



The Day The Punk Music Died -- Joe Strummer Interview

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Two years ago, on Christmas eve, the e-mail came. I was in Omaha and surprised to see a note from an old college friend. I assumed it was something about Texas Tech winning its bowl game that year. It wasn't.

"I just read the news about Joe Strummer of The Clash, and I thought of you," wrote my friend, Gay.

She knew I interviewed The Clash back in 1983. Today, on the wall of my home office, I have a newspaper clipping with two articles from that Christmas season. The stories ran side-by-side -- "tombstones" -- as they say in the newspaper business. One has a photo of Tech's Kliff Kingsbury celebrating a win ... The other article is a photo and obituary for Joe Strummer, singer and chief political architect of The Clash.

For me and many in my g-g-g-generation, THAT was the day the music died -- Dec 22, 2002.

I have kept the tape recordings of my Clash interviews in various safe places for the last 20 years ... always hoping to produce some radio program ... A small percentage of the interview was used during my college journalism stint. Most of the stuff has never been seen or heard before. And most of the photos have never been published before (see photo gallery on this site).

Even now, I enjoy reading over the comments, but it is so much better hearing Strummer's thick British accent on the tapes. It takes me back to that morning ... so long ago ... he and I sat in a booth at a taco joint in Amarillo, Texas ... smoking cigs and letting the tape roll. I laugh when I hear the "f-bombs" dropping so freely ... but it was the way he talked, part of his rough exterior. (For this site, however, I will delete the expletives and mark those spots with an asterisk so you get the flavor without the bitter aftertaste.) At points in the interview, Strummer sang ... or made rhythmic sounds to illustrate a musical point. At one point, he did a pompous, female British voice ... mocking then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher ... It was classic. (Sounded a bit like Julia Childs, too.)

"And that's what you lot were getting away from. You know when you had a war against England, you wanted to start fresh. You didn't want to, all that *bleep*ty Victorian *bleep* that we inherited and that we're trying to live with, that Margaret



Thatcher wants us to return to. You know she made a speech last month, " ... a return to Victorian values, good old values.' You know, we don't want to go back."

Yes, I normally procrastinate ... but in this case ... the delay was because I haven't had a "pulpit" (until www.wifi-guy.com). So, I would have preferred to do a tribute to Joe Strummer on the first anniversary of his death. But as it turned out ... this may be better ... because, earlier this month Strummer was nominated for a Grammy for his recording of Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" with Johnny Cash.

See: <http://www.strummersite.com/FRAMED%20PAGE.htm>

Somehow it seems fitting that Strummer is getting this recognition for work with a rebel from another generation – someone who shared an affection for all things black -- and big, long Cadillacs.

But, if it is hard to get over the fact that Cash is gone, it is unbelievable that Strummer, a marathon runner, died of heart failure at 50. It seems Strummer was always running against time.

So many years ago, Strummer told me that "Rock The Casbah" – perhaps the most widely known Clash song -- deals with time and the lack there of.

"I really enjoyed writing the lyric of that song. That lyric's a goof off. You know how it is when you can sweat and slave over some masterpiece for days, weeks and months, and then you can goof off in the corner for two minutes and when you look at it, you got to admit it, the goof off beats hands down all this sweat and toil.

"See in the studio we have a natural tendency to ramble on and on, right ... forever and ever. And to 'take the piss out' of ourselves, we started calling any song that we recorded that was normally six minutes ... we called it a raga -- after those long Indian pieces of sitar music. Then our manager was kind of like, 'Every f*ing thing in here is six minutes long! We're never going to get all of them onto the record.' So that's why the first line of the song goes 'the king told the boogie man, you have to let that raga drop.'

"Bottom line is, it's just goofing off, and there's nothing really wrong with that. And it's strange, kind of ironic that we got a hit with a goof off. Because it was never intended to be a single, just an album track."

