say that with her mouth full of Finchley Boy Cock.

Burchill and Parsons..... (Weren't they married for about five minutes?)

What a couple of fucking twats they were. Pop Idol, X Factor journos, answering an advert to supply the boring 'Hippy' NME with new 'young guns' to get out there and report on this new Punk Scene. The only criteria the NME required was that you had not been to university (Which would fuck up the whole street 'ethos' of the 'programme') The Gareth Gates and Michelle McManus.....of the literary worldfuck off..... Is it any wonder that we never took the music press seriously at all and is it remotely surprising that these 'journalists' knew it all along. They knew that they were phony and they knew that we knew that they were phony. Parsons and Burchill (and many others) were created, they were allowed to exist because the bloated music press needed a fire break between the old guard and what was happening on the streets in 77, they needed to sell copies of the NME and these common pseudo intellectuals would do nicely. These arseholes were encouraged to set sail on a punk journalistic journey to who knows where but they quickly realised that we were real people, with real lives, doing real things and that stifled their corporate bullshit to a large extent but they hated the fact that the Stranglers and the Finchley Boys would not be stereotyped as mindless thugs or senseless misogynists although this was what they generally wrote about us

"More suited to the football terraces"

What the fuck did they know about the football terraces?????

The message to them back then was simple.....Fuck you.....Fuck all of you. The message now in 2007 is ... "I hate you now.....I always will and when you're dead I'll hate you still".

By the way....is this same Julie Burchill who eventually shacked up with a chick called Charlotte Raven.....ultimately

fulfilling every homosexual fantasy that she had so vividly imagined was happening for us.....

How were the FBs viewed by the local youth in Finchley?

Good question.....You know something Owen I have never really thought about that before and to be honest I have no idea. I know that my little brother John and his mates thought we were pretty cool but we were always out of town and never really mixed with the younger lads in Finchley but I would like to think that they were proud of us.

Is it true that JJ persuaded one of the Finchleys to amend his NF leanings following issues with Pete (Enter, the black FB)? Did politics play a part in the FBs?

You'll have to ask JJ about that but I never heard anything about it.

I can't imagine who it might have been and I never heard a single word in that regard. For the record, I have known Pete Enter all my life, Pete's colour was never even thought about, he was a brother to all of us. Pete was solid as a rock and he knew exactly who he was and he also knew that he belonged with us (and proved it time after time) ..he knew it, it was instinctive and he had all the qualities required and many more besides. He was a fearless psycho on his bike and at one stage the Stranglers were seriously considering sponsoring him on the Grand Prix circuit

Back in the seventies there was just no getting away from politics and our lives were shaped by many of the events that took place.

Politics surround all of us all of the



time but, speaking for myself, I was born political and instantly understood that there was a social and cultural divide, which is far more sinister, damaging and far reaching these days. The other Finchley Boys felt very much the same but I'd like to think that because of our backgrounds we had a broader perspective on the effects of politics and the dubious actions of politicians and we all had a healthy skepticism that was shared by the Stranglers although none of us were overtly party political...we just hated all of them.

My old man was an active and aggressive shop steward in the fifties and sixties and like so many of the other local dads he worked at a factory called 'Simms Motor Works'.

My young life was colored by the hardships and merciless reaction to industrial action brought about by the

uncaring excesses of greedy factory bosses. I can remember many strikes at his factory during the sixties where my old man would support a strike to improve the safety and the working conditions of the men (and women). These actions were not all about more money and were never taken lightly; they were invariably about 'forcing' the factory owners to give some thought and spend some money on basic safety measures which, because of the very slack laws in those days, they were allowed to flaunt with callous disregard. These men took a stand against that dishonesty in spite of true hardship that they knew they and their families would endure and I'm glad to say that because of those dreadful days health and safety in the workplace improved.

Who suggested printing up the infamous Finchley t-shirts and badges?

I can't honestly remember who actually came up with the idea or the design I just remember being 'issued' with two and realising that we were no longer anonymous.

Was this an indication of elitism towards other fans or just a pride about your dedication?

Both. I suppose we could have been accused of a certain amount of elitism, we certainly felt that we were in an extended Stranglers family and we knew that we belonged there. We never paid to get in to gigs and we were always on the guest list, a bit later on when we were better known the venue staff just let us stroll in without any confrontation

Did you ever travel abroad to see the band? Amsterdam, Cascais in Portugal etc?

No I didn't. I was due to go out to Sweden but I got injured and Alan Warne went in my place

The normal assumption is that JJ was closest to the Finchleys. Were you close to the band as a whole?

That's an interesting question. Jet was a great laugh and had a really dry sense of humor (which they all had) but he was already in his mid thirties and had a family to consider. Dave was recently married (I think) and lived in a maisonette in Tufnell Park at that time (I did go there once) so I suppose it was natural that we spent more time with Hugh and John. Dennis and JJ were very close and I remember some great times up at Hugh's flat in Eggerton gardens in Knightsbridge. I particularly remember getting shit faced



Spot a blurred Hillier under Hugh's guitar

stoned with Hugh one night and listening to a first pressing of Rattus before it was released. We stayed up all night listening to various tracks and chatting about the Finchley Boys and the various bands of the day. On the way back to Finchley some time the next day I was still hallucinating and had one of the best trips that I had ever had (Actually flying above the van with London in full three dimensions..... amazing)

I suppose you could say that we all shared in different moments at different times. I remember an occasion when we were having some food in a restaurant behind Scotch corner in Knightsbridge and seeing JJ take a challenge to 'bar jump' and leaping the bar over thirty times without breaking sweat or traveling with Hugh on the underground to the UA offices and watching the faces of people firstly trying to work out if it really was him then trying to decide if his T Shirt really was a

photograph of a prick and bollocks with a cigarette tucked under the todger or a bad photograph of the singer from Mott the Hoople.

