

# The Genius of Joe Jackson

by Jim Miller

Joe Jackson proved to be the right performer, in the right place, last Thursday. In more ways than one.

With today's explosion in information it's easier than ever to try to follow the music scene

and miss out on a performer of true genius. Such is the case, for me, with Joe Jackson.

Like everyone else near a radio it was impossible to miss the ubiquitous presence of Jackson's single "Is She Really Going Out With Him?" And, like most

records that were played to death, I got sick of it. Besides, the lyrics I found rather banal and the song only saved by its emotional intensity.

Later a friend and I would travel to Penticon playing Joe's "It's Different for Girls" until we were virtually positive we knew every word. It still lead to intense debate about the song's meaning.

I recorded a few songs off "I'm the Man" to fill some space on a cassette and when Jackson's single off "Jumpin' Jive" hit the radio (for a few days) and was unceremoniously dumped, by AM and FM radio alike, I dumped him, too.

But with my insatiable desire for some new music to listen to I put on the "Look Sharp" album one day at my friends.

And, lo, it was good.

\*\*!!!\* good!

Joe's acid sharp voice and acid sharp lyrics on songs like "Sunday Papers" and "Look Sharp" cut through my musical doldrums like ammonia through grease, ladies.

So it was with some considerable delight that I managed to talk my way into a couple of seats to see Jackson live, for the *Gateway*, after he'd been sold out.

(Staying up till one am, putting this paper out should have some perks.) And considerable disappointment was aroused when the man from Perry Scope productions threw us out and said he didn't even know we were coming. He'd let us in, he relented, but we'd have to stay in line with everyone else.

Luckily the two seats we'd marked 'pless' were still there when we got inside again.

Jackson appeared on stage at the Convention Inn South, in a room that housed about 2-3,000 rowdy, generally belligerent rock fans.

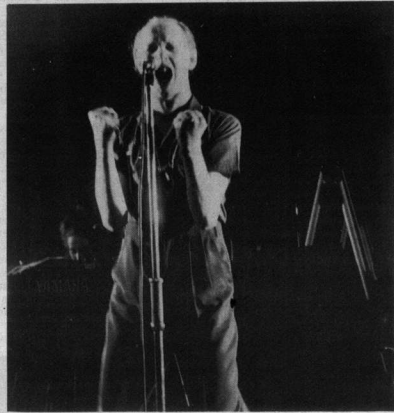


photo by Jim Miller

"Radio, Radio" kicked off the show which featured virtually all his material, old and new.

Musically the concert was excellent. The band professional. The sound good. And the audience inexcusable.

As long as Jackson was playing at the volume and speed of a 747 everything was fine. But when he'd try to slow things down for a change of pace, some of the audience, who must have dropped or smoked everything including the kitchen sink just couldn't handle it.

Which is a shame because musically, as I discovered, Jackson has more to offer than driving

rock, punk or whatever you want to call it. A latin influence is certainly prevalent in his new material in songs like "Chinatown", which I found a bit tedious and "Target" and "T.V. Age" which I enjoyed.

But eventually the sheer power of Jackson won out in his ballad aptly titled "A Slow Song". After considerable trouble in slowing things down he was given one of his best hands of the night when finished. And rightly so. This song has the intensity and power of the old standard "When a Man Loves a Woman".

And speaking of old standards the band was featured doing a string of oldies like "Up Tight", "Heatwave", "I'm Going To Make You Love Me", etc.

Literally, on past albums and on the present, Jackson, seems a pessimist and cynic. Consider the cuts "Target", "T.V. Age" and "Cancer" for example. Jackson seems to portray in some detail society's problems. But, as Jackson mentioned in Calgary, (where I saw his show in the Max Bell Arena) much of his music is taken too seriously.

In his performance and what I perceived as his stage presence, I felt Jackson to be an individual like the rest of us asking questions. Asking questions about men, women, relationships and the direction of society. Maybe, like the rest of us he doesn't have all the answers but his musical way of asking, borders on genius.



photo by Jim Miller



"I have clinched and closed with the naked North, I have learned to defy and defend; Shoulder to shoulder we have fought it out - get the wild must win in the end."

-Robert Service

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