

# Best of BLITZ



**Jim Shelley chats with Siouxsie  
about childhood and children  
crushes and dignity, and  
even about being in love**

**BLITZ 36 Nov 85**



# Sioux

DESPERATELY SEEKING SIOUXSIE

Interview by Jim Shelley ● Photograph by Richard Houghton

**I**N THE end, after I'd asked her, tentatively, about her life and the things she likes, loves and hates about it, and she'd talked about childhood and children, crushes and dignity, about being a daughter, a fascist and a queen, about her family, her wardrobe, the arms in her hallway and what she keeps on her bed, about being happy and miserable — even about being in love — it all seemed so easy interviewing Sioux. ►







**But as I'd waited for her in a dressing-room at the Brixton Academy, eating custard creams and Perrier, set upon by roadies and with too much time to ponder upon the warnings of her frosty spite and haughty petulance, her stern dislike of talking about herself, I'd confidently expected the whole thing would be a disastrous mistake. I'd wondered if I was right for this game after all.**

She arrived, calm and attractive, only slightly late, dressed in black, with a gaudy gold Cleopatra necklace but no rings, at once polite and relaxed. Smaller and softer than I'd expected, her round Cheshire Cat face is, as ever, impeccably made-up with big grey eyes and Aztec eyebrows and bright orange lipstick that leaves a tasty smear on her plastic cup as we sip apricot brandy.

As she talks she pulls gently at her neatly-crippled bob haircut, blows Rothman's smoke with just a slight hint of soft sneer in her voice. But if there is a strop, difficult Sioux I don't see it: she's friendly and funny, a neat mimic, maybe a little shirty, but no more than is healthy. She has a wonderfully croaky giggle and laughs a lot.

**T**HE BANSHEES' best quality seems to me that they can be all things to all men, you get what you want from them. They've managed to be, intermittently, pop and rock and punk without notable change but by just being The Banshees. I realised as I waited that I'd seen them three or four times before I was fourteen. They didn't change my life but they'd had their moments: spiky, strange pop like *Happy House* and *Hong Kong Garden*, the new instrumental, *Quarter-Drawing*, the glacial tenderness in *Melt*, the glistening charges of *Dazzle*, *Cascade* and *Slowdive* and the graceful chimera of *Israel* and *Swimming Horses*. Although Siouxsie's hollow lyrical obsessions — desires and disgust, skin, flesh and bone, sin, death and terror — were not my own, and they could, at times, be very obvious, The Banshees have always kept their decency, dignity and *distancy* intact, despite the occasional delve into the pompous and ponderous. In particular, *The Scream*, which prowled and thrashed like some demented and chained animal, yearning for a complete abandon they never quite allowed it, disturbed everything about it with one elegantly scything sweep, a music of vicious tensions and impelling threat and fury which no other group has equalled and which they themselves have never regained. With my favourite line, "You may be a lover but you ain't no fucking dancer", echoing in my head, I mention it all seems a long way away now.

"Nine years does sound like a long time, but in reality it doesn't seem so long. I don't remember it all very well. It's still exciting, yes, it's a passion and it's addictive. The implications are pretty awful but I think the Banshees are exempt from generalisations like that anyway. I still think when we're on Top Of The Pops we stand out so strongly. I feel no-one dare come near us. Of course those days were exciting, everything was new, but I'd like to think there was more to come. Everything was a lot narrower then, it was obvious how you looked, what you did, where you went. It's a lot more subtle now, how we do things. I think the tension's still there, though."

How seriously do you take it?

"I don't know really... I take it seriously in that it's vital to have that kind of *self*, you know, that this is important, this is what we're giving. I think the Banshees go in stages of being sarcastic, being deadly serious or being bemused by it all."

What do you do best? What are you offering?

"... Different-ness. Also we offer dignity, we're not desperate to maintain the momentum of hits, front pages, people pathetically flooding everything with their image. That's why we refused to play Wembley, it wasn't dignified, it's the audience that becomes complacent, not us. But these bimbos who do the solo career, and films... ambition's become an excuse to be a creep. The most important thing, I think, is to make your own world and atmosphere, times that take you away from the planet, moments writing or singing or performing and you become unaware that you're on

a stage or in a studio. You can't create those moments, they arrive. The most genius we've ever created has come through chance and I like that. It's important too that there's still doubt, doubts that it's working."

Do you think we know you — from the songs, the pictures, the interviews?

"I think people have a good idea of my ideal but that's not all of me. I'm very jealous of that side. If everything about me was public knowledge I'd probably pull my eyes out. There's a way of being open, giving bits of yourself without it sounding self-obsessed, always 'I', 'I', 'I', you know."

Do people treat you as an icon?