The RTC video was a music television classic in its day, with oil derricks pumping; military footage; The Clash in camouflage; a comical sheik and a guest appearance by a Texas armadillo. Rock The Casbah receive lots of airplay, just prior to The Clash's appearance in Amarillo. The band used the small venue as one of several warm-up performances in preparation for their appearance at Apple Computers' US



Festival in California. Prior to the few warm-up dates, The Clash had not played for several months ... the last date a gig in Jamaica.

See: http://www.gpjones.free-online.co.uk/Bands/Clash/recordings/1983/83-05-28_SanBerdino/83-05-28_SanBerdino.html

"I suppose you have all been used as guinea pigs."

For that final tour, there was a new drummer Peter Howard, who joined original members Strummer, lead guitarist Mick Jones and bassist Paul Simonon. And, when they played "Rock The Casbah," they were joined on stage by "The Amarillo Armadillo" (a guy in a sports mascot costume).

"While we were playing 'Rock the Casbah,' I was thinking, the Amarillo Armadillo is not going to show up. You see when I was walking downtown earlier, this guy pulled his car up at the light and jumped out in front of me: 'Just watch me man!' And he did a backwards summersault standing there on the pavement. I thought he was going to break his brains out on the floor. And he brought his picture out and he goes, 'Look, I'm the Amarillo Armadillo, what about me doing back flips while you play 'Rock the Casbah'? I thought great idea! So, backstage, I hadn't seen him around. We we're playing the song, I was thinking 'oh he's lost his balls.' He's not going to come out. And I just turned around and he was doing his gig. Can you imagine walking downtown and some guy goes 'hey just look at this' ..."

Despite the armadillo acrobatics, Strummer and company said their Amarillo performance was rough. I was shocked to hear the veteran rocker say, that even in a small city, he was nervous.

"If you get it all sounding perfect during sound check and then come back later and the audience is there ... I was nervous as *bleep*. It sounded like absolute crap. Even though it might suddenly sound terrible, you can't stop. The only thing you can do is to keep going.

"It can be like that 58 days into a 60-day tour. By then, you're really able to play the set in your sleep, you can play the tunes behind your neck you know. It's really just living dead then.

"You get the fear, naturally ... feel the bullet coming – especially since we haven't played, and then again, with a new drummer. You hope the band remembers the stuff, you know, remember when it ends or... And then again, we were trying to learn our stuff in our back catalog that we never touched to play live, you know we just written the song, recorded it and then forgotten about it. And we've been going back over our back catalog and fishing out songs that we never ever played, we played quite few of them last night, but we never played live before. The lyrics won't be tattooed on my mind.



"If you're going to say something dumb in life, you should know what you're going to say and say it, right? But I was always looking for the great time when ... but it hardly ever happens to me ... where I would just be talking to the to audience and doing songs, going through the sets and it's like you're actually f* Bruce, the comedian ... that moment when you're thinking of something, a new thought, and you're telling it to the audience straight away and it's happening all at once. You know, it's not like something you thought before and then you're going to say it to them later, like a routine joke or something, but there's always that magic moment you're looking for and you find yourself speaking to the audience and saying something that's sensible and constructive and not nonsense and it's spontaneous. I didn't speak for a long time during that concert. I was too nervous to ever get to the point.

"It might sound stupid, but when you're unsure -- because it was our first gig on the thing -- it'd really piss me off to look at people. But when I know that it's good, and I know that we know what we're doing and we're doing it well, then I can really 'screw the crowd' as we say it. But last night, I wasn't looking at them, because I was concentrating on trying to keep it together."

Throughout the concert, Strummer closed his eyes and did his trademark hand to the side of the head.

"All I'm doing, right ... the voice has got to tune up okay. You don't use it, you don't shout really loud for an hour every day. It won't be tuned up so I haven't sung a concert in five months or whatever so my voice is pretty, it's not ... you know muscled. So after a couple of shows, I'll be able to tune up and throw it out loud. But until I can, what I'm doing is that. I'm blocking one ear just so that I can hear my voice because I don't want to go out of tune.

