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Joe Strummer in Andalucía

Part THREE - ALMERIA

by Chris Chaplow

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ALMERIA - SPAGETTI WESTERN

In 1987 **Alex Cox**, director of film "Sid and Nancy", was planning a concert tour in Nicaragua, but supporting the Sandinistas on the ground in those Reagan and Contra (of Iran-Contra scandal fame) years was not feasible. Plan B was a hastily conceived western parody called "**Straight to Hell**". It was said to have been written in two days, and filmed in a month in the heat of the summer in [Tabernas](#) in Almería. "Straight to Hell" was named after The Clash song and also starred **Sy Richardson**, **Dick Rude** and **Courtney Love**. It brought together many of the musicians from the abandoned Nicaragua tour and features cameos by **Dennis Hopper**, **Grace Jones**, **Elvis Costello**, **Jim Jarmusch**, **The Pogues** (as a gang of cowboys addicted to coffee), **Amazulu** and **The Circle Jerks**.

The crew stayed at **Hotel Torrelux** now [Hotel Nueva Torrelux](#) today with the John Lennon bronze statue outside) in [Almería city](#) during the filming, which coincided with the Almería annual fair. **Jem Finer** of **The Pogues** could not get to sleep due to an over-repeated feria melody that was "like Chinese water torture". The melody became "**Fiesta**", a song from **The Pogues'** 1988 album, "If I Should Fall From Grace With God".

Although he never believed in himself as an actor, Joe was known for throwing himself completely into his part. He decided to sleep rough on the set with his (stage) gun under his pillow. He rarely changed clothes. He wore his (stage) gun in a holster under his jacket all the time, including visits to local bars. Others have said that he did not seem to know when he was acting and when he was living. "Straight to Hell" was not a commercial success and one film critic said it was enjoyed more by the actors than the audiences.

It was during a filming day off that Joe borrowed a film truck and returned to check out the coastal village of [San José](#). He still loved it.

In 1988 Joe was based in London. He travelled to Granada (Nicaragua) in 1988 to write the soundtrack and have a small acting

part in the Alex Cox film "Walker", based on the interesting life story of [William Walker](#), the American [filibuster](#) and first president of Nicaragua.

LOS ANGELES

Joe and Gaby and the girls moved to **Los Angeles** for a couple of years in November 1989 to work on solo projects. In 1990 Levi-Straus chose The Clash classic "Should I Go, or Should I Stay?" for a massive worldwide campaign to sell their jeans. He also toured with **The Pogues** but told **Jem Finer** that he had to "go out on his own and find it".

Back in London in 1991, Joe was having a mid-life crisis and a guilt trip when he heard that US bomber pilots played "Rock the Casbah" as an anthem before bombing raids in Iraq.

At Easter 1991 the family flew to **Almería** and stayed in [Mojacar](#) as a base to find the ideal place to stay in San José that summer. They discovered an apartment at **1 Los Genoveses**. This set the pattern for many years to come. Summer and birthday in [San José](#), returning to London for the Notting Hill Carnival.

GRANADA REVISITED

In August 1992 it was Joe's 40th birthday and it had to be celebrated in style. Where else but [Granada](#)! Joe and Gaby and old friends John and Amanda Govett and all their young daughters drove from San José to Granada for a short break, staying at [Alhambra Palace Hotel](#). Joe called **Jesús Arias** and together with **Fernando Romero** and **Gaby "Mad Doc" Contreras** they walked to an old favourite haunt of Joe's, **Plaza Campo del Príncipe**, to enjoy a beer. Along wandered **Fabrizzi**, a homeless busker with his accordion. He was known locally for his excellent rendition of Tchaikovsky. Knowing he could also render The Clash songs, Jesus made a request. Joe joined Fabrizio and a nearby group of English tourists threw them coins saying, "Brilliant, really brilliant. You both sound exactly like The Clash."

The "*Quiero tener un ferretería en Andalucía*" film includes many interviews with [San José](#) locals who remember the family. Joe was known for making a big camp on the beach at 4pm with all the children. His daughters recall that when older they would join their father in the local bars. These included the **Red Fish** (now Blue Fish) and **Jo's Bar**.

Jo's bar was located in a nearby coastal hamlet called [Los Escullos](#). It was legendry for bikers and hippies as a hidden away desert ranch-style hangout. The house shot is called "**El Toxicó**" and is made from tequila infused with a certain herb and stored in an

ominous looking black jar with skull and cross-bones painted in white.

Joe loved flamenco and, as there was not much in San José, he never missed a performance by Rafael Calderón, "**El Niño de Olivares**", in the "peña flamenca" (flamenco club) in the nearby hamlet **Fernán Pérez**. It was run by José Manuel Calderón "El Sevillano", but unfortunately the club no longer exists.

