

● The Men In Black are back! Journo-torturing hard men THE STRANGLERS are set to storm the charts with their best single since 1977. They mocked, beat up and abused STEVEN WELLS. But they didn't dare touch PETER WALSH (pics)

# SILENCE IS OLDFEN

**W**hoooooo! The Stranglers! Read any and every interview with these SCUM over the last decade and a half and it starts like this.

Aaaaaargh! The Stranglers! Oh dear! They hate journalists! They tied one of us to the Eiffel Tower (true, with gaffa tape but not very high up)! If I ask the wrong question they might get Jean

Jacques Burnel to do his karate on me! Oh no!

"What a load of bollocks!" I snort, tossing the Xeroxed sheaf of whinging cowardice into a litter bin on the fashionable but discreet Rue De Charles De Gaulle. Ain't not no way I was going to let a bunch of poncey musicians (hawk! spit!) frighten ME! I walk into the lobby of the plush Parisian hotel. A lean, puppy faced youth in black leathers slouches at the receptionist's counter.

"This is Steven Wells from the NME..." murmurs the press officer respectfully.

Jean 'Jack' Burnel raises one perfectly trained eyebrow and then speaks to his mates in French.

"Paf! Le cochon a la music press Anglais avec le visage du chien!" (or something like that).

His mates all put their hands over their mouths and giggle gallically.

Then he flexes like whip-cord. He grips my hand and stares me

in the eye.

Five seconds later he is still gripping my hand.

Ten seconds later and he is still gripping my hand. Oh no.

I try to pull my hand away and he pulls me closer.

He has a strange, chilling look in his eyes. Does he see me or does he see Sharon Tate? Am I shaking hands with a Dobermann pinscher? The slightest thing can make them go insane and attack—says RSPCA Inspector John Storey. Nice doggy! Trust! Has he been suddenly paralysed by a stroke or is he really going to kill me?

He smiles politely. He says: "Er, WHAT music paper did you say you were from?"

And then he smiles some more.

And suddenly I realise why every interview with The Stranglers starts the same way.

**SNIFF MY TITS YOU SEXIST BASTARD!**

A HAPIST gently trills in the

background. Indian tea in bone china cups is served by nice young men in silly costumes. This is so *civilised*. I am having a discussion with Hugh Cornwell about the new Stranglers album and despite the fact that JJ Burnel is studying me from across the table—contemplating the exact angle of impact necessary for his booted foot to remove my head from my shoulders (probably)—I am struck by the sheer incongruity of it all.

I mean these are The STRANGLERS! Surely by now they should have me chained to a rusty pipe in some stinking Paris cellar while they play a blow torch over my testicles and LAUGH!

**"I knew it was time to get out of London when I walked down a market street and three traders tried to pick a fight with me."—JJ**

enough, is The Stranglers' classic 'Peaches'.) So what is he *really* like, Hugh?

"Well you'd have to meet him. He's, ah, affable, vain, uh, very, very sincere and a warm-hearted person who loves attention. Sounds rather like you. The producer of the programme is a BIG Stranglers fan..."

Do you hang out with Keith?  
"Occasionally, but he's a very busy man and he lives right down in Devon so it's a pretty long trek."

Are you a good cook?  
"I cook, yeah, not bad..."

Are the band very domesticated these days?  
"Well, uh, what does domesticated mean?"

Are you house trained yet?  
"House trained? Uh, yeah..."

Do you shit in the tray?  
"I think it's quite safe to let any of The Stranglers into your house without any fear of them wetting the carpet huh huh!"

In 1974 The Stranglers bombed around London in a converted ice cream van stealing other people's gigs and acting hard.

"We were the hardest," claims JJ later. "Nobody was harder than us. It seemed to matter at the time. It got stupid though, it got to the stage where I couldn't walk down the street. I knew it was time to get out of London when I walked down a market street and three traders tried to pick a fight with me one after the other..."

And the harp goes plink plink and the tea goes sip sip and the most violent sound around us is the servile and slippered tread of the hotel staff nimbly mincing on thick and luscious carpet, serving tea to the stinking English rock aristos and dreaming fondly of guillotines...

