

Paradox is the energy of my life!

text●by Yuji Konno

"Tattooing two teardrops hides one real teardrop -this was what a man, who was sentenced to death for murdering his wife, had said on TV and I think it describes well about what I've been trying to tell you here. There is a chance I will make a song titled 'Two Tattooed Tears'." Joe Strummer then saps his dark Irish coffee down to his throat.

GUEST LIST

Day after day, I have been following him around to cover every move from hotel to back stage, and it was Joe Strummer who approached me to suggest we meet that evening at a bar in the hotel.

His voice was rough after a concert but with that strained voice, he casually asked me to meet him later at the bar. However, when I saw him at the bar that night, he was too drunk to carry any meaningful conversation. Anticipating a day off the next day, Sunday, he must have been celebrating two successful stages of the day. I had to give up the interview.

The next day, a sunny Sunday afternoon, Joe went to Harajuku to see "Takenokozoku (a group of youngsters who gathered around Takeshita Street)" and again, suggested that we meet at 19:30, that evening, at the bar in the hotel.

After what happened the night before, I had tried not to expect too much. Yet, I had to go to the designated place because I had a couple of questions that I wanted to ask him. I had decided to give it another try.

When I arrived at the bar, I saw Paul Simonon and Pearl Harbour sitting side by side and quietly enjoying their beer. As I started to enjoy the conversation with others, Joe walked in with a fashionable girlfriend and a bodyguard. I was determined not to repeat the mistakes of the last night, I quickly grabbed the seat right next to him and started the interview.

I felt it inappropriate to start a heavy discussion by telling him what kind of impressions I had about Joe Strummer by watching him close for a few days or to bring out the subject of an impressive scene in the movie "Rude Boy". Instead, as a warm up interview, I started to ask him about the new album. As soon as he heard the words, "the new album", Joe looked uncomfortable and said "how about a glass of beer before we go any further". As a matter of fact, after visiting Harajuku, he had gone to Ginza to eat Tenpura and consumed a certain amount of alcohol before arriving here. He looked relaxed and real himself not a performer anymore. My instinct told me this might be the opportunity I was waiting for.

The day before that day, in the back stage, I had caught Mick Jones to ask about an outline of the songs compiled in this new album, and now, it was the chance to throw some questions at Joe about the songs that were particularly of my interest. The line up of the guests to the new album is Paul Schrader, Allen Ginsberg, Futura 2000, Ellen Foley, Joe Ely, Tymon Dog and etc.

"Paul Schreider hadn't actually participated. You must be familiar with our manager, Cosmo. When he's drunk, he always does the miming of DeNiro in 'Taxi Driver'. So we let him do just that at the recording. We had taken the line right out of Schreider's play that we decided to include his name on the credit but we haven't properly asked him for the permission to use. We won't be surprised if he sues us.

Allen Ginsberg, once showed up to our back stage and at the encore, invited himself up to the stage and did a performance and that was when we first met. For this recording, he came to the studio everyday and he always clenched his fist. He was trying to hold himself from speaking. We had him do a poetry reading for a song. •

Futura 2000 is an artist who paints with sprays and he had just opened an exhibition at Italy. We've asked him to do the so called, "Graffiti Rap Song". This is something we have once done in London but re-recorded with slower tempo in New York. I think this is going be in the 12 inch version.

And Ellen Foley, and this was a English Folk Singer who collaborated in 'Sandinista', Tymon Dagg. And one more, Joe Ely. We sang a song written in Spanish in the order, "About my Spanish? I learned it in bed."

The new album which took about 3 month for recording in New York was 99% complete before coming to Japan. The title is "Rat Patrol" which is taken from an old American TV series and it is said that they plan to include the 12 inch rap version. Producer was themselves, and for the engineer, instead of Bill Price, who was working for Elton John with Chris Thomas, they had chosen his assistant, Jerry Green and Joe Blaney -as they had done so in the past, they have been calling this Japan tour "the Rat Patrol Tour" and performed "Should I Stay Or Should I Go" sang by Mick and "Know Your Rights" by Joe and so forth.

BACKSTAGE

The Clash's image of sharply defiant Punk boys still lives on stage but the moment they get out of the spot lights, their impressions change. They change to, or better said, return to quiet young men with attitude.

The backyard scene of the stage just before the opening is like this -at the corner of the room, Paul and Pearl chats silently, having their back to the center.

On the other side, Mick, with his charming big eyes and big mouth, smiling and going in and out of the room, restlessly.

Topper, with his girlfriend, is a cheerful person, as you see him on the stage, wearing jogging wear, dances to the music from the radio cassette player he had brought in. Topper's favorite tape is "Do It Yourself" by Ian Dury and Macaroni Western's theme songs by Ennio Morricone. He is a big fan of Bruce Lee and he tells people "Don't follow me, follow Bruce Lee!"

Then this troublemaker, Joe. He is extremely moody. There is no doubt that he was exhausted by mixing for 6 days with very little sleep before his arrival in Japan. Nevertheless, he works hard, and drinks hard, too.

