

JOE STRUMMER JOHNNY CASH DAVID CROSBY OZZY OSBOURNE

NOVEMBER
2003 · £3.80

MOJO

The Music Magazine



ALL-STAR 10TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

FROM ELVIS PRESLEY TO THE FLAMING LIPS.

FROM JOHN COLTRANE TO PUBLIC ENEMY. LET IT BLEED!

Cast a long shadow

When he died last year, **Joe Strummer** was working on an album imbued with his famed hobo philosophy.

Pat Gilbert went from the hills of Granada to North London seeking that spirit. Portrait by **Barry Myers**.

Strummer's boot: Saturday,
September 29, 2001;
The Depot, London N7.
"It's Joe's Hudson boot,
his Telecaster and his song-
sheets, three things that say
so much about the man."



“**J**OE LOVED SPAIN,” REFLECTS RICHARD DUDANSKI, FORMER DRUMMER with Joe Strummer’s mid-’70s pub-rock outfit, the 101’ers, and one of the singer’s oldest friends. “He loved the openness of the people, flamenco culture, the way of life, the poetry, the passion...” It’s close to midnight and we’re looking across the roof-tops of Granada, Dudanski’s adopted home, towards the magnificent Alhambra palace, the 13th century Moorish citadel that watches over the city like a slightly unreal and outsized Hollywood prop.

MOJO, together with 400 other souls, has climbed to the summit of a hill in the gypsy quarter of Barranco De Los Negros to attend an intimate concert which Dudanski has organised in memory of Joe. The show has been arranged to coincide with Strummer’s birthday, August 21 (he would have been 51), but the date also chimes roughly with another significant anniversary: the death of Federico García Lorca, Spain’s most famous modern playwright and poet, shot by fascists in an olive grove near here on the eve of the Spanish Civil War. Joe had long been an admirer of Lorca, name-checking him – and using echoes of his death-poem, Farewell – in The Clash anthem Spanish Bombs on *London Calling*. Legend has it that, one drunken evening many years ago, Joe even tried to dig him up...

The venue is the Centro de Interpretación del Sacromonte, an old gypsy encampment preserved as an open-air museum. The original inhabitants lived in small spaces gouged out of the rocky hillsides; in fact, outside the museum’s gates, scores of them still do, protected from the world by nothing more than pieces of old sacking. Joe apparently loved this place, hanging out with the *gitanos* in the tiny bars that dot the roadsides.

Backstage, where an antidote to the midnight heat comes in the form of a horse-trough filled with sangria and ice, a familiar figure sashays past in a white linen jacket and jeans. Neat and graceful, with hair slicked back and a huge grin, Mick Jones looks like a cross between a matador about to do battle and one of the Lavender Hill Mob. “Better get back to my dressing cave,” he smiles after surveying the huge almond tree that dominates the stage. Dressing cave? “Yeah, the dressing room’s in one of the caves...”

