

Music: Feature

## Smokin' Joe

Joe Jackson's gotten older but remains quite pissed off

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CURMUDGEON FOR A QUARTER CENTURY: Joe Jackson (foreground) with the Joe Jackson band

**At 48, Joe Jackson** is no longer an angry young man. Some may even say he's been in a mellower, more reflective mood as of late. In his 1999 "book about music thinly disguised as a memoir," *A Cure for Gravity*, he reminisces about his classical music training at the Royal Academy of Music and about putting the original Joe Jackson band -- Gary Sanford (guitar), Graham Maby (bass) and Dave Houghton (drums) -- together in 1978. The band pumped out three brilliant new-wave pop albums -- *Look Sharp*, *I'm the Man* and *Beat Crazy* -- in two short years. They then disbanded as Joe moved onto forays in swing (1981's *Jumpin' Jive*), urban pop (1982's *Night and Day*), concept albums (1997's *Heaven and Hell*) and classical (the 2001 Grammy-winning *Symphony No. 1*).

With Jackson a man not known to repeat himself, it was all the more surprising when he got the original band back together, 25 years after it formed, for 2003's *Volume 4*. It was an idea that even surprised Jackson. "When we had the 25th anniversary looming over us, I think the idea of a reunion was just in the air, generally," he says. "It was in my mind, but I actually thought it was terrible idea. It was in my mind as something that I really didn't want to do because I just thought of it as wallowing in nostalgia and I felt that it would be cheesy. But at the same time I was working on these songs and I had quite a few songs written. As I was continuing to work on these songs without a particular project in mind I started thinking about this band playing these songs and I was surprised to realize it would work."

The tour includes many old Jackson favorites, including "Is She Really Going Out With Him" and "It's Different for Girls," two early songs that Jackson still enjoys playing. "It's hard for me to listen to some of the really early stuff now," he says. "I don't dislike it, but I just think I've come so far. I think I only really started figuring out how to write lyrics in the last few years. Some of the lyrics on my first couple of albums make me cringe now. Some of the ones that we still do, it's sort of like playing cover versions. It's a weird feeling, because they were written so long ago that they almost are someone else's songs."

While *Volume 4* does a nice job of blending the past with the present, it's not Jackson mellowing out. What has his ire as of late is the smoking ban in New York. Jackson has a home in New York City as well as in London, but is considering leaving his American hometown. He wrote an editorial in the *New York Times* in May berating the city's new ordinances. During his phone interview from Hamburg, Germany, he pointed out that a large study on second-hand smoke with 35,500 couples, in which one person smoked and the other did not, found no clear connection with second-hand smoke and disease. "Second-hand smoke is like those Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. There are people who really want them to be there, so they just must be there, damn it," he says.

"I would hate to think people would seriously think I would leave New York just over that one issue, even though I am quite infuriated by it. It's not just New York, it's the whole U.S., a lot of things are becoming intolerable to me."

Not the words of a man ready to go gently into that nostalgia band circuit. Still young? No. Still angry? You bet.