

had butcher paper all over the walls." He says, "Yeah, whenever I wanted to do art, I wanted to do it on the walls."

**JOE:** Awesome! Hey he never told me that.

**JR:** So your film really captures *that* spirit of him, two years later. He was mostly nude, I mean not much left to the imagination, as they say in **THE RULES** film [1978's *All You Need is Cash*].

**JOE:** Yeah! But, boy, I had much more of a personal relationship with Tomata, and he told me a lot of stuff, but I never got that story. I'm kind of disappointed!

**JR:** And *The Screamers* are perhaps the *ultimate* example of what Target Video has done for the world. I did that [turned out to be] final interview with him, three months before he died [May 3, 2000, cancer], which wasn't my intention, here in San Francisco in Nob Hill. I'd been trying to track him down for years to interview him, and found out that he'd been in New Orleans for years. And I said to him "I've wanted to ask you this for 15 years: Why no *Screamers* records? You were by far, along with **THE WEIRDOS**, the most popular band in L.A., you were selling out three nights, six shows at *The Whiskey!* And he said "We were not a recording band. We were a visual band. You could not just record us in a studio. I took an hour psyching up to that persona before we went on, and when I came off, I was so exhausted, I just wanted to go home. We considered ourselves a performance art band as much as music, and the only way you could capture us was on film."

**JOE:** That's right!

**JR:** And I thought: *Joe Rees!*

**JOE:** Yeah. [Tears up a little.] And without getting blubbery about the whole thing, it was a phenomenal experience to do it! I met them in L.A. because I loved them. They were on a bill with *The Weirdos*, and I shot that too, from the balcony.

**JR:** Was that at the Stardust Ballroom?

**JOE:** There you go! Bingo! And I said, "What can I say? I want to work with you. You guys interested?"

**JR:** Here's the date [looks at *Search and Destroy*]: July 3, 1978.

**JOE:** Yeah! And they came up here. You've got such strong personalities; strong like **K.K. [BARRETT]** the drummer, and [co-keyboardist] **PAUL ROESSLER**, and then Tomata. And Tomata, obviously he already had a painter/art background, very subtle, very subdued, but very passionate and just a pleasure to even talk with, right? Anyway, we discussed what was gonna go down, and I felt like I was working for someone like **ALFRED HITCHCOCK!** [Laughter.] I felt like I was shooting [1958 Hitchcock San Francisco-set film] *Vertigo!*

**JR:** [Sings *Screamers* song:] "Vertigo! Oh no!"

**JOE:** Because you see the sincerity in his face when he looks into the camera! He was there! And I don't know if you've seen it lately, but I'm telling you ...

**JR:** I watched your [stunning] film of [*The Screamers*'] "122 Hours Of Fear" again, recently, actually. These guys really were a force!

**JOE:** They were absolutely *there*. There was no doubt! They were the most unique group I ever worked with! I've worked with some strange cats but ... that was just heaven. 'Cause I have to call them "punk" I guess.

**JR:** And here's where we remind the audience that they were a "punk" band with no guitars and no bass!

**JOE:** Yeah, so that confuses everybody, right? But let's face it ... *The Screamers!* I mean, my God! The intensity of that music! And the knowledge behind that music! Because you could feel the Hollywood stuff come through there, the knowledge of film and the classics—it was there and it was beautiful! And then the classical part with Paul, he was trained! And K.K., *that beat never stopped*, and he's dedicated—he's *still* working in the film business. [25 years a production designer, for **SPIKE JONZE**, **SOFIA COPELAND**, etc.] So you

could see a lot of that come through. But then there was the relationship between **TOMMY** and Tomata. Tommy was always reserved but he seemed to be in control. And of course he completely disappeared after Tomata passed away. Now I'm gonna tell you something that no one else knows.

**JR:** For the record?

**JOE:** For the record. And I think it's time to talk about it. [Pause, tearing again.] I want to get through this. [Pause] Tomata called me just before he died.

**JR:** Three months after I interviewed him, then.

**JOE:** Right. And it was devastating because he apologized to me—for what? I don't know. But he felt like he didn't do enough. It was such a serious thing to him. And also he wanted to make sure that I didn't have any bad feelings about anybody. But why?! Good lord, I had no bad feelings! I only felt like it was it was one of the best things I'd ever done in my life. But the sensitivity and the love from that man was just overpowering! [Pause as Jerry and Jack let him regain his composure.]

**JR:** For the virtue of people who've never seen this video for "122 Hours of Fear," can you just go on YouTube and look at it?

**JOE:** Yeah. People rip me off all the time. [Laughter] [See: youtube.com/watch?v=MdCRcrgX080] Eventually *all* this stuff will be available, I'm working towards that. But yeah, that's one my favorites, of course! And I would love to have that out there. But with the new digital audio mix.