"Because we play really loud. We're a terribly loud band. We're too damn loud. We play really loud and we all got those two monitors banging my voice back at me. And as I'm really putting a lot down the mike, a lot will come back on the monitors. You see what I mean, it depends on how much sheer physical force I'm projecting the voice system. Like last night, I was kind of not in good, not in top form, right so I had to keep doing that to locate the note I was looking for. It makes me feel confident. Like it is going ...rrrrrrgh ... you can't and you can't hear what you're saying. And they're like it's not happening man.

"So I was desperately jamming it in (finger in ear). ... Almost got stuck in my ear I was sticking it in so much."



Among the songs revived from the back catalogue, The Clash played a song first in Amarillo, and then at The US Festival -- from the three-disc recording, "Sandinista" - "The Sound of the Sinners."

"It's an old tune, but I brought a lyric to it. I just kind of, I had this lyric about Jesus, right, so I started singing it to the first tune of ... of the first gospel tune ... It's probably a traditional gospel tune. I wrote that in 1980, early 1980. About two months after ... the lyric goes on about floods of lava flowing down the mountain ... there hadn't been a volcano eruption for years and years as far as I knew. And that one, was it Mount Saint Helens?"

"It went off and then they started popping off all over the world since then.

Quite a coincidence?

"I don't know. But whatever I thought, see we never played that one live ever, we never even attempted to play it since we recorded it and that was the first time we did it last night (in Amarillo). ... Came off better than we thought."

So what was the message exactly?

"I'd say 75 percent of everything has always got a message going on with our songs. I find myself writing about those things, you know. It doesn't appeal to me to, haven't really got into, you know, people like Elvis Costello, they get into analyzing personal relationships between say men and women and being all tainted and getting right in there and analyzing that and that's never appealed to us you know. I just prefer thinking about the world."

Where ever The Clash went, the topic of nuclear disarmament followed.

"I almost feel like saying let's get it over - a nuclear holocaust, you know because they're saying we need a balance of arms to be secure. But I don't feel very secure I decided. That's what the conservative politicians are saying. 'Look we get rid of these missiles, NATO will crumble, the Russians will be just what the Russians want, which is true but it's too f* insane to contemplate. I'm almost like, 'Let's get it over with.'"

Well, Joe, that sounds a bit fanatical.

"We were much more like religious fanatics. You know what a religious fanatic is, right? We were very fanatical about what we were doing. I mean, in the way that young men can be, you know, when they're young. We were very fanatical about everything. Oh it was so great to change anything. I'm talking about music and then bang! The Sex Pistols happened right? And we followed their lead and we really took it seriously. Everything had to go. We changed everything. We changed ourselves. You know, a real process and we were real fanatical about what we were saying.



"We had written some (pop) songs and we denounced them as irrelevant, you know what I mean? Like we had some songs in the beginning that we rehearsed up and we kind of had big arguments get in the way. Like this song is irrelevant, but there's it no time for that, no time about teenage love. That made us stick together for so long because me, Mick and Paul went through that and I don't think anyone else would understand it."

After The US Festival, the band planned to return to the recording studio ... (But, of course Mick Jones left for creative differences and formed his own group, Big Audio Dynamite. Strummer and a remnant of The Clash eventually recorded "Cut The Crap.")

"It's been 18 months since the last recording. After we've done this little talk and we done the arts festival, then we go back to England and start rehearsing and writing some songs and then we'll see what we've got. And then we'll record, I don't know where we'll be. We'll have to come out with something eventually you see. But I like a lay off you know. Hell ... It gives you time to step back. And I don't like to be writing songs all the time, because you become ... It can drive you out of your mind you know?"

Although The Clash experimented with dub, rap, reggae, synthesizers and more, it seemed that Jones' BAD would later prove to be much more electronically inclined than The Clash.

"I'm one of these people that likes old records you know. And I know that I'm a dying breed. I know that it's all here to stay. I'm mean f*, with a little machine as big as the recorder you're using we can program Buddy Rich into it ...