"Obviously it happens but you ask yourself which is the lesser of two evils. It's not that I like it, but I'd rather me than some other fool. Some of them are really nice, though. A girl in New York gave me this rag-doll of me, really ugly with dislocated arms and legs like this (*she pulls a face as an ugly illustration*). She meant it as my alter-ego, I think so I could bash it around. I use it as a sort of pyjama case on my bed."

Do you like being Siouxsie? Doesn't it become a barrier? You must frighten people off...

"Not really, nothing can shake my friendships. I know I used to frighten people, looking back, but now I don't know really. I think a lot of the time they think, 'No it can't be her, it couldn't be'. What you said about 'preparing a face to meet other faces', I think that's important to do. Usually it's the thought of going out that's the worst part. Sometimes it makes me gnash my teeth but I'd go mad if I couldn't pop round to the shops. I can enjoy the fame when I'm in the mood, if I want to be worshipped. It's a lovely feeling being treated as a queen, I can't get enough of it sometimes (*laughs*)."

I always liked you more than the group. It seemed you knew exactly how you wanted to live and what you wanted to be. Like Crisp said, true style is re-inventing yourself, deciding what the style of your values and character should be and pursuing it until you become it. In the same way as you decided you were a star. "Living with subtlety," you put it, with dignity. You seemed to be a very modern, exotic creation. Did you do that at all?

"Probably. I don't know... I haven't thought about that. I think everyone should have the pride, though. I think too I always had a very strong opinion of myself from a very early age, everything was cut and dry, about what was right and wrong."

Morally you mean.

"Or immorally."

What first appealed to you about the way you look(ed)? How did you get this style of presenting yourself?

"Well I always liked dark-haired ladies. I always thought of a beauty or goddess as someone like Carolyn Jones rather than a Jane Fonda. The twenties appealed to me very much, old photos, Man Ray especially, that very... I like the black eyes! (*laughs*) When I was fifteen or sixteen I used to go out of my way to have very attractive hairstyles, very short, geometrically very ugly, cropped and very frightening to the opposite sex... I think I always knew the way I wanted to live yes, that was completely as a fascist. I mean, I call myself a fascist personally, I like everything my own way. A very popular thing to say at the moment, I'm sure. Not politically, but I won't tolerate people around me if they don't agree with me (*laughs*)."

Did you like being young, were you happy?

"No, not really."

Were you strongly affected by your upbringing?

"Yes, I think everyone is, but I think you can escape from it. I was brought up in Chislehurst, Kent, it was alright. Not a big family, but close. I've got, erm, just a mother, my father died when I was fourteen. I like all my life so far. If there hadn't been any dissatisfaction at the beginning, I wouldn't have bothered to go about satisfying myself. When I left home I always wished I had severed everything to do with home. Everything. Completely. But because it wasn't one hundred per cent bad I felt obliged to go back every now and then. I always regret that. You have to be pretty ruthless. A weakness, yes, I suppose it is. I was very close to my



brother. I saw him just recently actually, but he came to me! He runs an off-licence. My mum's quite proud of me, mmm, but she'd have been proud of me if I'd been a secretary, she'd be calm in her mind about that. I mean, there's always something there that I couldn't get from anyone, anywhere else which again... are secrets."

You said your sister was quite an influence...

"My oldest sister is ten years older than me. When I was six or seven she went to Art College, her and her friends were pretty outrageous, they used to take me along. I was allowed to see what little girls shouldn't see at a very early age, like comprehending words like 'Homosexual' and knowing that the friends of hers I liked best, who were most entertaining and funny and who dressed the best, were her homosexual friends. At that age most people aren't even thinking about their own gender, let alone a deviant of someone else's. She was a dancer, she lives her own life. I remember she used to make her own clothes and they used to have these bells round their necks, ridiculous bug bells. She gave me one and I wore it everywhere. I remember having my first heeled shoes when all the other kids had horrible, flat Clarks shoes. She brought me a pair of sparkly-heeled shoes for my birthday. I was continually dressed in things that were three sizes too big for me and being told I could grow into them... And I remember I was fascinated by these tap shoes a friend of mine had. I forced them onto my feet and they were far too small, 'cos she was two years younger than me. I said I couldn't get them off so that I could walk down the street in them. I gave them back, though. In the end."

**A**S WE talk about what she does with the rest of her days, Siouxsie says she likes theatre and films and reading ("except Barbara Cartland"). Truman Capote, Ray Bradbury, Beethoven, Prince, *Blood Simple*, Eartha Kitt, *Performance*, Steven King, requiems, Talking Heads videos and artwork all get a mention. This year's favourites?

"Nightmare On Elm Street - 'Here's Freddy!' - brilliant. I like really good family films like that. I really enjoyed the Philip Glass opera and we went to this brilliant Tchaikovsky evening at the Albert Hall. They did the 1812 with the mortar effects and we were sitting right by the cannon and I wanted it to be louder and louder and there were loads of these old dears going, 'Oooerrr' (perfect Dick Emery old lady impression), all these old ducks clutching their hearts. It was brilliant."

