

Ay Interview

Pennie Smith
Telephone Interview @ West London Studio
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Interviewed by: Steve Bateman

On Friday January 17, 2003, I had the privilege of interviewing one of my idols, and one of Britain's most celebrated / revered rock photographers, Pennie Smith.

In just over 3 decades, Pennie has captured some of rock's most defining moments, icons and legends, including: Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, The Who, Iggy Pop, The Clash, The Jam, Debbie Harry, U2, Morrissey, The Stone Roses, Primal Scream, Manic Street Preachers, Radiohead, Oasis and The Strokes, to name but a few.

Such images are timeless and will without question, continue to inspire and impress future generations alike.

Pennie, like many rock photographers, acts as an intermediary between a musician and their audience, and whilst her live photographs capture the on-stage magic of a band / artist, it is arguably her portraits, which show the real person behind the rock star.



The Stone Roses
By Pennie Smith

As a freelance photographer, Pennie specialises in Black and White photography, and her work has appeared on the covers / pages of the NME (with Led Zeppelin being her first commission), on album sleeves, promotional material and in editorial / book features. She has also documented many tours, exhibited images worldwide and in 1980, published the best-selling book, The Clash: Before & After.

In 2002, Pennie was awarded with 2 prestigious honours: Q's 'Greatest Rock 'n' Roll Photograph of All-Time' (for her 1979 shot, of The Clash's Paul Simonon smashing his bass to the stage), and NME's 'Godlike Genius' (for her services to the paper).

Pennie still lives and works, in a disused railway station in West London, which she bought and converted into a studio, whilst she was a student. I found her to be very honest and humble, and hope that the interview which follows, is both interesting and informative, and gives an insight, into the working life of a legendary rock photographer.

1. The music world recently lost a true rock 'n' roll icon, with the sad passing of Joe Strummer. You must have many fond memories of Joe, are there any in particular, that you would like to share with the readers of R*E*P*E*A*T?

"I find it difficult, it's just that I knew him so well, for so long, that I can't pull out any particular point, there's either too little to say to the outside world, or too much. No, I can't pull out one quote in particular I'm afraid, not being obstructive on this one, there's nothing that I can say in one sentence, sorry".

2. You were born in London and studied graphics and fine art, at Twickenham Art School in the late 1960s. Is this where your interest in photography first began?

"No (laughing), I didn't mean to be a photographer. I went to Art School and did photography for half a day a week, in the last year - hated it! The only

bits that I enjoyed, was when I was sort of sent out with a camera, to do like what is commonly called reportage now, just go round the streets and snap. Then, I didn't know what I wanted to do, I was doing layout for a magazine for a while, sort of an underground magazine, and odds and ends of left-field posters for various people. Then Nick Kent came up to the magazine, and started writing about Iggy Pop, Lou Reed etc., he knew exactly who was who, and who was liable to be influential".

3. The NME wrote: "Throughout the '70s, Pennie Smith's photos and Nick Kent's writing defined music journalism, and set a consistent benchmark that few have got near since. Their reporting lent the music of the time, a dramatic depth and romantic dimension, for which their subjects can only have been very grateful". How did you evolve into a music photojournalist for the NME?

"Nick and I trotted around in a truly amateurish manner, he'd get amazing interviews and I'd get all sorts of off-stage, well, all sorts of informal stuff, because I'd never looked at a music mag - I didn't know what was what, I didn't realise people were doing football line-up photos. He then said: "Now we go up to NME and they take us on as sort of staffers, or whatever", so we trundled up to NME, clutching our swag that we'd done for this underground paper, and they promptly took us on. But we were both always determined to be freelance".

4. Are there any photographers that you admire?

"I got into photography totally inadvertently, so I still don't think of myself as a photographer, but as somebody that takes photographs. I don't know modern technology, I know what works for me, with my sort of bashed up old equipment. Therefore, I'm just as likely to get inspiration from a left-field bit of decoration, or a bit of music, or anything, as I am from another photographer. I don't swot photographers, having said that, I like Don McCullin's Vietnam stuff, I like some of the early Cecil Beaton, because I can just see that he was very much hit and miss, as I am. I quite like the wild-game aspect of it, I don't use a flash, and I quite like wondering if I can make it with the lights that are there, and stopping the action in time. If it's not dangerous - I don't like it! There are no rock photographers, most rock photography bores the pants off me, particularly the modern stuff where it's studio-orientated, glossy passport photos, no, don't like".

