

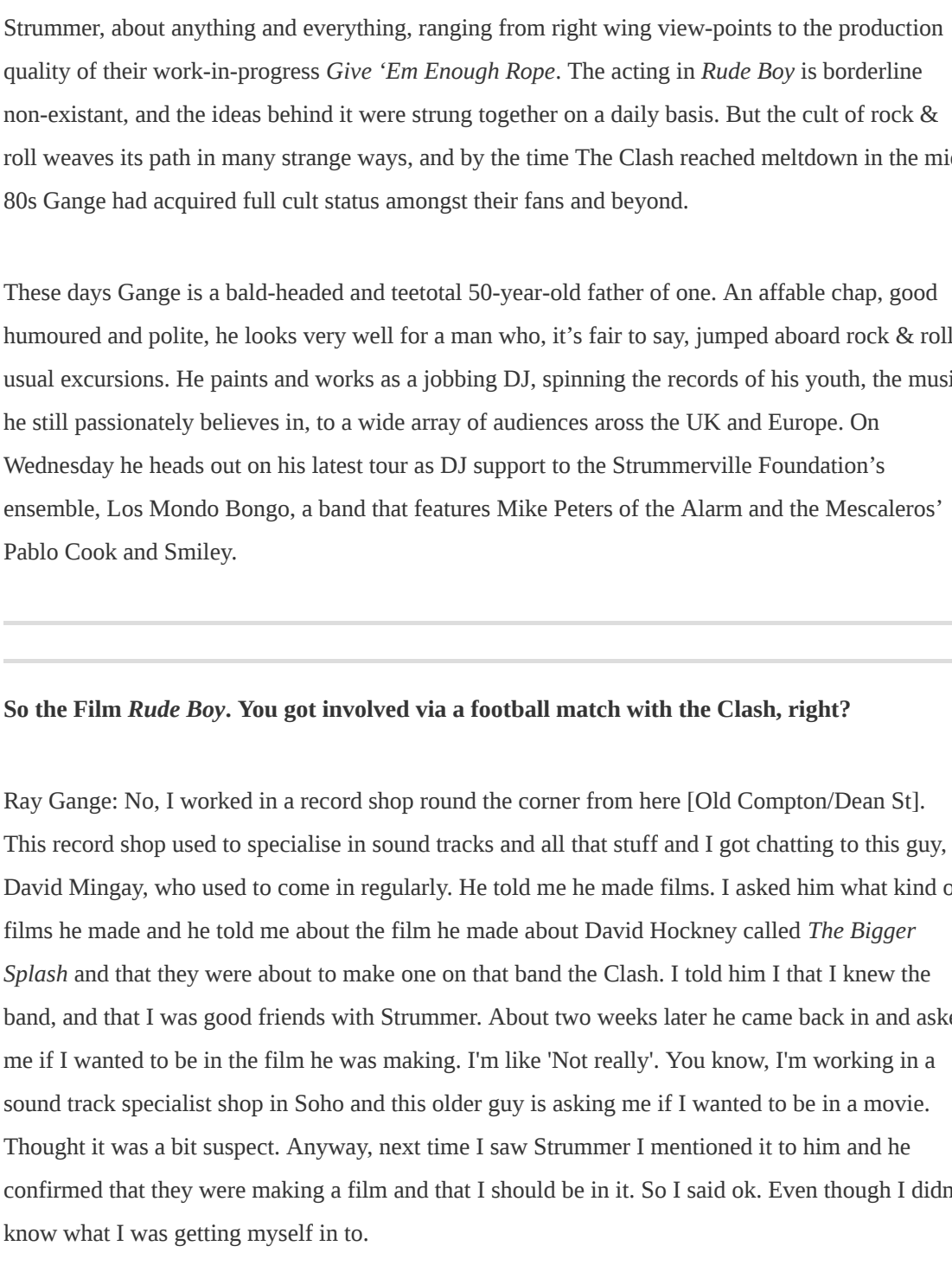
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Film Features

# The Clash's Rude Boy 30 Years Later: Ray Gange Interview

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To celebrate the 30th anniversary of The Clash' film *Rude Boy*, AP Childs talks to actor Ray Gange about the making of the movie, his rise from shop worker to actor, and his relationship with The Clash



30 years ago this month punk's prime movers The Clash released their first feature-length film to strained and at best mixed reviews, not least from the band themselves. Produced and directed by Jack Hazan and David Mingay, the film is part fiction and part rock-doc that tells the story of Ray Gange, a Clash fan who leaves his job in a Soho sex shop to work as a roadie for the band. Although it includes excellent footage from the On Parole and Sort It Out tours, as well as the band in the studio recording the album *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, it fails as a complete piece of work. It's a disjointed and confused affair: where the live footage electrifies, the remainder of the film only serves to baffle, and left The Clash disillusioned. For a while the band made efforts to get *Rude Boy* edited down into a concert film.