Many people will have seen photos of the Finchleys on stage with the band and shots from the 100 Club with a noose. Were there any other on stage antics?

Loads.....In the early days we would all come on to the stage and sing into the mikes during Go Buddy Go and just have a great time. It was something we always did. I distinctly remember Pete Sharp falling from a flying PA and landing right on the stage still holding a couple of cans of beer....I just grabbed him by the feet and pulled him off stage and everything just carried on as normal, as it always did. To a greater extent stage invasions by the punters were encouraged as long as they were just boisterous. Later on

stage invasions could be dangerous as the original agenda changed somewhat.

There was a name check for the Finchleys in the lyrics of Burning Up Time. Did this mean anything to you?

Totally... Personally, I saw it as a great honor to be recognised in this way. The song was about a particular incident that happened in Brighton when we were down there for the Buccaneer gigs. John showed what he was made of that night and took to the streets with us in search of some guys who had whacked Alan Warne. Thinking back, I really am glad that we never found those guys that night because the mood we were in I reckon we would have killed them.

Any thoughts on the other song relating to Dagenham Dave?

As I have said before, Dagenham Dave just did not live long enough to become some kind of guru to us. That is total fantasy. The guy was pissed up and out of his nut at the 100 Club and he wanted to have a go at the Finchley Boys. He actually grabbed hold of Dennis and that was never a clever thing to do at any time, he started flailing about and chucking chairs about and being a fucking arsehole so he was quietened down in Finchley Boy style.

I do know how important he was to the band and they knew him really well and appreciated him much better than we did and we all respected him and his part in the Stranglers story.

After the 100 Club incident there really wasn't many opportunities to ever meet up with him

I do actually still feel a bit sad that he decided to end his life in the way that he did and I accept any criticism that may

have been loosely leveled at us for this incident (should that actually be the case) in the last verse of this song.

I'd be glad to be wrong about that but I'll leave that up to your own interpretation.

"Like the howling of bulls"

At what stage did the avid gig going start to ease off? Any particular reason?

In my opinion the Stranglers were a phenomenon, they were undoubtedly the best live band that I had ever seen and to that extent we were not surprised that they were invited to spread their wings and take their music all over the world. This just had to happen and the logistics of that were obvious. Although the early forays into foreign soil like Amsterdam and Sweden and various places in Europe were doable the American and Japanese tours were simply not generally cost effective. By the beginning of 1978 the Stranglers had evolved into a world class outfit and the world, as they say, was their lobster. We watched their progress at all times and through May and September 78 we hooked up with them when they were back in the UK leading up to Battersea gig and onward toward 79. Nothing had a sense of 'fizzling out' we were all getting a little bit older and doing our own thing. Personally, I was playing in my own band by 79 and that started to take up a lot of my time, but I always got to see them whenever I could.

About how many times did you see the band in the 76/77 period?

Loads. I genuinely wish I could remember them all but apart from the most notable many of them just gel into an overall experience.

Any particularly memorable gigs?

Every one of them.

Do you still keep in touch with the rest of the Finchleys and do you miss pack mentality?

Not as often as I should, but we are like family and you know what families are like.

I do miss that ‘pack’ mentality and I think anyone who has been a part of a successful team a gang or a military unit, especially when your safety relied on the strength of the ‘whole’ will always say the same. There is a special bond that evolves amongst a group of people who share a common interest especially when others are trying to destroy you, be that the press or psycho’s who just want to beat the shit out of you to get a scalp.

Although I agree that we were a ‘pack’ I will also say that the Finchley Boys were fundamentally a bunch of individuals with different qualities who had a common purpose and to some extent the word ‘pack’ somehow gives the impression that we

were a thoughtless group who reacted to initiatives or orders and did not think for ourselves, this of course is not true, but it is fair to say that when the shit hit the fan we moved in to battle formation ‘as one’ very quickly, we often had no choice. We relied on each other completely.

Do you still keep in touch with the band?

Not really.....My brother Steve contacted Hugh quite recently (They were quite close back in the day) via Johnny Rubbish but from what Steve told me it was evident that Hugh is a very busy pop star with more important things on his mind than to chat to old mates like the Finchley Boys, which is understandable.....I suppose, but I still have great respect for him, what we did together and what he has achieved on his own.

I keep in touch with JJ with the occasional email but John remains (as he always was) a totally genuine gentleman and always replies (and still finds a place on the guest list for me whenever that’s possible.....How many people would do that after 31 years???...Total respect to you for that JJ)

Jean Jacques Burnel is a busy man with shitloads of things to do so it’s a true testament to his ongoing commitment to the memory of what we all did together back then, he talked about the importance of the Finchley Boys back in the early days and he still walks that talk in 2007. Consistent!!!!!!I think so.

If I never meet up with him again I will always have the enduring memory of him making time to visit us (During the recording of Norfolk Coast) at the funeral of Finchley Boy Daddy Cool (Andy) where we were all given shovels by Andy’s dad and asked to ‘bury’ him as if we were his real brothers...which of course.....we

were. To be honest JJ was never one to look back. I reckon he will have enough time to do that when he has finished with what he is doing right now and I don’t think that will be for a long time yet I hope. Looking back is for those of us who have always ‘observed’.

Could you foresee the band lasting over thirty years?

To be honest, I have burned my candle at both ends and I could never have foreseen me lasting the last thirty years let alone the Stranglers, but here we all are in 2007 and long may we all continue. Seriously though..It simply wasn’t something that the Finchley Boys would have ever thought about. I was 18 when I met them at the Torrington and when you’re a kid everything is permanent, everything lasts forever, nobody dies and the terrible news in the newspapers is happening to someone else, somewhere else and we never gave that a thought.