5. Can you remember the first photograph that you had published?

"It was probably what's commonly called a fanzine, but it was like an underground magazine, which was more politically-led than the current fanzines. But I think it was perhaps a picture of Pink Fairies maybe, in Frendz Magazine, I don't know".

6. How did it feel, to have Led Zeppelin as your first NME commission?

"I'm not a music swot, so I didn't know their past legacy, to be truly fearful (laughing). I mean, I think they were probably as much surprised as I should've been, if I had known more about them, in as much as I don't think girls actually took photos at the time, it was a male job. With bands, the music press or everybody presumes that they ought to like having their picture taken, but if you're somebody who writes music, you don't necessarily like having your picture taken. So photographers weren't thought of as much, they were sort of something that journalists dragged in with them, particularly with Zeppelin, who didn't really have their photos taken huge amounts - they didn't really like the process at all. But I found them perfectly charming, and I did odds and ends with them, you know they were just nice blokes, as far as I was concerned".

7. Was it easier to gain access to bands, when you were starting out?

"I think probably yes. Well, having said that, I sort of came in the back door really, because I almost came in at the tail-end of the Led Zeppelins and stuff, or a bit before that. I wasn't working for the music press at the time, and I can't believe that the Zeppelins didn't have higher security, or limited access, on their tours of America. I mean I enjoyed working with them, but what I'm trying to say is, I think access to those big American gigs was always difficult, because you've got your egos

and people being concerned about their jobs. Nick and I used to (pausing), I don't know how he got the interviews with the people that he did, I suppose he hit them, as they were about to become famous in England. So they thought that any publicity was good publicity, even if you worked for a little magazine. I mean he probably bumped up the mags, and he did write very, very well, so I think they were quite pleased, to have him writing about them. So I got into some quite big names, through the underground magazine, and then I suppose I had the clout of NME behind me. But I think bands, and this isn't meant to sound ego-laden, it's that old parallel universe thing, if you show you're worth your weight, then you'll be given as much as you want, do you know what I mean? I think there's a lot of people waving things, saying I want to take pictures of bands - but not actually prepared to trundle into the darkroom, and then they're never seen again. You know after the gig, you'll get up really early in the morning and process the stuff, so it's in for 9am or whatever. So I think provided you keep ploughing on, you'll probably get access, but no, obviously the industry has stepped in and things are more difficult, but also, that could be because 1 person in 3, wants to be something to do with a band or fashion".

8. Many congratulations on winning your Q and NME Awards in 2002. What was your initial reaction on hearing the news, and what do these achievements mean to you?

"The Q Award was strange, just because so much life has passed between that, and taking the photo, and when it actually came up for some award (pausing) - I'm not a 100% sure about the 100 best of anything actually (laughing). I mean it's very pleasant to be praised, as a photographer in the music business, you tend to sort of go out, shoot the session, throw the stuff at the office and then it appears in the paper. And well, there's not usually a lot of thanks, so yes it was very nice. As I say, rating things is a current contagious habit at the moment, in 1 - 100, I just don't know the ethics of this at all (laughing). The NME Award I don't know, again slightly curios, just because when the NME was really I suppose, at its heyday, when everybody was ploughing away, because they were really interested in doing pictures on what they wanted, doing articles on who they wanted. Nick Logan who was the Editor, bless his cotton socks, gave everybody the leeway to do exactly what they wanted, we were all on a high, all on a parallel plane as it were. You just didn't think in terms of abstract praises, or awards, or anything, like the nature of the curios beast that it is now, the music industry. I mean, I still only shoot bands that I really want to shoot, so I haven't changed, but the nature of the industry has. It seems necessary for them to put people in certain orders, so I suppose it tidies me up a bit for them (laughing), by giving me an award. Yeah it was great, again it's nice to be patted on the back, but sort of unnecessary from I suppose, I can't think of the word, it's not a mental point of view for me. But yes, of course it's nice to have someone saying thank you, but a bit curios".

9. You couldn't have envisaged that The Clash: London Calling photograph, would become such an iconic and lauded image. Paul du Noyer, editor of the special edition of Q Magazine said: "This was a picture that lots of photographers mentioned without prompting... it's a classic picture because it captures the ultimate rock 'n' roll moment - total loss of control". Are you pleased that this shot of Paul Simonon, was selected as Q's 'Greatest Rock 'n' Roll Photograph of All-Time'?

