
Interview with Paul Roberts - March 2008

We managed to catch up with Paul Roberts, the former front man of The Stranglers as he and his band Soul Sec took a well earned time out. Currently recovering from incessant rehearsals for the Cabaret hit, The Art of Love, down on the Battersea Barge, Paul talks to The Buz about his time in The Stranglers, drugs and current bands to be found on his ipod.

Ok, let's start at the very beginning. How did you break in to the music industry?

Oooh. After a lot of turmoil, falling out with friends and bribes! No truthfully, back then you just flogged and flogged as hard as you could and then eventually I got a break. I was actually a plumber by trade, then I tried my hand at drumming and got involved with musical theatre.

What do you think the other guys saw in you to make you the replacement for Hugh Cornwell who'd obviously made quite an impact prior to you joining?

The best quote I've got is that it would probably be easier to replace Mick Jagger than Hugh Cornwell! I have a lot of time and admiration for him and I guess we we're both enigmatic and share a love of lyrics so maybe that was the reason.

You were a part of The Stranglers for 16 years, was it a difficult decision to leave that part of your life behind and leap in to the unknown?

Not really no. I was kind of driven out. It was time for a change because I felt as though I was no longer allowed a voice and it was important for me to write and perform lyrics that were significant, and when that wasn't happening I had to say goodbye.

So, on the back of The Stranglers, you opted for some solo time. Did you miss the companionship of the band?

No, I wouldn't say it changed all that much. I felt that although The Stranglers were a skilful unit but we all worked independently. I felt singular in the band so in that respect it wasn't a massive transition for me.

Ok, back to your current music. Where do you get inspiration from to create your songs?

Absolutely anything! Talking to people, meeting people, meeting you! Oh, thank you (woohoo! I'm inspiring). I have a bit of a fascination with love, madness, and drug abuse which obviously comes from my earlier days when getting high was the done thing but there are so many things that make me want to write. Politics even. Just looking around or watching TV and witnessing the horrors of the modern world with fear, terrorism and war. I touched upon that a lot in my last album – End Games.

How do you feel Soul Sec differ from The Stranglers?

I think there's just a different emphasis on the music and lyrics. I feel like we're all equally important in making the music and I'm surrounded by a team who can interpret exactly what I want to express musically.

You've been touring with the guys since 2001, what do you enjoy about it?

They're all off their heads – not in a druggie way or anything like that! We just bounce off each other. Our tour is continuing in March, an acoustic one just me and my guitarist. Vinnie, our drummer went off to work with Mel C and now he's on tour with the Spice Girls. Really? I went to see them last week they we're amazing, which one was he? The baldy drummer. Give him a wave from me! I will if he ever comes back. We've probably lost him now that he's rich and famous.

Moving on. Who do you consider as major influences on your musical career?

There are so many. Bowie, The Monkeys, Lennon, MC5, King Crimson, Zapper, Stavinsky, Roxy Music, Kate Bush. They all inspired me and I think you can always hear everything that I've listened to in my own stuff. Nothing's ever 100% original because you take bits from here and chunks from there without even realising.

Which current bands or artists do you admire?

I love the Killers, the Future Sound of London, Hot Chip and CCS a Brazilian band. I try to keep my finger on the pulse! My pet hate though, is the trend at the moment to sing in a regional accent. It's so annoying! One person does it, makes a hit and all of a sudden everyone piles on the bandwagon and before you know it you've got thick Scottish accents, Cockney, and Northern twangs cropping up everywhere. It's just not natural. None of the greats have had a distinguishable accent, it's an affectation that's spoiling a lot of decent tunes.

What is the highlight of your career so far?

Playing in the Albert Hall in front of my Father was pretty special.

And finally, what are your hopes for the future of Soul Sec for 2008?

To go on as we are. Get through the next tour and take them as far as humanly and creatively possible.