Looking at that question from a 2007 perspective I can honestly say (as I have said before) that the ‘current’ Strangler members in 2007 are the ‘custodians’ of some of the best music of our generation, music that was created initially at a pivotal and important time which has been augmented and added to at various points over the last 30 years (Norfolk Coast and Suite XVI is testament to that) and the

fact that they are still motivated to create more ‘original’ music is a demonstration and an ongoing example of their burning desire to continue to be creative on their own personal level. I know this might sound hard or callous but in my personal opinion they owe us (the fans) absolutely nothing and what they continue to do is done for their own enjoyment with the hope that we might enjoy it too. It simply has to be that way, it always was and I hope it stays like that. I just wish I had taken a camera.

What are your memories of that period?

Thirty years have flown by and there have been many, many experiences for me along the way (Marriage, children and all that stuff) but I can honestly say that my association with the Stranglers was one of the most important experiences of my life and I would never change a single minute of that.

“Can we just go back in time and do it all again?”





Video locations, Colville Road, W11 & Southern Row, W10

It's not easy finding the opening scene for the Something Better Change video; here the band emerge from a basement and jog past a row of whitewashed terraced houses. Back then the sun was shining, the sky was blue – and Dave G was hirsute. Today, through the grey mist, buildings look charmless. Owen Carne is here – and puzzled since his 1990s pilgrimage: we traipse the Colvilles, that is, Road, Mews, Terrace, Gardens and Square:

“These are new...” he says, waving at the white plastic bin shrouds.” This is it.” Beyond gentrifications and facelifts, lies the old terrace. But now we need to find the location for the rest of the shoot. Along Ladbroke Grove, heading for Kensal Green, there are some grey steps on the right leading down to some industrial units. It is here Hugh delivers his ‘First Commandment’ intro to Straighten Out. At the foot lies an innocuous bollard-busting, block-paved area where The Stranglers make the rest of Straighten Out and Something Better Change – the most eye-catching videos in their back catalogue. Meanwhile, I tread in some dog shit, which they say is lucky.



Royal Borough of Changing & Straightening



THOSE PLAQUES HAVE JUST BEGUN TO LINE THE WALLS...



Windsor Castle, 309 Harrow Road, W9

The third of the capital's pubs referenced in *Bitching*: The Stranglers play here in 1976, but they don't get on with the publican. *Bitching* omits any names, abbreviating the Westbourne Green venue to Windsor C. Rumour is Joe Strummer was inspired to write *Protex Blue* about the pub's contraceptive dispenser. Not 'when Johnny comes marching home...'



Red Cow, 157 Hammersmith Road, W6

Next stop is Hammersmith where I have to report that sadly, the Red Cow is slaughtered, courtesy of a wrecking ball. In its place, cheerless modern architecture and Thai food: even Fuller's ale fails to tempt. But back in 1974, interior shots feature heavily in Thames TV's *'The Sweeney'* with opening scenes from Colet Gardens; film unit offices adjacent at Colet Court; and cast and crew christen it their social club. In 1976, The Stranglers, The Jam and many more, cut their live teeth here. Future Pogues Shane McGowan actually loses his teeth one night after jumping off a friend's bike outside after a 101'ers gig



Dating back to the 17th century when it formed the southern end of the London to York stage coach this Irish Country & Western boozery with cow horns over the entrance, is run by a young Liverpoolian couple called Bill and Sue Rose. Entertainment includes striptease on a Friday afternoon – and a piano-playing ghost. Bands circa '76 get between £35 and £50 a night. One cold night in January, JJ has his scarf over his mouth singing. Another time, he swaps about the lyrics so much, Dave walks offstage in disgust. The band sometimes play two sets a night, and it was here UA boss Andrew Lauder takes producer Martin Rushent to check out before finalising the record deal. Martin urges him to sign them, and two hit albums on, the press backlash starts to filter through, leading to another reason The Stranglers are written out of punk history, according to JJ. Sounds journo Jon Savage disses the second opus, and our bass man seeks revenge at the Red Cow:

"I punched his lights out right there in front of Jake Riviera, Andrew Lauder, Elvis Costello, Nick Lowe – all these people saw what I did. So yeah, we made a lot of enemies, bless 'em, and these people got in a lot of influential positions within the music industry and literature including Tony Parsons and Julie Burchill. But we weren't gonna suck up to these c*nts."

The pub is put out to graze in August 1978 – and razed altogether in 1981. The New Red Cow appears in 1988 with vitally essential office space above but the following year, it becomes Latymers. The only surviving relic is the sign post on the pavement. As the route to the next iconic boozery takes us down the side road, bronze-coloured Ford Granadas zoom by, with echoes of: 'We're The Sweeney – and we haven't had our dinner.'



The Nashville, North End Road, W14

Regan and Carter aren't the only ones! Despite a rumbling stomach, cheeseburgers here priced at £6.55 fail to lure *The Burning Up Times*. Now called the Famous 3 Kings, bands no longer play at West Ken's Nashville Rooms. All that remains from years gone by is the famous glass portico – the stage has gone. Jet recalls to *The Burning Up Times* it being the only pub with one, and crowds "queued up right round the corner." Garry Coward-Williams later reveals the exact spot: to the right of the entrance, as you go in. The Stranglers smash the pub's attendance record two years after debuting here. Not only is it the first time the band play in London, it's also Dave's first gig as a Strangler. Plans to release 'Live at the Nashville' are scuppered when the recording is deemed inferior. Coincidentally – Rattus giveaway 45, Choosey Suzie c/w it's FREE 3, the live Nashville recording of Peasant In The Big Shitty – is the nugget I discover in Portobello Road before getting here.