"This is going to be another broad answer, I don't take pictures of bands, I take pictures of people. It bores me slightly, that people put me in brackets, saying you know of The Clash, this is a reference to the great British public, that bracket people for their own mental stability. I mean if you're a great painter, they will never let you be a great poet as well, in fact, if you turn out to be a better poet, they'll probably throwaway both your original paintings and your poetry. You're not allowed to step out of your bracket, because you're safe being contained, and it's easy for people thinking that this person does that, and that's where I'll put them. Particularly within the climate of the music business now, or any industry, where they want a quick reference, they're unprepared to swot (pausing), I've gone well-wide on the mark, and this is one of my rants at the moment. But, I don't think it was judged within my Clash photos, I think

for whatever devious reasons, they were doing it to fill their papers or whatever. I mean that picture to me, I can't see it now, its been used in various forms so many times - it's a bit like wallpaper. I think it was chosen in a parallel with other photos, for whatever personal reasons people put up as their choice, so it was against other music photos per se. Of The Clash photos, there are others that perhaps I'd prefer, for all sorts of reasons. Yes I like that picture, as I say, it's so long ago now, I've seen it too many times to get the gut reaction, that I had at the time. But basically, Clash-wise there are other more snap-shot type things, that still take me back to the gut feeling, that I had at the time - perhaps an odd backstage one, maybe one that's never been seen before. Obviously I'm known for Clash photos, but I don't bracket myself. The Clash, bless their cotton socks, I stuck with them (laughing) for 6 or 7 years more or less, whatever their career was, so obviously I had quite an intimate relationship with them, but like-wise The Stone Roses, I did the bulk of their career etc. Primals etc. But I've never had any concerns, bands included, what anybody else thinks of my pictures - I take them for me. So as I say, with The Clash, the reason I stuck with them, is that they just left me completely alone. All the bands I've worked with over periods of time, including bizarrely, The Pet Shops, because they just crease me up, I find them so funny. They're bands that have either got to make good shapes, and / or I'm compatible with, and they leave me to get on with my job, and they don't have any say over the pictures, that are chosen finally".

10. Are you interested in photographing other subjects?

"No, I mean I've done odds and ends of boxing stuff, but I suppose I'm a bit of a lazy photographer. I quite enjoy the adrenaline of being sent out into the wild (laughing), or somebody might describe me as an itinerant photographer, you know on the road with a band for a bit. But no, I don't go out and do landscapes, obviously I do holiday snaps of landscapes, and think I don't know why I'm looking at this, when I get it back (laughing). I'm not very good, I don't know what the focal point is, and I don't naturally compose with that. No, I'm only a photographer I suppose, given a set of circumstances, it's like being a mountaineer, if you haven't got a mountain in front of you. If somebody says oh go do, like NME did with The Strokes, who I'd vaguely spotted and wanted to do pictures of - me being chucked in New York for 3 days, with a band that I don't know, who've probably got their own bit of edge and camaraderie, then great! You know, it's slightly (pausing), not dangerous that's far too big a word, but I thrive under that sort of situation. But I don't trundle around, doing pictures of someone at a bus stop really".



Yummy Jam

11. What are your musical tastes / which bands do you enjoy listening to?

"Again, I'm probably musically stone-deaf. I hate it when I've shot a band and they say, come and listen to the album in the studio, and I think Oh Christ (laughing), really don't want to be put on the spot here. I'm not avoiding the issue, I'm not a musical person (laughing), I don't particularly like dancing - I got at this through art, so I'm just as likely to go and look at an art exhibition, as I am to listen to an album. At home, if I get any time-off, I enjoy reading, in the darkroom I can't listen to music, because it puts my timing off for my prints. I'm not saying I don't listen to music, I mean I seriously couldn't do an entire tour of somebody's, without liking some aspect of their music, or you know, basically something about them. But obviously, I like quite a lot of The Clash, I like The Strokes - I thought they were clean, new and had a new take

on Punk, and their attitude mentally seemed to be similar to mine (laughing), that sounds arrogant, but do it round the other way if you like. If anything is on the same mental-plane as me, it will give me stimulation, and music doesn't per se do that you know, it does, but I don't go out looking for albums at the weekend. I mean having done this for so long, often people will send me stuff saying I think you'll like this, and it's a great way of doing it, it's a real lazy way of doing it - often their right. But to be honest, I have no one particular musical taste, I don't keep up with what's current, only because I'm too busy doing a parallel universe. I can't say anymore than that, it's just that I'm not musically-based".

