

SURF SKATE SNOW TRAVEL MUSIC FILM ART FASHION

huck

MORE THAN JUST THE MUSIC



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JACK JOHNSON
MORE PUNK THAN YOU THINK



JACK & OMFUG

NEW RECORD, NEW HAIRDO, SAME PROGRESSIVE STANCE.
JACK JOHNSON IS BACK AND HE'S ALL PUNKED UP.

INTERVIEW TIM DONNELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY HILARY WALSH

When you think of Jack Johnson, you don't think 'punk rock'. You think daydreams, palm trees and campfire sing-alongs – and that's not very punk.

Thing is, deep down, Jack Johnson is punk rock. Punk rock as fuck, in fact – even without the tattoos and leather uniform. For starters, the guy is truly DIY. He built his two recording studios with his own bare hands, to record songs he wrote for albums released through his own record label. He speaks out for progressive social and environmental change. He helps the children from the Hawaiian neighbourhood he grew up in, the one he never left. He stands against corporate greed, and holds the rich accountable. Remind you of anyone? The Clash? Stiff Little Fingers? Minor Threat? Bad Brains?

HUCK took the maestro of surf melody to the Bowery in New York City, former home of CBGB and the birthplace of punk rock, to talk about his new release, *To The Sea*, because for the first time in his eighteen million album-selling career, Jack Johnson is rocking out.

LOCATION: 315 BOWERY,
NEW YORK CITY.

THE SPACE THAT ONCE HOUSED SEMINAL UNDERGROUND MUSIC VENUE CBGB NOW PLAYS HOST TO A FASHION BOUTIQUE OWNED BY DESIGNER JOHN VARVATOS. JOHNSON IS LOOKING AT THE FRAYED GIG POSTERS ON THE WALL, AND ASKING ME WHO I SAW PLAY HERE. I TELL HIM EVERYONE FROM THE CRAMPS TO GUNS 'N' ROSES TO PEARL JAM AND HUNDREDS OF NO-NAME BANDS IN BETWEEN. >

Johnson: Who was the last person to play here?

HUCK: Patti Smith.

Johnson: That's Merlo's [Podleweski, Jack's bassist] godmother, Patti Smith. He has given his first guitar at a Patti Smith Group show at Max's Kansas City when he was eight years old. It's funny, Patti's daughter comes to the shows in New York and hangs out backstage. It's come around full circle; Merlo gets to host her and he gets all proud.

Talking of punk heritage, what do you think people will make of you rocking out on this record, with big guitar solos and the like? It's gonna be fun for my musician friends to listen to. For the first time I took guitar solos – a lead, solo, whatever you call it. I've had little guitar parts before, but not like this. One of the fun challenges of this record was taking this little four-track thing, battery powered with built-in microphones, around with me and recording ideas on camping trips and then bringing the ideas to life. I would build the drums and bass guitar and vocals – it was really garage-y. It sounded like the vocals from the Strokes and it came out like garage rock. We found a way to hold on to that kind of energy and [added] the stuff that we already do with acoustic tones. I like where it ended up.

What about the people who are expecting the Jack Johnson acoustic formula? A lot of musicians listen to tones, but most people, when they listen to music, they either like it or they don't. The one song that sticks with people from the first listen is 'At Or With Me' which has the electric guitar... I'll be more curious than most people to see how people react. So far, it seems alright.

LOCATION: ST. MARK'S PLACE, NEW YORK CITY.

THE STREET THAT USED TO BE CRAWLING WITH MISFITS, FREAKS, DRUNKS AND JUNKIES – LIKE SOME VIRTUAL 'DERELICT JUNCTION' – IS NOW AWASH WITH CHAIN STORES AND SIGNS OF GENTRIFICATION. AS WE WALK, WE PASS PATTI SMITH'S LEGENDARY GUITARIST LENNY KAYE AND A STRING OF STORES FLOGGING CBGB-ERA MEMORABILIA; THE REAL THING WALKING ALONGSIDE THE EPHEMERA HE HELPED SPAWN.

Johnson: Wow.. I see the whole tourism aspect of it now with all these CBGB's shirts. That's what happens when you create a moment in time.

HUCK: Yeah, but there's also a Pinkberry [a trendy US frozen yogurt shop] here now...

Johnson: That's life, huh?>



"I THINK IT WOULD BE HEALTHIER FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT TO BE RE-FRAMED AS A THING THAT WASN'T SO MUCH ABOUT MONEY."

HUCK: Talking of money, do you think the 'green' movement has been hampered by the financial crisis? There is that danger in environmentalism that we are getting associated with, 'If you can afford it'. But there may be some positives that come out of this... There is a great book I read called *Break Through* by Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, who also wrote the manifesto *The Death of Environmentalism*. Their whole theory is that environmentalism, the whole concept, is something you think about when you get to a place where you are comfortable enough that you can. In Brazil, for instance, how can we expect them to, when they are struggling for equality? It's a good argument. The bottom line of the book is that we need to help these countries out economically, get them to a place where everybody has the luxury to think about the environment on that level. There is a lot of truth to it. There are a lot of things that could end up happening where people start community gardens, grow food locally, come at it from that angle. I think it would be healthier for the environmental

movement to be re-framed as a thing that wasn't so much about money. When I talk about the solar panels on my studio, sometimes people say, 'That's great that you can afford it'. I understand that aspect. But I feel that's dangerous. Anybody who can afford it should go ahead, take the time to do what they can with it. But there are so many other aspects that have more to do with where our food is coming from. Hopefully things will get re-framed through the whole process.

Saving the neighbourhood seems more realistic than saving the world. What's happening on the North Shore of Oahu, Hawaii, on the development front? Your home is always tricky because there's always politics involved. But politics is in everything. With the growth of the Turtle Bay Resort, I think most people in the community like the Turtle Bay how it is... But even people who were opposed to a hotel going there originally have now accepted it. I'm sure if five new ones went in, the next generation in however long will just get used to it. Still, most people who live out there

and a lot of the tourists who come to Hawaii agree that it is nice to have a place that represents that natural beauty of Hawaii still; it's nice to have those pockets. Because a lot of it has been developed on Oahu, it makes logical sense not to create another Waikiki on the opposite side of the island. I'll definitely keep doing what I can to support the idea of not [developing] there. There has been a lot of positive preservation work there. Some of the battles have definitely been won.

Do you see yourself as politically engaged? What are your thoughts on Obama? He's from Hawaii and we get protective of each other, so I've got his back. But I've kind of disengaged from it. I've been writing and stuff. Before the election I was sucked into reading everything. A friend of mine met Bob Dylan and his only advice was, 'Don't read the newspaper or watch the news'. It has been frustrating to watch, but who knows, it could have been worse **b**

TO THE SEA IS OUT NOW ON BRUSHFIRE RECORDS. WWW.JACKJOHNSONMUSIC.COM