



Unpublished Joe Strummer Interview Part-1

Joe Strummer, was he for real? I mean, he was so massive, so untouchable. He was THE hero. He still IS the hero.



So my really good friend Monte, sent me this, supposedly unpublished Joe Strummer interview from 1988. Written by Jon Savage, it is a thing of dark beauty. A real inside personal look at the West London squatter scene from the early 70's, through to the early dalliance of crossed, and eventually grudgingly aligned swords, with The Sex Pistols and the rest of the South Eastern England burgeoning punk scene. A tale of skullduggery, Bernie, Malcolm, opportunism, Vw, squatting, pubs, raw talent, riots, politics and a whole lot more. Enjoy. Warning, it is also long. Will be in 3 parts.

Joe Strummer

Jon Savage, unpublished, 30 May 1988

I'D LIKE to start with the busking tour - can you tell me what the point of that was?

I think Bernard suggested the busking tour. The point of it was he sensed that the Clash had become too prey to his ideas, he realised he had it under his thumb too much, and there wasn't a lot of life in there, so he said to us - what he expected us to do was to go up north, somewhere like Bradford and live in a house while we I don't know what. We just went up and kept moving, and to me it was the best tour that we ever did.

Where did you play? I know you played in Leeds.

We played a lot of gigs in Leeds, and in Glasgow, in York, we didn't get to play in Manchester, cos my voice had gone by then.

About twenty gigs?

More, much more. We would knock off eight or ten a day, we'd play in any pub, any club anywhere. The sets were ten numbers, maybe seven numbers the whole band. Three acoustic guitars and a pair of sticks. Pete would drum on anything, mostly a plastic chair. We played in some university in Glasgow or Edinburgh anyway, Paul and Nick and Vince would play acoustics and I'd just sing.

Was that all Clash stuff?

We played a couple of Cramps stuff, some Clash stuff and maybe a couple of standards. We used to play 'Movers and Shakers'.

You didn't tape them did you?

No. There are tapes circulating around the north, apparently, and there are tapes of us rehearsing in someone's flat in, I don't know what city.

Was that it after that, or did you do another tour after that?

When we came back to London after that busking tour, we felt we had something good going inside the group, but as soon as we came back and met Bernie and Cosmo in Holland Park, later I understood that Bernie felt it was slipping from his control, 'cos he didn't know where we were, and we only came back 'cos I'd lost my voice. Bernie didn't like that it was slipping out of his control, so somehow he put a stop to the good feeling that we had at that moment.

I fell out with Bernie after we returned from Munich, where we recorded the tracks, somewhere between that and when he began to mix it.

So the LP's release was something you had no control over?

Absolutely none. But Bernie's trip was at the time, he wanted to know what it was like to be Mick Jones. Mick used to sit in that seat where you arrange the songs, and produce them, and once he'd encouraged me and the rest of us to get rid of Mick, I didn't realise until after the *Cut the Crap* sessions that that was Bernie's trip. He was fed up with organising tours and stuff, he wanted to get right in on the music. He hated song writing 'cos it was the one mysterious area where he couldn't go. He hated that. He wanted to reduce songs to slabs of bacon off the roast, he didn't see why it should be strange. He hated the tortured artist thing that Mick would lay on him, it was slightly out of his grasp. He used to say to me, I've analysed life so completely - that its boring. I used to look at him and think, that's insane. Song writing was one of the things he didn't understand how it was done, and he resented that, he wanted to do the pop Svengali thing, he could make the boots, the t-shirts, the look, the direction, everything, but when it came to the songs, that was the one thing that he couldn't understand.

Maybe that's what Bernie should have done.

Come on then Bernie, Malcolm is doing it. Come on!

Is that why he had his nose done?

I think that was just to make himself more beautiful.

There's a lot of stuff to get through. But I'd like to talk about where the 101ers started. Where you played, what the arena was at that time.