## UNLEASH THE GREY MUZZLED PIT BULLS!

WHEN PUNK rock caught up with The Stranglers they decided to become the rudest and the most controversial as well as the hardest—and woe betide any little safety-pinned purist hack who said they were "too old". Their high-pitched whining bass and squealing organ was condemned by the deaf-with-shit-for-brains as a "second rate Doors homage". Bollocks!

Bollocks a million times says II 'Go Buddy Go' was the anthem for those of us who KNEW that punk rock was really about taking a sulphate and Tetleys cocktail and running screaming around a student New Wave disco. The Stranglers were macho and smelly and obnoxious—masters of the F— You! school of rock 'n' roll naughtiness at a time when Axl Rose was still a Bees Gees fan. So why, apart from Jean, are they being so nice? Are they out to ruin this article or what?

Alright, so drummer Jet Black—

massively impressive in his leather jacket, black ladies' tights and no trousers, *did* try to pick a fight with an old lady at the airport who kept on bashing him in the back with her trolley because he'd nicked her place in the queue, but overall The Stranglers are such horribly PLEASANT people. I mean I'm sat here with Hugh and he's so nice and middle class, middle English and mild mannered—the perfect English Gentleman—and I'm thinking, is this *really* the udder-sniffing slimeball who wrote the hairy-foreskinned wank-anthem 'Peaches'?

Hugh sighs ever so slightly whilst he ever so gently removes a stray tea leaf from his cup of ever so genteel Darjeeling and places it ever so neatly on an ever so spotless white napkin.

"You are the victim of image," he says in a voice that could charm the knickers off an Etonian third former or the life-savings out of a Coldstream Guards widow. Then he pauses. Has he been too dismissive? Got to see the other chap's point of view, what?

"Well, I must admit that when I play a gig I do have this certain *other thing* that takes me over. I have done things when in that state that I have been very ashamed of..."

Hmmmm, like what exactly?  
"Well! I won't go into that! (AAAAAAAARGH!) But on occasions I have shown very little respect for the people who have paid good money to see us and I am very, very ashamed of myself for that."

This change that comes over you—is it demonic possession?  
"It could be, I've never thought about that..."

Are you the vessel of Ragay the Music Demon?

"I could well be..."

## IS THAT A RABID ALSATIAN IN YOUR POCKET OR HAVE YOU GOT AN ERECTION?

THEY DIDN'T keep it up. 'Black And White' (their best album) lacked the ferocity and scrappy dumbness of the classic 'Rattus Norvegicus' and they've become more studied and gentle ever since—wooing mums and dads with cheekily sweet and sombre chart incursions.

There is a two second organ screech at the beginning of the new single—a cover of? And The Mysterions' garage-punk classic '96 Tears'. The drums and the bass kick in and stay rock solid throughout (*what, no nimble bass lines Swells?—Ed*). Cornwell's deadpan and cynically bland vocals lend the already nasty lyrics a stunning gravity. It's a single which plays perfectly to The Stranglers' strengths.

There have been four brilliant pop singles released so far this year. The first is Sinead O'Connor's sublimely off-key 'Nothing Compares 2 U'. The second is Queen B's total trash-out 'Red Top Hot Shot Beep Beep'. The third is Faith No More's metal-rap 'Epic'.

The fourth is '96 Tears'. It's the best thing The Stranglers have recorded since they put 'Go Buddy Go' on the flip of 'Peaches'. No, it's *better* than that. It's the only original 'punk' band still going bringing 15 years of experience to bear on "getting back to basics". At their best The Stranglers sounded like The Doors with brain damage and better drugs. That's what they sound like here. Only *more* so.

The rest of the album's not bad but... Hugh, in the song 'Man Of The Earth', "*sonnet*" is rhymed "*base your life upon it*", that was your idea was it?

"That's right, yeah..."  
Did it come in a flash of inspiration?

"Yeah, I suppose so. I didn't read it anywhere. They do rhyme though don't they? Good! Hee hee hee!"



L to R: Jet, 'Jack', Hugh and Dave



'96 Tears' is a very cynical and bitter song. Is that why you've chosen to cover it?

"Nah. It's got a lot of *humour* in it, hasn't it? It's very double entendre—'I'll be on top when the sun comes up' that's very double entendre. I love double entendre and I think it's very clever that."