Following Paul and Topper who had come in beforehand with their girlfriends, Mick and Joe with their manager and publicist, Cosmo Vinyl arrived in Japan the day before the opening of the tour. The day they had arrived, Joe went out to discos and did not return until the next morning. I am sure they were suffering from jetlag and day and night were reversed.

I had my first appointment to meet them at 15:00 on Wednesday at the lobby of a hotel. I had to wait for a while before a message came to tell me that they had just woke up and now going into the shower.

Though, I had a bit of wait, I was lucky to accompany him for his late Tenpra lunch. Only a giant bodyguard, Jerry, came along so that I had an opportune time to explain our purpose of this report. They originally accepted this interview because they thought it was only for 30 minutes. Therefore, I felt very fortunate to have this unexpected lunch.

When he realized that our project was not only the 30 minutes interview, but to cover 16 color pages, Joe agreed that we need tons of pictures and kindly allowed us to take as many pictures as we like but not when he is crying.

I heard from others that two days earlier, on his way to Osaka, he was given a gift by a fan and he got so emotional and cried.

It was reported although that he patronized

oriental eating in London and New York, Joe was hesitant to try raw shrimps. In this aspect, unlike Talking Heads, The Clash, who are the real Japanese food fans, he is an ordinary English person, who is not very patient about food.

They had usually taken Chinese Caterings at the backstage because they are mostly vegetarian. Though, Joe eats fish, Paul went out to Korean barbeque with their friends, Chika and Toshi from The Plastics. Mick is a 100% vegetarian. He will not touch a plate if it contains even a small amount of crabs and shrimps.

They all drink heavily, mainly vodka and cognac. I was impressed by their drinking habit of mineral water. For some reason they preferred the domestic mineral water bottles. They always kept plenty of supply in the icebox.

Hangover may not be the only reason but when he does not feel well, Joe hides himself in another room. At the end of this tour, he had problem with his throat that he frequently used an inhaler. Oxygen tank was also readily available for Joe, all the time.

ON STAGE

The most interesting point of the whole Japan Tour was that every stage was different.

They altered the programs so often especially for the encores that there were fans who had chance to hear "Armageddon Time" but not "Tommy Gun" or the fans who listened the opposite. Fans who were fortunate enough to hear both or those who missed both.

I had to miss the first stage at Tokyo(1/24) but later, I heard that there was a very unusual happening that Joe became ill and puked at the backstage.

They went to the sight seeing in Kyoto on 26th after the night performance at Osaka and I suppose that previous night seemed to have energized the group that the stage on the 27th, the band gave the energetic fine performance.

Off the stage, the members wore blue or black trendy zoot fashion but on stage (Cosmo was more vivid than the band, wearing Pink zoot!), as many people know, they return to the leather pants and camouflage punk boy style. The members appeared on stage with ear piercing sound of siren -it was a dramatic reaction of the crush scene with flashing lights and black stage. But for some reason, this part was not repeated after the 1st night and changed to Toppers' favorite, Macaroni western film's theme music.

Joe sang "London Calling", "One More Time", "Safe European Home" and gave the microphone to Paul to sing "Guns Of Brixton". Then, Mr. Michel Geoffrey Jones and introduced in full name, Mick sang "Train In Vain".

"(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais", "The Magnificent Seven" heats up the audience even more and just like Paul, Topper sang a solo, "Ivan Meets G.I. Joe" and then "Should I Stay Or Should I Go" by Mick and "Know Your Rights" by Joe followed.

The program for this Wednesday was, "Career Opportunities", "The Leader", "Junco Partner", "Clash City Rockers", "Somebody Got Murdered", "Janie Jones"

and "Koka Koka". And until Joe shouts "watashi ha seiyou no buta da (I am an European pig!)" and clashes speakers by the guitar, then leaves the stage, for about an hour -for the encore, "This Is Radio Clash", "Brand New Cadillac", "Stay Free", "Charlie Don't Surf", "Complete Control", "London's Burning" and "Bankrobber" were performed for 3 sessions.

Especially the song "Charlie Don't Surf" which ventilate the image of Coppola's "Apocalypse Now", the slides which illustrates the meanings of the lyrics stood out but the most impressive part of their stage is created by this roughly strong instrument techniques.

The amplifier was probably turned all the way up which added energy and enthusiasm which is the necessary ingredients of punk rock. Furthermore, I was impressed by their superb techniques and variety of music. Except for the stages at Osaka, and the one on the 29th in Tokyo, I had seen all of their stages, including the performance they did for the shooting at NHK, and I think, among them, The Clash was at its best and performed the best at the night stage, on the 30th -including "Armagideon Time", "Tommy Gun" and "White Riot", plus 10 songs only for the encore, playing 30 in total. They were all moved by the response of the audience that Joe became very emotional and left the stage screaming, "You are the great audience!".

OFF STAGE

When Joe starts singing, his pale face turns red and the veins on his fore head stand out.