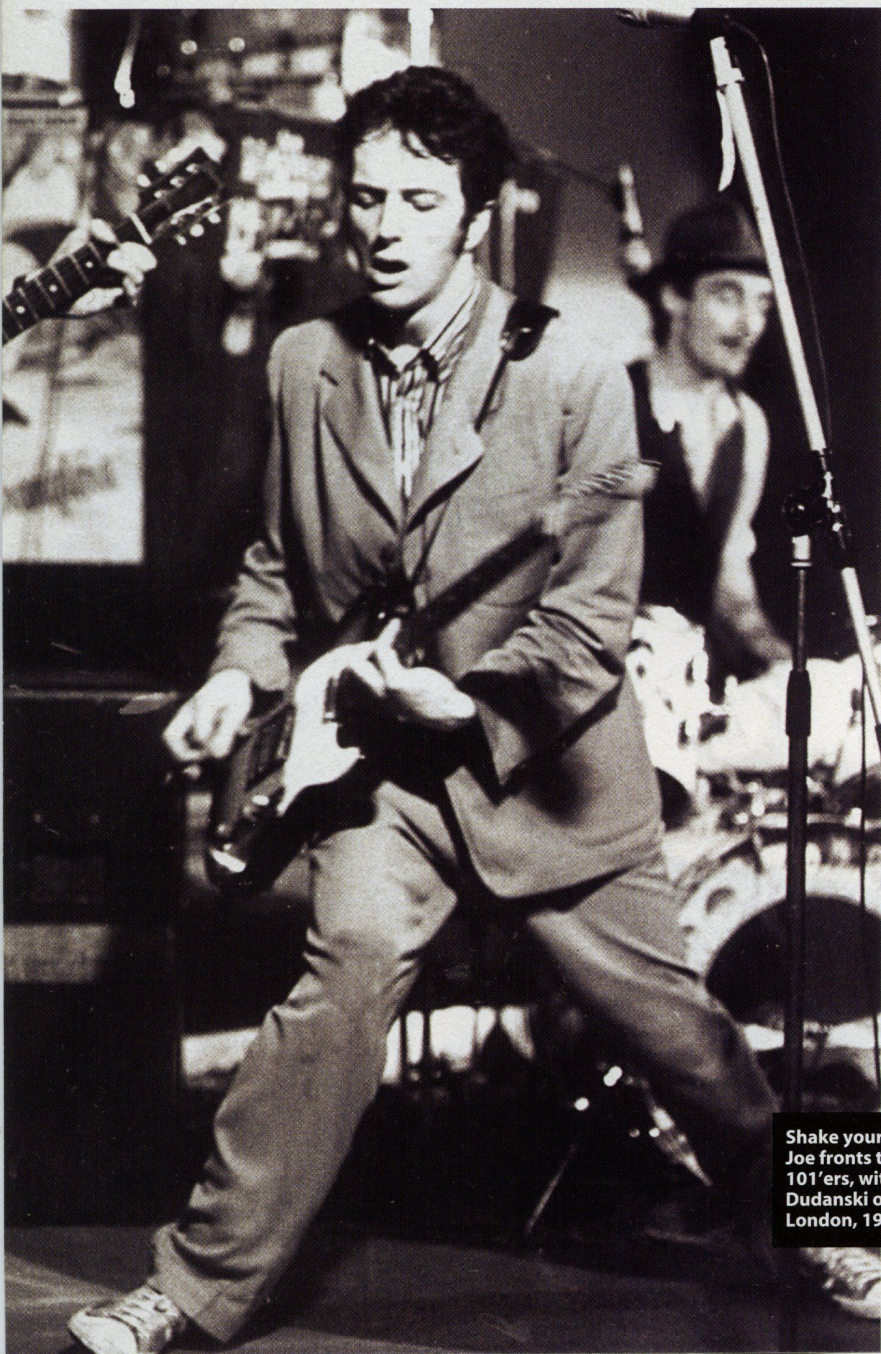
Mick’s in fine form, and proves to be a charismatic, uplifting presence on this surreal, sad-happy morning. The headlining scratch combo Los Amigos – old friends Mick, Tymon Dogg, Richard Dudanski, Derek Goddard, The Pogues’ Jem Finer, New York musician Tom Lardner and Julian Hernandez (formerly of Spanish punks Siniestro Total) – hit the stage at around 1am, and play a 90-minute set of spirited, if sometimes musically precarious, 101’ers, Clash and old R&B covers. The performance ends with a 15-minute version of Them’s Gloria, for which, in a moment that Joe would have no doubt appreciated, Mick invites the flamenco percussionists from the support act to join in the cacophony.

It’s a magical occasion, full of pathos, chaos and passionate rock’n’roll. But, as the party under the stars winds up at dawn, the abiding sense is a kind of disbelief that we are all here in the first place. Joe Strummer not with us any more? The whole thing seems unreal.

THIRTY-SIX HOURS BEFORE Sacromonte, MOJO is sitting in a pub opposite Kensal Green cemetery with Martin Slattery and Scott Shields of The Mescaleros – the group most people agree

John Tiberi/Redferns, Barry Myers (4)

Shake your hips: Joe fronts the 101’ers, with Richard Dudanski on drums, London, 1975.





had proved to everyone, and especially to the man himself, that Joe still had a whole lifetime of great rock'n'roll ahead of him. As if to prove the point, we're looking at the finished CD of *Streetcore*, the album the group were working on at the time of Joe's death from a congenital heart defect last December, and to which Martin and Scott have spent the last few months putting the final touches.

"Joe had made loads of notes about how he wanted certain tracks to sound," explains Martin, who emphasises that the work they've done has the blessing of Joe's widow, Lucinda. "So we referred to those. We didn't change anything, we just finished it off. We didn't want it to be like Jeff Buckley, where people were going, 'Is this a demo or not?' Basically, it's the album we were trying to make."

Martin and Scott are the only surviving members of the first Mescaleros line-up from 1999, a young aggregate of mostly northern musicians put together by former Pulp and Elastica guitarist Anthony Genn. It was the first band Joe had been in for nearly a decade – the self-confessed "wilderness years" during which he groped around for an outlet for his creativity, variously toying with record production, film scores and acting. Uncertain of how a fortysomething Strummer might be received on-stage, he would ask people, in all innocence: "If I play, will anyone come?"

