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Episode 74: The Cockney Bard - Garry Johnson (June 2016)

Transcription by Christabel Smith

Host: David Turner - **DT**

Guest: Garry Johnson – **GJ**

Conversation:

DT: Hello, this is the Lunar Poetry Podcast. I'm David Turner. Today, I'm in Pitsea in Essex and I'm going to be chatting to the original punk poet, Garry Johnson. Hello Garry.

GJ: Hello David, hi.

DT: How are you doing?

GJ: All right thanks, fine.

DT: We're going to start with a reading and then just because it's the first of the poems in Garry's new book, The Cockney Bard, we'll start with The Young Conservatives.

GJ: All right, love to, yeah. OK, Young Conservatives.

[This poem is unavailable for transcription.]

[0:02:00]

DT: Hear, fucking hear! Cheers, Garry.

GJ: I enjoyed that.

DT: Yeah, it was good. It was a good opener. Let's talk about how you got started.

GJ: OK. Well, wanted to be a punk-rock singer, formed a punk-rock band, was brilliant in the bedroom, all right in the garage or whatever, done our first gig and to be honest, we were terrible. I couldn't sing to save my life. Because I was taking so much speed and all that and I was nice and wasted, looked like Johnny Rotten meets Ziggy Stardust, thought I looked the part, could blag it.

Once I got on stage, my voice just didn't cut it, but luckily, our first gig, although it turned out to be our last gig, it was a life-changer. In the bar afterwards, you know when you're on speed, you're all cocky and whatever, I went up to the guy who was reviewing us. It was, you can remember who it was, have I told you who it was before? Garry Bushell, the legendary punk writer on Sounds, went up to him, 'all right, Gal? Good, weren't we?'

And he went: 'No.'

You know how blunt he is, don't you? He went: 'To be honest, you was dot-dot-dot.'

'Oh right, thanks, great.' Because you're speeding, you still feel cocky and confident, I wasn't going to take it. I said: 'You must have liked something. We looked good, didn't we?'

He went: 'Nah.'

'Oh, right.' So you're fishing for something you can grab hold of. He said: 'I like the songs, I like the lyrics, I don't like the music, but I like the lyrics. Who writes the lyrics?'

Well, that was my chance. 'I do. All the words are mine.'

And he said to me: 'Do yourself a favour. Give up the singing, cos you can't sing. Start writing.'

‘All right then.’ Never would have crossed my mind to do that so I said: ‘All right, I’ll start writing.’ But I thought: ‘What do I do then, then?’ So I thought: ‘What do you mean, start writing?’

‘Become a music pundit first, a critic, do your poetry and mix the two together. Be a poet and a writer, do the best of both worlds.’

So a week later, I turned up at Sounds office in Covent Garden and blagged a job. Talked my way in. So that was it really. Pure luck. Pure luck.

DT: But from taking that step, how difficult or easy was it for a lad from Hackney to start talking about poetry and wanting to be a poet?

GJ: It was never spoken about. It was never something that would ever have crossed my mind that I could do.

DT: What year was this, would you say?

GJ: 80, 81. 81, that’s it, yes. So I’d seen all the punk stuff and that’s what got me inspired to want to form a band and all that business. I just thought… Everyone kept saying in all the papers that anyone could form a band, anyone can sing. Yes, anyone can form a band, but not everyone can sing. You’re not that blessed like, you know. So I’d always been writing. The only thing I’d ever liked at school was English. Football, English and having a laugh and that was it, basically. I ruined my education.

I mean, I hate Tony Blair with a passion, can’t stand the guy, but the only thing he ever said that was good was: ‘Education, education, education’. I wish someone had said that to me when I was 12, 13, but I mean, I took no notice. I didn’t do anything, weren’t interested in whatever, but I always liked writing. Whenever I bought albums, I used to buy… When I first got hold of the Ziggy Stardust album, the Aladdin Sane album, the Diamond Dogs album, the lyric sheet. I used to love all the words.