**JR:** It's my favorite bit of your film: when the band drops out and he looks in the camera and snarls, "You better shut up and listen!" The first time I saw that, on that VHS I ordered in 1981, I went, [frightened:] "aaaaaaaahhhhh!"

**JOE:** Yeah! I tell you one thing: I just had a show in Austin, TX, and because I just happened to be at the right angle to look at the audience when that [Tomata part] happened, I saw the expression on their faces, and... they stopped breathing just for a second! They actually listen to him! "You better shut up and listen!" [Laughter.] Of course the sound system in that place was just amazing. So it had 'em. It had 'em by the throat! [Laughter.]

**JR:** Anybody reading this interview really has to watch this video now. I hope we've piqued their interest enough to see what it is we're spending so much time talking about.

**JOE:** Yeah! It was a passion thing! I love those guys, and it's a story that continues because, well, there's other things that I can't really say, because I don't want anybody to get hurt. If I told you, you wouldn't believe me!

**JR:** Even as unbelievable as some of those people were and all the unbelievable things they did?

**JOE:** Yeah. But the love that goes on is—I just don't know how to explain it. But let's just say that some members of the band have been paid their royalties for years, because, everything I do, must be done that way ...

**JR:** ... is on the level?

**JOE:** Everyone gets royalties! But there's a large amount of money that's unclaimed, and it's only because they'd rather not say a thing. They're still so devastated [that the band broke up in 1981]! It's amazing. I don't know. How do you survive? That's true love, to me. There's more than one story like this. I should talk about **THE CRAMPS!**

**JR:** The Napa show you filmed? [June 13, 1978]

**JOE:** That's the first one, right! In Napa, CA, they have a mental hospital. It was real obvious in those days we were always trying to find a venue that was different. [Laughter.] And the other thing is, how many times [as punks] did you hear, "You're crazy!" [Laughter] So why not go there.

**JERRY:** That's the benchmark for all venues!

**JOE:** Well, I did **CRIME**...

**JR:** at San Quentin... Another famous film [1978].

**JOE:** Right! At San Quentin [State] Prison. That was a surreal situation, because obviously **CRIME** wore police uniforms, and all the inmates in the audience... [Laughter.] And those were the days when they allowed them to work out with weights, and there was such a strong divide between Caucasian, Black, and Hispanic. And the Hispanics were in between the Blacks and the Caucasians, so when my camera pans around, you can really see it. But they all loved the poster, kind of an S&M poster of this woman dressed in black leather with a whip! [Laughter.] They liked that. [laughter] They could relate to that! They had no idea that this was a punk band. They didn't know what punk *was*, so it was this surreal relationship. Now, if you watch the camera pan up to the walkway over the prison where the guards are, you see this black woman standing up there with a big giant gun, and she's got bleach blonde hair, and you're saying "Wait a minute, who was that? Who was really strange here?" [Laughter; see "Piss on Your Dog" at [youtube.com/watch?v=FW2bQNVdVal](http://youtube.com/watch?v=FW2bQNVdVal)] It is kind of a twist? It was kind of a surreal kind of experience. But anyway, so you've got The Cramps. The Cramps in those days, it was just a great scene. They're great people, they really are, but they were *different* than everybody else—they had a different style, and started a whole new style. The man was a genius, **LUX INTERIOR** [1946-2009], but that came about in a strange way. **SALLY WEBSTER** from **THE MUTANTS** was there too —

**JR:** They were the opening act, right?

**JOE:** No, they headlined! See here's the problem. I remember. When I had the black and white camera, I was really limited to light, and the show started in the middle of the afternoon, and the light went fast so I could shoot The Cramps, who went on first.

**JR:** I didn't know that!

**JOE:** Nobody knew this! I didn't even realize what was going on. I thought they'd be finished and I'd be able to shoot The Mutants. Well by the time the poor Mutants came on, I couldn't even *see* them in the camera, so that was a terrible thing. It was a bummer.

