

# PAUL ROBERTS

words *rebecca paiement*

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*rockers.*

Early drinkers like to joke that it's evening somewhere in the world. And, though it's still morning in my Los Angeles office, it is indeed after six in Brighton, UK, as Paul Roberts sits down to a beer and chats with me. We talk about everything from his sixteen years at the helm of British punk icons The Stranglers to his decision to leave the group and his burgeoning solo career.

A talented singer, actor, showman, poet and even comedian (realizing he somehow possesses the ability to "just stand there and make people laugh"), Roberts might seem a world away from his childhood roots. But he's very proud of his upbringing, never hesitating to remind me that he's "the son of a train driver and a hardworking housewife."

After writing the bulk of Stranglers material from 1990-2006, stage diving while performing at the Royal Albert Hall and touring the world, Roberts was a bonafide rock star but had had enough of band infighting. Marginalized, he took his overlooked song writing contributions and funneled them to an already flourishing solo venture, Soulsec. The band's name is a sarcastic dig at what Roberts calls "deeply thought out band names. It means, in short, emotionally bereft but is tongue in cheek."

It was the very struggle and determination, undoubtedly passed down from Roberts' parents, that has inspired him since his departure. "I'm not looked after anymore. For 16 years, I didn't have to think too hard about too many things financially. But I was brought up in a working class family and I always worry about the future. And I want to do something honest, with integrity but I also realize that I have to pay my bills. You have to pick yourself up and determine what you're going to do and try to have a plan."

Part of Roberts' plan, after admittedly being slightly "anti-music for a while," included theatre and television roles. He has starred in numerous BBC, fringe and professional theatrical productions including a stint as Satan himself in Rocky Horror Picture Show creator Richard O'Brien's "Mephistopheles Smith" and the lead in the musical "Pop Larkin."

And though acting gigs have taken up much of Roberts' hectic schedule, the drive to write hauntingly beautiful ballads, catchy danceable rhythms or even hard driving rock songs has not left him. "Music is such an important part of my life and I want to make it good and I want people to respect it even if I never sell another record," he says.

In addition to acoustic and band concert performances, there have been numerous Soulsec albums, filled with his signature intense but infectious pop songs about obsession, desire and promise. Roberts also plays swing tunes, hoping to write some new work in that genre along with orchestrating and composing contemporary classical music and penning some poems. "A lot of people have made some good comments but I don't want to think of it, I just want to get on with it," he insists.

With a new EP "5,4 Now!" just released and a US tour in the works for late spring, Roberts' focus is paying dividends. "I am of the Dead Poets Society mindset," he says. "Half of me doesn't care if I die and people say, 'He did write some good songs but they never got heard by anyone,' rather than do something cheap and sell it out."

See Paul Roberts on tour in New York, Boston, San Francisco and Los Angeles in May 2009. Visit [www.soulsec.com](http://www.soulsec.com)