I used to love all the words to The Sex Pistols, Joe Strummer, Paul Weller. The Paul Weller album Setting Sons, absolute classic. It was always in the back of my mind, but I didn’t know it, that I wanted, I didn’t know I could be or wanted to be a poet. I sort of had this fascination with lyrics. It was always lyrics. Since then, I’ve gone back and looked at Bob Dylan, Lou Reid, any great lyricists, I’ve loved them. So as I said, I couldn’t sing, so became a poet.

Then there was other people who would stand up on stage, doing poetry, some to backing tapes, I mean I was a big fan of Linton Kwesi Johnson, John Cooper Clarke, Beasley Street, and all that business. It was great so I thought: ‘I’ll give this a go.’ It wasn’t planned, I just got into it that way. I wrote a book called Boys Of The Empire and I took it to the Compendium bookshop in Hackney, just abut 50 scraps of paper with various notes put on and all this business, and the guy liked it and he recommended me to this guy in

Manchester, John Muir who runs Babylon Books, and he went on to put out books by Morrissey.

So, he's well-known in Manchester, John Muir was. I sent him this rag-tag 50-odd bits of paper, he loved them, loved them, put them in a book. So Boys Of The Empire was my first book, got great write-ups in Time Out, New Musical Express, The Guardian and all that. I thought at the time, I was basically uneducated, biased, I thought: 'Why are all these posh people…? Like, there's got to be a catch.' So I never went through with it. Now, I like the NME, Time Out, The Guardian… but I always used to associate them with all posh people.

'These aren't my sort of people, why are they like this?' It didn't relate to me that this was good, do you understand what I mean?

DT: Do you still see your poetry as more like lyrics?

GJ: That's how I write them, yes.

DT: And do you think that comes from feeling like you didn't have a door into, or a way into poetry?

GJ: Exactly.

DT: It was easier to think in terms of music.

GJ: Yes, like Paul Weller. Reading Joe Strummer's lyrics, Paul Weller's lyrics, Billy Bragg, that sort of got me into it. And Elvis Costello. Even Squeeze. Squeeze wrote some great songs. Up The Junction and all that. So I always write my poems as lyrics, but I don't write choruses. Just lyrics.

DT: Do you have melodies in mind when you're writing? Do you go that far?

GJ: When I write, I'm in my head. You know, I'm writing with a flow. I've got just a CD coming out, Punk Rock Stories And Tabloid Tales. I gave them to PSEUDO just as lyrics and he's put all the tunes to them, the melodies, the choruses, which I could never do in 100 years, but he's turned them into proper songs, which is the best of both worlds. I do love a lyric, reading a lyric. It's the lyric that always, you know you sometimes say: 'I've got a tune in my head?' I don't, I get a lyric. If I have a favourite song, it's the lyric that eats away at me, that gets me going, yes.

DT: There are a lot of similarities. I can remember when I was younger, buying albums, I always used to pour over the lyric sheet, but I could never remember them. I'm terrible. I can't remember names or anything, poems as well. I can't remember poems or names of poems.

GJ: Even some of my favourite songs now, by The Pistols or The Clash or The Jam, when I'm singing along to them, I put my own words in. As long as they rhyme, I put my own words in with the tune, when I'm singing along to them. It's just a habit of mine, yes.

DT: When you first started, how easy was it to get your poetry read or heard? What avenues were open to you?

GJ: There was the performing side, which was going on before bands and doing five minutes. It got to 10 minutes or whatever, but at the time, as I said, I didn't understand then that there was a way for poetry that would suit me. I didn't think I was made… I thought I'd just stumble in by chance, be a five-minute wonder and that was it. But my love of it just kept on going and people seemed to like what I wrote. Now, I'm more popular. I didn't know so many people at the time, because there wasn't Facebook and all that then.

So I get emails now, messages from people in Leeds and Swansea, Glasgow, who say: 'Oh, we loved your stuff back then.' I never knew. I got a fantastic email about two or three weeks ago from a girl that used to be friends with Joe Strummer. She said she used to be in his hotel room and 'he would be reciting your poems from Boys Of The Empire'.

DT: God, that's something, isn't it?

GJ: If only I'd known that then. She said: 'He was desperate to get in touch with you. He wanted you to open up for The Clash.' I framed her email to show it was kosher. For her to say that was just a dream. She's a friend of Tim Wells so it's all been authenticated. It is true, she actually did know Joe.

