

Going to Buddy Holly's grave

Buddy Holly's grave. That was the destination.

It was about four years ago. In Lubbock. Joe Ely, one of the most innovative country-oriented singer/songwriters today, had invited some of his English friends to come to town and play at a club.

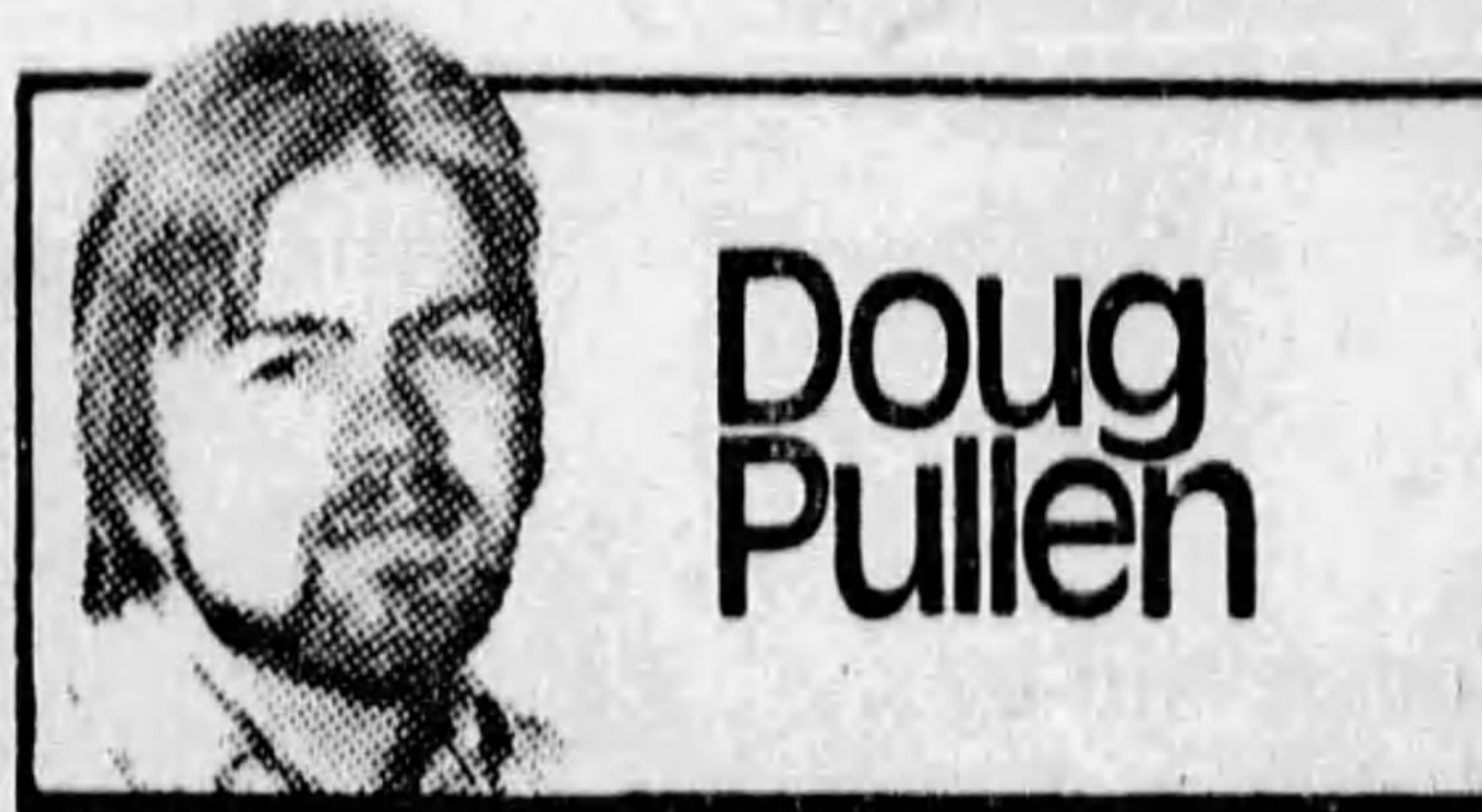
Those friends — The Clash — took him up on his offer. The show that night in the full, 500-seat club was the kind of performance one doesn't easily forget. No pretensions. No restraint. Just a cathartic, primal experience that had patrons dancing on chairs.

After the show, the group, its entourage (including perennial manager Cosmo Vinyl) made for one of those illegal, after hours clubs. The momentum it established onstage snowballed, even though the music now was provided by a stereo system. The band, with a chance to unwind, did just the opposite. Yet conversation flowed easily and with little inhibition.

That's when I met Mick Jones, the band's gifted lead guitarist. He carried himself like he was just anybody off the street. That's when I first saw the real charisma of The Clash's brand of imperfect rock.

The party flew by in a swirl of activity. Someone, no one ever found out who, wanted to go to Buddy Holly's grave, an inconspicuous grey slab in a run down east Lubbock cemetery. So about 20 of us went.

Booze flowed, music blared from the band's motor home and soon, singer Joe Strummer, bassist Paul Simonon, drummer Topper Headon, Jones and about a half-dozen of us — joyfully inebriated — linked hands and began dancing around the tombstone. An odd scene, for sure, but one that taught me just how sincere these guys are. Holly was a musical hero of theirs,



and this was their own, unique way of paying tribute.

But the night didn't end there. The caravan moved to Ely's house, hidden somewhere quietly outside of the Hub City. Ely slipped on some mariachi music, Strummer rolled English joints (conventional cigarettes supplemented with marijuana — smoke one and you'll fall flat on your back). The momentum established on stage hours earlier was going even faster.

When it finally did stop, near dawn, there wasn't a person in attendance who hadn't experienced one of the most memorable evenings of their lives.

What it taught me, through my observations and conversations with Jones and Strummer, was just how sincere these guys are. They have a genuine concern for the people from which they come, and they've never lost sight of that. That's why their music has taken on such global connotations. That's why their music is so important, their message so relevant and eye-opening.

The Clash isn't just any band, folks. The Clash's uncompromising brand of rock activism is an invigorating symbol of the music's social impact, an impact that has been lost to marketing, research and formula music.

Go see The Clash this Wednesday in the Civic Center Theater. You'll never see anything like it.

Doug Pullen is an arts writer for the Herald-Post.