TW Studios, 211 Fulham Palace Road, W6

Alan Winstanley first samples sound engineering here after convincing the two owners of a music shop to start a recording studio in the basement. From 4-track to 8-track, TW eventually upgrades to a 24-track mixer. The Stranglers originally come here for demos in 1976, returning in January 1977 to record their debut single. Following that, work quickly starts on their first album, with leftovers for the second and another session which became the Heroes session in July 1977. Producer Martin Rushent harnesses The Stranglers' raw energy. I give him a bell to see if he can recall the precise location:

"Redeveloped." He tells me. "I didn't recognise it at all when I drove that way a while back. It was in a small parade of shops in the Fulham Palace Road. Beneath the launderette was where TW was, in the basement area. To get to it then, you went into a turning round the back which was a small, suburban road. Round the back of these shop fronts was a small car lot with about three cars or something, and a gateway through an iron fence which then took you down some steps into TW. I can't remember the name of the road – it's fucking thirty years ago – I just used to pull in there, park up and run in the studio. I was always fucking late."

Chas de Whalley does a feature for NME during the Heroes session, with Chris Gabrin images. It turns out it was in a state of disrepair then:

"TW Studios are tucked away behind a drab shop front off London's Fulham Palace Road. To gain entry you have to go round the side, through a used car lot and down three crumbling steps. The building looks so ramshackle it's difficult to tell whether it's in a state of terminal collapse or whether it's being shored up at the eleventh hour."

Two accounts the same. All I need is a door number. I flick through jaundiced music rags from early '77, and there in the NME classifieds, is TW. I can't resist calling the phone numbers – but no one's in. Does the building still exist, I wonder?

We're here at Lillie Road and Fulham Palace Road. Once again, nervous trepidation fills the air at the prospect of coming up against a brick wall, a Tarmac car park, or a modern glass edifice coffee shop; how close was I?!

Past the red brick mansion block and round the ageing parade that arcs past the lights, a fanlight above a door reads 211. Adjoining this, is a coffee shop! Café Kreme is shut. Security fencing screens out a proper view inside but I rattle the door handle all the same. To my surprise, a pair of eyes pops up. A stoic black man walks out from the shadows of the shop door. Is this the spectre of Dagenham Dave? Is he still miffed at being evicted from the Rattus sessions?

With a jangle of keys, the door opens and I explain my presence. Mike, it turns out, is the proprietor. He is welcoming, and has his own story to add to the history of what was TW. After its studio life, the basement becomes a bar.

"Must have been sometime in the 80s, I guess. It was very derelict."

Mike takes us round to the old entrance in the side road. A steel security gate has been added, and pad-locked. I ask Mike for a key: "I don't have it. The owner has it – he lives in Portugal – and he's not interested in selling or leasing."

I try calling the letting agents' phone number on the wall, but they only deal with residential upstairs. I can't help thinking this silver door is out of place, even for a bar, but then Mike tells the rest of the tale:

"It was a speakeasy – a strip joint. The Police used it. But complaints of fights and noise from the local houses lead to them losing their alcohol licence. When the lease came up, I came to view in the 90's. It was shut down for years. I remember the urinals were still there, and the bar optics, but the DJ booth and decks were destroyed. Must have been some party."

Mike's plans to reopen as a bar take a swerve when he instead opts for the cheaper, empty electrical repairs shop upstairs. It's also £6,000 a year cheaper.

Spying through the gate I spot the old crumbling steps beyond, strewn with litter. The energy is still here, dormant and stifled within. You can sense the creativity inside as the silver gate dissolves to let The Stranglers go in, hopping down and scurrying inside. JJ with his steaming mug, tea bag placed in the overflowing bin. Hugh with his new guitar string liberated from the shelf in the upstairs shop. Gabrin snapping away with his Hasselblad camera. De Whalley shorthand scribbling – and Martin Rushent, late again!



T.W. STUDIOS
 211 FULHAM PALACE ROAD
 LONDON W.6
 For Your Sexulor
 ring for details
 01-385 4630/0393

The Greyhound, 175 Fulham Palace Road, W6

The Greyhound neighbored the nightspot monopoly of the Red Cow, the Nashville, the Clarendon and the Golden Lion. In the early 70's, residents campaign for it's closure, but a 3,000-strong signature petition ensures live music status, paving the way for many including, The Stranglers. Bands are history now, in it's new form as The Puzzle Sports Bar,



Albion Management, 12 Putney Bridge Road, SW18

In the shadow of Young's Brewery, for £12 per week, The Stranglers' Brewery, for £12 per week, The Stranglers' management were based in an upstairs office. Next door to a Chinese takeaway, and through a haze of hair lacquer on the ground floor, Dai Davies, Derek Savage and Ian Grant forge and plot while publicist Alan Edwards hits the phone and chain-smokes Marlboro cigarettes. Albion helped The Stranglers crack the live circuit cartel of the Hope & Anchor, Red Cow and the Nashville – and world domination is just around the corner. Or Wandsworth, as it's also known.



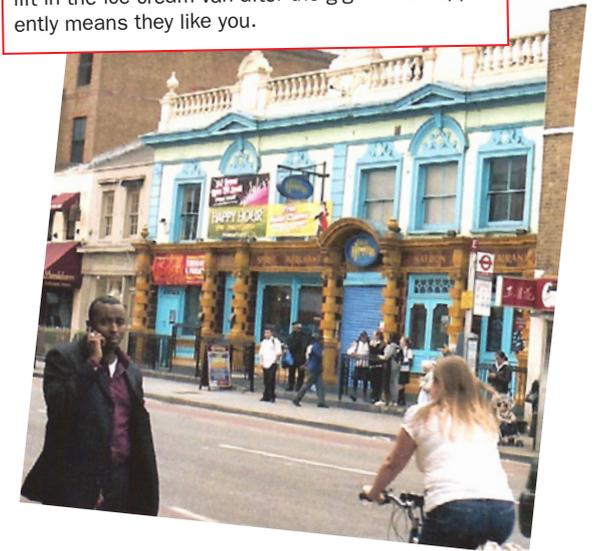
The Coleherne, 261 Old Brompton Road, SW5