When the Mescaleros Mk1 fizzled out, Strummer invited Slattery and Shields to help write and produce a second album, the world music-flavoured *Global A Go-Go*. It was the first time that they really experienced Strummer's all-consuming 'method' approach to writing and recording, familiar to older colleagues who remember the long nocturnal sessions and bunkers built from flight cases at Wessex studios in the late '70s and early '80s.

"It was unbelievable!" laughs Martin. "It was like, Who's gonna get out of this alive? Recording all night until midday, then back in at 8pm. That was really intense, it went on for three months. So this



Rebel waltz: Joe at The Depot, September 2001, with Tymon Dogg (far left) and (top right) The Mescaleros on the way home from Liverpool, November 22, 2002.

time we had to take Joe aside and ask if we could do it so..."

"...So we didn't end up in hospital," finishes Scott. "Man, I got seriously fucked up, I went mental. Joe was in his element, so full of energy. He was inspiring everyone, coming in at 5am shouting, 'I love that guitar bit! It's fucking great!'"

"The thing is," continues Martin, "*Streetcore* ended up the same. Joe started living in the studio.

He had a vocal booth in the live room where he made up his bed and had his home comforts – a ghetto-blasters, piles of lyrics all round him, a little tape-recorder he'd stick round the door when he heard something he liked..."

As one might expect, Joe's hobo spirit – crystallised in his teenage busking years – seemed perfectly to suit life on the road. Barry 'Scratchy' Myers, The Clash's tour DJ, whom Joe recalled into service for the Mescaleros' *Bringing It All Back Home* dates last autumn, was amused to find that his old friend, famous for living out of wrinkled-up carrier bags, now owned a suitcase. He soon realised the suitcase – a gift from an optimistic friend, perhaps – simply held all the carrier bags.

Commandeering the upstairs-front of the tour bus (previous occupant: Robbie Williams), Joe made himself at home. With the crew travelling with the band, and the gear swinging along in a trailer behind, the singer would disgorge the contents of his ➤



“Joe was great fun. He lived every day, well...” – he hesitates, as it dawns on him what he’s about to say – “well, as it *was* his last.”

Joe, I really want to go home! He said (*adopts Joe growl*), ‘You’re not fucking going home! You’ll get sacked... in fact, if you go home I’ll kick you outta the band right now!’ So I said, Yes, maybe we should go on somewhere...”

The other toll on the band’s energy came from Joe’s insistence, as in The Clash days, that he wouldn’t leave a venue until he’d chatted to and signed autographs for any fans who’d made it backstage. Often there were a couple of dozen of them. Such was his eagerness to do this that the other Mescaleros eventually requested a second dressing room where they could cool off for a while longer. “You will not find any artist, pop star, whatever you want to call them, who had the same commitment to their fans,” says Martin. “He was a very humble person, with this great integrity – political, personal, all those things. He was genuinely interested in meeting all the fans.”

As the afternoon wears on, Martin and Scott fondly recall some of the vivid memories they have of Joe on tour – playing his beloved *cumbia* (the music of Colombia) CDs full volume at 4am in airport lounges; having a crafty spliff in the foyer of a hotel being used for a police convention; rushing into service stations to buy the most ridiculous thing on sale (most impressive item:

a batman outfit for dogs).

Martin laughs, “Joe was great fun. He lived everyday, well...” – he hesitates, as it dawns on him what he’s about to say – “well, as if it was his last.”

On reflection: Joe writing, September 2001, outside The Depot; (right) with Tymon Dogg outside ‘Vomit Heights’ 1971; and (below right) with hero, Johnny Cash, Hollywood, California, 2002.

polythene bags and rest his battered old Hudson motorcycle boots on the bunk. It was implicitly understood that this was his private space, where he read, slept, drank red wine, smoked weed and scribbled fervently.

As soon as he was ready, Joe would join the party. Scratchy describes Joe as “essentially a nightbird”, with a huge appetite for the company of others and a deep fascination for people from all walks of life. Like Bo Diddley and The Clash back in 1979, when Bo would stay up all night drinking rye whiskey while his guitar took his bunk, Strummer showed his young companions a thing or two about stamina.

