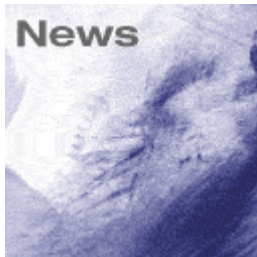



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Punk legend Joe Strummer dies

Jon Dennis

Monday December 23, 2002

Punk pioneer Joe Strummer, a musical and political inspiration for a generation, has died aged 50.

The former Clash frontman died of a suspected heart attack yesterday at his home in Somerset.



Joe Strummer

U2 singer Bono called the Clash "the greatest rock band" and said they "wrote the rule book" for later acts.

Billy Bragg said Strummer was the driving force who helped give punk its "political edge".

Writer Jon Savage said: "In 1977, the Clash did one of the best live shows I've ever seen. Joe Strummer in particular gave it his all - and thereby inspired a whole generation."

Born in Ankara, Turkey and the son of a diplomat, Strummer, whose real name was Mellor, was middle class and public school educated but became a hugely admired figure as the musical voice of rebellion.

The Clash scored 16 top 40 hits including Rock the Casbah, Bankrobber and I Fought the Law. Should I Stay or Should I Go? reached number one after the group split up when it was used in a Levi's ad.

The group's third album London Calling was named the greatest album of the 80s by Rolling Stone magazine - even though it was released in 1979.

The news of Strummer's death was announced to the world today on his official website. A message dated December 23 on [strummersite.com](#) reads: "Joe Strummer died yesterday. Our condolences to Luce and the kids, family and friends."

A statement issued by his publicist said Strummer "died peacefully at his home in Somerset". It added that the musician's wife Lucy, two daughters and stepdaughter "request privacy at this harrowing time".

Strummer -singer, guitarist and songwriter - was the creative force behind the Clash, along with Mick Jones.

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Strummer and Jones began writing two-minute, three-chord punk anthems such as White Riot, but eventually diversified into reggae, funk, blues and rap. In many ways they were at the forefront of world music.

The pair had a strained relationship and Strummer - famed at the time for his mohican haircut - ousted him from the line-up in 1983. The band limped on with new members but called it a day in the mid-80s. They always resisted lucrative offers to reform, unlike their contemporaries the Sex Pistols.

Today Bob Geldof - a musical contemporary as frontman for the Boomtown Rats - today said he admired their refusal to sell out. "I know for a fact they were offered huge amounts of money," he told the BBC. "They just said no, that isn't really what we stood for. That's truly admirable."

He added: "They were very important musically but as a person, he was a very nice man."

Bragg said his political imagination had been fired by Strummer, after seeing the Clash at a famed Rock Against Racism show in east London's Victoria Park.

"I have a great admiration for the man," he said. "His most recent records are as political and edgy as anything he did with the Clash. His take on multicultural Britain in the 21st century is far ahead of anybody else," he told the BBC. "Without Joe, there's no political Clash and without the Clash the whole political edge of punk would have been severely dulled."

Bono planned to work with Strummer next month on a Nelson Mandela tribute track for an Aids fundraiser show in South Africa. He said today: "The Clash was the greatest rock band. They wrote the rule book for U2. It's such a shock."

Strummer made a number of film appearances, including Jim Jarmusch's *Mystery Train* and Alex Cox's *Straight To Hell*. The Clash also made a cameo in Martin Scorsese's *The King Of Comedy* and starred in their own film, *Rude Boy*.

He had a brief stint as singer with the Pogues in the early Nineties and by the end of the decade had formed a new band, the Mescaleros. He had long resisted lucrative offers to reform the Clash and preferred to develop new music rather than dwell in the past.

It long irritated him that the spectre of the band cast its shadow over his solo work. The band finished a tour just a month ago, during which he performed with Jones for the first time in almost two decades at a firefighters' benefit show in west London.

The Clash had been tipped to finally play together for a one-off performance next year as they were inducted into the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame in the US.

A post-mortem examination is due to take place tomorrow to establish the cause of death, which is not thought to be

suspicious.

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