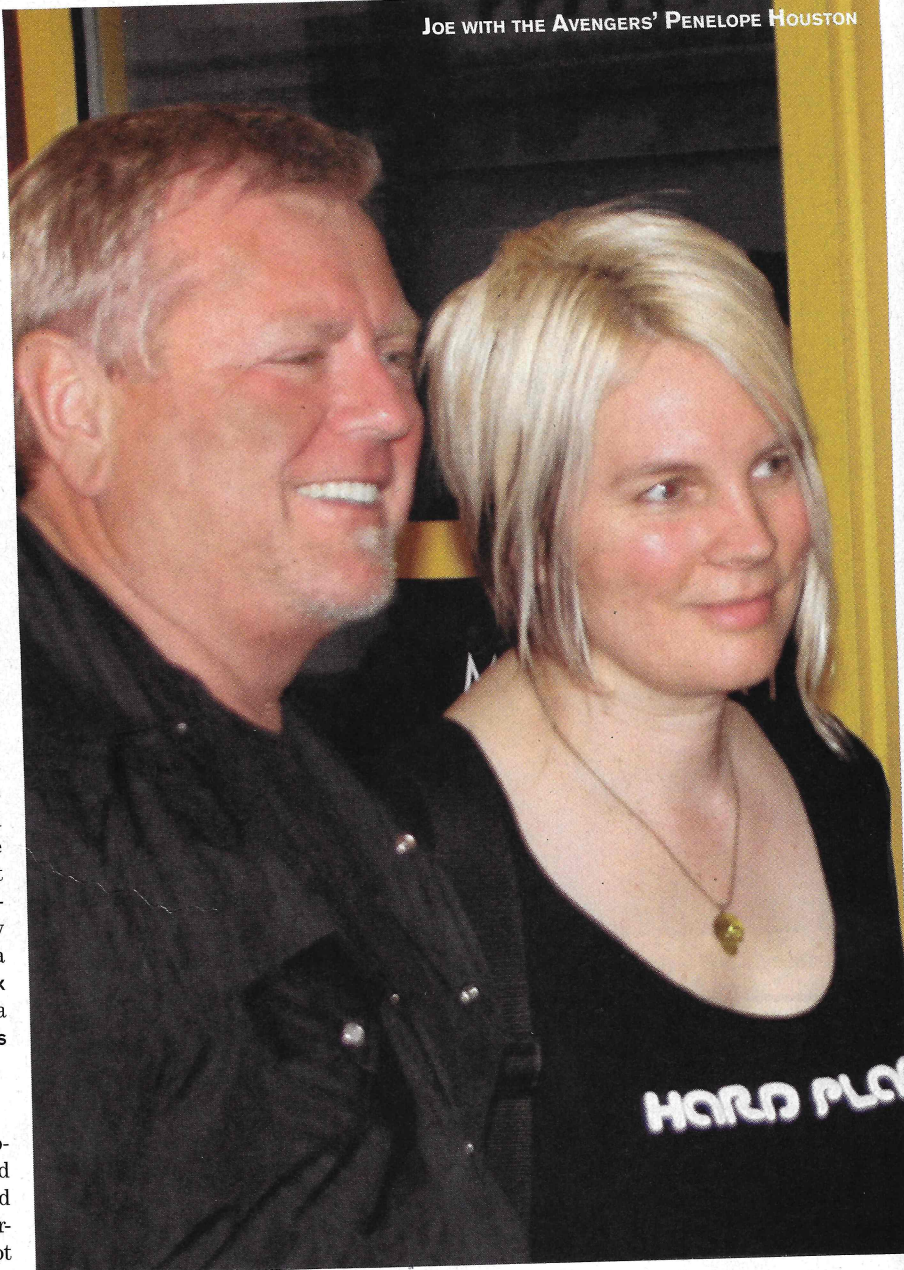
**JR:** Fortunately you did many other Mutants films, albeit that was a particularly unusual gig.

**JOE:** I've done 20 Mutants films. They've been in my studio, on and on and on. I've got stuff against the Mutants they'll never be able to live down! [Laughter.] We really shared a lot of things. But that Cramps film, it was a beautiful thing. The look on most of those patients, the fact that someone cared enough to put on a show—you have to remember they didn't do this kind of stuff. No one came out to entertain people that were mental patients. And The Cramps were totally into it!

**JR:** **VALE** [*Search & Destroy* editor] and I watched that yesterday on YouTube. [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fat2rswNJ1k>] The band is manic! And a bunch of patients are dancing really crazy too, in and around the band.

**JOE:** Absolutely! They would get onstage, and the thing you saw

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right away: they would start mimicking the performers! They'd be standing there like they had a microphone, jumping up and down, right to the beat, it was beautiful! But what happened was, you didn't know who was patient and .... [Loud laughter.]

**JR AND JERRY:** That's classic! Great!

**JOE:** Yeah! What a love-fest.

**JERRY:** It's one of my favorite documents from that time, because you watch it now, and intellectually in my head I know that's really what happened, but at the same time it looks too perfect. It looks like it was staged, but it wasn't! And that's what's so fascinating about it. How did that happen? The fact that you even got up there to film it was just...

**JOE:** It was just one of those things that was very fortunate, because I would go to just about every damn thing that would happen. Some things were very boring—but then this happened, and it turned out to be magic. That's what happens sometimes. Thank god! [Laughter.] [Interview concludes next issue, with more great stories!] ☺