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» **What punk rock has taught me: A discussion with Joe King of The Queers.**

With downtown Ottawa blanketed in snow, Joe King (aka Joe Queer) is hidden under a hoodie as he walks through the door of Mavericks and onto the small stage, which is set up for the evening's performances by The Queers, The Heart Attacks and The Riptides. After about 10 minutes of loud distortion, his guitar is ready. He checks with Sean, the promoter, about heading back to the hotel to have a quick shower and is informed of his interview with PlugInMusic.com.



"Oh hey, I'm Joe," he says to me. "Where do you want to do this?"

We head up the stairs to Café Dekcuf – another Ottawa venue and staple for punk shows. Clenching his hands together and arching his neck down, he sits near the top of the stairs – probably to avoid the cold draft near the entrance – and happily talks about the band's next record.

"We're putting out a DVD through Music Video Distributors, called 'The Queers Are Here,' that's coming out next month and we've got a new album with an official release date of February 6th called 'Munki Brain,'" he says, talking about current developments. "We haven't had a new album out since 2002, so we're getting quite a buzz and a new push."

King adds that fans can also look out for a Queers tribute album with a slew of punk artists in the fall of 2007. "I've got that all done but, I'm just waiting because we've got so much stuff coming out that I don't want it to get lost," says King. Artists on the album will include The Dwarves, Screeching Weasel, The Nobodies, New Bomb Turks, Hard-Ons, Toys That Kill and others.

"I like doing more poppy stuff and I'm working on doing a small tour with a keyboard player, some really good singers and not doing it with the Marshall Amps," he says. "I never really get a chance to do the pop stuff, maybe one or two songs. I have some really good stuff I'm proud of."

"I can do the three chord stuff fairly well but, to me, doing the layered vocals and coming up with percussion and keyboards – it's a challenge."

As a punk, King says he's learned to mellow out and embrace a Beach Boys "Pet Sounds" style through the song "I Think She's Starting to Like Me" – a track that is on "Munki Brain."



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"I want punk rockers that have listened to The Queers in the past to say, 'Wow. This is a band that's moved on. They're not just doing the same stuff, locked into that forever.'"

King credits the late Joey Ramone as a continual influence.

"Joey always told me, 'Move out musically and don't worry about if you're punk or not – just move ahead and try new stuff and do whatever keeps you going,'" he says.

"I refuse to be pigeon-holed in the two-minute pop punk genre where you're singing about going to the prom with your girlfriend and she fucks a jock and you're bummed out. I mean, I like that type of stuff, but I really want to branch out."

Despite keeping busy with constant touring, King admits he'd love to stay at home with his wife, Mimi – something he says he rarely does.

"I just got married, so I'm thinking more and more of settling down and we're going on a two-year plan to save money and get off the road."

However, he says there are definitely benefits to meeting fans during tours.

"A lot of kids come up to me and say, 'Your music helped me through high school.' That's really awesome, when people say that.

"The Ramones got me through a lot of stuff with those goofy songs," he continues, "and kids say that stuff to me [about our music] and little stuff like that is what I put a price tag on – that, as oppose to how much money I make or how many kids show up or how many albums we sell.

"If you keep that attitude then things are going to be okay. That's what keeps me going."

Touring with friends is also a plus, he says.

"It doesn't have to do with drugs or how many chicks someone is fucking or any of that stuff. It's almost like going back to sixth grade and camping out behind your parents' house with your buddies. Those fun times and those summer nights – I never thought I'd be able to do that again," he says.

"Touring has kind of been like that," he continues. "There are tough times; friends get mad at each other but I've made some incredible friendships. Seeing the world, going to places I have no business to go to like Brazil or Thailand or Italy. I never would have gone there without the band. I'm really thankful for that."

In the last 18 months, King was home for only seven weeks. This year, touring with The Queers will take King far from home once again – the band plans to go to Europe in the fall.


Considering this type of lifestyle, King says that maintaining a positive attitude is important.

"I try and have the best day I can and sometimes I wish I was home cooking pea soup and sitting on the couch with my wife but [the band has] been able to do some incredible stuff and travel together. One of these days, I'm looking at staying home. I wonder how I'll be."

- Dara Hakimzadeh

Photo from ThatsRockStar.com

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