

JOE STRUMMER SPEAKS!

THIS INTERVIEW IS GAURUNTEED 75% ACCURATE

-Joe Strummer speaks to Hank Ogles.

I met Joe down the caff in Portobello Road. One of the first things I did was to tell him I'd show him this article before I handed it in if he wanted me to. I always offer to do that, although up to now all the interviews I've done were for a fanzine I used to do. But anyway Joe said he's so used to things being printed about him that were wrong that he doesn't bother. JOE: You expect it to be 75% accurate, 25% error. One thing that really sticks in my mind...my



first ever interview with a music paper. I was talking about I needed a guitarist because my one was quitting on me, and I was saying I wanted someone who could really play the beat, and Allen Jones went and put down "I need someone who can really whip their axe!" I read it and I got hold of him afterwards and said "I never said that!" and he goes "Yes you did" and I said "No I didn't" and he was only writing it down on a jotter.

"Five years later I read it and it still made me cringe. But I don't know if you can get that precious about it. Not everybody gets to do interviews, so you take the good with the bad."

ME: "How does the Clash see itself with regard to pop music? You're making a lot of records that get into the charts."

JOE: "I wanna do it more and more. Like,... the alternative scene, it's sort of incestuous. Therefore all the barriers they're braking and the new things they're doing aren't happening because no-one else is hearing them apart from small circles. That's what Bernie was interested in, and he impressed on me very early on that we could be really radical, but everybody from Oklahoma to Akinawa to Aberdeen would be rushing out to get a copy of the record, because that's really



something. It's one thing to be all modern and s tuff but if there's only a few hundred people gonna hear it then it's not as powerful as if a million people all over the world would hear it immediately. That's power. And I'm conscious of that - that that's power, and we've got to use it in some constructive fashion, some positive fashion. It's like every time you went "Ahem" and cleared your throat a million people leant forward with their ear cocked. You'd have to say something after clearing your throat. Something worth saying. It's like when you talk to Japanese people they grab hold of their tapes and they go "And now Joe Strummer's gonna give a message to

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TO THE WORLD!

the whole of Japan!" and there they are - the whole of Japan's waiting for it! It's not, like, "Well I feel a bit grey this morning, Brian" That just doesn't make it!"

ME: "Your own interests are gonna have a bearing on the audience you're gonna appeal to though, aren't they?"

JOE: "I think you've gotta serve them first. Serve your own aims and goals first. Say,

“ THAT'S POWER. I'M CONCIIOUS OF THAT ”

writing a song. You're writing it for yourself. It makes you feel better to do it. Then afterwards you write to make sure that everybody can dig it or that it's not just gonna be some crossword puzzle that only you could ever understand. I definitely think that you write for yourself first. Otherwise you wouldn't bother. Sometimes I think I'm talking to somebody. I never realized this consciously, but I began to realize that, testing whether it meant anything or anybody could understand it, I think of a young white bloke, a skinhead say, someone to concentrate on. And I imagine him

reading it, or thinking about that, whether it would make any sense to him or what. He's the main person I write for, a sort of imaginary guy, an imaginary punk-type-skinhead. I don't write for, like, a lot of people that dig us, sort of people as old as I am. I don't write for them. I try and write for the youngest person possible, really."

ME: "There's a lyric on Sandinista that goes 'The more I know, the less my tune can swing'. What did you mean?"



JOE: "You're the first person that's ever asked me that. Congratulations. I always thought somebody might ask me that someday. It's kind of like when you get down, and you wonder what the hell you are doing. Or you wonder what the point of singing a song is. That's a really bad state of mind to be in. When you don't know what it's for. If you don't have to think about it, you know it's good for you, to sing, cos you're a singer. But when you get really depressed and everybody's slagging you off, you tend to believe them, at least just for a few minutes."