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## Fans mourn passing of the political man of punk

### Stars pay tribute after the influential and radical frontman of the Clash dies at home aged 50 of a suspected heart attack

By Chris Gray

24 December 2002

Within minutes of the announcement that Joe Strummer had died aged 50 yesterday, one fan's message to an internet bulletin board neatly stated his legacy.

"The Clash changed my life in a fundamental way. Their mixture of politics and music shaped my beliefs and tastes and made me the person I am today."

Bono, the Manic Street Preachers and Billy Bragg all became stars after they were inspired by Strummer, and each had a similar reaction to the news that the man who defined punk's political and musical radicalism had died from a suspected heart attack.

He collapsed at his home in Broomfield, Somerset, on Sunday afternoon and despite attempts by his wife, Lucinda, to resuscitate him, was dead by the time an ambulance arrived. A post-mortem examination is due to be held today.

Strummer formed the Clash with guitarist Mick Jones and bassist Paul Simonon in 1976 after seeing the Sex Pistols and realising his pub rockers the 101ers were history. The drummer Tory Crimes (aka Terry Chimes) was soon replaced by Topper Headon.

Strummer gave the band their political edge, adding confrontational lyrics to Jones's guitar arrangements, but the band's left-wing statements appeared to some to sit uneasily with Strummer's middle-class background. The son of a diplomat, he was born John Graham Mellors in Ankara, Turkey, and was sent to a boarding school in Surrey before attending art school in London. But he dropped out and started busking with a ukelele at Tube stations.

The Clash's success exploded with their third album *London Calling* and its follow-up *Sandinista!*, but just as they had their biggest hit with "Rock the Casbah" in 1983, Strummer sacked Mick Jones and the band released a poorly received final album.

Strummer later helped Jones with his new project Big Audio Dynamite, had a handful of film roles, and played with musicians including the Pogues, the Levellers and Shaun Ryder.

In 1999 he formed a new band, the Mescaleros, who released two albums and toured worldwide, playing a mixture of new material and Clash songs. Rumours of a Clash reunion were fuelled recently when Jones joined Strummer for an encore at a London concert in support of striking fire-fighters.

Bono, the U2 frontman who had been working with Strummer on a song for Nelson Mandela's Aids Awareness concert said: "The Clash was the greatest rock band. They wrote the rulebook for U2. It's such a shock."

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Billy Bragg said Strummer's latest records with the Mescaleros were as "political and edgy" as the Clash releases, which showed it was Strummer who was the band's "political engine. Without Joe there's no political Clash and without the Clash the whole political edge of punk would have been severely dulled," he said.

Pat Gilbert, editor of the music magazine *Mojo*, said Strummer was a "wordsmith to compare with Bob Dylan" and one of the most important figures in modern British music. The Clash were to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame next year.

Another internet message illustrated the mood of fans yesterday. Quoted from a song by Aztec Camera, one of the many bands inspired by the Clash, it said: "The face of Strummer has fallen from the wall and nothing is left where it hung."

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