

Julien Temple passed a rehearsal studio in 1976 and was lured in by the sound of the Sex Pistols rehearsing. He was drawn to punk immediately and began filming the Sex Pistols and the Clash that year. True to the spirit of the movement, he proceeded to write and direct the 'fantasy' story of the Sex Pistols portrayed in *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* (1980). Remarkably, this also served as his final year film-school project. Since then, Julien's filmmaking career has continued with a heavy music bias. He has enjoyed a free hand directing pop promo videos for artists of the stature of Bowie and the Stones and in 1986 made the feature film, *Absolute Beginners*. However, he has continually returned to making punk documentaries; in 2000, there was a second Sex Pistols documentary, *The Filth and the Fury*. His latest, *Joe Strummer: The Future Is Unwritten* is set for release this May.

Julien introduced a recent screening of *Joe Strummer: the Future is Unwritten* by saying that Joe's life was, "One of the best lives you could hope to make a film about." In a subsequent interview with Eccentric Sleeve Notes, he explained what it was that wanted to capture in the film. "The contradictions, there were so many in his life; the public school, the hippy squat days, the Clash, his role as a father. It was crucial to me that the film would show that. It was something that Joe struggled with for a long time and initially he denied parts of his life but in the end he was able to find a way to bring them together. He realised that the contradictions didn't mean he was a bad person. In the end he celebrated the differences."

HIPPY ERA

Joe's hippy era friends knew him as Woody but the friends, and that adopted name, were jettisoned as he took on the Strummer name and his punk persona. However, it's evident in the film that in his later life there was a reconciliation with these friends and even his hidden middle class background, which he allowed to resurface. Julien describes hanging out with Joe at their children's private school sports day together, although he admits that "they were getting pretty out of it".

Julien and Joe had become close friends in the last 6 years of Joe's life, which was the impetus for the film but also meant that it was difficult to make. "I wanted to be sure that I did something with respect and love really, but on the other hand I didn't want to make a hagiography and blow snow up his bum. It's hard to find the balance of that."

Julien had access to a huge amount of material for the film and of course, he was looking to portray a very eventful life. The task must have been daunting. "It was a rollercoaster ride but so was Joe's life in many ways, especially the Clash part of it. [Making the film was] an instinctive thing. It took quite a long time to get into this and I was depressed as usual. I get pretty fucked up in the process; pretty negative and hopeless. You worry that it's not going to be as good as it could be... the problem is also that you never stop, you lie awake at night thinking about it and you dream about it so you get into a bit of a mess and then you start to find your way out... as you climb up the sprocket holes and into the light."

The film features some remarkable Super 8 footage of Joe as a child bouncing around with the energy that he would later display on stage. Not surprisingly, there is very little footage recorded of Joe's life that pre-dates the Clash, yet more than half an hour of the film covers this period. Similarly, to *The Filth and The Fury*, this film gives a starring role to found footage; it's well chosen and creates the background so vividly that it could almost be CCTV recording of Joe's life. Julien explains that addressing

the dearth of film footage was the hardest part of making the documentary, but it was a challenge he enjoyed. "I liked having very little and had to find a way to edit it so that it seemed to come alive rather than use rostrum camera zooms and a narration voiceover. We did some filming with a torch in the dark where you pull out the passport or you look at a school report. You're actually intruding into someone's private life, which is exactly what you're doing; there's a kind of breaking and entering feeling about that. I wanted to make it clear that is what was happening rather than invisibly, "this is his life" and you magically knew these things."

101ERS

Only snatches of footage exist of Joe playing in the 101ers so the film includes an animated sequence of the band that captures Joe brilliantly. It is based on sketches made in the mid 70s by artist, Esperanza Romero. They have since been animated by Julien's gardener, Tim Standard, which is a little sideline that he has for rainy days! "I always like animation in film. I did it in *'Swindle* when it was a very irreverent thing to do. At that time the last thing you could do was make a cartoon out of the hippest rock band in the universe whereas now the hippest band in the universe are a cartoon: times change."