"Maybe it'll catch on in a big way until everyone gets sick of it, and we'll go back to one man and acoustic guitar. The opposite extreme to electronic. I'm definitely out of step with the tech stuff. But I don't want to, I feel like those people, who ... like ... this guy in France said this new invention is going to kill reading, no he said literature is dead. He took out a serious article in the newspaper. What he was talking about was that the bicycle had just been invented. He was complaining that he and his parents went riding one Sunday afternoon instead of reading novels. He took it so seriously – believed the bicycle was here to corrupt humanity, right? I'd definitely prefer old records, where the performance is recorded. Compared to something building it up."

And with Strummer's sensibilities, he seemed to be very much aware of social responsibility of performers. He described some pretty wild things from the music industry.

"I can't stand these heavy metal groups in England , you know, they call their albums the number of the beast I mean , do they know? I wonder if they know what



they're dealing with. I think they're just dabbling. ... I can't understand it though. ... To deal with that black magic ... I mean there's sort of a faction in England, worshipping Alistair Crowley ... it's en vogue and the people don't do any research on the guy. They just kind of take it in, you know they probably read about him for five minutes and go 'yeah Crowley.' Yes, Jimmy Page (Led Zeppelin) bought Crowley's home, by Loch Ness in Scotland. He bought it and a whole lot of stuff happened. Ah ... a little kid died in one of these rooms ... and all these rumors ... probably all hogwash. But all these rumors -- it was black magic and everything.

"There was a group called Eddie and the Hotrods right? And on their album, for some reason they chose to put a picture of Alistair Crowley wearing a Mickey Mouse hat. You know those hats ... the black thing with two big ears. Right. Well, this EP had this picture of Crowley with this Mickey Mouse hat on. I couldn't think of why. Jimmy Page saw this right, and he rang the band up and said, "I'm putting a curse on you all." And ah, after that, their album went away, just like that.

"I mean it could be coincidence, I mean they were kind of fairly new outfit, but they weren't worse than anybody else I've seen. They were quite rocking. But after that ... he said they were making fun of 'the great magician' or whatever they call themselves."

So, Joe, does this mean you lean toward the side of good, versus evil?

"Turns me off. I think organized religion is just a con. A straight trade off, fear for money. 'I'll get rid of your fear, if you give me your money.' But, I like to think about Jesus and study it up. And the meaning of whatever the hell all this is about. I think about Jesus, but certainly ain't going to start supporting 'Bill' Graham or anything like that.

"Let's say I definitely believed He existed -- Jesus. You know, I definitely believe in good and evil. I mean, you know, I would not like to do evil things. It does not make feel good to do evil things. I can differentiate what I think is a good thing and what I think is an evil thing. Like ... I've done a lot of stealing in my life. But I only stole when I was hungry, you know what I mean, and since we've been a success and I've been able to afford food, I never stolen nothing. Because there was never necessity to steal, you know what I mean? I felt I stole a lot of food and never got caught because I was stealing it for the right reasons."

It was so refreshing and unexpected that Strummer was so candid and treated me so well ... at the time of the interview, I was a small-town, Texas kid ... who knew very little about the world and considerably less about The Clash. I didn't walk away with a working-class, British accent, and hopefully I didn't give Strummer my drawl.



"I don't reckon anybody knows what the hell is going on. Not even ... take the sharpest, smoothest operator in New York. None of us ... nobody knows what the f* is going on. Certainly not in the real populated cities. People are really lost ...

" You know, if you sit there twanging at me for a couple of hours, I'm going to walk away and start twanging away at someone else. You know what I mean? I pick it up. I find myself talking the American every way. Like, have you got enough sugar in your coffee? 'That's fi-iiine. I'm fi-iiine.'