The star of the film, however, is not the band, but Ray Gange, its titular rude boy. The hapless punk drifts from scene to scene, in a hilarious Special Brew stupor, arguing the toss, mainly with Strummer, about anything and everything, ranging from right wing view-points to the production quality of their work-in-progress *Give 'Em Enough Rope*. The acting in *Rude Boy* is borderline non-existent, and the ideas behind it were strung together on a daily basis. But the cult of rock & roll weaves its path in many strange ways, and by the time The Clash reached meltdown in the mid-80s Gange had acquired full cult status amongst their fans and beyond.

These days Gange is a bald-headed and teetotal 50-year-old father of one. An affable chap, good humoured and polite, he looks very well for a man who, it's fair to say, jumped aboard rock & roll's usual excursions. He paints and works as a jobbing DJ, spinning the records of his youth, the music he still passionately believes in, to a wide array of audiences across the UK and Europe. On Wednesday he heads out on his latest tour as DJ support to the Strummerville Foundation's event, *Los Mondo Bongo*, a band that features Mike Peters of The Alarm and the Mescaleros' Pablo Cook and Smiley.

### So the Film *Rude Boy*. You got involved via a football match with the Clash, right?

Ray Gange: No, I worked in a record shop round the corner from here [Old Compton/Dean St]. This record shop used to specialise in sound tracks and all that stuff and I got chatting to this guy, David Mingay, who used to come in regularly. He told me he made films. I asked him what kind of films he made and he told me about the film he made about David Hockney called *The Bigger Splash* and that they were about to make one on that band the Clash. I told him that I knew the band, and that I was good friends with Strummer. About two weeks later he came back in and asked me if I wanted to be in the film he was making. I'm like 'Not really'. You know, I'm working in a sound track specialist shop in Soho and this older guy is asking me if I wanted to be in a movie. Thought it was a bit suspect. Anyway, next time I saw Strummer I mentioned it to him and he confirmed that they were making a film and that I should be in it. So I said ok. Even though I didn't know what I was getting myself in to.

### How did you meet Strummer?

RG: I met him in a pub in Putney. I went to see, I think it was either the Lurkers or Wayne County, and he was just sitting there on his own so I approached him and started talking to him, and from there on we became pals. He used to live up the road by Regents Park and he'd stop by the record shop quite a lot. We'd hang out and go to shows and stuff like that.

### Was the sex shop story a myth then?

RG: No, that was over the road from the record shop. But to do the film I had to quit working in the record shop. Then, when we weren't filming because I had no money coming in and I knew the guys working in the sex shop I ended up working in there for a little while.

### There is this great scene in the film. You're in a motel room with Joe, and you're both discussing the Brigada Rossi (red brigade) tee shirt he is washing out. Was that set up?

RG: Not really, it was just ad-lib. I think I make a good joke about the Cinzano thing...but no one ever gets it. I suppose we're both too dry. You know, Joe makes the pizza shop joke too. I think we're kind of taking the piss out of the people making the film too.

### You get a rough deal in the film. Did they really kick you off the tour and leave you behind up north?

RG: No. The film makers, well, they had had a big falling out with the band and Bernie Rhodes. They set up a few situations where I think I was representing them, if you like. Which I wasn't really aware of. I was like yeah ok, what's next. As they were in conflict with the band they'd set up a conflicting situation for me that would kind of conflict against the band in the film. It was all by their design really.

### You were 18 or 19 in that film. You have been criticised for having a right-wing view point. Would you say that was an accurate reflection of your political views, if you had any?

RG: I didn't have any. I mean, how many 18 year olds in 1978 had any real concept of politics? I don't really argue for any viewpoint. The way that film was shot was: you get picked up to do the filming, you would be handed a sheet of paper with some information scribbled on it with instructions to talk about this, that and the other. Ok, what do you want me to say? They'd say just come up with something, all a bit vague as I recall. So in that situation, when the person opposite says something what are you supposed to do? Just go 'Oh yeah...I think you're absolutely right da de da de dah kiss my arse'. Agreeing with them wouldn't have worked - and vice versa. What are you supposed to do? You know, I'm supposed to be having a discussion. I'll listen to what the person opposite says then try and counter it. I didn't give a shit really. I didn't have any views. We had to create dialogue and there are four geezers standing around you with expensive equipment so it's well ok, so what's obvious? Just create a counterpoint.