12. In 2002, the NME celebrated its 50th anniversary. However, some critics have argued that it isn't as necessary as it once was. Would you agree?

"I think it's total rubbish! Basically I think it's too concerned with itself, not wishing to sound like somebody's aunt here, well it's probably sounding the opposite, everything is too company led now, it's too much how many units are we going to sell? Oh, we need a really young editor, because he knows what he's doing, or we need a really old editor, to know how it worked in the past and to re-do it now. There's too much politicking, they need to send millions of people out on the street, look around, listen around, get on with things - you can't plan a weekly, a month in advance. More or less the covers are tied up, they know what they're running in 3 weeks, there's no real reason, unless their dead lucky and it hits right, to pull a cover and put on something that has drastically happened, like sort of say Joe dying or whatever. I know there's the Internet, but there's a real room for a graphically immediate paper, that comes out biweekly, or certainly weekly. You know, some grubby thing that felt like it had just come off the presses, that you shoved in your pocket, like NME used to be in the old days. Obviously, news can be gleaned from the Internet, but you can't really take a computer on the train, or it hasn't got the immediacy of some scuzzy bit of paper, that you shove in your pocket or can pin up on your wall, if you happen to fancy one of the pictures in it. I despair the music business at the moment, it doesn't know where it's going. I think with people's jobs on the line, things are changing, more pirating is going on, the Internet has happened, DVDs have happened - the structure is changing. Everybody's running scared so they're playing ultra-safe, which I sort of understand, knowing quite a lot of people in the music industry, and you know, I hope they keep their jobs. On the other hand, I think there's stuff around that ought to be being covered, and nobody dare cover it. Having said that, I think the tenor of the beast has changed, I don't know if music is quite as immediate, I know it can be whacked out quicker, because of computers and recording decks etc. But I just think that we might be at the tail end, and it might be about to change, of like a whole nerd generation (laughing), that spent an awful lot of time playing with this new technology, and didn't actually ever get out of their bedrooms. Hopefully, every time you think this has got to be the lowest of the low, everything explodes again, which is great. I'm not quite sure, which bits of technology people are playing with at the moment, there's an awful lot of retro stuff around, which happens obviously every 10 years - someone borrows from 10 years back. But so long as you take it and run, which I think The Strokes did, but some of the others didn't, I think it's great. The Clash and other bands, obviously borrowed from the past, but it's whether you actually use that material, to do something else with, that somebody else in turn, can borrow and evolve on. I think there's an awful lot of just straight-forward retro stuff, which is terminally boring at the moment".

13. You worked for the NME between 1975 and 1982, and left when colour was introduced. Where else has your photography appeared during the past 20 years?

"Difficult one that, basically NME was black and white, I shot black and white and I got quite a reputation from there. Bands tend to call on me, because they think that I'm compatible with what they do, so it's a long answer, but people like The Stone Roses, liked all my stuff that they had seen with NME. A lot of their own personal stuff, stuff that's on albums, press things, they wanted to use me in B&W, although I shot maybe an odd roll of colour for them. You know, basically they use the

stuff, Primals do, all the Oasis stuff this year was in B&W, NME went back to B&W for The Strokes cover for me. I think because I've carved my own niche out, people are prepared to take me as I am, and bands want to use me for what I do, even The National Portrait Gallery has bought 2 or 3 of my things. In a way, I've come back to where I started off as - I haven't actually got any competition, in as much as I'm now again doing art, which is what it was originally to me, it's not art with a capital A, but it's art as I went out and snapped. I've now bypassed all that middle period, of going back to sort of lip gloss and god knows what. I'm back to where people take me for what I do, so I've been lurking, but not so much front covers with credits on. I've just carried on with the same old rouges and vagabonds really, all the Black Grape stuff, it's just more and more of the same, and stuff that I enjoy doing".