DT: Since you mentioned Tim Wells, we should probably mention the gig you've got coming up at The Roundhouse on the 9th July. It's part of the punk and poetry discussion.

GJ: Yes. Professor Matt Worley is doing the discussion.

DT: So you're going to be on, Salena Godden's going to be on…

GJ: Phil Jupitus, Linton Kwesi Johnson.

DT: Good names.

GJ: What I related just now, about being a bit wary at the time I was ignorant, I thought posh people, different or other planet or whatever, if you'd said to me 20-odd years ago that you were going to become friends with a professor, I'd be: 'You're having a laugh, what you talking about?' Well, I met Professor Matt Worley, one of the top blokes. For me, he's a hero, he's up there with Paul Weller and Strummer. He's a big fan of The Jam as well, but he's everything, he's like a working-class boy done good, super-educated and a top man. He's going to write a foreword for my book.

DT: He's a really interesting guy.

GJ: Yes, yes. Looks like Will Self.

DT: He's involved with a lot of stuff that Tim and Speaking Volumes are trying to document at the moment. So this is one of the series of gigs that Tim is doing for his Stand Up and Spit project, looking back at ranting poetry and punk poetry and wider things. Is this going to be your first gig, or second gig in how long?

GJ: Second gig since I had my heart op, yes. I'll be going on straight, Dave, as well.

DT: I was waiting for you to mention that.

GJ: Back in the day, I used to… I was such a fan of David Bowie, I was obsessed with David Bowie, still am. When you used to read all the things about him, speed freak and all this, he used to write his best stuff when he was coked-up or on speed or whatever, I always naturally thought I had to. Everything back in the day, back in the days of Boys Of The Empire, Labour MPs Ain't Working Class, all the stuff I wrote, National Service, Dead-End Yobs, it was all written under the influence of speed. I didn't know whether I could still write because now, I can't take anything. Tea is the strongest thing I have now. As I say, I was at a party, John King was there out of Football Factory, he said: 'Hello, blah, blah, blah'. He knew my stuff from the old days: 'Do you still write?'

I said: 'No, I don't do it anymore.' I was ashamed. I felt ashamed. Well, not ashamed when I told him that, but on the way home, I thought: 'Jeez, I shouldn't have told him that, it made me look silly I don't write anymore. I wish I did.' I thought I'm going to give it a try, see if I can write natural, natural adrenaline. Touch wood, I can.

DT: Do you think it was a big part of the courage to get on? You must have been performing to a lot of audiences that weren't necessarily there to see poetry?

GJ: Exactly, but when you're speeding, you think you're better than you are.

DT: You can take on the world.

GJ: Exactly, yes, you hit in on the nail there. I thought: 'I like this.' It was like self-medication as well, for depressive times because of my background or whatever. I've never had any medication from the doctor, off the National Health or anything like that. This always made me feel good. I never became addicted, as in being an addict. Like people have a pint of lager or a cup of coffee, I'd just like some speed.

DT: You're definitely talking to the right audience. If anybody knows about self-medication, it's poets. I wanted to come onto, obviously we opened with The Young Conservatives, there's quite a heavy political message through most of your work.

GJ: It hasn't dated!

DT: No, unfortunately! Maybe we can take a second reading. We can get onto talking about politics a bit and because of the Referendum, I find it hard to push it past my lips at the moment.

GJ: It's one of the most recent ones I wrote. We Want Our Country Back.

[This poem is unavailable for transcription]

[0:14:23]

DT: Thank you Garry, I really like that one, especially in light of… I mean, that very phrase is used by UKIP: 'We want our country back'.

GJ: Who's to say it's theirs?

DT: Exactly. We were talking briefly before about nostalgia and the realities of that and what it actually means.

GJ: The good old days weren't the good old days.

DT: Do you think we're in danger of slipping back to the bad old days in politics?

GJ: No. I think young people are much smarter and more intelligent than they were when I was a teenager. You think about it now, if Cameron or any of them was to go on telly and say: 'We're bringing back National Service' and go and invade another country, all 16, 17, 18-year-olds turn up in a local town. There'd be hardly anyone turn up. They wouldn't get it. The kids are much more sussed nowadays.

