

The Clash and Joe Ely: Lubbock Calling

Oct. 4, 1979 at the Armadillo was British band's Texas debut

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Ely joins the Clash at the Armadillo in 1979. Photo Mark Ely.

Someone described this show in Oct. '79 as Joe Ely and his band pouring gasoline all over the stage and then the Clash coming out and lighting a match. "There was such an explosive feeling in the air," said Ely. "I felt it. The Clash felt it. They had been disappointed with some of their first shows in the States, because some of the crowds were hostile and confrontational." The Clash's "I'm So Bored with the U.S.A." apparently rubbed a few lunkheads the wrong way. But the Dillo crowd was ready for a great rock and roll show and the Clash, Ely and opening band the Skunks gave it to them. Then everyone crammed into the Continental Club and jammed all night.

Three years later the Clash, in town making the video for "Rock the Casbah," would play two nights at City Coliseum, where their opening act Stevie Ray Vaughan was booed the first night and replaced the next by Alice Berry's rockabilly band Trouble Boys. But Ely's set wasn't met with such wrath from diehard punks because the Clash made it clear they were fans. "Our attitude was 'it's Saturday night at the honky tonk and someone just shot a gun into the ceiling,'" Ely said of the Armadillo show. "It was one of those dangerous night where anything can happen."

The modern singing cowboys from Lubbock met the Clash five months earlier in London, when the scraggly punks showed up at an Ely gig at the Venue and then showed the band around London every night for a week. "I said, 'if you ever come to Texas, we'd like to return the favor and show you guys around,'" recalled Ely. "They were all fascinated with Texas." Joe Strummer called Ely a few weeks later and rattled off the cities the Clash wanted to play: Laredo, El Paso, Wichita Falls, the cities of cowboy movies and Marty Robbins songs. But first was the show at the Armadillo: the Clash's Texas debut.

The Armadillo was known among fans for its nachos (a fairly new culinary concept), but touring acts loved the quality of chef Jan Beeman's pre-show catering. Jerry Garcia so raved about the shrimp enchiladas, Van Morrison added a show so he could try them. But the Clash's only meal request was for a toaster, a loaf of white bread and a big can of baked beans. "Beans on toast is all they ever ate," said Ely.

The Clash had just covered "I Fought the Law," written by Lubbock native Sonny Curtis, first recorded by the Crickets and made famous by El Paso's Bobby Fuller Four. So they spent three days in Lubbock after their Oct. 7, 1979 show there immersed in West Texas music history. "I took 'em out to Buddy Holly's grave and we stayed there all night," said Ely, "just talking about music and singing songs." The Joe Ely Band flew to London in February 1980 to open the Clash's *London Calling* tour (cut short when drummer Topper Headon broke his hand) and the bands stayed close through the years. In fact, Ely and Strummer had planned to go to Mexico to make an album together when the punk icon died suddenly in 2002 from an undiagnosed heart defect. He was 50.

Listen to Joe Ely cover the Clash:



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These are random, unedited chapters of a book tentatively titled "Overserved: A Personal History of the Austin Music Scene." The memoir shading will come after all the information is organized.

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