“None of us could keep up with Joe,” recalls Scott. “We had to take it in turns, even the crew. And it wasn’t because he was an excessive drinker or drug taker, just a little spliff, it was because he had a strong constitution and he could pace himself very well. So we used to take it in turns to stay up with Joe to get ‘Strummer’d’, as we called it affectionately. In Paris, it was eight in the morning, for example, and I said,



ON A BEAUTIFUL DAY in late August, a week after Granada, your correspondent finds himself in the Sussex seaside town of Hastings, on the trail of another Mescalero, violinist and guitarist Tymon Dogg. Joe’s busking compadre from the hippy days of the early ’70s, Tymon went on to collaborate with The Clash on *Sandinista!* and *Combat Rock*, before losing contact with the singer for 15 years. In 2001, he became a full-time Mescalero. Over a pint of the local brew, Tymon relates how, when he first met Joe in 1970, Joe was still called Johnny (soon to change to ‘Woody’), and was playing invisible cricket at a shared student fleapit nicknamed ‘Vomit Heights’ in north London.

Over the next couple of years, Tymon and Joe would share many adventures together, the two mis-

Barry Myers, Bob Gruen, Craig Riddington



Los Amigos de Joe
Strummer: Granada, August
20, 2003: (from left) Tom
Lardner, Jem Finer, Mick
Jones and Tymon Dogg.

fits obsessed with songwriters like Dylan and Tim Buckley, living out the hippy dream, busking together in Amsterdam, wheeling Joe's equipment round London in a pram (later nicked), and scratching a living thanks to the musical appreciation of the capital's commuters.

The Joe that Tymon speaks about is of a far softer shade than the man many others describe. "He was a gentle, gentle man," he says emphatically. "Joe was this kind, generous person who lived in this funny, Biggles world. Did you know he was an excellent cartoonist? Yeah! And I think he saw the world through a cartoonist's eye. He found things very odd and very funny.

"It's strange, but when we met again a few years ago, we discovered that we'd just bought not only the same model drum machine, but from the same shop in Charing Cross, and from the same assistant. Joe looked at me, and said, 'Wow. Funny!' We couldn't stop laughing. It was like nothing had changed."

It's clear that the violinist felt extremely close to Joe, and the impression of a deep bond between them, rooted in the days when they had nothing but each other's company, is borne out in many amusing stories — like the one about the pair collecting flies in a paper cup on the Mescaleros' tour bus, and then releasing them to freedom at the next stop-off. So had he changed at all between 1970 and 2002? "Not much," laughs Tymon. "Really, you can say that for him: fame never changed him much at all."

While at Tymon's house, MOJO conducts a phone interview with the US producer Rick Rubin, who recorded two of *Streetcore*'s most haunting tracks: a cover of Bob Marley's Redemption Song (and if a white man's going to do it justice, then it's gonna be Joe, right?), and Long Shadow, which Strummer wrote for one of his great heroes, Johnny Cash. The two met in April last year, when Johnny was recording at ➤

The seeker

The Clash's tour DJ and official photographer **Barry 'Scratchy' Myers** on the music and memories of his friend **Joe Strummer**.

STEEPED IN the magic that the Spanish call *duende*, Granada made a most fitting location for the gathering dubbed 'Los Amigos de Joe Strummer'. Joe himself had been mesmerised by the charms of this city for years.

Prime mover behind the homage was a long-term pal of Joe's, Richard Dudanski. Following the 101ers-led tribute he'd organised in London, Richard, Tymon Dogg and Granadine 'amigo', Jesús Arias, decided, with the encouragement of Lucinda, Joe's widow, to set up a birthday memorial show.

Joe's passion for Andalucía blossomed over the years, while Richard and his artist wife, Esperanza Romero, relocated to Granada. Many summers were spent together and with their families down on the coast.

Joe built strong connections in Granada. Three of the acts that played on the divinely warm night of August 20 into the next morning emerged out of local band 091 — named after the Spanish emergency code — who Joe produced and befriended.

Strummer was a seeker, a storyteller. He possessed an insatiable appetite and enthusiasm for international music and culture. Renowned for his love of the honky-tonk of the Bayou and the skanking beat of Jamaica, he found as much delight in the infectious beat of Colombia's *cumbia* as in the raw power of Blitzkrieg Bop.

In Sacromonte, the barrio of Granada dotted with gypsy caves and cacti, we joined together to honour the man. A ticket-less posse hiked up one of the surrounding craggy and dusty hills, lit a fire and took it all in for free. Joe would've dug that.

Across the valley, the mystical aura of the Alhambra floated on the heat. Under the star-laden, endless sky we remembered Joe's incredible musical legacy. Though we mourned, the atmosphere was never maudlin and we celebrated his remarkable life. Old friendships were rekindled, and new ones forged.

Joe touched people wherever he went, wherever his music was heard. Witness the kids dancing by the campfire at Glastonbury and the fans singing along in Granada. His message effortlessly transcends generations and crosses borders.

