# Joe Strummer, political voice of punk, dies at 50

**By Richard Savill**
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Joe Strummer, a diplomat's son who became the punk movement's voice of anti-Thatcherism, has died of a suspected heart attack, aged 50.

Strummer, who was guitarist, singer and songwriter for the Clash, collapsed on Sunday at his West Country farmhouse.

Strummer, born John Graham Mellor in Ankara, Turkey, expressed the anti-establishment frustration of the youth of the mid-1970s and early 1980s in lyrics of songs that included London Calling, English Civil War, I'm So Bored with the USA and White Riot.

The Clash brought politics to the punk scene, with Strummer railing at the inadequacies of politicians of all parties and supporting revolutionary movements from Nicaragua to Notting Hill.

Politicical punk: Joe Strummer

The band broadened the scope of punk, drawing on the influence of Reggae and Ska and expressing solidarity with the black community in the area of west London where they lived.

The Clash, and Strummer in particular, were influential in Rock Against Racism, which was launched in response to the successes of the National Front in the late 1970s.

The band's power to inspire revolution continued into the following generation. As cars packed with young people headed for Belgrade for the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic in October 2000, the Clash's Should I Stay or Should I Go blasted from their stereos.

Billy Bragg, the singer and songwriter who followed in their political footsteps, said last night that the Clash had given punk its "political edge".

"Were it not for the Clash, punk would have been just a sneer, a safety pin and a pair of bondage trousers," he wrote in an appreciation posted on the BBC website.

"One of the hardest things to do in rock 'n' roll is to walk it like you talk it. Joe Strummer epitomised that ideal and I will miss him greatly."

His final concert, in Acton town hall last month, was a benefit for the Fire Brigades Union at which he appeared with Mick Jones, his co-writer on many of the Clash's songs.

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Yesterday, family and friends were comforting Strummer's wife of five years, Lucinda, and her daughter Elize, 10, from her first marriage. Strummer also leaves two daughters, Jazz Domino Holly, 18, and Lola Maybellene, 16, from a previous relationship with Gabrielle Salter, which ended in 1992.

Michael Carvill, 53, one of Strummer's neighbours in the village of Broomfield, Somerset, said he was called to the ivy-clad farmhouse on Sunday and found Strummer unconscious in a chair.

He said: "Lucinda was absolutely distraught. She said she had tried to give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation but it hadn't worked.

"There was nothing we could do. We just had to wait for the ambulance to arrive. We're all in a state of shock."

A spokesman for the coroner's officer in Taunton said: "There is nothing to suggest any suspicious circumstances. We are looking at natural causes. It was an unexpected death." A post mortem examination was due to be completed last night.

Strummer, who never looked as if he had aged, was an icon of the rebellious punk generation. But the former public schoolboy's lifestyle was not entirely unconventional.

He read The Daily Telegraph, believed in family values and moved to Somerset to bring up his children in a rural setting. Neighbours said they had a good rapport with him.

Last night there were many tributes from musicians. Pete Shelley, 47, guitarist and vocalist with the punk band the Buzzcocks, said: "He was a generous, funny, intelligent and a great person who will be sorely missed.

"The Clash were the first punk band to have a real musical sound."

The U2 singer Bono called the Clash "the greatest rock band" and said they "wrote the rule book" for later acts.

Bob Geldof, a musical contemporary as frontman for the Boomtown Rats, praised the Clash for resisting lucrative offers to reform. "I know for a fact they were offered huge amounts of money. They just said no. That's truly admirable," he said.

"They were very important musically but as a person he was a very nice man."

The Clash's former road manager, Johnny Green, said: "His greatest legacy is that he made a generation of people think for themselves. It's a sad day - but what a life."

Graham Boynton, travel editor of The Daily and Sunday Telegraph, met Strummer a month ago at a mountain gorilla benefit concert at the Royal Opera House.

"He revealed with some glee that he was an avid Telegraph reader. One was aware there was an articulate voice behind the Clash. Clearly that was the voice of Joe Strummer."

Strummer's family yesterday asked that instead of floral tributes money be paid to the Mandela SOS fund-raising concert to raise awareness of Aids in Africa. The artist had been due to take part in the show on Feb 2.


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