

Belfast Telegraph

News Opinion Business Sport Life Entertainment Travel Sunday Life Sections

News Film and TV Music and Gigs Theatre and Arts Nightlife Puzzles Weekend Competitions



Belfast Festival: Joe Strummer

October 18 2012 11:09 AM



I first came across Joe Strummer and The Clash in the customary fashion of the late Seventies, by hearing them on the John Peel Show on a weekday — and knowing exactly what I was going to spend my pocket money on at the weekend.

Though the inkies carried regular features on the band, their association with punk meant a limited amount of radio airplay, and a self-imposed exile from TOTP in those pre-video days led to a leggy interpretation of their song from the show's dance troupe, a cast iron guarantee of subsequent chart oblivion. I bought White Man in the Hammersmith Palais, a coruscating mash-up of reggae and power chordage that was arguably the band's finest single, and left it in the back window of the family car where the sun warped the vinyl into mush. It remains one of my great musical regrets.

Because in many ways The Clash were The Last Gang in Town. Though they grew out of punk they were a classic outlaw rock and roll band. Their masterpiece, 1980's London Calling LP, was built on a slew of different influences from reggae to rockabilly to straight pop. Perhaps only they could have followed it up with a triple album (Sandinista) of bewildering eclecticism which they insisted be sold at the same price as a single album.

But Strummer's Clash had already made a particular impact on Belfast. Due to play the Ulster Hall on October 20, 1977, insurance cover was withdrawn at the last moment and the gig cancelled. This caused one of the few riots in town that had nothing to do with either politics or religion. For punks it was "a riot, a riot of our own". The Clash meanwhile took the opportunity to have themselves photographed with surly armed soldiers and beaming urchins. Combat rock was born.

Despite the radical politics, Strummer could hardly claim to be one of the shock troops of the working class. Born John Graham Mellor in Turkey in 1952, he was the son of a British diplomat who boarded for much of his school life. His estranged brother David became a member of the National Front before committing suicide, which may explain why Strummer embraced anti-racist causes with such fervour.

The Clash never did play Belfast in their classic line-up, but made the Ulster Hall during the ill-fated Cut The Crap tour of 1984 which featured only Strummer and bassist Paul Simonon from the original band. A Mohicaned Strummer berated the audience for spitting, and their middle-class tendencies: "I thought Belfast was more like Glasgow than Edinburgh," he declared.

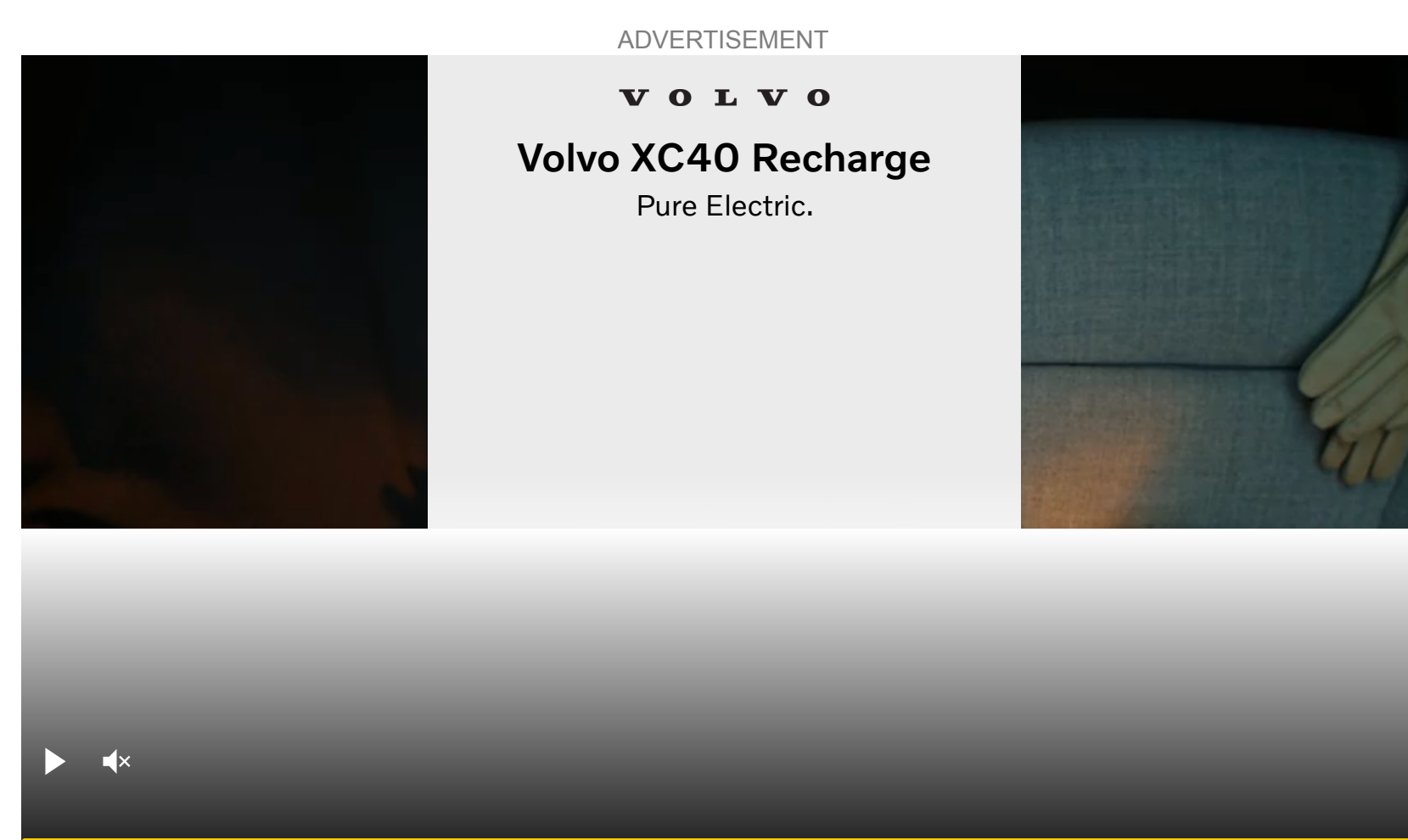
It was an Elvis in Vegas moment that Strummer would have appreciated. Despite announcing themselves as "bored with the USA" in 1977 The Clash went out of their way to embrace it, cracking the States through hard work.