"I'm moving in the Coleherne with the leather all around me..." Hanging Around documents this Earl's Court gay watering hole and the sleazy S&M scene therein. Adherence to covert codes of dress determines sexual preference, according to lore: an ear-ring in the wrong ear or a newspaper jutting out from the wrong pocket are translated accordingly. With girlfriend Choosey Suzie living close, JJ was known to enjoy a swift here, to be promptly surrounded by leather jackets and moustaches. But it's not all fun: in 1978, this cruiser boozier is the terrifying stalking ground for the start of an incredible run of serial killers: Dennis Nilsen, Michael Lupo and Colin Ireland. Between them, they slay an incredible twenty people. So, it is with some trepidation The Burning Up Times enters the majestic-looking inn with its telling multicolour flag, erect and stiff as a board outside. Inside, tradition reigns at full mast. It's dark and seedy. At the bar, lengthy looks come out of the shadows. I get the drinks in, and declare the need for some 'fags'. More looks. It gets worse outside: "Who's doing the cooking tonight out of you two then?" says one regular. "He's the vegetarian!" I say, pointing to my colleague. With that, we head off for lunch in Fulham Broadway where Chelsea fan Owen spots Didier Drogba.



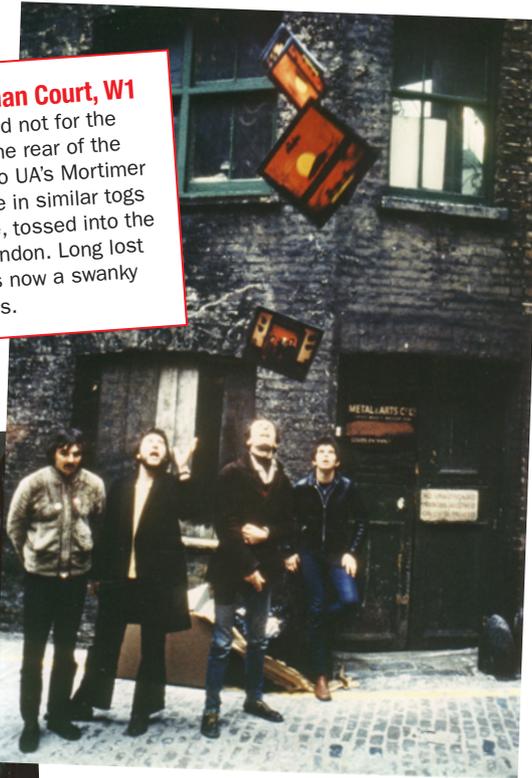
Golden Lion, 57 Fulham High Street, SW6

Dagenham Dave sees the band play for the first time in the early months of '76. They offer him a lift in the ice cream van after the gig – which apparently means they like you.



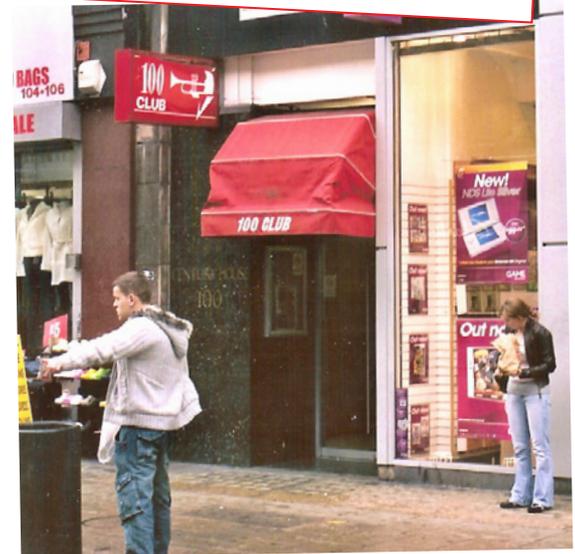


Early photo shoot, Newman Court, W1
 The Stranglers in court – and not for the last time! This location to the rear of the 100 Club is also proximal to UA's Mortimer Street base. The band pose in similar togs to the Rattus sleeve – here, tossed into the air in an act of wanton abandon. Long lost Metal Arts over the back is now a swanky Swedish eaterie and offices.



100 Club, 100 Oxford Street, W1

The subterranean jazz club hosts The Stranglers on 30th November 1976. Primo fan Dagenham Dave clashes with the Finchley Boys in the mosh and the band play on. Sex Pistols' svengali Malcolm witnesses the carnage as he is about to offer The Stranglers the support slot for the Pistols' tour. A week later – on 6th December – The Stranglers return to the club to sign a five album deal with UA worth £40,000. Meanwhile Dagenham Dave nurses a fractured skull and broken ribs quietly at his Paddington flat; the Thames beckons, and his washed up, beaten body is found near Tower Bridge that February. Immortalisation comes in the Heroes LP, Side One, track four.



Tired of Stranglers' landmarks being consumed by multi-national outlets or car parks? Frustrated at the lack of recognition the band seem to attract, despite their obvious popularity in 1977- not to their mention longevity? And has there been a Stalinist revisionism of rock history as far as our men-in-black are concerned?

In recent years, English Heritage have honoured rock artistes in recognition of their work by erecting a Blue Plaque at a specific locations. The *Burning Up Times* magazine proposes a nomination for The Stranglers. But where? You decide, download your own Blue Plaque [here](#), and award it yourself. Send your photos to editors@strangled.co.uk.

English Heritage use specific criteria in recognition of worthiness – details can be found here: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.1498>

Thank you to Owen for his locations help and to those who kindly let me in their homes, pointed me in the right direction, or just got out of the way of my camera for the shots. Gary.

Force nine gale

In the heady days of late '75, whilst the Stranglers were struggling on the gig circuit, a bigger struggle that faced them was to get any press coverage at all, let alone favourable. In the autumn of that year, one enthusiastic young hack at Sounds had picked up on them and had managed not only to see the band but also to get a review in print...that journalist was **Chas de Whalley**...

Chas de Whalley, along with a couple of others, gave The Stranglers good reviews long before their peers jumped on the bandwagon when they had become well known.