### What about nowadays, 30 years on, in some ways things are just the same, do you think an 18 year old now would be more politically motivated towards the hard right?

RG: Back then the hard right, BNP or National Front, were much more active in central London and other big cities where as now it has been pushed right out to the fringes of the big cities and beyond. I suppose what's happening now is what has happened right through history, like with Hitler and the Nazis. When the economy of a country is in the shit these people start to develop a voice, and people who don't have anything will listen to them.

### As a main player in the film were you disappointed when things started to go tits up, in that The Clash reportedly wanted to disown it, and wanted to change it to just a concert film?

RG: I didn't really understand anything that was going on with that situation. I only got involved in it because Strummer suggested that I did. When I agreed to do it, it was purely on that basis so I had no allegiance to those who were producing the film except that doing the film meant that I had to quit my job right. So now I'm left in the situation where if I turn round and tell them to fuck off, what do I do? I've got no job, no money and I'm out on a limb, right. So I kind of got stuck in between the two so I thought, ok whatever, I'll just carry on and do what I have been hired to do. I didn't really understand what their (the Clash) problem was anyway. My suspicion is that they thought it was going to be like *Help...or Hard Day's Night* maybe...and it didn't really turn out like that did it. They thought it was going to grow legs and become this madcap adventure.

### Despite its shoddy finish it does stand out as a gritty social document at least, so personally I'm glad it didn't get cut down to a concert film...

RG: I've never had this discussion with anyone involved in the film so I don't know, but that was always my assumption. You know, that it got a little bit too gritty, and real. And that is ironic considering what the band's stance was. As for my understanding, or lack of, all the stuff they did with the black kids pick-pocketing and being arrested and stuff. I didn't know that was going in...or being filmed for that matter. I was oblivious to that whole aspect of it. On the DVD with the extras, there is an interview with David Mingay and he says the market where this movie was best welcome at their shows and whatever else and when I moved back to England I went to see them at Brixton in '82 and the first thing Mick says to me when I walked in to the dressing room was, "Ah, that explains why we didn't see you at the L.A shows." It's kind of weird now because at the time of making the movie Mick was the person I had the most difficulty with, or the most conflict with. But I always followed his career. I was always at B.A.D shows and all of that and was always made welcome. These days we're very friendly. We'll always have a good chat whenever I bump into him. In fact I'll see him tomorrow night.

### Joe Strummer had a reputation for ending relationships with people around him rather swiftly. In the film there is the tension we spoke of between you and him. How was it in real life?

RG: My friendship with Joe was OK up until he realised where I was going with my own drug addiction in the mid to late 80s. And then he just like cut me out. Yeah, once you sort of crossed the line with him it was very difficult to get back on the good side of that line with him. And that kind of made me very sad.

### Topper and Paul?

RG: Topper, I haven't seen for years. Spoke to him on the phone a couple of years ago. Had a nice chat but me and him kind of went down the same road with heroin . . . you know, London in the 1980s, I suppose was awash with that stuff. Paul I haven't seen for 15 years. If I bump into him, great; but I'm not going to stalk him to try and have a chat with him or whatever. Apparently I missed him by a couple of hours at the Rock & Roll public library opening. But it would be good to see him. I'd like to go and see his paintings actually and have a good talk about art

### Did you get paid on *Rude Boy*?

RG: Yeah. But to this day I have no idea how much, or if I signed anything or what I signed if I did sign something. But I got paid. It was a very different time to now wasn't it. Back then you would have just written something on the back of an envelope and put an X beside it and that would have been OK. Now there would be pages and pages and lawyers.

### So, L.A. What did you do stateside for four years?

RG: In a way, what kind of took me over there was the feeling that in London it felt like the punk scene was dying a slow death. And when I arrived in L.A, although it had been going on for a couple of years, at the beginning of '79 it was really just starting to take off. It was kind of like relating that whole energy of all those new bands, hanging out in similar type clubs. It was great...bands like The Germs, Black Flag, The WeirDOS...all these incredible L.A bands that were really starting to break out. You know, they were really fantastic vibrant times. Whereas London just felt like it was dying.