Um, you've lost me here. Are we talking some sort of sexual innuendo?

"Of course, yeah! When the line comes up 'I'm going to be on top with you looking up'—I mean how else . . . what is . . . how else can you, er, interpret that?"

Depends what sort of mind you have really.

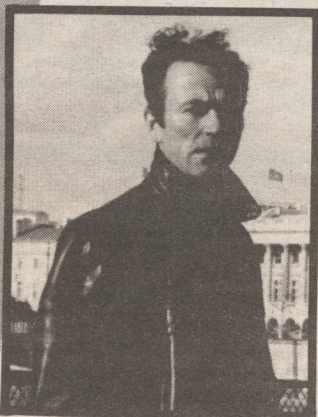
"Well if you have a good healthy mind like I have . . ."

Would you not agree that you tend to write songs that are not exactly full of sunshine, joy and optimism?

"Oh! We're very optimistic people. You're with us—we're not manic depressives are we? There are a lot of things in the world that could depress you if you let them. If you look at it with humour then it helps you bear . . . it helps you bear thinking about it."

I look up. JJ still has his eyes locked on my throat.

## NEAPOLITAN MASTIFFS AND CARTESIAN DUALISM—A SHORT ESSAY



"I'm hard, me"

I SIDLE up to JJ. Fancy doing a short interview? I point to my tape recorder.

"Nah!" he says. "There's no point, we got off on the wrong foot."

We got off on the wrong foot! You got off on the wrong foot you mean! But he's not persuaded.

At dinner I am sat next to organist Dave Greenfield. Dave is a shy bloke who looks like Max Miller.

Do the people in your village know you're a Strangler?

"Um, some of them do, in some of the pubs . . ." The rest of our conversation is just as interesting and exciting. "He's a really difficult guy to talk to"—I later remark to a friend of the band.

"Not if you come from the planet Venus he's not," says the friend.

Drummer Jet Black (45) is a big breezy sort of bloke wif a beard and he is easily my fave Strangler. I am also fascinated by the fact that he is wearing ladies' tights.

"I got fed up with everyone doing this baggy stuff. It's like the way I was doing blond hair and everyone started doing that so I thought—shit! I've got to look *tight!* So I went out and bought some ladies' tights . . ."

Kind of the principal boy look. I can't imagine you with blond hair.

"Ooh, yeah, 16 years ago . . ."

Were you a sex symbol?

"Nah! Perhaps some of the band were but I certainly never was."

What do you think of Stock, Aitken and Waterman?

"If everybody in Britain had the same foresight and ingenuity and energy as SAW we wouldn't have the economic crisis that we've got

**"If everybody in Britain had the same foresight and ingenuity and energy as SAW we wouldn't have the economic crisis that we've got now."** — Jet



"Who you calling old?"

now. Probably."

Have you got enough money to retire if you wanted to?

"Gor, you've got to be joking! If I had enough money to retire I don't think we'd be doing this!"

Where's it all gone then? Did

you blow it all on a whirlwind of drugs?

"Nah, such is life. You must know that this is a very expensive thing to keep doing."

Are you a sexist git? Were you ever a lout, a hooligan, a yob who would gouge an old lady's eyes out with a spanner for thruppence?

"Well . . . there was certainly elements of truth in that image but truth is always stranger than fiction and there was a lot more fiction in it than truth. I mean, we had our moments but most of the outrage was more a figment of the

imagination of journalists. We certainly had our moments, though!"

Did you believe your own hype?

"At times I think we did. I mean all that stuff about racing across the Queensland border chased by secret police in helicopters firing at us was all made up by some journalist but we never denied it because it was fun. But I DID put a table through a plate glass window once—I was drunk and was really frustrated having spent three days in Spain and everything was closed. That left me with this thug image for life.

Actually I don't mind being seen as a thug because actually it has its finer moments."

Back in my hotel room I try to unwind by watching a sub-titled movie called *Bigfoot*. Bigfoot is the abominable snowman of the American rockies. I was ready for bestial carnage, for heads ripped from gunk-spurting torsos, little children torn limb from limb and eaten in full gory Technicolour. It turns out though, that Bigfoot is actually a quite nice vegetarian and as cute as heck.

His bark is *considerably* more offensive than his bite.