He spits while shouting and singing. Once, an American critic described his style on stage a criminal pleading for innocence at the court.

One day, I had noticed that Joe rarely says "Thank you!" after finishing the song. This is not normal in the typical show business world of receiving applause, returning courtesy. Knowing The Clash's stage is not concluded by giving and receiving, it maybe natural to think that their performance is built by the collaboration of both the players and the audience that people on stage does not need to deliberately say "thank you".

Nevertheless, Joe's gratitude was expressed in a different way at each show -by giving seemingly excessive care for the children who come close to the band (The Clash call them, "kids").

Giving autographs, shaking hands, posing for pictures, presents and conversation. I was surprised to see how elaborately they work on those. They sometimes invited the kids who came into the backstage into their room or gave a ride to the girls who were waiting outside while the band was at the lunch break, to the hall. They even had put the fans that followed the band from Osaka and Nagoya and happened to run into them at Harajuku, on the guest list.

Ignoring unwelcoming face of the manager, they would give the autographs to every fan at the hotel lobby and when they notice that there are people waiting for them outside the bar, they gave the gesture to those fans to come in. This exhaustive service for the fan was not the image I had of The Clash before actually meeting the band.

Sometimes, their attitude towards kids,

might have been considered troublesome to the media, including myself, but The Clash kept their policy throughout the tour.

I have once heard of a story about Mick, during their US tour, he had met their fanatic fan from London in San Francisco. The fan told him that he had moved to the US and was about to join the US Marines for the salary of \$500-. Mick told this to Cosmo and they hired the boy for \$500- as a roadie. The Clash before Marines, Rock and Roll than a war -this seems typical episode of The Clash. The Clash is one of the rare artists whose lifestyle and their songs have so much in common. They are seen as the most political Rock and Roll band but this word, "political" has such a weight because of their, especially Joe's, attitude.

Joe's (his real name is John Graham Mellor) father was a diplomat and his brother was a member of the National Front, the radical activists, and I guess they all descended from the same family. His brother has committed a suicide and Joe, living the each moment so enthusiastically, somehow reminds me of the self-tormenting youngster. Then Joe laughs at me and says. "I'm 29, okay? And so many songs are coming out of me or waiting for me to be written. I think Bob Dylan at 1963, had the same feeling. Self-torture is like showing off their youth. Too fast to live, too young to die. This doesn't make any sense. Look at my friend, Sid Vicious. 'Die before you get old' is a teenagers' nonsense! I am not one of them and I have myself under control. It's so obvious after you turn 25, don't you think?"

Some people do not want to categorize politic and music into the same box.

As a matter of fact, at the last scene of the movie "Rude Boy", a boy who was working for the porno shop is hired for The Clash's roadie and says the same thing to Joe.

Joe, who was looking at the piano, silently listening to the boy smiles and instead of replying, starts to play the piano and sings - come on, baby. Let the good times roll.

"This is what I wanted to tell him, 'fuck off!'"

Joe, again, smiled and placed his middle finger under my nose.

"Rude Boy" by Jack Hazan was completed in the Nov., 1978 but Joe have not seen the complete edition.

The film includes the documentations of the event that Paul and Topper shot the parrots from the roof of their friends' house in Apr., 1978, and had to appear in the court 7 times, and had acted in the concert of Rock Against Racism as a curtain raiser for Tom Robinson Band and Paul frankly says..

"We were not told what the purpose of that movie was but the camera shot us and we were only given \$100- and that's all. No idea who has planned that movie. This time, we've asked Don Letts to shoot real movie and we did."

CHECK OUT

"I have one thing I want to tell you and I want you to promise to print it. I have received 100s of letters from kids and some complained that the entrance fee is high. However, we had to bring tremendous amounts of equipment with us. We've traveled 10,000 miles. We could not let you listen to the poor sound. Some people say that they cannot believe The Clash being

with Udo. But Udo was the only promoter who was willing to work to allow us to be on stage. Anyways, if you want to see the paradise through The Clash or me, you have to find it yourself. And if you don't agree, please don't hesitate to say bye bye to The Clash. That's your choice. Some people ask why we work with established enterprises, such as CBS and others, but I have to tell that there are times when you have to be tied to the society, even if it's dirty. Paradox is the energy of my life! Teenagers tends to see the world as a fairy tale of good and evil. They don't know there is grey, not only black and white. Many people called me a fool in the letters, but I didn't cry over that. I want to tell the fans, who claim that my deeds don't match my words, look at yourself in the mirror. We could only be in Tokyo and Osaka, but next time, we'll be in your town, Hiroshima, Nagasaki. I was broke one time, too, but it did not stop me. I hitch hiked to see what I wanted to see."

This was the message from Joe Strummer to the fans in Japan.

I asked him if he ever thinks that fans might be seeking for a martyr and Joe answered with sad expression.

"Sid is a good example but he did not last even for half a year and I don't even see his T-shirts anymore. Botlocks!"