Monday, 23 December, 2002, 15:55 GMT

Billy Bragg: The Joe I knew

By Billy Bragg
Musician and songwriter

The Clash were the greatest rebel rock band of all time. Their commitment to making political pop culture was the defining mark of the British punk movement.

They were also a self-mythologising, style-obsessed mass of contradictions.

That's why they were called The Clash.

They wanted desperately to be rock stars but they also wanted to make a difference.

Billy Bragg: Politically inspired singer-songwriter

While Paul Simonon flashed his glorious cheekbones and Mick Jones threw guitar hero shapes, no-one struggled more manfully with the gap between the myth and the reality of being a spokesman for your generation than Joe Strummer.

All musicians start out with ideals but hanging on to them in the face of media scrutiny takes real integrity.

Tougher still is to live up to the ideals of your dedicated fans.

Joe opened the back door of the theatre and let us in, he sneaked us back to the hotel for a beer, he too believed in the righteous power of rock'n'roll.

And if he didn't change the world he changed our perception of it. He crossed the dynamicism

News Front Page
World
UK
England
N Ireland
Scotland
Wales
Politics
Business
Entertainment
Film
Music
TV and Radio
Showbiz
Arts
Reviews
Science/Nature
Technology
Health
Education

Talking Point

Country Profiles
In Depth

Programmes

BBC SPORT
BBC WEATHER
CBBC news
SERVICES
Daily E-mail
News Ticker
Mobile/PDAs

Text Only
Feedback
Help
EDITIONS
Change to World

WATCH/LISTEN REAL MEDIA
ON THIS STORY
Musician Billy Bragg
"He walked it like he talked it"

Punk pioneer

Clash star dies
Stars' tributes
Billy Bragg writes
Joe's culture Clash
Interviewed in 2001
History of punk

HAVE YOUR SAY
Your tributes

Top Music stories now:

Clash star Strummer dies
Girls Aloud top festive chart
Rapper wins Sound of 2003 poll
Robbie CD is year's bestseller
Ex-Beatle granted coat of arms
Irish song voted world's favourite
Fame Academy's Sinead signs deal
Bono pens Mandela song

Links to more Music stories are at the foot of the page.

of punk with Johnny Too Bad and started that punky-reggae party.

Radical band

He drew us, thousands strong, onto the streets of London in support of Rock Against Racism.

He sent us into the the garage to crank up our electric guitars. He made me cut my hair.

The ideals that still motivate me as an artist come not from punk, not even from the Clash, but from Joe Strummer.

Strummer, centre: Walking it like he talked it

The first wave of punk bands had a rather ambivalent attitude to the politics of late 70s Britain. The Sex Pistols, The Damned, the Stranglers, none of them, not even the Jam, came close to the radicalism that informed everything the Clash did and said.

The US punk scene was even less committed. The Ramones, Talking Heads, Heartbreakers and Blondie all were devoid of politics.

Were it not for the Clash, punk would have been just a sneer, a safety pin and a pair of bondage trousers.

Instead, the incendiary lyrics of the Clash inspired 1,000 more bands on both sides of the Atlantic to spring up and challenge their elders and the man that we all looked to was Joe Strummer.

Inspiring form

He was the White Man in Hammersmith Palais who influenced the Two Tone Movement. He kept it real and inspired the Manic Street Preachers.

And he never lost our respect. His recent albums with the Mescaleros found him on inspiring form once again, mixing and matching styles and rhythms in celebration of multi-culturalism.

At his final gig, in November in London, Mick Jones got up with him and together they played a few old Clash tunes.

It was a benefit concert for the firefighters union.

One of the hardest things to do in rock'n'roll is walk it like you talk it.

Joe Strummer epitomised that ideal and I will miss him greatly.

E-mail this story to a friend

Links to more Music stories

In This Section Go

© BBC

^^ Back to top

News Front Page | World | UK | England | N Ireland | Scotland | Wales | Politics | Business | Entertainment | Science/Nature | Technology | Health | Education | Talking Point | Country Profiles | In Depth | Programmes

---

To BBC Sport>> | To BBC Weather>> | To BBC World Service>>

© MMII | News Sources | Privacy