I'd been on a busking tour of Europe with Tymon Dagg, and when we came back he moved into the squat at 23 Chippenham Road, we were loose kind of people, we had two squats going, and one was at 101 Waltherton Road, and the other was at Chippenham Road. Eventually we took over the whole area, 'cos 23 ran the local restaurant, that tea room, and we put the group together that everyone would go and see. I always felt that the cultural life of all those hundreds of squats around Elgin Avenue and Shirland Road, eventually our two squats were the lifeblood of the area, 'cos none of us were into heroin, or alcoholics, you know. We managed to be good. After I came back from that busking tour I moved into 101, more to get away from Tymon - you know when you've been very close to someone in very harrowing circumstances? I continued busking in the underground, but it got too heavy, when they started putting microphones and speakers in the tunnels, so I was looking for a way round it. I looked into the Elephant and Castle pub on Elgin Avenue and I saw this Irish trio playing. We weren't even allowed in that pub, if they saw us they threw us out 'cos they knew we were squatters and they didn't want it. I was looking at this Irish trio playing and I thought, I could do that! So I thought it would be a good way to get over the summer, I thought it would be an easier way of earning money than running from these transport cops down the tube. It seemed like less hassle. This was '74.

Me and Tymon went to Europe in '74 so it would have been late summer '74. I went back to 101 and tried to put a group together. Big John was trying to learn the saxophone, and I got Patrick to play the bass, but we had no money or equipment. I had this friend called Dick the Shit, who I still owe this money to, I borrowed his bass guitar and amp and speaker, and suddenly we were happening, we had a bass rig, which we set up in the basement, and we begged borrowed or stole stuff until we had a drum kit and I bought a guitar for £20 off Mickey Foot's brother, a Hofner. Somehow we got hold of a drum kit. Antonio, this guy from Chile, 'cos after the right wing coup in Chile we had a lot of refugees come over and two of them moved into our squat, Antonio, who was a drummer, and the sax player, who's still going, made a song called 'Rubber Hammer', Alvarro. None of us could really play except for Alvarro, and he'd been playing in rock'n'roll bands for years, playing horn, we had a sax section, with him and Big John, Patrick on bass, Antonio on drums, we had a group, but we learnt six numbers: 'Bony Moroney', 'Gloria', 'Route 66', 'Too Much Monkey Business' and two others. So we managed to get a gig at the Royal College of Art, where there was a Chilean refugee's art exhibition, we went down and set up our pathetic equipment, a mike stand that require two bricks to hold it upright. There was like two people there, and we played our five or six cruddy rock'n'roll numbers. This Chilean guy came down saying, get out of here, you're playing this imperialist rock'n'roll! And I thought, blimey! This guy's got a hard on, you know, and we split.

There was this teacher who lived with us called Ros, and I said we should hire the room above the Chippenham as a club, but we were scared to do it, and this girl Ros physically dragged me over to the Chippenham one day and forced me to ask the landlord to hire the room on Wednesday nights. It cost a quid for the room. We called it the Charlie Pig Dog Club, 'cos there was a dog in the squat that was a cross between a pig and a dog. Then every Wednesday night we'd go up there, and charge 10p to get in, I leafleted all the squats in the area, and soon we had quite a jumping scene, we'd learn a couple of numbers every week and add them to our set, and we learned standing in front of those gypsies and squatters and lunatics - you can't really learn unless you're playing to people. You see the effect of what you've done. We were also doing gigs at the Brixton Telegraph, we did another Chilean benefit, and Matumbi were heading and they lent us their equipment. I always thought how great that was, 'cos we were a really dishevelled looking bunch of people, dressed in rags.

There were so many squats then, that's all gone.

There were streets and streets, a real community. There were certain areas that were being left to run down, the councils hadn't got it together.

You could see London visibly decaying through the early 70s.

Elgin Avenue was because someone in the council had decided they were going to knock all these down, about a hundred fine Victorian terrace houses, and it was between deciding and them actually knocking them down that the squat culture flourished on that street.

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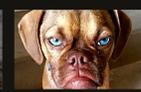
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- February 2017
- November 2016
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