"I like to play with every format in a film like this; Super 8, 35mm, commercials, feature films, documentaries and animation to produce a high bred mongrel monster which is what people's lives are really. Everything fits if you can find a way of making it work. The less likely it is the better, just like people really."

CAMPFIRE

There is contemporary interview footage shot for the film, which in addition to telling the story is also used to introduce another of the major themes of Joe's life; the campfire. Nightly campfire gatherings began backstage at the Glastonbury festival in an area that was to become known as Strummerville. Julien uses campfires to great visual effect on-screen. They take place in various UK and US locations. Each time they seem to have a real impact on the participants.

"It's mentally calming to be around the fire, you can lose yourself in it. You're not blasted by light and you can't see the camera because it's on the other side of the flames. The fire is a big equaliser, it doesn't matter if you're a celebrity or not. You're swapping ideas and stories and lives with people that you've never met before. Joe was doing this a lot at the end of his life. He felt very strongly about it and thought it was a good part of his work. He saw it as part of his creative work to make these fires and keep them burning for a few days, to bring people together around them. He wouldn't go to sleep, he would just keep going. They were amazing events. Hopefully the film will encourage other people to have them."

There are many speakers around the campfires, some are instantly recognisable and with others it's necessary to hear what they talk about to understand where they fit into Strummer's life, people from his pre-Clash squat days for example. There is a feeling of democracy around the campfires which is reinforced by there being no text to identify the speakers. Some need no introduction. It is a very surreal moment when Johnny Depp suddenly appears straight from the set of *Pirates of the Caribbean*; heavy eye liner, beard plaits et al. "It's great that he didn't take the costume off. I don't know if we could be sued by Disney for stealing Jack Sparrow. It's funny. I think that he knew it was quite a subversive thing to do so it was good."

Depp was amongst a number of very famous participants who were keen to be in the movie, which marks Joe's immense effect upon them. "People like Chili Peppers, Depp and John Cusack were growing up at the right moment for Joe to really influence the way they saw themselves in the world. He was a fixed point in their emerging ideas of how they would deal with things. Both Cusack and Depp, in different ways, have been honest in their careers in terms of doing stuff that had a personal connection to their core beliefs which is very hard to do in Hollywood."

Bono also appears at a fire in Ireland. For a long time, he has said that U2 wouldn't exist without the Clash. "I have a lot of time for Bono but I just feel that in the film that you get a very clear sense that no matter how much he might want to be, he'll never be Joe Strummer."

The Clash's inner circle, including the road crew of Kosmo Vinyl, Johnny Green and Baker are renowned for their loyalty to the Clash although it is thought that they are the keepers of many Clash secrets. Whilst not suggesting that Julien would chase anything salacious was there any content that he wanted but was unable to capture?

"It was hard to get people to talk about Clash mark II, particularly Kosmo who was so much a part of it. I thought I could ask him about it and get some answers but obviously it's something that they keep quite close to their chest."

JOHNNY GREEN

Julien found Johnny Green to be a mine of information but there is very little of him in the film because his story is already well known. "The guys around the Clash are very important but I was interested in trying to uncover other areas. The idea of Joe in tears breaking down in Granada isn't the macho hard guy from the Clash. Johnny had a lot of good things to say, I'd like to put that on the DVD. It's not really a film about the Clash; the thing about the roadies is almost another film."

Despite being a major influence in Joe's life, former Clash manager, Bernie Rhodes refused to appear in the film although you will hear a few snippets from a telephone conversation in which Bernie claims, "I am punk! Without me, there's nothing." This contrasts sharply with Malcolm McLaren's claims in *'Swindle* to have invented punk. Talking about the two managers, Julien says, "There were times when they'd come together and seem to be working together and other times when they would repel. Bernie was a big part of Malcolm's initial project. He found Lydon. Some of the more powerful things in the Sex boutique like the love/hate list T-shirt, *You're Gonna Wake Up One Morning...* were directly Bernie's so he did have a creative role. Malcolm always put him down as his sidekick which is something that he liked doing with people."