### I know you're friends with Rusty Egan and I think Steve Strange, the new romantic thing didn't attract you back then?

RG: No. Well, I couldn't do the make-up thing for a start. That was 80 to 84 I suppose, wasn't it? I was over there then. The closest I got involved to that movement in California was when Steve Strange came over to do some Visage stuff. I knew him from here when he was in a band with Chrissie Hind called The Moors Murderers. But I went to see him because he was a friend of mine. For that reason I had a slight interest. But it wasn't my cup of tea. I can't name many albums that I like from the new romantic thing. Soft Cell were quite good. I think that guy had a good punk sensibility. I mean, all the good ones were faces on the punk scene anyway. Boy George, Rusty...

### Did you do any more film stuff in the UK?

RG: When I got back Julian Temple gave me some work on *Absolute Beginners* which might have led to something else but I would say that half the time that I was supposed to be on set doing my thing I was behind the scenery doing drugs. Me and this other guy would be behind the scenery doing whatever we were doing and they were shooting the scene without us. I fucked up because I was supposed to be doing a scene with Stephen Berkoff on that film which would have been an excellent chance for something

### You're awash with missed opportunities Ray...

RG: I had a girlfriend in L.A that was a documentary film director who, after I'd ended it with her, then went on to make the first *Wayne's World* film and made millions. I've got a whole history of being at a crossroads, turn right to glory or turn left to chaos. I always wanted to go where the fun was, know what I mean?

### It's a real British thing isn't it, a wrong turning that leads to a good story is very British...creative failures if you like...

RG: 'Snatching defeat from the Jaws of victory'? Haha, yeah, story of my life. I try not to regret anything. I suppose I would like to have had a different perspective on the potential of what making one film leads on to. Funny enough I'm talking to someone at the moment who is planning a film for next year and wants me to do something in it. Early days though so I can't really say any more.

### So how much damage did heroin do?

RG: It started in L.A. At that time I was hanging out with actors that didn't make films, musicians that didn't make records - the kind of people that really worshiped folk like Dennis Hopper because he was as fucked up as them but they were resentful too because somehow he managed to be successful, though at the time he couldn't get arrested, as they say, except of course he could...I came back to the UK to try and sort myself out and spent most of the 80's fucked up and getting worse year on year. I cleaned up in 1990 and went to Chelsea School of Art at the beginning of the 90s and studied Sculpture. Not much damage internally, just a waste of a good few years really.

### Didn't you flirt with band management back then?

RG: Well, yeah, that was one thing that actually worked alright back in the 80s. Some mates of mine had a band [well thought of Ladbroke Grove punk sceners, The Folk Devils] but no management so we set up a record label [Ganges Records] and released two singles. One of which did ok. If you remember the indie chart they had back then, the first single called Hank Turns Blue went to number three, but was being kept off the top by New Order's Blue Monday and a Smiths record. If it had come out a month or so later it would have been number one.

### So you have thrown yourself into painting in recent years since art college?

RG: Yeah, I'm currently working on scenes from gangster films with dialogue stencilled over the front of it. I used to do a lot of paintings based on maps that were relevant to me. You know, like walks and journeys I would do and that, or where I was born and where I was living and stuff like that. They were quite good as I would paint a map literally and by putting on more paint I would remove elements of it so then in the end you were only left with about 25% of the visual information so you would have to go on a journey in the painting to try and work out what it was about. And I called them urban hieroglyphics. I did have a series of them but I had to leave somewhere in hurry and left them behind. I didn't have any photos of them so fuck it they have gone. I may try and revisit that sort of stuff, I don't know.

### Very Clash, with the use of stencils, in fact it's a bit Pop Art, no?

RG: I suppose yeah. Punk rock DIY and all that. I had a girl from Macedonia living in my house last year and we were talking about my paintings and things and she turned round and said that I was a pop artist. I hadn't thought about it because when you say pop art I just think 60's, so I can't relate myself to being with that movement. But after I had that conversation, and when I look at it I suppose it is. Most of my favourite painters are pop art I suppose like Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Warhol, though to a lesser degree.

### You have a young son, if he started making waves about entering into a Rock n roll lifestyle would you advise him against it or not?

RG: Oh I would encourage it at all costs. Funnily enough he told me at the weekend he was going to learn the electric guitar. I'd be happy if he went to live in a squat and form a rock band. By choice though, I'd hope, not by necessity.

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