14. You print your own photographs, which are very stylised. For you personally, what qualities do B&W photographs have over colour?
"I suppose when I learnt photography, black and white was the norm, it's not now. Colour I find, unless you're very, very clever, is exactly what you look at and I find it boring. With a colour supplement, well I don't even think anything, I don't really look at the pictures, because it's what you see when you look out the window. Weirdly now, B&W looks more I don't know, not fashionable that's not the word, I can't think of the word, probably more poncey than colour did (laughing), when I was doing B&W. I sort of think in B&W now, if I look across the room and see somebody, I can work out how much light is coming through the window, and what shape to make with them and the window. I know with colour, the whole room will be there, and that's it. Colour doesn't lend itself to atmosphere and feeling very well, unless you're extremely clever, it's just always all there. Somebody said to me the other day, that when they looked at my pictures, they could look at what I was looking at, and I'd never really thought of it. I mean I know what I'm looking at when I take a picture, but that's partly to do with composition I think, that they said that. Basically, I think that's the thing, you do sort of look at what's being perceived at the time, it's almost like a sketch, wherein colour it is all painted in and you think, oh the whole things nice, but you're not particularly looking at in detail".

15. Is it true, that you used to give discarded prints, to a second hand shop near to where you live?
"I've got a book shop in the front of my premises, which is like out-of-print books, and in order to get the premises, I had to have a shop in the front as a retail outlet. So it wasn't a case of giving them, but if stuff came back damaged or if I did unspectacular prints, I just used to shove them in a box in the shop".

16. Are studio portraits, live photographs and candid shots, equally important to you?
"Well, I can't do studio shots for a start (laughing), I'm no good at lighting, I find it terminally boring - I have got a studio or I did have, it's now at the moment storing someone's furniture who's moving (laughing). No I'm not that good at lighting, it's a bit like doing a still-life once I get a band in the studio, I have done stuff, but I just gave it up. I don't like other people around when I shoot, so there's no point saying, well why not get a lighting engineer in or whatever. As for live and off-stage, I don't know really, I enjoy just watching people - I probably should've been born an Italian, watching the promenades in the evening, I just like watching the shapes that people make. So I'm in my natural habitat on the tour bus, clutching one bag of cameras, and bunkering up in my hotel room or in a bunk on the bus, and going out. Then if that involves live, which it does, then it's part and parcel of the same, but I don't really like being tied down in studios, I get claustrophobic".

17. So you enjoy life on the road?
"I really love being on the road, I like having all my possessions in one small bag, and just being like a functional / functioning person, without the debris of everyday life around me (laughing). I mean any problems that happen on the road, unless it's camera equipment, or me feeling I'm not getting the photos, they're somebody else's problems. Not saying that in a hard way, but it's just nice not to have

problems of your own around (laughing). I mean I just love travelling, I get twitchy if I'm at base too long".



The famous one

18. Do you have a favourite country?

"No, countries differ with the people that you're with actually, strangely - I mean it's not like going on holiday or anything. But I must confess, some of the very long American tours I really like, where you just sort of watch the country peeling away in front of your eyes, it's truly spectacular. Looking out the bus, at like a stop in the middle of nowhere, and not knowing what you are going to see, I mean it's just amazing, but I'm not saying America is my favourite country. In a way, a lot of the time you're flying to somewhere, you get out of the plane, you catch some sort of transport back to the hotel, chuck your bags in the hotel, go to the sound-check, go to the gig, and do the whole thing in reverse. So you're not actually really seeing countries, and on the road means either a long trek round Europe, because everywhere else is sort of flying, or you know England or America. People don't seem to do the UK trek like they used to, and I suppose I've done that so many times, that it's really not novel, unless the band is making it novel for some reason. But I mean America, visually you can't really get enough of it, it's just amazing to look at".

19. What cameras, lenses and films do you use?

"I use old Pentax ES2s, lenses various and I usually use Tri-X, up-rated to 1600 ASA or ISO - even in daylight! I mean that all stemmed from the fact, that music papers were printed on totally rubbish paper, and therefore to give photos clout, I always went for a hard negative, so it didn't sort of sink in the paper and wasn't all greys. Lenses, depends on what and where".

20. R*E*P*E*A*T is a Manic Street Preachers inspired fanzine, and the Manics were greatly influenced by The Clash's political conscience, sound and image. What were your experiences of photographing James, Nicky, Richey and Sean?

