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Culture

Filth, Fury and Fags – Julien Temple Filmed the Breakout of British Punk

We talked to the great music documentarian about immortalising The Sex Pistols and The Clash on film.

By [Amelia Abraham](#)

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MICK JONES AND JOE STRUMMER, THE CLASH. PHOTO [VIA](#).

Julien Temple is the great British music documentarian. He began his career filming The Sex Pistols and The Clash's earliest gigs in 1970s London – at now legendary venues like The **100 Club** and **The Roxy** – and turned the footage into the feature films *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* and *The Filth and The Fury*. Later on, Temple put together the 'Best Of' and 'Greatest Hits' films for the likes of The Rolling Stones, Blur, Bowie and The Culture Club.

After sitting on some of his early footage of The Clash for almost 40 years, Temple has just put together a new film called ***The Clash: New Years Day 1977***, centered around a gig they played on the 1st of January at The Roxy. The documentary contextualises that moment in time and space for punk by pitting chaotic live footage of the band alongside talking heads of regular Londoners on their hopes and fears for the New Year.

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I talked to Temple about how the new film pays homage to The Clash frontman, Joe Strummer, who died 12 years ago last month.

VICE: What are your earliest memories of cinema and how did you get into filmmaking?

Julien Temple: I didn't really see any movies at school – apart from maybe *A Hard Day's Night*, which everyone saw. But when I was 18 I went to see a film with some friends of mine, Jean Luc Godard's *Les Mépris*, or *Contempt*. I hadn't seen any art films, so I was kind of shocked. Apart from Brigitte Bardot reclining naked across the cinema screen, I couldn't understand any of it. I had to go back five or six times, secretly, to get my head around the grammar of it. I ended up really liking it. And so that was the first film I really got into.

Later, I was studying architecture at Cambridge and got very bored with it, so started a film society. My college – King's – was the only college without one. It meant we could then see 75 films a week on 16mm prints because all the colleges hired free movies and you could swap them around. That way, you could spend all of your time watching films.

The first film I actually made was called *The Tunnyng of Elynour Rummyng*, which was a John Skelton poem about a witch who brewed psychedelic ale at the top of a hill. I made that with a bunch of students and friends and, with it, got in to the National Film School. I was studying there when I came across The Sex Pistols.

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How did you first meet them?

I used to go walking in the East End and the docks on a Sunday. It was great because they'd just been closed down so it was this wonderfully derelict, atmospheric space with rusting cranes and ships. Ghostly quiet. One summer afternoon in 1975, I heard the sound of a Small Faces song on the wind and followed it to an old warehouse. The door was open and I went up these rickety stairs and, as I got higher and higher, I could hear some people just destroying this song. They were shouting, "I want you to know that I hate you, I don't love you."

When I got to the top of the stairs it opened up into this kind of loft and my head poked up from the stairwell with a worm's eye view of this extraordinary, silhouetted band who seemed like nothing you'd expect a band to be; spiky hair, skinny legs, mohair stripe jumpers in black and yellow and black and red. They looked like weird cartoon monsters from space.

No other band was like that. This was a very, very new sensation.

Did you speak to them?

I asked them what they were doing, and they were just rehearsing. They hadn't played a gig, actually, so it was a very fortuitous encounter. I asked them if they might be interested in doing a soundtrack for my little student film that was set in the 60s – because I loved the Small Faces – and they told me to fuck off. But they did say they were going to do a gig, so I watched them rehearse for a bit and went back to West London and told all my mates I'd just seen this incredible band. They asked me their name and I realised I'd forgotten to ask.

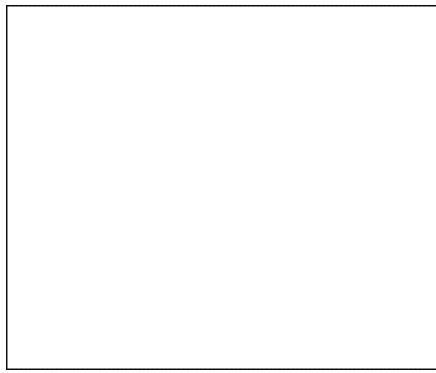


STILL FROM THE FILTH AND THE FURY (JULIEN TEMPLE, 2000)

How did you find them?