Chas remained an ally, friend and confidante of the band until late in 1977 when their mistrust of all journalists came to the front. Soon after, he moved to pastures new by becoming an A&R man (signing the likes of Adam and the Ants), then a producer (including U2's first two singles) and subsequently into music publishing. He has remained within the music business to this day but still has fond memories for those early days.

Mantheylovetohate met up with him in one of his haunts in the late 70s where he witnessed the band on many occasions: The Nashville.

How did you first get involved in music journalism?

I was in a band at university and I wanted to get a job in the music business. One of my mates was Charlie Gillett's half brother. Charlie had a very important Sunday lunchtime rock show on BBC Radio London (which was central to the pub rock scene). I contrived a meeting with him and he gave me some contacts in the business. One of whom was Vivian Goldman who was then a press officer at Island Records but was shortly to become

Features Editor at Sounds. At that time I went to a lot of Pub rock gigs and Vivian suggested that I could write reviews and send them into the Melody Maker. I did but nothing was printed for 6 weeks so I tried the NME instead. Within 2 weeks I was in print with my review for the 101ers at the Hope and Anchor in August 75.

You seemed to concentrate on the Pub rock scene. Was this from your own musical preference?

I had been a huge Pub rock fan for a couple of years. I used to go and see Ducks Deluxe, the Brinsleys (Schwartz) and Kilburn and the High Roads. That's where I was happiest and I understood what the music was about. It was a pre-punk movement and the music was back-to-basics. It was also a reaction to the Progressive rock thing. There were only a few people involved with the scene too so that made it very cool. I had a Back To Mono badge which I wore with pride!

Why did you move from NME to Sounds?

Basically the NME wouldn't print me after a while. Compared to Charles Shaar Murray or Nick Kent I wasn't the greatest writer in the world. But I was good at picking up on a certain kind of new band and conveying why I thought they were worth listening to. After I hadn't been

printed by the NME for 6 weeks, I finally got the message and went to Sounds where I was immediately put on features. The NME had stopped me writing about the Stranglers or Eddie and the Hot Rods, as they didn't think they were 'punk', but with Sounds I could do more or less what I wanted. I moved to Sounds in early Summer 76.

How did you first hear about the Stranglers?

A friend of mine used to book gigs for Weybridge College and he would go all around Surrey to find bands. He had seen a Stranglers gig in Redhill where the bass stack had packed up and according to him "the bass player spent the whole set singing the bass lines into the mic. It was just brilliant." I knew that I had to go and see them...

[Note this wasn't as previously assumed at the 'NOB' gig but a different gig at the same venue]

When and where was the first time you saw the Stranglers?

It was in October or November 1975 at the Hope and Anchor. There were only about 5 or 6 people in the audience, but no dog! I remember that in the encores Dave strapped on a guitar and they did



Chas de Whalley, 2008

Page 44 SOUNDS April 16, 1977

"Like a force nine gale of bad breath."

Chas de Walley - Sounds



the stranglers THE LATEST FIRST IV ALBUM
RATTUS NORVEGICUS

ALBUM URG 30045
CASSETTE YCR 30045

First 10,000 include a free single

'Fun Fun Fun'. They also did 'Walk On By' and that Shadowy 'That Was The Size of Her Tits' thing. They were really interesting and had that Doorsy-thing about them. I went up to speak to JJ afterwards and introduced myself saying "Hi, I'm from the NME" which usually got most bands' interest. JJ just looked at me and said "Yeah, so?" Every other band would be impressed but JJ just wasn't phased!!! I thought that this was a different attitude, especially as this was before attitude became so important. I took to them and they seemed to take to me. I went to see them lots of times after that in all sorts of places. Whenever I wasn't reviewing another band, I went to see The Stranglers. They were great.

What were your first impressions of them?

They were up well up to standard! They knew what they were about musically as they'd already been gigging for a year. I wanted to go and see them and I wanted to write about them so I was obviously impressed...

What about the individuals in the band?

JJ and Hugh were both well-educated and very articulate young men. They also seemed to know a thing or two about history and political theory and philosophy and so on and invariably came up with a very interesting and unusual slant on whatever was going on in the wider world at the time. It was fashionable to be nihilist in those days but JJ and Hugh were the genuine intellectual articles and knew what they were talking about. JJ also took a very European perspective on things while Hugh was really into art house movies and stuff. So they were always really stimulating company.

I never really understood what Dave was about, especially when he had his dark, occult phase. Jet on the other hand was one of the funniest raconteurs you could ever meet.

Can you remember any details of your first review of the band?

Not really. It was as soon as I joined Sounds in July 76. I think it was at the Nashville although I can't remember much else.

What circumstances led to you writing the band's first promotional leaflet for Albion management?

I lived near the Albion management office in Wandsworth and I used to go in there regularly. They needed a promotional leaflet to help the band get gigs. Dai Davies asked me to write it for £10 which they took weeks to pay me!!! On the front was the Boston Strangler victim photo and on the back I wrote that they were "a mix of The Velvet Underground and the Electric Prunes that will bring the EXPERIENCE back to a rock gig". This was around the time that they did some demos in Wales with Grip with the sax solo.

You seemed to be the first reviewer for quite a few bands that went on to great success (the Jam, Elvis Costello, XTC). Was this simply a case of right place right time or a future A&R man's nose for talent?

A bit of both I suppose. If I could I'd go to gigs seven nights a week. Places like the Hope or the Nashville always put on a high calibre of bands because they had good bookers. You just picked up on

bands which is basically what an A&R talent scout does. At that time, there wasn't a good band playing London that I didn't know about.

In one of your earliest reviews, you were the first to use the word 'Punk' relating to the Stranglers. With 30 years of hindsight, how do you feel that the band actually fitted in with the punk scene?

