



# DON'T GOB ON JOE— IT MAKES 'IM ILL!



**Joe Strummer tells Rock On! the real cause of his hepatitis, discusses his lavatorial approach to song-writing amongst other things...at the same time as posing with the rest of Clash for the lens of Sheila Rock.**

I headed across a scruffy courtyard to a door marked *Rehearsals, Rehearsals*. The walls were damp and the stairs were bare of carpet, or anything come to that. Just as I thought how grim it all looked I pushed open another door and there were The Clash.

Rock-On! photographer, Sheila Rock, had beaten me to the rehearsal hall and the band were busy posing for photos.

"Be with you in a tick, mate," Joe nodded. He looked worse than I thought he would. Hepatitis leaves it's mark alright.

"Let's get out of 'ere over to the pub," Joe suggested when the posing was through. "This place drives me crazy." I readily agreed with Joe. The hall reeked of damp and stale sweat.

On our way to the pub Joe informed me of his living status.

"I stay in a bed and breakfast at Marble Arch. I want to get a bedsit but it's hard to find one in London."

When I suggested he move in with friends: "Ain't got no mates. I prefer living alone. Got to get away to write my songs. The tracks on the new album I wrote whilst sitting on the bog in the studios. I write better like that."

In fact, the new album has had it's share of problems. Firstly, it hasn't got a title yet. Secondly, it was delayed by Joe's bout of hepatitis. When I asked him about that he was quite forthcoming.

"I reckon I caught it at a gig in Newcastle. The kids in the audience were gobbing at us like mad. I mean, all of us were covered; the equipment, the lot. This bloke must've been a really good aim 'cos he got me right in the mouth. And, by accident, I swallowed it."

A couple of days later Joe was taken in to Winston Hospital, Fulham.

"It was really weird. They put me in this glass cubicle, in a ward full of glass cubicles. And the nurses wore masks.

"Course, I had visitors, me girlfriend, the band, and people like The Slits came and saw me. But me manager never did, too bloody frightened, he was!"

Being in hospital put the album back several weeks. The producer returned to the States thinking Joe would be laid up longer than he was.

In the meanwhile CBS Records had brought out a Clash single, *Clash City Rockers/Jail Guitar Doors*. The single had been planned for release at the tail end of '77 but was dropped for a while to give the pre-Christmas rush of record releases time to die out.

When I spoke to Joe that bleak day he didn't seem aware of the band's single release. According to him Clash's next single *should* have been *White Man In Hammersmith Palais/The Prisoner*. He didn't know the record company were going ahead with the last planned release.

Maybe they didn't want to burden him with minor details whilst he was laid up, who knows?

So, looks like the *next* single will be the double 'A' of *White Man/The Prisoner*. As Joe explained, "I paid a visit to Reggae City at the Hammersmith Palais and that's where I got the idea for the song."

"There was me, and about twenty other white guys in the place and it was really packed. But the whole thing felt a bit weird. I got the impression the crowd wanted gutsy roots music to respond to, but band after band came on looking and sounding just like the Jackson Five. They were totally out of touch with their audience. Hence *White Man*."

The song is in the familiar style of Clash but Joe reckons punk is a bit passé now. And gobbing is definitely out of favour as far as he's concerned.

In fact, Joe's just coming out of his Gene Vincent style and is looking forward to touring America and Europe this year.

"America's gonna be great for us, not like the Pistols over there. They've got an American type Clash band called *The Dils*."

But The Clash's last album never got released in the States. Why?

"Well, CBS thought it was so badly produced they refused to release it. I think they expected us to come up with a Philadelphia Sound! But I'm proud of that album. It was our first time in the studios and I reckon seeing as we didn't know all about producing we did O.K."

So there it was. Interview over, I left Joe by the pool table clutching his Coke (he still can't drink yet because of the hepatitis).

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