ANDOVER

In 1992 the family moved out of **Notting Hill** to a house near Andover Hampshire. He had become worried about his two daughters, he said, after one of them found a syringe in a west London playground.

On 8 May 1993 a family friend, Amanda Govett, casually phoned Joe one grey wet Saturday to ask if he wanted to come to the local fun fair with a friend and her children. Although he was enjoying a quiet weekend home alone something made him say yes. Amanda's friend was **Lucinda Tait**, who had a baby daughter (Eliza) born in 1992.

Joe's relationship with Gaby had been difficult for a while, and now he was seeing Lucinda in secret. He plucked up the courage to tell Gaby shortly before the family holiday at San José in 1993. Jem and Marcia Finer were there in San José and recall the awkward moments.

Joe and Lucinda were married on 30 May 1995 at Kensington and Chelsea registry office on the Kings Road. Joe had never married Gaby, telling her for years that it was impossible to find Pamela to serve the divorce papers. This time he somehow found her.

Joe worked on numerous and varied solo projects and horrified some by breaking his long-standing embargo of BBC's **Top of the Pops**, appearing with **Black Grape** performing their number one hit, the Euro 96 football anthem "England's Irie".

In 1999 Joe formed the band **Mescaleros**, which went on to make three albums and toured England, Europe and North America in early 2002.

LOS ESCULLOS

Richard "Snakehips" Dudanski was the drummer of the 101ers who later joined other post-punk bands, most notably **Public Image Ltd**. He now lives in Granada and recalls how they celebrated Joe's 50th birthday in San José, with artist **Damien Hirst** and Maia Hirst, Jem and Marcia Finer, John and Amanda Govett. They went to Jo's bar in [Los Escullos](#). Joe was knocking back the "tóxicos" all night long, round after round. A weird German R&B band was playing. Gaby and their two daughters were also there and remember having

gazpacho for breakfast. Joe talked with Richard about buying a mobile recording studio and driving it down to **Mali** as Joe thought world music was the way it was going.

According to Lucinda, **Jo's bar** "was his favourite place in the world". Since then day Jo's Bar held a Strummer tribute party on his birthday, 21 August until the authorities shut the bar down in 2017.

- Read more about [Bar de Jo and campaigns to re-open the bar](#).

last concert

On 15 November 2002, Strummer and the Mescaleros played a benefit concert for striking fire fighters in London, at the Acton Town Hall. Mick Jones was in the audience, and joined the band on stage during The Clash's "Bank Robber", the first time since 1983 that Strummer and Jones had performed together on stage. The encore aptly included "London's Burning".

Strummer's final performance was in a small club venue, The Palace in Bridgwater (Somerset), near his home. He died suddenly on 22 December 2002 in his home at [Broomfield](#), the victim of an undiagnosed [congenital heart defect](#).



On what would have been his 51st birthday, Richard Dudanski organised a tribute concert in Granada. The event should have been in Viznar but he could not get permission from the Granada provincial government. It was held in the second best place, the Sacromonte.

PLACETA JOE STRUMMER, GRANADA

In 2011 local Granada residents launched a Facebook campaign lobbying the city authorities to name a square after him. "**Placeta Joe Strummer**" is found at the intersection of Paseo de Las Palmas

and Cuesta Escoriaza (GPS: 37.168884N, -3.587732W) in **Realejo**, a neighbourhood full of bars and clubs and popular with students. At the inaugural ceremony in May 2013 widow Lucinda (now Garland) and Marcia Farquhar paid tribute alongside local politicians, with daughters Jazz and Lola present. **091** band members and **Richard Dudanski** playing a mix of The Clash songs.

Strummer finally became part of the establishment - in Granada, at least - although he never did open a hardware store.

Joe Strummer, The Clash y su Spanish bombs re



FURTHER READING

Redemption Song: The Ballad of Joe Strummer - biography by Chris Salewicz (2006), New York, Macmillan

[Joe Strummer and Granada](#) recollections in Spanish by Jesús Arias.

FURTHER WATCHING

"Quiero tener un ferretería en Andalucía" - Spanish TV documentary by Carles Prats, including many interviews with people who know Joe and shared his life in San José (2011)

"I Need a Dodge! - Joe Strummer on the Run" - documentary film by Nick Hall with interviews by The Clash members and 091 band members recalling his time in Granada and beginning a search for the lost Dodge (2015)

Rise and Fall of The Clash - Inside story of the only band that mattered - documentary film by Dani García (2012)