They've got friends in France, Italy, Spain, they're not going to join up and fight in a war, another country's war. It wouldn't be. The working class now ain't thick like they was in the 1920s. They was only 14 and they'd make out they was 18 so they'd go to war and think they was doing a great thing for Queen and Country and all that rubbish. Although times get hard, there will never be another war because you'd never get the people to fight it. Do you think kids would fight nowadays? I don't.

DT: I think you're right. You've hit something on the head there, something I've been thinking about a lot, the demonisation of the working classes in terms of 'It's them that's pushing the country back, them that's voting for UKIP', as if it's all the fault of the working classes, which is just nonsense. It maybe that some towns are predominantly working class and they voted heavily to leave, or thinking about voting UKIP in local elections, but to say that it's overwhelmingly the fault of the working classes is nonsense.

GJ: It's rubbish. It's them using the working class again to be the thing to kick.

DT: Also, I agree with you, I think the world is far too small a place now to go to the youth of the country and go: 'You've got to kill all that lot.'

GJ: You'd never get an army. National Service, it wouldn't happen. I mean, I'm not going to let my kids go and fight for King, Queen, the Establishment, the House of Lords and all that rubbish. Bring us another Referendum, yes, but this time to abolish the House of Lords

and abolish the Royal Family. That's the Referendum we do need. The working class now are more educated than they were when I was 20.

The old people now, when they were 20, they were like cannon fodder. They were proud doing their bit to go and fight for the country, leave their wives behind and go and get killed. The First World War, the thing that says it all for me is the Blackadder series, Goes Forth, the last-ever episode when they all got out the trenches and went and died? I think I read somewhere there was one person killed every minute in the Somme. That will never happen again. The working class, it wasn't their fault, but they was thick back then. They was easily led, tugged their forelock.

DT: It was absolute lack of information. You couldn't rally an army together based on the fact, because if anyone wants to find out what another country's like, the information's there.

GJ: When I said the working class was thick in the 20s, and 1940s, I weren't putting them down. They didn't have the education so they genuinely did think they was doing it for the Lord of the Manor and the King and all this rubbish, but you wouldn't get it now. If you called back National Service now and said: 'I want all you youngsters to report to town', there would be nobody there. There wouldn't be an army to fight. You can't blame the working class for how they voted in the Referendum, because you don't know how everybody voted.

DT: There's a lot of huge assumptions being made about who voted in which direction.

GJ: Exactly. If it's true that all the young people voted for the UKIP side, where are all these youngsters doing when they buy all their great records, and they've got their own ideas? Why were they only swayed on June 23rd to do UKIP's dirty work? They're just blaming the young for that. I think more youngsters voted against UKIP. I think figures have proved that it was the older people who voted for the so-called good old days that don't exist.

They sent kids up chimneys and mothers without husbands being put into unmarried mothers' homes, all that rubbish. There was no glory days. If you think about it, it was the posh people all round the world making slaves of people from foreign lands but also treated the working class in this country like slaves. That rubbish like Downton Abbey, when they all live downstairs and were treated like second-class citizens. The posh ruling class treated the working-class poor people in this country bad, just as they treated the people all round the world bad. I've got no time for them.

DT: I was at the Speaking Volumes thing the other night and Tim was there as well. They just had this great initiative, a US tour called Breaking Ground, they took a group of black British writers to the States to showcase the talent that's over here and doesn't get necessarily much promotion over there. One of the writers, can't remember his surname, Gabriel is his first name anyway, we were just talking about nostalgia for what was before and what it was like as a first-wave immigrant from the 50s. He just said: 'I don't want to go back to a Britain where you had shit music, terrible food and no one could dance.'

GJ: Exactly that.

DT: Yeah. If they want to go back to that, then fair enough, but that's a reality, isn't it? It hasn't done this country a lot of good.

GJ: Exactly. My best mate from school, Via, I used to go round his house, his dad would have all the old ska records, original stuff, it was brilliant. That influenced so many things, fashion, Mods. Mods and ska all came together, didn't it?

DT: Maybe we should take National Service as a reading.

