

Punks' golden years

All the bad press has not stopped the Stranglers rocking, writes **Sally Browne**

IT'S the kind of story good documentaries are made of. The Stranglers are lined up on one side of the courtyard and members of the Clash, the Sex Pistols and the Ramones are on the other, while Paul Simonon of the Clash and Jean-Jacques Burnel of the Stranglers are going head to head.

The fight was over a "really silly thing", recalls Burnel, bass player and sometime singer of the Stranglers.

"We just supported the Ramones and had a few drinks and everyone was there. And I walked past Paul from the Clash and he was standing in the corner with Steve from the Sex Pistols and he had a nervous tic in those days. Just as I walked past, he spat on the floor and I thought he was spitting at me, so I just punched him.

"Young blokes, you know. They can't handle their drink."

Simonon would have had a tough time on his hands, as Burnel is a black belt in karate and still teaches in London, where he is the head of Shidokan UK. He also rides motorbikes and has done since he got his first one, a 1942 Harley-Davidson, at the age of 17.

From that Ramones gig on, the Stranglers, who formed in 1974, found themselves outsiders in a scene of outsiders. They continued to get bad press and courted it.

"We were getting so much bad publicity and we were selling more records than all those other bands."

"We just developed a ghetto mentality, I suppose.

"Us against the rest of the world.

And let our music speak for itself, hopefully."

Their music has indeed done the talking, with the Stranglers chalking up 16 albums, including their latest *Suite XVI*, and a string of hits from *Get a Grip on Yourself*, *Peaches* and *No More Heroes to Golden Brown*, *Always the Sun* and *Skin Deep*.

The raunchy song *Peaches* was named by the current issue of *Bass Guitar Magazine* as having the "greatest bass line ever".

It's the bass line in that song that strides along the imagined beach as the band sing about checking out the so-called peaches lined up along the shore.

The song, which at the time the BBC refused to play, was originally inspired by reggae rhythms.

"I don't know if it's the greatest," Burnel says, "but it's the most memorable within three notes."

A biochemistry student, an ice cream business owner and a karate expert seem an unlikely group to form one of the best proto-punk bands of the era. And the picturesque commuter town of Guildford, outside London, seems an even less likely place to do it.

But it was there that drummer Jet Black, who owned ice-cream vans as well as a bottle shop, brought the group together. The Scout hall where they used to rehearse is still there, says Burnel. He drove past it the other day.

Former frontman Hugh Cornwell, who gave up his biochemistry studies to join the band in 1974, left the group in 1990.



Back in black: The Stranglers, with Burnel second from right

But the Stranglers have not stopped rocking and have performed with singer Baz Warne for more than 15 years.

After their Australian visit, they'll be back to the UK to work on new material. Burnel reckons he has about 35 song ideas recorded on his mobile phone.

Touring these days is "the best ... it has been for over 25 years. And as a result the audiences have multiplied three-fold. It's amazing."

They've got plenty of stories to tell, too. There was the time Burnel crashed his Porsche in Nice.

"I smashed five cars up in one night. Drank too much, smoked too much, and mixed with the wrong company. Well, no, the right company, it was great, but ...

"It was in Nice, France. I've been arrested there. Smashed up cars there. Got married there. You know, all the worst things that ever

happened to me happened in Nice," he says with a chuckle.

Car dealers and journalists have no need to be afraid any more, assures Burnel. He's a changed man.

"In fact, they're going to start making teddy bears in my likeness," he claims.

The Stranglers perform at the Tivoli, Brisbane, on Wednesday.

"We just developed a ghetto mentality. I

suppose. Us against the rest of the world. And let our music speak for itself"

gig guide

Topology Politics in music. Visy Theatre, Brisbane Powerhouse, New Farm. Today, 6pm. Tickets: \$24-\$29. Bookings: 3358 8600.
Justin Bond is Close to You Tribute to The Carpenters. Powerhouse Theatre, Brisbane Powerhouse, New Farm. Wednesday and Thursday, 7.30pm. Tickets: \$39. Bookings: 3358 8600.
Peter Rowan Bluegrass/Country. Old Museum Concert Hall, Bowen Bridge Rd, Herston. Wednesday, 8pm. Tickets: \$28-\$30. Bookings: 3390 2066 or 0413 877 756.
Old Crow Medicine Show Bluegrass, folk and country. The Zoo, 711 Ann St, Fortitude

Valley, Wednesday, 8pm. Tickets: \$48-\$50. Bookings: 1300 762 545 or www.oztix.com.au.

Andrew Morris Keyboard-based. The Globe Theatre, 220 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley. Thursday, 7.30pm. Tickets: \$17.50-\$18. Bookings: 1300 762 545.

Sparkadia Alternative rock. The Zoo, 711 Ann St, Fortitude Valley. Thursday and Friday, 8pm. Tickets: \$17.50-\$18. Bookings: 1300 762 545.

Hungry Kids of Hungary Pop. The Troubadour, Level 2, 322 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley. Thursday, 8pm. Door sales: \$12.
End of Fashion Rock. The Globe Theatre, 220 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley. Friday, 8pm. Tickets: \$19.50-\$20. Bookings: 1300 762 545.

Frenzal Rhomb and Nancy Vandal Punk. The Arena, 210 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley.

Friday, 8pm. Tickets: \$27.75. Coolangatta Hotel, cnr Marine Pde and Warner St, Coolangatta. Saturday, 8pm. Tickets: \$22.75. Bookings: 1300 762 545.

The Church Rock. The Sands Tavern, 39 Plaza Pde, Maroochydore. Friday, 8pm. Tickets: \$25.75. The Zoo, 711 Ann St, Fortitude Valley. Saturday, 8pm. Tickets: \$27.75. Bookings: 1300 762 545.

The Arachnids Rock/dance. The Globe Theatre, 220 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley. Saturday, 8pm. Tickets: \$11.50-\$12. Bookings: 1300 762 545.

Rocket to Memphis Rockabilly, rhythm 'n' blues. The Troubadour, Level 2, 322 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley. Saturday, 8pm. Tickets: \$15-\$17.50. Bookings: 1300 762 545.

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