


[Login](#)

 Go to: [Guardian Unlimited home](#) [Go](#)
**arts News**
[Home](#) [News](#) [Friday Review](#) [Regulars](#) [Critics](#) [Pick of the week](#) [Special reports](#) [Film](#) [Books](#)  
[Reviews](#) [Art](#) [Classical](#) [Dance](#) [Jazz](#) [Rock and pop](#) [Theatre](#) [CDs](#) [Help](#)


## From busker to bestseller: Strummer's musical journey

Sally James Gregory  
 Tuesday December 24, 2002  
[The Guardian](#)

Search this site

 [Go](#)

 All stories ☒

 Reviews only ☐
**Recent arts news**
[You don't have to be Posh to enjoy ballet](#)
[Revealed: perilous sting to recover The Scream](#)
[Leaderless ENO in turmoil as chorus cut](#)
[Manchester theatre eyes Mermaid](#)
[Digital homes ditch Dimbleby](#)
[Listed status halts jail upgrade](#)
[Stars to appear against Hello!](#)
[Arrested TV presenter Kelly denies child sex abuse claims](#)
[Olivier hopes for Mendes as Nunn is overlooked](#)
[Letter: Dream on](#)
[First view of Freud's portrait of Hockney](#)
[Mini adventure](#)

- Born John Mellor on August 21 1952 in Ankara, Turkey. Son of a British diplomat, travelled with his parents and had lived in Cyprus, Mexico City and Cairo by age of 10.
- Sent to board at City of London Freeman School, Surrey, when he was eight. Left with three A-levels and after a stint at London Central School of Art and Design, where he toyed with idea of becoming a cartoonist, became a busker outside London's Green Park station.
- In 1973 moved to Newport, Wales, and periodically attended lectures at Newport Collge of Art, where he was known as talented artist Woody Mellor. After playing in a band called the Vultures he moved back to London and returned to busking.
- In 1974 set up his second band, the 101ers, which was named after the street number of the house in west London where they were squatting. Spotted by Mick Jones and members of another band called the London SS. Both groups disbanded and The Clash was formed in 1976.
- Supported Sex Pistols on ill-fated Anarchy tour of 1976, when many shows were cancelled after media outrage. Signed with CBS Records for \$200,000 (£129,000) and first album The Clash, was released in the United Kingdom in 1977.
- The band made five albums - The Clash (1977); Give 'Em Enough Rope (1978); London Calling (1979); Sandinista! (1980) and Combat Rock (1982) as well as having 16 Top 40 hit singles in UK.
- In 1980, a fight erupted during concert in Hamburg, Germany, and Strummer was arrested after hitting a fan with his guitar. In 1982, he disappeared for three weeks, forcing band to cancel UK tour.
- The Clash disbanded in 1985, reputedly after falling out with Jones, who formed Big Audio Dynamite. Strummer embarked on solo career that included the soundtrack to director Alex Cox's movie, Walker, in 1988, he also acted in Mystery Train, in 1989.

- In 1991 became lead singer of The Pogues for a year after Shane MacGowan left.
- Founded the Mescaleros in 1999 and released two albums. They toured the UK in November this year, during which they played a benefit show for the firefighters' union.
- At the time of his death he was working on a song, co-written with Bono and Dave Stewart, for Nelson Mandela's Aids Awareness in Africa.

#### Related articles

24.12.2002: [Punk's rebel with a cause dies at 50](#)

24.12.2002: [Obituary: Joe Strummer](#)

10.06.2002: [Live review: Fleadh, London](#)

22.11.2001: [Live review: Joe Strummer, Manchester](#)

24.09.1999: [Spit and polish: Jon Savage on The Clash](#)

24.09.1999: ['Definitely not admitting defeat yet': Caroline Sullivan talks to Joe Strummer](#)

08.06.1999: [Live review, Liverpool](#)

#### Talk about it

[RIP Joe Strummer](#)

#### Useful links

[strummersite.com](#)

[JoeStrummer.com](#)

[The Joe Strummer Resource](#)

[2001 interview with Strummer](#)

---

[Printable version](#) | [Send it to a friend](#) | [Read it later](#) | [See saved stories](#)



Guardian Unlimited © Guardian Newspapers Limited 2003