GJ: Course, yes. One of my favourites;

<u>National Service</u>

Born in a city of tower blocks
Alcatraz without the rocks
Sent to overcrowded schools
Beaten up if you broke the rules
And our mothers sit and cry
Cos they know we're gonna die

We beat the boredom with slimming pills
Go to the seaside in stolen wheels
Bunk off school every other day
If we get caught they make us pay
So we watch out for the boys in blue
You never know who's watching you.

Soldiers wearing pin-stripe suits
Want us to wear army boots
Army life they say is fun
Clear the streets of all the young
We want you to go to war
And kill another country's poor

We are the class who fight their wars
Sometimes steal from department stores
You know the kids that their kind hates
Cos we live on council estates
So they've invented a new state game
Playing soldiers is the name

DT: Cheers. Do you think that poetry's got a decent part to play in proving there isn't such a divide as there was? If you read your poetry and I'm trying to think of a decent example now, we were talking about Emily Harrison before, she's what 24, the generation where you almost expect them to go to university, part of the 'education, education, education' thing, there's quite a similar message between the both of you, isn't there? I think about the way you talk about society…

GJ: We're both sussed. She's very sussed and I like to think I am, but she is. I never would follow sheep and be manipulated or whatever. I am half Irish, a natural-born rebel, I've always been anti-authority, it's not a new-found thing. I've been anti-authority since I was 12. I never liked authority. Before I found David Bowie, I was a skinhead and all that. I was a liberal skinhead. I'd never been a National Front skinhead.

Even if you've looked at National Front and looked behind their stupid rascist message, they all believed in National Service and the Army and bowing and scraping to the King and Queen and flag and all that rubbish. I could never have liked them at any cost. They were in a way establishment. Old-school racist, but establishment. There was either the thug ones or the old military guy from the Shires who supported them, gave them money and all this business. UKIP's all posh. If I was 20 years' younger and I'd turned up on Nigel Farage's doorstep with my Cockney accent, someone would take the door out and tell me to piss off.

Do you know what I mean? He's got nothing in common with the working class, he's just fodder to them. I think people like Emily speak the same sort of language as me, from a younger generation obviously, but it's just there's a theme that runs through it. I mean, the UKIP people and that will never get control, because the old people are dying out. No offense to old people, but as years go on, there's going to be less and less old people, we're going to become the old people. We're not suddenly going to turn into what they want us to be overnight, are we?

Their time has been and gone. They're dinosaurs. A lot of people didn't really know what they were voting for in the Referendum. The sensible ones who voted out were the ones who wanted to avoid that TTIP rubbish, nationalising the National Health. I love the National Health Service, it saved my life. Professor Khan, who saved my life, I owe everything to him and it was never mentioned enough. They kept going on about Vote Out because of this, that or the other, or Vote In, because of this, than and the other.

TTIP to me was one of the most important things, because the Americans wanted to come over and nick our National Health. So all the people who voted out weren't all thick ones. One of my old heroes is Bob Crow. Do you remember when all the posh papers were 'Don't like him because he lives in a big house? He earns all this money as a Union leader, why isn't he living in a council house? It's outrageous.' Never mind the Queen, living in Buckingham Palace, she's the biggest scrounger of the lot.

DT: At least he worked for it.

GJ: Exactly. Bob Crow was rich, well, not rich, but he earned a decent wage and lived in a big house and they were scared of him. They thought it was disgusting he was living in

subsidised property, blah blah blah. The Queen and all her mob live in subsidised property, when are they going to start moaning about that? It's wrong. It was definitely wrong to vote Out, but you shouldn't blame it on the working class. It was a lot of people who genuinely didn't like TTIP. Bob Crow probably would have voted Out, but he wouldn't have voted out for the same reason as Nigel Farage voted Out. There's a story behind the headline.

DT: Since we've been talking about that and you've mentioned being so strongly anti-establishment, how does it feel now to have a book and perhaps be a part of that a little bit with the writing? You're not, strictly speaking, but you are entering it a little bit.

GJ: I still don't consider myself part of the establishment, never. Never in a million years. David Bowie, greatest living entertainer when he was alive, greatest dead performer now, he'll been around for 100 years, but he was never establishment, was he? Everything he did was anti-establishment. Johnny Rotten, Joe Strummer, they're anti-establishment.