"I shot them huge amounts of times - again, I'm not very good at anecdotes really, because (pausing), I know it's weird, but unless somebody talks directly to you, if you're observing them as the photographer, you're almost not part of what's going on. Basically, I think James obviously liked The Clash, I was a bit cautious that they were going to be too much Clash-copyists, at first. So I did a couple of shoots, and I just wasn't a 100% sure, but got on with them really well as blokes, then ultimately they used Mitch Ikeda a lot. But I did shoot odds and ends and liked them all. I was surprised when Richey went missing, because I'd just done that gig at Tottenham Court Road, and to be honest he was in totally good form when I saw him, which wasn't that long before. He was a lot more smiley at the lens, and I just found it a bit surprising really, I don't know what my take is on that".

21. You recently worked with Oasis and The Strokes, what was that like?

"Oasis, I had known Noel through all the stuff I'd done with Paul Weller, he kept popping up. Liam I hadn't met, but he's apparently good friends with

John Squire, so if he got on well with John, then obviously there's going to be some sort of compatibility. I thought of doing them, and probably should have done them about the time, that I was doing The Stone Roses, perhaps that's the time when they were sort of a lot more young and eager, I'm not saying that they're not now, I mean I found them great. I tend to leave bands alone, to get on with what they're doing and snap, so basically I told them just to edge closer together, and I think Liam thought that one of them was touching him up (laughing). He then turned round and threatened him, then they all burst out laughing, which was great, it was like the pre-shot, which worked better than the more arranged ones, which were shot afterwards. The Strokes again great, I think I'm probably a bit of a Tomboy, I mean I went out to New York, I heard them and thought they sounded great, but again, I was a bit bothered that they were going to be retro. I went out and met them, we walked out on the street and I did the photos. But I should've probably settled in, or the interview should have been done first or something, because I'm not very good at meeting a band and going straight out, until I've assessed what I'm looking at in a way (laughing) - but the interview was being done the following day. We went out on the street and within about 5 minutes, they were in the middle of a fight, which was quite interesting and quite nice (laughing). It was quite a nice introduction, because I was then able to say, well no, we need to go to an off-licence and get some ice-packs, before we do the pictures, or we'll have to do them tomorrow, because you're swelling-up badly. In that way, we became a bit more of a unit, rather than here's the photographer come to take the pictures. Then the next day but one, they were playing a gig and really they were unknown in New York at the time. They did this gig and about 5 people and a dog turned up, but they hit the stage and were just great! They played their socks off, possibly (pausing), well no, they always do I'm sure, maybe because NME was there, but I don't think it was, because it's very difficult to play to a pretty empty hall. The only place in the world that they could be, was on-stage, which is what's right with some bands and isn't right with others - there was no acting, that's just where they belonged and they looked right. That tends to be the sort of band I work with, not particularly for the live pictures, it's just bands who no what they're doing and why they're doing it, I think".

22. Some British artists, have complained that American acts, are receiving more coverage in the UK music press than they are. What is your opinion on this?

"I don't think it matters who does what, like Women who want Women's Books, or Black people that want Black Rights Books, I think they're causing themselves a handicap. I mean people say to me, what's it like being a woman in the music business? I don't notice that I'm a woman doing anything, and I don't think anyone should notice whether you're English or Guatemalan. I think you've just got to do what you do, and make it obvious, flaunt it around and if it's good enough, it'll be picked up. If anybody's good, be it American or Icelandic, it should give you a poke in the back to get on and do better, you know. If you read that sort of thing, if you're making music in your bedroom and know damn well you're good, then you'll emerge and I would think, enough people are going to notice you're good. I don't think nationality or sex, has anything to do with at all".

23. Of all your photographs, do you have any favourite images, for either aesthetic or significant reasons?

"I always get caught with this one. I mean people who put on exhibitions, say we need 20 shots, I don't know how to choose 20 shots, because I can use 20 quiet shots, I can use 20 loud shots, I can use 20 live shots, I can use 20 shots that are nearly black (laughing). You know, I'm the world's worst at pruning out for what reasons / what shots. I mean I know what makes a good shot, and if somebody says have you got a picture for this use, I shall think right, that's the one to use - but no, we're back to the best 100. So I can't say it is this one of Mick Jagger, or it's this one of Fabrizio from The Strokes, or Noel from Oasis, it depends on attitude of the day really. You know when Joe died, I immediately thought well (pausing), people kept wanting mug-shots of Joe, and I kept trying to explain, that he wasn't the singer with a band, The Clash were a unit. Then I just thought, well perhaps

pictures of Joe feeding Mick the donut on the bus, basically I know what's right for an instance, but if you say what are your 50 best pictures, god knows".