The Stranglers were part of that mindset. They were back-to-basics and were all about attitude and breaking down the old order. They were also more intellectual than the other bands around at that time. Unfortunately, because of their attitude, they got worse press than they should have done and that resulted in them not getting half the respect that they should have done. Historically, that is unforgivable...

One of your most well-known quotes was describing the band's music as a 'Force 9 gale of bad breath'. In a later review, you coined a term 'Sewersound' which I actually think is a more apt description. In your view, what were the attributes that gave the band their distinctive sound?

The organ and the drums. The key to the Stranglers' sound was that Jet could play the drums well. Most of the other early punk bands had very dodgy drummers whereas Jet gave The Stranglers a real groove from the start. It made them sound really coherent and that they knew what they were doing. Also, Dave had that great Ray Manzarek keyboard going... If I remember he was voted Keyboard Player of the Year in the Melody Maker readers' poll for 1977. I think The Stranglers won in some other categories too. They were recognised as the most musical of all the

original punk and new wave bands.

As you were an ally of the band from the early days, I assume you never suffered any intimidation from them. Do you feel that later threats of violence or kidnap put some journalists off giving the band critical reviews?

Yes, of course it did! When you're a journalist, you feel you have a god given right to write anything you want to – and then hide behind your type writer. If you were confronted by Hugh or JJ being obnoxious, as they could be, it was intimidating. Some people thought it was a great PR aura to have around them. There were journalists who wouldn't talk to them or give them fair interviews. I'm not sure it did them any good, although they are still in existence despite all that!!

Was the mock kidnapping of you staged for Sounds designed as a warning to other journalists regarding potentially less favourable reviews?

No, it was just a blatant ploy to get more work out of Sounds and more coverage for the band! I'd already been to Chelmsford prison with them. As soon as they got their deal with UA I did a feature about what gear a punk band buys when they get their first advance! I was always looking for angles to get more work and to get them in print. The photoplay feature thing was supposed to be a pisstake of the sort of things you used to see in the old Disc and Record Mirror papers. It was loads of fun until they decided to take it further than expected... I was crucified, debugged and covered in water.

In the summer of 77, you were invited to the TW studios in the middle of the

recording of the No More Heroes album. Apart from the squalid conditions of TW's facilities, do you have any particular memories of that visit?

I had been there with them several times before. By that time, I was on friendly social terms with both JJ and Hugh, so I persuaded them to do that interview. Martin Rushent was really helpful, as was Alan Winstanley, but the band weren't interested. Around that time, I realised that I couldn't be a journalist and their mate at the same time. I'd earlier been told by Ian Grant that, in future, anything I wanted to do press wise must go through Alan Edwards first. I started to realise my days as a journalist on the inside were numbered...

Although you reviewed NMH single release in Sounds, you were asked by the band not to review the album itself as you would be 'too partisan'. Do you feel that you were too biased to give an objective review?

I can't really answer that. I don't remember the band asking me not to review it. I think it was more that Alan Lewis, Sounds



editor

at the time thought it was about time that somebody who wasn't a complete fan get a chance to take a view on their stuff. So he decided to give it to Jon Savage – who really didn't like them....

Your reviewing place for NMH was then taken by a certain Jon Savage who's scathing critique of the band's album led to JJ famously taking physical action



against the reviewer. How did you feel about these events? Did you feel that JJ was justified in his actions?

JJ was very upset by Jon Savage's review! Shortly after the review, I was at a gig with JJ at the Red Cow, to see 999, I think. We were standing at the bar and I noticed Jon Savage walk in. I said to

JJ "You'll never guess who's just walked in: Jon Savage!" JJ replied "Which one is he?" as he didn't know him so I pointed him out. I can't really remember exactly what happened next. Maybe there were drinks thrown, I don't know, but JJ certainly ended up hitting him. I was very shocked. I thought JJ was out of order and I told him so. A few days later he came to my house with Dennis (Marks, Finchley Boy) and he gave me the rationale of why it had to be done according to street fighting rules but I wasn't convinced... I wrote a letter to Jon Savage to apologise for the situation as I thought it was a shameful moment. Jon accepted my apology but he got his own back by totally writing the band out of punk history in his book

'London's Burning'! I can understand why he did it but, I think it's a great pity because the omission of what was obviously one of the most successful bands of that era represents a sort of Stalinist re-writing of history which is inexcusable. He could have simply dismissed them as being not particularly important according to his point of view. But to ignore them

completely...

Interestingly enough, you are one of the few journalists who heaped praise on Hugh's guitar technique and sound on the early albums. What particularly struck you about his musicianship?

He didn't just trash the guitar like other people around that time. He played parts with melody and riffs. And he played a Telecaster. Best guitar in the world.

You chaired a singles review in Sounds where the Stranglers were meant to be the guest reviewers. Three of them seemed to take part whereas JJ refused point blank to cast judgement over other peoples' work. What did you think about his decision?

I'd just done a similar review with Nick Lowe and Rat Scabies and they threw any records they didn't like out of the window! I wanted to replicate that with the Stranglers. They could be difficult and they never played the press game like other bands. They were the awkward squad and JJ was the most awkward. If he refused to pass judgement on other people's work, I'm sure he would have had an intellectual reason. But I can't recall what it was.

Nowadays, many of the band's fans (& even the band themselves) are annoyed that the band are written out of any media history of the Punk scene. Do you feel that this is the case and if so, why do you think that is?

They were too successful, far more than say the Clash were. They were too difficult plus the misogynist thing tarred them with that brush. People seemed happy that Paul Weller could write and sing difficult

lyrics as a fictional character in order to make a point but couldn't accept that The Stranglers were often doing exactly the same...

Since your time as a music journalist you have had a very varied career in all different areas of the music business (band management, producer, music publishing, A&R and even playing in a band). What's the secret to your longevity in the business where careers are normally so short lived?

I don't know anything else and I can't get out of it. I have tried. The only thing that I can do now is write about the music industry, rather than the bands and I've been lucky enough to find outlets for that. I am quite good at communicating in a coherent way and I've got hands on experience and inside knowledge. You can then write in a more informed way.