DT: I said that tongue-in-cheek, it's more to get round to the point that there isn't any reason, is there, that people should be put off with the idea of trying to get published? There are no barriers, are there?

GJ: No. The more the merrier. I can't stand Shakespeare, I love Charles Dickens, it's not being an acting dinosaur or thick, or anti-education or whatever. To me in my world, Shakespeare's for the posh mob, might be wrong, Charles Dickens is for the likes of me. I think Dickens is brilliant, yet they make more fuss of Shakespeare, more fuss of the Royal Ballet. To me, punk rock is more important than the Royal Ballet, they've got a Royal Opera House. They've got the Queen's patronage, you know what I mean?

Like Harrods, it's got the Queen's patronage. I'm happy with Lidl, thank you. Why because something's got a Royal connection to it, why is there not a Royal Punk Rock establishment in London, like Covent Garden? We've done more in the last 50 years, punk rock, Bowie, whatever, for the modern culture than the old ballet and the opera singers have and all that. There should be a new establishment, a new order, that's what I reckon.

DT: So how did the book come about?

GJ: As I said, we didn't have Facebook and all that, did we, back in the day? When I came out of hospital, I got loads of Get Well messages or whatever, and I got this message from Sulo Karlsen in Sweden. I thought first of all it was a wind-up, 'Hello Garry, blah blah blah, big fan of all your writing.' I never knew he even liked me, let alone being a fan, he's a proper rock star in Sweden and all that. 'Can I put music to your poetry and will you write some new poems for me and can I do some of your old ones, like National Service, Dead-End Yobs?'

Checked him out, thought it was a wind-up, he said yes, so that led to the album with Cargo Records. That got publicised, then I got in touch with Teddy from New Haven Publishing, she said: 'Oh, I see you've started writing again, blah blah blah, you've got a story to tell, would you consider writing an auto-biography?' I didn't have to be asked twice, did I? 'Of course, I'd love to.' So I wrote Punk Rock Stories And Tabloid Tales. Because she liked that, because I

was getting more mentioned about my old poetry than others, she said: 'Would you write a poetry book? Half of your old stuff, half new stuff?' That's what's out now. The Best Of, plus a load of new stuff.

DT: Through New Haven? I'll put a link to the books and the CD, so however you're listening to this, there will be clickable links underneath, so people can find that easily enough. I know what I wanted to talk about next: Oi. Maybe you could explain what that term is and what it was?

GJ: The word Oi to me is something from the old music-hall days. Ian Dury used to say Oi Oi and all that. That's where the word Oi come from. I don't know how or why, but street punk, working-class punk, got put under the umbrella of Oi. Who came up with the word, I don't know, I prefer the word street punk, but that's what Oi was, basically, street punk. Oi had a bad name at the time, because people latched onto it and whatever.

Anyone who was associated with street punk got associated with Oi. I got called Oi The Punk at first, rather than the Cockney Rebel punk or street punk or whatever. Oi was just a big umbrella. At the time, because it had a bad reputation, people who didn't like street punk had a gun to fire at you. 'Oh, you're Oi, boom boom boom, we don't like you.' I remember this lady who got in touch with me two or three weeks ago, said how much Joe Strummer liked all my stuff, said: 'I was in a pub in the 80s down Portobello Road and there was Attila the Stockbroker and another poet called Seething Wells slagging me off saying, 'who? that Cockney geezer, don't like him'.

She said: 'I stood your ground, I stood up for you and said: 'Just because he's from the East End doesn't make him a bad person.' That's my attitude against middle-class posh people because they were like posh people attacking me and I was just writing from the heart, true stuff. She said: 'I stood your corner, blah blah blah'. When she said Joe Strummer liked me, I was much more happy Joe Strummer liked me. Since then, I've met Attila and he's a nice guy. But it's preconceptions.

He probably thought: 'East End, dodgy Cockney accent, blah blah blah, he's a West Ham fan, must be dodgy', do you know what I mean? So I'd never met the guy and he was slagging me off and I didn't know anything about it. Same I didn't know he was slagging me off back then until this lady told me, I didn't know Joe Strummer liked me until this lady told me. To start with, it was a purely working-class section of punk.

