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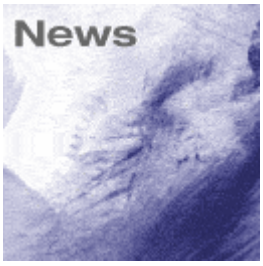

From busker to bestseller: Strummer's musical journey

Sally James Gregory
Tuesday December 24, 2002
The Guardian

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- 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 Freemen 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.

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