

ENTERTAINMENT

History made: The Clash, Christchurch Town Hall

8 Feb, 2012 2:00pm

3 minutes to read



'I was introduced to Joe Strummer as the person who started it. 'I don't know why you f**king bothered,' was his reply'. Photo / Supplied

Volume

By: Michael Higgins

Michael Higgins drafted the Radio U Clash petition that brought The Clash to the South Island to play the Christchurch Town Hall on Monday 8 February 1982.

In January 1982 I was station manager of Christchurch's student station Radio U and a passionate Clash fan (from the first moment I heard 'Janie Jones').

Several months earlier Joe Strummer and Mick Jones had told *The Christchurch Star* they would make sure they played Christchurch when they toured here. New Zealand had two islands and they would go to both. They knew the South Island missed out on too many concerts. Bless them - they always said the right things.

Tour dates were announced - Auckland and Wellington only. Without the *Star* interview, it would have been just another disappointment, but this was betrayal. It demanded action so we started a petition through Radio U. We plugged it on air, Stewart Page ran up a poster and forms were distributed to the city's record shops (only UBS survives but its music department is long gone).

Looking back, I'm surprised that the petition only earnestly calls on The Clash and promoter Stewart Macpherson to explain the absence of a Christchurch concert. It doesn't actually ask the band to play. If Clash fans were surprised at my wording, it didn't stop them signing. I wish I could tell you how many did.

Meanwhile, Orientation controllers Mary Richardson and Maryrose Wilkinson (later of The Renderers) began agitating to see if they could organise a gig. I

have no idea what went on behind the scenes but a Christchurch date was announced. Perhaps it was all that free promotion.

The night itself was odd. TVNZ was filming *That's Country* in the James Hay Theatre, and Clash fans and the TV audience made an incongruous mix in the foyer. And there were the time-warped dickheads who thought gobbing on the band was appropriate. It wasn't. A Strummer tirade followed, and the plug was nearly pulled.

I would love to report it as the transcendent evening of my dreams but it never quite got there. The band was tired and strained, and the spitting was a major downer, but it was still The Clash in Christchurch.

The local record company rep had arranged for me to present the petition to the band, and I was introduced to Joe Strummer as the person who started it. "I don't know why you f**king bothered," was his reply. Not quite the reception I had hoped for, but I'm sure it was tiredness and disappointment speaking. I'm never comfortable meeting my heroes and the rest is a blur, but there is a photo of Paul Simonon looking at the petition.

That was where I thought it had all ended - until a couple of years ago when I was looking at a Strummer documentary. There in the bonus features was the Radio U Clash Petition. The one I was sure had been binned as I left the room (unaware that everything was kept, put in shopping bags and taken back to England for Joe's archives). It was well worth the f**king bother.

Who: The Clash

Where: Town Hall, Christchurch

When: Monday 8 February 1982

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