DT: How did the albums come about? How many were you involved with?

GJ: I think there was about seven albums. I was just involved on the second one, I think, because I had a poetry book out called Boys Of The Empire, got rave reviews in Time Out, The Guardian, NME and also, it got a write-up in Sounds. Sounds co-produced or co-promoted the album or something. Because I blagged the job on Sounds as a music critic, when they said: 'Would you come and do some poems and the album?', I mean, to me, I'd never been in a recording studio before.

I said: 'Yeah, I'll do it', so I went down the Old Kent Road, do you know the old washhouse? The Henry Cooper pub was there and the studio was next door. I just went into the studio and just recorded, in and out in an afternoon, sort of thing. That's how it came about.

DT: Was it Garry Bushell? Was he producing all of them, was he?

GJ: I don't know whether he produced them, but it was his idea to put them all together. I don't think he was the producer.

DT: Was it poetry on all of them?

GJ: No. No, well not that I know of, I still haven't heard the first one. I definitely heard the second one, because I was on it. I think I was on the third one. There are seven or eight, I was on the second and third, I think. I did first time National Service and Dead-End Yobs, not sure whether Ballad Of The Young Offenders was on there, I can't remember, but that was the first time I ever got put down on vinyl.

DT: Maybe we could have United?

GJ: United, yes. Ballad Of The Offenders is one of my favourites, written about my time in Borstal.

DT: I want you to do that one as well. You can read as many as you want.

GJ: I love Ballad Of The Offenders. Do you want me to do United?

DT: Yes.

GJ: There we go, I've got to find where it is now. Have you heard the reggae version of United? Have you heard the reggae version of Young Conservatives? Oh, they're classic. A guy called Clyde Ward on iTunes, 99p, a reggae version of Young Conservatives to a reggae beat. It's lovely. It's just brilliant, the way he's done it is really good. He's done like a toast at the beginning of it and everything. He's really done it good, he has.

United/The Voice of Oi

The voice of Oi is calling you
With a message that is true
Punk herberts straight and skin
All of you come on in
Oi is for skins and Oi is for punk
Oi is inner city urban funk

The voice of Oi is unity
The beat of the street is you and me
United is the thing to be
United against society

Think how strong we can be
United against society

So stick together and see it through
Strength thru Oi is me and you
Let them twist our every word
But we're gonna be heard
Cos Oi ain't about having a fight
It ain't about black v white

The voice of Oi is unity
No them and us just you and me
United is the thing to be
Power to the people not anarchy
Think how strong we can be
United against society

DT: Thanks, Garry, nice one.

GJ: He's put that to music as well. It flows better with the old skinhead ska music in the background, it's great.

DT: I suppose it matches the rhythm you were writing in anyway first time round.

GJ: Yeah, it's what I always saw my stuff… The guy who did the punk-rock album with Sulo, Kevin Porry, he's going to do a whole album of ska music underneath me doing it. It's going to be like John Cooper Clarke meets Linton Kwesi Johnson, with me doing it in a Cockney accent above a ska beat. Brilliant, it's what I've always wanted, he's going to do it for me.

DT: We should probably talk a bit about the future as well. You were talking before about a project coming up with Sandy West, just remind me.

GJ: She came and interviewed me, got on really well and she got me to take her to London and meet various people who were involved in the punk scene or whatever. Like a punk-rock documentary. She's got me performing two or three of my poems on it, one in here, one outside the pub, performance sort of stuff, done that, and then she got a copy of my book, Punk Rock Stories And Tabloid Tales and she's read it and she's: 'I could turn this into a film. Have I got your permission? In America, they call it a treatment, like a synopsis for a screenplay.

I said: 'Of course you can, yes' so that's what she's working on at the moment for me. She's on the BAFTA committee in California and she's speech, dance and films, so she's got quite a good track record, so it will happen.

DT: Before I met Tim Wells, I wasn't aware of how much of a link there was to poetry. Before I started doing these interviews, I never really connected lyric writing with poetry. Of course, if you look at the two forms, they look similar, but to my mind, they were two separate things and people who wrote lyrics weren't interested in poetry necessarily. But it does seem like a lot of the people now, because it's such a big thing, especially this year, with the Jubilee of punk, or whatever they're calling it, but it does seem a lot of people have focused a lot on the poetry of punk.