She likes going to the gym - "if I didn't I'd probably hit someone I'd regret hitting, I become so ratty, like when I'm woken up early" - and has a need sometimes "to be a complete drunkard, a complete wreck, completely loud, to purge myself" and still feels she can be rash and have adventures: "I can't get a half fare on the bus obviously, but yes, there are moments, but I don't feel like noting them. Keeping secrets is very much a part of that." Siouxsie likes sleeping, sitting in the front row at the cinema ("I wouldn't mind being in a film but only if it was brilliant") and fast drivers.

Siouxsie hates duties, waiting, and bad passengers ("like our guitarist John Carruthers") and "people who aren't completely appreciative of what they're doing. Drunks who aren't lusher, who don't celebrate their drunkenness or people who are completely sober. And I hate it at the cinema when you can't have a drink, or go for a piss or put your feet up. Or when someone laughs at something that isn't funny. I gnash my teeth at that."

"I hate opera too, all that (imitates opera pomp) 'I walked to the door/But you were not there/Or there/Or there'. So ridiculous. I find it hilarious but not for three hours."

She hated school simply because she hated getting up early, says her oldest friend is "Severin, which goes back ten, eleven years. We have an unspoken understanding that's very special. No-one from before, no. I've thrown away lots of address books, scratched them all out." Siouxsie finds it easy to be happy and easy to be miserable and when she's miserable she sleeps a lot and makes a bowl of soup. The things that

cheer her up are Vivien from the Young Ones, Richard Pryor, Mae West, *Eraserhead* and people falling over in the street by accident. Just thinking about this makes her laugh.

How does she treat herself?

"I like treating other people, buying them things. I enjoyed getting my flat exactly how I want it. I got Michael Kostiff to do it, he does shops and stage sets. I've actually got arms coming out of the hallway holding candles which are the lights on dimmers - that come from *Repulsion*, which I've always loved. It's as uncluttered as possible, wooden floors, white walls, some red walls and black cupboards with red knobs on (laughs). And mirrors in the hall that make it look like it goes on forever. It didn't cost a bomb. I want to get a huge house with a huge garden, now that I've got enough to last me."

We play 'Insignificance' and find talking about crushes is the most fun Siouxsie's had in an interview.

"Who would I like to sleep with... It depends on their manners. Jason from *Jason and the Argonauts*. When I was seven I had this terrible crush on David McCallum from *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* and Patrick McGeehan in *Danger Man* and Diana Rigg from *The Avengers*. It'd be great to just bump into someone when you've popped out to buy a pint of milk, rather than be introduced to them, like Truman Capote or Luis Bunuel, who was a god. Or sticking up for someone and then it turns out to be them and they say, 'Well thank you ma girl, come home and have some tea.'"

Would you like to have children?

"No... No, I think it's too late."

It might be sweet.

"Mmmm, I know, but that's what scares me. It would be horrible to think you'd be responsible for this kid being fucked up (laughs). You'd probably find it'd rebel and become a boring, officious little twit and that would be my child and I'm the child of someone who wanted a boring, officious little twit, you know (laughs). It's too big an issue. I think I'd prefer a girl."

Do you prefer women to men? Nell Dunn said she thought women were so much more interesting, valuable.

"It's much harder to be a man. There's more men that have problems because they're either too sensitive about the wrong things or not sensitive enough. I suppose because of the men I attract I prefer men."

What sort of men do you attract?

"Ones that aren't typical. A majority of the men I know are completely different."

Are you worried about losing your looks?

"I think there's a fear at the back of everyone's minds. In a way I'm looking forward to growing old. The older I get the more I hate young people, no really I do. It's a challenge to grow old and do it well, like Margaret Rutherford or Mae West, I admire that humour and dignity. I've never felt really young actually (giggles) so I think I'm catching up with myself. I can be completely infantile."

Have you been in love much?

(There's a ten-second pause and I wait for the snap)

"Erm... no... but I am at the moment, and have been for, erm, four or five years..."

Do you believe in perfect love?

"Er, I think you have to work at it and a lot of that is keeping a distance. Perfect love is when you're dying to see someone, and you've got to be dying to see them or it's just a matter of course that you end up looking back thinking, 'What's happened?'"

Are you still at that stage, that perfect stage?

"Erm (getting sort of heated), yeah, probably, again... it's not... stale. It's very... erm, precious... so enough said."

It seems more than enough.

I thank her for her time and candour and try to say how nice she's been, after what everyone had told me. "It's true I don't like interviews, but that was more like a conversation," she says and gives me another happy, becoming giggle. Siouxsie still looks to me like someone who has learnt how to live and I'd seen a gentler side. I had a great time. Siouxsie made me happy. I couldn't have asked for more.