



## The Other Side of Steve

Joe Keery, the actor who portrays *Stranger Things*' loveable jock, shares how he relates to his Netflix character, the best (and worst) aspects of the '80s, and why he dreams of returning to the stage.

**BY TOMMIE ETHINGTON**

**Q: We get to see a different side of Steve in season three. What has it been like to watch your character evolve?**

A: It's been so exciting for me to be able to see the change and the growth that's happened since season one. Steve is growing up and turning into a man. I remember that time in my own life and certain formative experiences, although they're not the same as the supernatural experiences Steve's had. It all kind of translates into Steve becoming a little less selfish and a little bit more selfless.

**In what ways are you similar to Steve, and how are you different?**

There are certain experiences from high school that I have drawn on. Steve might not be the smartest guy, but I think he's always trying to do the right thing, which is something I like about him. I'm not trying to ever do wrong by someone. Also, Steve is emotional. He gets kind of carried away. I can kind of connect with that as well.

**You play a character growing up in the '80s, but you're a '90s kid. What do you think was the best part of the '80s and the worst?**

The best part of the '80s was probably the music. There were some really interesting things going on with music, specifically how they were incorporating electronic elements into pop music. The worst part was the little tropey outfits and clothing options. There were some really ridiculous trends that I just cannot get behind [laughs].

**In that same vein, you're a musician and in a band [Post Animal], so if you could see any other band or musician from history live, who would it be and why?**

There's too many to count. I'm a big fan of ELO. I saw them recently, but it would have been pretty fun to see them back in the day when they were kind of raucous. Maybe Pink Floyd? Or the Rolling Stones, right when they were fresh out of the gate. Then, there's the Beatles. They're the best. I'd really want to see them play *Abbey Road* live. That rooftop show they did, their last live performance, would have been incredible. That will be my answer—that performance is the one I'd choose to go back to if I could time travel.

**Do you have a favorite Beatle?**

My favorite Beatle growing up was Ringo. He was a great drummer. Then, in college, it changed to George. That's when I was discovering his solo album. Recently though, it's been Paul McCartney. All of his tracks have a very artistic sensibility, but they don't ignore people's desire for a good catchy pop song.

**What's a skill—unrelated to acting or music—that you'd like to learn?**

I've always had a pretty wide array of interests, but lately, I've been really into baking bread and learning about the science behind it, specifically with sourdough culture. I don't have a [sourdough] starter, but I have a friend in New York who has a little starter that he has promised me. I've just got to go and fetch it. In the meantime, I've made basic, bad-tasting bread [laughs]. I've still got to get my skill level up.

**Getting back to talking about Steve, when we catch up with him in Season 3, he's working at Scoops Ahoy, the ice cream shop at Starcourt Mall. I'm curious—what was your first job?**

I was a busboy at this restaurant called the Grog, after an old sailor's drink. I'll always remember it because that was the first time I developed friendships with people who were older than me. It's a healthy thing to experience.

**So, how did you wind up an actor?**

I went to theater camps as a kid, and I also had an influential teacher in high school who really encouraged collaboration. We didn't just learn the acting side. We learned how to be proactive problem solvers in terms of building the set and the lighting and the sound. It taught me that there's so many different ways to do the job. When I graduated from high school, I looked at everything I had been involved in—academics, sports—and realized I enjoyed theater the most, so I went to DePaul University and continued studying theater.

**Would you like to return to your theater roots at some point?**

Totally. Theater is the actor's medium where you can hone your skills, and you truly have much more control on stage. I sort of fell into film. After college, I was living in Chicago and auditioning for plays, commercials, TV—everything, really. The first major thing I booked was *Stranger Things*, and that ended up sweeping me along this new track. Apart from one semester of a class about acting on camera, I didn't have much experience in film. There's something about acting on camera that is way different, and it has had its own challenges, but I would definitely love to get back into theater. It kind of frightens me just because I haven't done it in so long. It'd be a total challenge, but it would be a good reawakening.

*Joe reprises his role as Steve in season three of the hit Netflix show, **Stranger Things** (<https://www.netflix.com/title/80057281>), out July 4. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

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