GJ: Because you didn't only get people into clothes designing and to turning out fanzines or whatever. Those who couldn't get into bands always wanted to write and that's how the poetry grew. Tim was in a band, what was it called? The Anti-Social Workers. He was a singer in a skinhead ska band.

DT: I've seen pictures of him.

GJ: I think he was the same as me, he didn't really have the voice for singing, same as I did, but he had great words and he's a great performer, so that's how he got into his performance poetry. It's lucky for us his band didn't take off because he's lasted so much longer and he's a great poet. There was another band called The Redskins.

DT: I suppose this is what saved people's livers, wasn't it?

GJ: Do you remember a band called The Redskins? They had a great song called Lean On Me. EX Moore was the singer. They made one great single and disappeared. If that guy had carried on as a poet, he's probably still be around now. So me leaving The Buzz Kids, Tim leaving The Anti-Social Workers, worked out for both of us, gives us the longevity.

DT: At the time, were you involved with any zines? Were you being published in any zines? I know it was a big thing for Tim.

GJ: Quite a few, yes, and I found out recently, through Facebook or whatever, that loads of people covered my poems and performed them on stage. Without my knowledge. I didn't even know about them. I got an email this morning, dated today, that some band used to do my stuff, they did Rock Against Rascism gig in 1988. They did Dead-End Yobs. I knew nothing about it. There's bands in Italy, Germany, there's even an Indian skinhead band who recorded United and Dead-End Yobs and they're on You Tube, but I knew nothing about any of this.

I've been recorded all over the place and then there's some punk band put out an album about three months ago, I don't know how they've done it, I'm not a technical wizard, but they've gone back to the old Oi albums where I'm saying my poems, half-inched all the vocals and put music to them. How they do that, I don't know. Again, it wasn't with my knowledge. There's stuff all over where people have either published my poems in magazines or fanzines, or recorded the, they're on You Tube. There's a great version of United on You Tube. It's like a German ska band, they put together a smart video and everything. Look at that on You Tube, it's great.

DT: We're probably running out of time a little bit. I don't want to run over too much. Would you mind finishing with a reading? Choose whatever you want. Do your favourite.

GJ: I'll do Dead-End Yobs.

The Dead End Yobs

Deadend yobs got football boxing or rock 'n' roll
If they're any good at to save them from the dole
But even if you make it certain people will say
You're still no good and you'll be no other way
Cos you don't talk proper your accent ain't true blue
You were born in an house in Hackney with an outside loo.

They could be gangsters they could rob a bank
They could join the army learn to drive a tank
No hope no luck no future when you're down and out
When you're at the bottom nobody hears you shout
All authority keeps knocking you on the head
From the day you're born to the day you're dead

School report read you're no good you're a deadend yob
Might just make it in a deadend job
So you break all the rules in and out of school
Getting into trouble nothing else to do
And when they nick us don't they bleeding love it
Sod the system gotta rise above it

Deadend yob bash street kids like me and you
We all know this story is true
We're at war with the chosen few
The middle class and the boys in blue
We need money we need jobs
Give us a chance say the deadend yobs

DT: Nice one, Garry. So if anyone wants to check out your work, they should get hold of The Cockney Bard. What's the other book called?

GJ: You've got Punk Rock Stories And Tabloid Tales or The Cockney Bard From Bow Bells To Bitterstreet.

DT: They're both from New Haven Publishing and there's the CD.

GJ: That's on Cargo Records, that's it. They're all on You Tube.

DT: And your blog is?

GJ: The Punk Poet.

DT: So readings from that as well and you're on Twitter, so I'll put a link to that.

GJ: Get along to The Roundhouse on the 9th.

DT: I'll put a link to that as well, through Speaking Volumes and through Mr Tim Wells, who's getting mentioned too much.

GJ: Top man, always wears a nice Crombie.

DT: Yes, he's always very well turned out. Right, cheers Garry, thank you very much.

GJ: Nice one.

End of transcript.