Daily Headlines & Evening Telegraph Newsletter

Receive today's headlines directly to your inbox every morning and evening, with our free daily newsletter.

Enter your Email Address Sign Up

The Clash eventually cracked under the strain of maintaining a high level of success with being beacons of punk integrity, Strummer for a time leaping out of the frying pan of the band into the fire of The Pogues, not so much the last gang in town as the last person to leave the pub.



But he always remained a personification of punk's undersold moral backbone. If Joe backed your cause, you knew there was something to it. Which is why this December, on the tenth anniversary of his untimely death, many an old punk will be raising a glass and wiping away an unmanly tear in his memory.

> Joe Strummer - 10th Anniversary Talk | by Chris Salewicz, November 3, Elmwood Hall

Ad Get Belfast Telegraph Premium+ (includes ePaper) for only 50p a week for 1 year. Subscribe now!

Promoted Links By

Grid of promoted links including: Arthritis: A Simple Trick to Relieve Pain Easily, Refrigerate Any Room In 2 Minutes, Bowels: A Simple Trick To Empty Them Completely, Doctor Reveals: A Simple Trick For Prostate..., The Cost Of Walk-In Showers Might Surpris..., Top British Vet Says Avoid This Dog Food At..., The New £28 per Month Private Medical..., Empty Mediterranean Cruise Cabins Cost..., Married? Lookup Your Name To See If Your Du...

Dunelm product grid featuring items like Sherbourne Oak Large TV Stand, Green Leaves Wreath, Morocco Red Eyelet Curtains, Akina Oak Wide TV Stand, Berlin Charcoal Blackout Eyelet Curtains, and Hotel Finley 5 Light Ceiling Fitting.

Most Read

- 1 BBC's Stephen Nolan named to chair NI Tory hustings — but absent from event
2 Where's the best value property in NI? Here's what you get for your money across the country
3 Belfast International Airport 'worst in Europe for luxury offer to passengers'
4 DUP MLA Emma Little-Pengelly accepts apology from remorseful teen after abuse
5 NI tech firm boss (29) denies claim he told 55-year-old colleague to 'calm down, don't let the hormones get out of control'

Top Videos

Video thumbnails and titles: Finland's Prime Minister seen partying in controversial video, Watch: Pro IRA chants during Feile Wolfe Tones concert, Watch: This England trailer stars Kenneth Branagh as Boris Johnson

Promoted Links By

Promoted links including: How To Improve Declining Vision Fast (Do this Every Day), British Outsmart Surging Supermarket Prices By Ordering HelloFresh

Advertisement for Greek Island Cruise Specials with a 'Book Now' button.

Latest Entertainment

- 'Allo 'Allo! star Vicki Michelle: Comedy is being neutralised
Illustrious list of stars feature in The Sandman surprise two-part bonus episode
Leo Sayer: Veteran singer on the Troubles, family in NI and interviewing Van Morrison
This England: First look at Sir Kenneth Branagh as Boris Johnson
Anne-Marie Duff felt 'responsibility' to abuse victims during Bad Sisters filming
Finnish PM Sanna Marin: No drugs, just lots of dancing at 'wild' party
Jonny Evans may be thinking about retiring, says Gunners legend Ian Wright
Monkeypox: 'Possible' Northern Ireland could run out of vaccines
Loughgall will pose a major threat to Ards, warns Matthew Tipton
Glentoran's Champions League penalty pain hard to take, admits Jessica Foy

Belfast Telegraph

Search entire site

Table with 5 columns: News, Opinion, Business, Sport, Life. Lists various sub-sections like Northern Ireland, UK, Republic of Ireland, Politics, Health, Education, Courts, Obituaries, Archive, Analysis, Comment, Columnists, Viewpoint, Journalists, Northern Ireland, Food, Drink and Hospitality, UK and World, Jobs, Agri, Technology, Ulster Business, Ulster Grocer, Top 100, Olympics, Football, Rugby, GAA, Golf, Motorcycling, Boxing, Belfast Giants, Other Sports, Columnists, Restaurant Reviews, Features, Fashion & Beauty, Health & Wellbeing, House & Home, Food and Drink, Weekend, Books, Puzzles, Motoring, Horoscopes, News, Film and TV, Music and Gigs, Theatre and Arts, Nightlife, Puzzles, Weekend, Competitions, Events, Electric Ireland Game Changer, Ulster Grocer Marketing Awards, Sports Awards, Business Awards, Spirit of N. Ireland Awards, IT Awards, Property Awards, Pet Expo, Video News, Newsletters, Competitions, Home Delivery, ePaper edition, Editorial Code of Practice, Socials (Facebook, Twitter, Email).

The Belfast Telegraph is a member of IPSO and subscribes to its Editors' Code of Practice (IPSO) Regulated