I spent weeks looking in music papers trying to see a name of a band that could possibly be them and as a result I missed the first gig but I later saw this thing saying "Sex Pistols" and I thought that it must be them because it was such a great name.

When I went to the second gig I realised I should film it. It was at the Central School of Art [now Central St. Martins' old Holborn campus]. Sid was there, and Susie. The audience was tiny but theatrical – the same as the band. It was very clear that this was something great. I got a key cut to the film school camera room so that I could take a camera out at night as long as I put it back in the morning. There are 50,000 iPhones at a gig these days, but back then I was the only person with a camera.



Amazing. Did you go on to strike up a relationship with them because you filmed them so often?

Well, yes, I suppose so, but I was a middle class cunt and they were very keen to point that out at every opportunity. They would kick me whenever they could, spitting at the camera and hitting the lens. But yeah, we did develop a friendship – or an understanding, certainly.

How did your first feature film, The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle, come about?

The Sex Pistols became huge – or at least hugely notorious – so various people were making films about them. Only, they kept coming and going. They went from Ken Loach for a moment to Stephen Frears for a moment, and then Russ Meyer did it while I was his assistant, and then that all fell apart. Princess Grace of Monaco **refused** to let Twentieth Century Fox – of which she was on the board – make that film, so we were left with the film I'd shot over time and bits of stuff from television and so on. We made this kind of Godardian, ten-lessons-in-how-to- swindle-your-way-to-the-top-of-the-music-industry-type film. Me and Malcolm [**McLaren**] wrote and made it together.



How did you come across The Clash?

Well I knew Joe Strummer from the squats in West London, or, rather, I knew of him. He knew of me because there was one house that bizarrely still had milk delivered to its doorstep among all these squats. So, if you were up late or hadn't gone to bed, you could always find a bottle of milk for your tea. I would meet Joe Strummer approaching this doorstep and either he got there before me or I got there before him. So we were aware of each other. I also knew his band. I used to go and see them at the Elgin pub in Notting Hill.



STILL FROM THE CLASH: NEW YEAR'S DAY 1977 (JULIEN TEMPLE, 2014)

How do you remember him?

He was kind of a hippy at that point. I next saw him outside the 100 Club in Oxford Street at the Punk Festival with the Pistols, and he was standing there with short, bleached hair like Marlon Brando in *Julius Caesar* – like, too much bleach on his head – and I thought: 'he's this hippy guy, he's never going to make it'. I didn't think he could possibly pull off being like The Sex Pistols. But then we went downstairs where The Clash played a gig and he was extraordinary.

Your film about them aired for the first time on New Years Day this year.

Why only now? After so much time?

I was allowed for a while to film The Clash in that autumn of 1976 up until early 1977 and then I was told by their manager that I couldn't, that I had to choose between The Sex Pistols or The Clash. Bernie [[Rhodes](#)] was like that. He'd issue ultimatums. I'd filmed them for six weeks rehearsing and working up their songs, and then they were on the Anarchy Tour with the Pistols and he wouldn't let me carry on filming. There's also the fact that I'd filmed on a really early reel-to-reel video thing – you wound the tape on yourself and it was on your shoulder as you were filming, so it's a really funky quality, shall we say.

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So the whole thing was aborted. I've had the footage lying around for for 40 years. It's a unique thing because it's the last film artefact of British punk that hasn't been seen. It's an interesting insight into that period of time, before punk broke. It's been very nice to be able to finally make something of it. Especially as this is the time of year that Joe died. So really, it's dedicated to him.

[Watch The Clash: New Year's Day 1977 on BBC iPlayer](#)

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Culture

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By **Miss Rosen**

06 August 2019, 8:00am



PUNKS, KINGS ROAD 1979 ©JANETTE BECKMAN

This article originally appeared on VICE US.

In the mid-1970s, says British photographer **Janette Beckman**, she left her home in London to pursue her dream of becoming an artist. "I decided, 'I'm leaving home. I'm going to be an artist and take drugs!'" she says with a