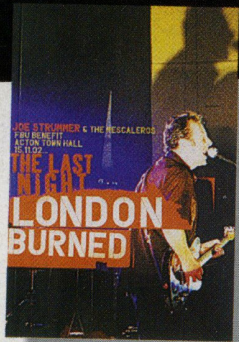
Why are people so devoted to Joe? Because, clearly, he cared. He was no man's sucker, but he was decent and generous, passionate and committed. He provided so many with the opportunity to find out for themselves who they were and what they were about.

The night on the hill over, a bohemian caravan of performers and lovers, kids and *compañeros*, meandered back down into the city. A hardy dozen squeezed into a packed, narrow, red-lit bar, raised another glass or two and grooved to a wild brew of flamenco voices, guitars and the percussive rhythm of the *cajón*. Around 6am we tumbled back out on to the streets of Granada.

Joe is irreplaceable, and in amongst the joy of the evening was the eternal sadness that he was not, in body, there with us. But, it is the power of a spirit like Joe's that keeps us all rockin' on.

Viva Joe Strummer! Para Siempre!

On fire: Mick Jones (far left) and Joe (far right) at the Fire Brigade's Union benefit, Acton Town Hall, November 15, 2002; (left) the souvenir booklet and (bottom) setlist of the final gig, Liverpool, November 22.



◀ Rubin's home in L.A. "Joe would always come to my house if he was in town, because he thought it had the best pool," says Rubin. "If I wasn't in, he'd climb over the fence, and when you got back he'd just be there! So when he found out Johnny Cash was here, he came and hung out every day down the studio. He had a great time. He used to lie on the floor and peer up through this glass window at

Johnny singing in the next room. Did Johnny know who he was? No, but we soon enlightened him."

According to Rubin, Joe was "excited but the quietest I've ever seen him. He looked like a student in school." When Strummer presented Johnny and Rick with the lyrics to Long Shadow, they were written on a pizza box, with extra verses on a paper towel and roll of insulation tape. To vibe himself up for his vocal takes, he would lock himself in his car outside the studio door and listen to his *cumbia* tape over and over again. Naturally, Joe insisted that Rubin record his stuff in the garage on a small tape-recorder, rather than in the studio itself. "That was Joe: everything he did was unique and special."

By the end of the sessions, Cash and Strummer were fast friends: Johnny recently told MOJO's Sylvie Simmons, "Joe was a nice man, a good man, and a good musician."

IT'S INEVITABLE THAT PEOPLE WILL read all kinds of stuff into the last months of someone's life, and Joe's life is no different. Those close to him talk about a lot of reconciliations and renewed friendships in the weeks leading up to his death; others, perhaps not so close to him, see great significance in the fact that he played White Man In Hammersmith Palais as an encore at his last gig (rarely an encore, apparently). One very public reunion happened on-stage, when

after a gap of some 19 years, Joe and Mick performed together again, at a Fire Brigades Union benefit at Acton Town Hall on November 15 last year.

Mick was no stranger to Mescaleros shows, but this one was somehow different. "When I heard the chords to Bankrobber," Mick told me earlier this year, "I just thought, I've got to get up there. So I said to the person with me, Hold me coat – I'm going in..." Mick plugged his guitar into Joe's amp, the two blasting out of the same speaker – "just like when The Clash started out at Rehearsal Rehearsals", Tymon Dogg smiles. Mick stayed on-stage for two more encores, White Riot and London's Burning. Tellingly, the weight of mythology has already convinced some that Acton was Joe's last ever gig (actually in Liverpool on November 22).

Joe's old friend, the writer Chris Salewicz, who's currently working on a biography of Strummer, observes that Joe is now "an icon along with the likes of John Lennon, Bob Dylan and Bob Marley". And that iconic status seems to be snowballing every day. His untimely death has made him an imposing figurehead for a whole generation for whom credible heroes are few and far between. It's interesting to imagine what Joe, who only a few years ago wondered "Will anyone come?", would make of it all.

The closing track on *Streetcore*, Silver & Gold, is a cover of Bobby Charles' lovely old New Orleans swinger from the early '50s, Before I Grow Too Old. On it, Joe sings about the things he wants to do before it's too late – "take a trip around the world", "kiss all the pretty girls", etc. It's unbelievably moving stuff.

But as Barry 'Scratchy' Myers points out: "Joe did in his 50 years what many people wouldn't get to do in so many lifetimes." M

Joe was a supporter of Future Forests, which aims to "neutralise" carbon emissions. Visit them at www.futureforests.com. Thanks to Andy Neill, and the kind people at blackmarketclash.com, strummersite.com and strummernews.com. The Last Night London Burned is available at £5.50 inc p+p from the F.B.U. on 0207 359 3638. See Hall Of Fame p106/7