24. Do you have any plans for more exhibitions / books?

"I have got an exhibition, that's supposed to be happening in Belfast this year. Stuart Bailie, who used to be a writer for NME, they put on an art thing every year in Belfast, he's approached me to do an exhibition. It would be in May and I haven't really (pausing), with Joe happening at the beginning of the year, because of people needing photos, again this year seems to be slipping through my fingers. Basically, I haven't decided what I'm doing, I don't know exactly how many photos, I've got dimensions of the space, but haven't worked out the size of photos, and how that relates to me doing what I'm hoping to do this year. So I'm not promising, because sorry to say it, but even talking to you, has now taken an hour out of my day sort of thing (laughing). The Fireman want a photo for the Fireman's Benefit Brochure, of Joe, because he did a gig etc. and my days seem to easily slip out my hands. So yes, there is probably going to be an exhibition in Belfast, that doesn't actually relate to any book that I'm hoping to do, but if I'm not careful, I'm going to be making false promises again. This year is just a me year and I'm supposedly having a sabbatical, apart from doing the jobs that I really, really want to do. Although this has been threatened in the past 2 years, but I keep being too busy to do it - to actually go through my back catalogue and see what's what, and then apply it somehow, to a book, the website, or whatever. I've got people pursuing me for books and exhibitions, but I don't want to be led by them, because I keep going back to the same images that everybody keeps using, and even they, aren't perhaps some of the most worthwhile. Some of the earlier ones got stolen from NME's files, so it's the ones that got left, that are doing the rounds and I just need to re-look at my negatives".

25. What can we expect from your website?

"I don't know, for the past 150 years, it seems like I've worked under other people's deadlines, and I've got one book publisher who is hammering me already, even though I've only just said I'm taking the year off. He said: "You know it takes 9 months to produce a book", but I'm not working under any deadlines, I'm going to be a completely free agent, and it's almost like doing a completely different brief. I haven't got a clue, it won't be a hard-sell site, probably because I keep being asked for prints, and I know I can sell at exhibitions. Obviously there will be prints for sale, it will not be a photographer's hard-sell, order this on this form etc. it won't be one of those. But, I have got to satisfy somehow, the demand for people who want prints, who at the moment bless their cotton socks, are a bit of an interruption from day to day, because I never have the stuff printed up, that they want to buy. Taking a year off is fairly expensive, and I have built up some money from last year, so I am actually going to help subsidise it, by selling the prints to people, that I've been putting off for the past couple of years. But I really don't want to commit myself - I haven't got a clue, I just want to be completely clear-brained and see what emerges".

26. Can you sum up your career to date?

"No, I haven't got a career, I might be an engine driver next week, I really don't know. I mean I'm only doing it all the time, that I'm enjoying doing it. I had 2 or 3 years, where I didn't really do anything, because there was nothing around that I fancied doing, about I don't know, 4 or 5 years ago. I can't do anything that I really don't enjoy doing, obviously I've got to survive, but I won't now take a job that doesn't please me. It's the world's worst, if you've sort of ended up with somebody, taken some pictures which are pretty average, they've raved over them, and you just feel like you've sold yourself down the line. I just really can't do that anymore, I'd rather not eat for a week, than do something like that. So no, I can't really sum up my career, because it isn't a career (laughing)".

27. Any final thoughts?

"Actually, if it explains some of the answers, most of the bands that I've dealt with - I think people fall into 2 schools, Classicists or Romantics and not as in New Romantics, but I tend to go I think,

not consciously, but for Romantics. So I suppose in a curious sort of way, most people think of careers as careers, I don't. But all the time it's romantic, not as in Mills & Boon either (laughing), it's your bandits, it's your cowboys, it's your whatevers. All the time I suppose it's romantic, I'll carry on doing it, if / when it becomes a career, which it has nearly become over the years, that's the point where I back off. If it gets near a job and it ceases to be romantic, then basically I'm just not interested, I could've worked in a bank I suppose - I couldn't, I can't add up (laughing)".

28. Lastly, chips or cream buns?
"Blimey, probably chips".

A very special thanks to Pennie, for taking time out of her busy schedule, to answer all of my questions.

