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Pop

## You can stand by me

Joe Strummer, Liverpool Lomax

**Guardian****Tuesday June 8, 1999**

Midway through Joe Strummer's blistering comeback at Liverpool Lomax comes a defining moment which proves the old adage "They just don't make 'em like that anymore". Strummer is on stage for the first time in years and loving every minute of it. With his guitar low-slung like a gunslinger, he looks like a cross between Robert de Niro as Jake la Motta and a Nicaraguan terrorist. He looks, in short, like a rock star should. Suddenly, during a momentary quiet in the music, somebody shouts out: "You're as cool as fuck, you are!" Strummer doesn't even look up, but carries on singing "Voting won't get you anywhere, fooling with the government. The British Army's waiting out there..."

The song, of course, is (White Man) In Hammersmith Palais, The Clash's devastating deconstruction of pop and the political, written in 1978 and perhaps even more relevant now than then. With our pop in its sorriest state since Strummer and punk cohorts first revitalised it, the last renegade returns to rally his troops.

Strummer has a clutch of new material and a new, skin-tight band, The Mescaleros, and together they manage to reconcile the man's legendary past (which will again stalk us when the first Clash live album appears in September) with the release of a new single, Yalla Yalla, later this month.

In a club so small you can spit at the singer from the back wall (nobody does), the set just reeks of rebirth. The new songs drip with the heroism and reggae glory of the Clash's heyday, but also show that the man has kept abreast of the times, right down to dance beats and speeches inspired by last week's Guardian (the sole protester at the anniversary of Tiananmen Square) and the morning's Liverpool Echo (about Pete Wylie, who owes him a fiver).

The set divides between politics and party. "Can anyone tell me which way to go? Can anyone give me good radio?" he sings at one point; at another he introduces a song called Tony Adams (about, weirdly enough, border controls). Interspersed with the new stuff are Clash hits (a rousing London Calling; a desolate Straight To Hell). He leaves us with a Tommy Gun so startling I drop my can of lager, and grown men are seen to weep into the streets.



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