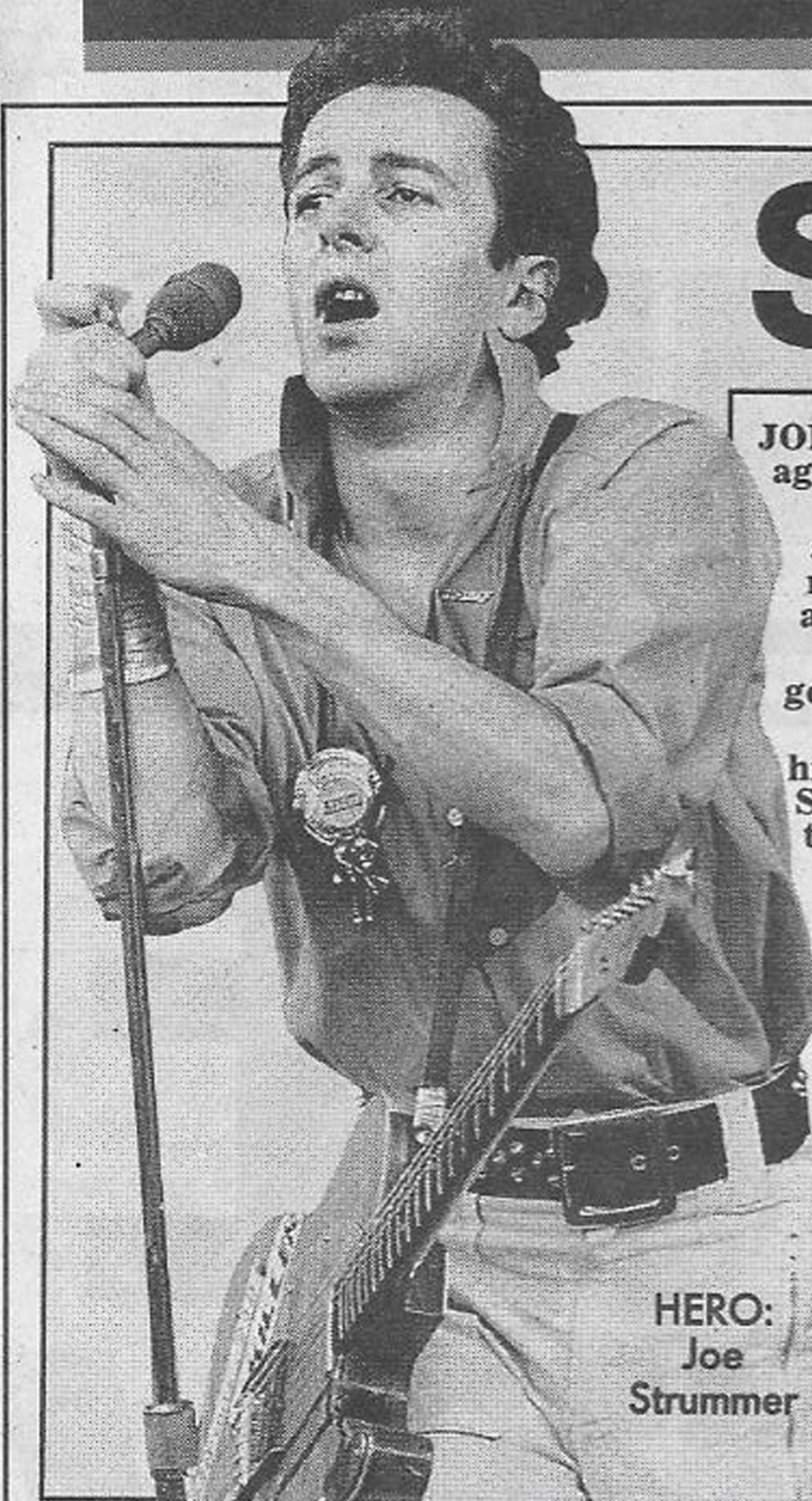


TONY PARSONS

SAD TO SEE YOU GO, JOE



HERO:
Joe
Strummer

JOE Strummer dead of a heart attack at the age of 50.

The horrible news arrived on Monday. For a generation in their middle years, it meant more than the death of John Lennon, Elvis and Princess Diana rolled into one.

The general public would have needed some gentle reminding. Joe who exactly?

Because although The Clash had some big hit singles – including *Rock The Casbah* and *Should I Stay Or Should I Go* – that's not what they were about.

Even at their peak, around the time of *London Calling*, The Clash never appeared on *Top Of The Pops*, never had celebrity romances, and never played a concert for royalty.

But if you came of age in the late Seventies, then you needed no reminding. Joe Strummer was one of the most charismatic, electrifying and committed performers to ever grace a British stage.

The Clash emerged during the iconoclastic punk years, which means they were obliged to slag off any band who had ever come before. "No Elvis, Beatles or the Rolling Stones in 1977!" they bawled, and I am stunned beyond

belief that it was all a quarter of a century ago. But for all their jeering about boring old farts, The Clash were part of a long, rich heritage that stretched back to the Rolling Stones, Beatles, Kinks, The Who, and forward to The Smiths, the Stone Roses and Oasis.

The Clash on stage and on record were a shot of adrenaline straight to the heart.

Joe Strummer – and his partners Mick Jones and Paul Simonon – did more than entertain us. They changed lives.

They certainly changed mine.

Because they made me believe that, with passion and commitment and a bit of fire in your belly, you could be exactly the person you wanted to be.

I met The Clash in 1976. I was a young journalist on the *NME* and they were an unsigned band. I did their first big interview for an *NME* cover story in early 1977. I thought they were the greatest band I had ever seen.

And half a lifetime on, in a large part of my soul, I still do.

What can I tell you about Joe Strummer? There was an intelligence about him that allowed his band to change and evolve, just as Johnny Rotten and the Sex Pistols were disappearing up their own bondage trousers.

And there was a generosity about Strummer, too, a warmth and humanity about the guy, a generosity of spirit.

He was a brilliant musician, a beautiful man, and a charismatic artist.

There is a part of me that bitterly resents the fact that The Clash never replaced the Rolling Stones in rock music's hall of heroes.

But The Clash were not about milking it for a lifetime. Their music was more than a pension plan.

Strummer was a working musician. The last time I saw Joe was a couple of months ago. It was the middle of the day in a Soho club and for some reason he was there collecting a guitar. I thought he still looked 23.

"How you doing, Joe?"

"I'll be better when I've had a hug from you," he smiled, and embraced me, for the first time in my life, and also the last.

Then he was gone. And I am now one of those sad middle-aged blokes who gets all choked up at the thought of Joe Strummer dead from a heart attack at the age of 50.

This is all I know about Joe Strummer.

He was a diamond.

And they don't make them like that any more.