The Clash v Pistols rivalry goes deeper than the managers. Julien first filmed the Clash in 1976 but once he became more involved with the Sex Pistols, he recognised that even though there was a lot of mutual respect beneath the 'slagging', it wasn't possible to work for them both.

"It was probably easier to work with the Pistols as they had less baggage in some ways. They were so anarchic they were off the edge of the social scale. They were beyond working class, some kind of suburban vermin tribe or something. With the Clash, Joe was covering up being middle class." Julien includes himself when he says, "Two of you in the same camp was not necessarily a good idea... The Pistols

hated middle class cunts like me too but Joe didn't want people to know that he was middle class and obviously it takes one to know one; I couldn't help knowing that he wasn't from a dissimilar background to me so it was probably easier for me to work with the Pistols. Saying that, if you put a camera anywhere near them they'd try to kick it off your shoulder or gob in the lens. They weren't that into being filmed."

Julien is credited with writing and directing *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* although it was actually co-written with Malcolm who took his name off it just before completion. The film was made shortly after the Pistols split up. Was it not Malcolm's attempt to keep the name of the Sex Pistols alive a little longer either as a brand or to see if he could resurrect the group in some way? "No, not at all. The film was a provocation. The Pistols had become what they had set out to destroy; they were on teenage bedroom walls being worshipped in the way that Gary Glitter or the Faces had been a few years before. It was that idea of worshipping that was wrong. The whole point of punk was to break that aura down so the film was seen by both of us as a deliberate provocation to annoy, confuse & piss off Sex Pistols fans by saying that they couldn't play; they were idiots; we've made them into cartoons. But then the tension is that when you see them playing live in the film they are great." Ultimately, Julien says that he and Malcolm wanted to say to Pistols fans, "Go out and form your own bands."

Julien was surprised to hear that the DVD release of *'Swindle* no longer includes the scene with Sting and his fictitious group, the Blow Waves. "I try and have Sting in every movie that I make. I did try and get him in the Joe film, I had a plan but it didn't come off in the end. I got him in Glastonbury... just as a warning of how bad it can get."

Twenty years after the *'Swindle*, Julien made a second film about the Sex Pistols, *The Filth and the Fury*. There was impetus from the group to get the film started so that they could tell their side of the story. John Lydon hated *'Swindle* and had declined to participate in it so it seems odd that he would agree to Julien directing a new film. "It was a difficult choice for him to have me do this one. I had to convince him in the end. It was quite a wheel because I didn't want to do it initially but then I thought it would be a good thing to do because I could show the other side of the story and do something that people say you shouldn't do; make a story about exactly the same thing but only if I could do it in a really different way."

On Christmas Day, 1977, the Sex Pistols played their last UK gig; in Huddersfield. This was filmed by Julien. "It was a great day. It's bizarre to think that they broke up two weeks later. There was something really perfect about that day; partly because it was Christmas Day, partly because it was for the firemen's kids. They were pretty underprivileged kids having a really great time with the hippest band in the universe at the time; right amongst them and throwing cakes at them. Up until that time, pop stars were distant beings who arrived in helicopters and blew dust in your eyes and that was about it. The group all seemed to get on pretty well. Although it was terminal by that point, it seemed OK on that day."

Julien has turned this footage over to TV-documentary maker, Pete Spence to prepare a 30th anniversary screening for TV. Why give the footage to somebody else to work with? "I don't think you should be that precious especially if it's a young kid trying to do something. I think that's what punk film making should be about; if they can see another way, as long as they show you some respect and they're not just pissing on you. If they can find a way of taking footage that you've shot and find a new way

of doing it that's great." As Julien says this, it seems clear that he has now finished making punk period documentaries. Julien confirms it. "I hope so, yeah. I think so. I'm done. I've done the ones about the people that I really cared about so to keep on doing it doesn't make much sense." Is this a roundabout way of saying that he has used up his best footage? The response is deliberately tantalising. "Ooh, I'd never say that, I've got a lot of stuff hidden behind the piano..."

SIMON McKAY