The band's publicist Alan Edwards stated in a recent interview that punk has influenced everything he has done in his later life. Is this the case for you too?

I was never really a punk fan. I was quick to embrace the new wave and I even came up with the term 'power pop' to describe some of the later stuff like the Knack or the Vapors. Punk excited me and although I don't really listen to it much anymore, I still play the Jam and the Stranglers – and Elvis Costello.

The punk era is normally remembered fondly by those involved in it at the time. What are your memories of the period?

It was a fantastic time. I felt really privileged. I saw The Beatles and the Stones break when I was about ten – at

If you're secretly bored by what seems an endless succession of the same old musical tricks - this could be the break you're looking for.

Book the Stranglers and guarantee that, once again, something will actually happen on rock 'n' roll night.

Book the Stranglers and be sure of a gig that'll be a talking point for weeks to come.

A night with the Stranglers will bring back the EXPERIENCE to a rock concert, and if you want proof, just consider that, after only a few months on London's pub and club circuit, the Stranglers have already fired the imagination of the legendary Brian Eno, while Arista Records are sufficiently interested to pay for a weeks worth of time in Wales's newest recording complex, Foel Studios, Llanfair Caereinion.

The Stranglers certainly play long and loud, complex and chorded. They are raw, rancid and riotous, but there's more too. The Stranglers are completely Unforgettable.

John Burnel (bass), Hugh Cornwell (guitar), Dave Greenfield on organ and drummer Jet Black write and perform material that has all the Punk Poise of the original Electric Prunes, the Acid Ingenuity of the early Doors, tempered with the dark, Twentieth Century Gothic Horror of Lou Reed's classic Velvet Underground.

And if that sounds a shade too academic for you, don't forget that their successful career in the London pubs means that they can rock like crazy too.

A trip to Amsterdam last February, supporting, Country Joe McDonald, had the Dutch reeling in amazement.

A weekly residency at Poseurs Palace, London's Speakeasy, saw would-be rock stars jarred and beaten out of their normal apathy.

Gigs around the South East, down the bill at clubs and colleges, has created the sort of interest that can only snowball into Stardom.

And all for a band, the Stranglers, who refuse to knuckle under and pander to anybody's musical wishes but their own.

Of course, some may not enjoy them. Uncompromising and unfashionable rock like theirs isn't for the punter hooked on any non-participatory spectator sport.

But if you remember the days when, without a doubt, the appearance of a rock band was the high point of everybody's weekend, book the Stranglers and bring back some genuine Excitement to life.

The Stranglers are an Adventure.

Chas de Whalley

All enquiries IAN GRANT at Albion 01-870-2166

the precise moment when I first got into music - then the progressive rock thing happened just as I started going to gigs and then there I was working in the music business just as the next big musical movement was happening... and on speaking terms with all the new faces!! There was an intensity that I'll never experience again. Music isn't so important nowadays. For 18 months, punk and new wave were incredibly important. You felt that history was being made week in week out.

Are there any events/gigs involving the Stranglers that stand out?

I remember seeing them at the Red Cow a few times in late 75/early 76. There was a pool table in front of the stage then and you'd have guys playing pool while Hugh was doing his neck to School Mam behind them. It was very funny! I also remember a gig at a Roman Catholic teacher training college in Surrey where the Stranglers had been substituted for another band. The College people didn't want them and Jet was arguing that they had to play as they'd been booked. It was a very odd evening. Battersea Park with the strippers was quite a laugh. They were always quite consistent, although there were some iffy gigs too. The Brunel University gig, on the Heroes tour, was a dodgy one. The stage got invaded and it got quite ugly, but I still wrote it up as a big party! The Roundhouse gigs were always good as were ones here (the Nashville). Then there was the Rainbow Theatre show to mark Hugh going into prison. Who Wants The World was out then - although I can't remember which of the guests sang it. It might have been Nicky Tesco from The Members. But that was always the song which most summed

up the Stranglers' world picture to me. "Tasted man, tasted tree, couldn't taste the difference!" What a great lyric! What a great chorus.

Stranglers at the Nashville

IT'S BEEN tried, but it's proved impossible to give the Stranglers the cold shoulder. Even if the Hot Rods roar in your ears, and your head is still reeling from the shock of exposure to the Sex Pistols, you can't afford to ignore The Stranglers.

On stage at London's Nashville, where I saw them last, they pulled no punches but hit hard and low, characteristically uncompromising and direct.

They're not essentially a high-energy rock 'n' roll outfit, mind you, although they do their fair share of the blistering boogie. Rather they're a Band on a Time Warp, firmly locked into the early Spring of 1967 and Southern California. The Stranglers owe their allegiance exclusively to the bad-acid landscapes and smack dreams of the early Doors, the Electric Prunes and a distinct touch of New York and the Velvet Underground.

Thus their music can be seen to strike an uneasy pose between the naively structured pop songs of the era and the heady raucous excesses of acid-rock.

Yet the Stranglers keep it all together through sheer arrogance. Their brash super confidence spills over from bass player John Burnel's punkish stage demeanour and the hard drumming of anchor Jet Black, a man with strong jazz schooling. Showing a cool disregard for the normal tenets of good taste and public safety Burt Bacharach's 'Walk On By' is treated like Hugh Cornwell's 'Down In The Sewers' or the gloriously rude 'Teacher'.

The tune is stripped down to its barest bones and tenacious guitar riffs that climb haltingly up the octaves like a blind man ascending a spiral staircase.

Unfortunately though, the Stranglers may play as tight as almost anybody else, but ultimately they're only as good as you, the listener, allow them to be. They are certainly raw, rancid and riotous - and if music alone is all you seek, well, the odds are you'll be disgusted. - CHAS DE WHALLEY.

SOUNDS, July 3, 1976, page 44