"I saw a late night program on Nashville network, a group from Nashville called the White Animals and they were doing a version of Brand New Cadillac. See we got this song 'Brand New Cadillac' from early English rocker right? ... That was supposed to be the only British rock 'n' roll song that was ever written -- I mean in the early times -- when it was Gene Vincent and Buddy Holly ... Eddie Cochran, all that. We had Vince Taylor and he had this song called 'Brand New Cadillac' and we covered it on some record. And I watched on TV these American kids, they duplicated our version off our record. And this American drummer who was singing the song was mimicking my speech defect. When I sang it, I was trying to sing clearly -- not making the defect. But, he copied it to a tee. He copied the way I was going like 'brand n-y-ew' without pronouncing it correctly. I was amazed cause I wish I had done it proper, you know. Now I wish I spent more time on the vocal made it a bit more quirky."

So American bands copy you ... does everyone here know you. Is it better to be anonymous?

"Well, it's good because it's a few people you know what I mean. I like the feeling ... like I can walk around anywhere. I really like that. I'd hate to lose it. See, we never go on TV in England, so, our faces are not known. Maybe a few -- like music, people who are into music would know -- but general population, cab drivers and that, they wouldn't know us. So it's kind of good."

Is it considered a negative thing in England – selling out – that you are touring America?

"It didn't mean that before, because no one had figured that out. Everyone was real naïve in those days, but it is now. For example, like you know the people who 'beat the Clash with a stick' always use the stick of 'yeah, you live in America, you're always in America, which I don't mind because I like to just get on with my life and getting on with it. And if most people think that I live in New York all the time, I'm quite pleased cause it means I can walk about and I can walk about all the time, go anywhere and like it over there. I don't think David Bowie can walk anywhere -- maybe in disguise -- but ..."

What about you, Joe Strummer, in the States?



"Yeah, yeah, I think so. I mean obviously, if I shaved the sides of my head off, just that would attract attention just for having a loony hair cut, you know what I mean? I'd like to stay where I could walk around. Yeah. Imagine that you were so famous no matter where you stuck your face, everyone would go 'i-iiyeeeeeh!' I mean you'd have to stay in your own room.

"Yeah. And what could you write about if you can't observe the human race, you know what I mean? I think writers have got to be great observers. You got to sit and watch people and think about the people. If you couldn't see them, you couldn't go around on a Saturday night, what the f* would you write about? I think that's why a lot of people get destroyed, you know people that make it really big. They ... it f* them up. Like that's why Elvis always stayed inside Graceland. No wonder he took to taking mind trips."

Strummer never mentioned whether he took any "trips without leaving the farm." But I doubt it, I doubt it. But he was forever with a smoke in his hand and he was open about it being a nasty habit ... That coming from a guy who swam and played "football" (soccer) on the road, to stay in shape ... in addition to marathons. He offered me a Carlton.

"They are supposed to be the lowest in tar and nicotine. But they don't say it on the pack. You notice that? What do you think of these other brands, that are going like, you know, low tar you know, and Merit lights or Vanguard lights or Ultra lights, you know, and yet they don't have a single word on the front of the packs that say anything about it. I haven't figured that out yet. Maybe they figure that it's for macho men who don't want to look like they're smoking lights. Like you could look like Pall Mall ...right?

" I ran a marathon in London about three weeks ago and it about killed me ...

"Drugs? Yeah, that is soulless. I've watched friends go and dedicate themselves to a life like that and if there's anything left, they're just empty shells, you know what I mean? ... people addicted to heroin. They're dead or ... It's sickening. That's why I need something real, that's what I was thinking about, something real to touch."

They say Strummer died peacefully in his sleep, in England. He was born, the son of a British diplomat, in Ankara, Turkey. He described his upbringing as similar to Tom Brown's "School Days." Strummer was 12 when England launched Beatlemania. He always knew he would end up in London.

"I think you got to know where you're coming from, and to me that's London. I got a really good education, not that I bothered to listen, but some of it seeped in because I can spell. You know? That's the only way I can tell. I was into art and English. I stayed on two subjects, you know, at the school that's what you do.



"I don't know. I was never into anything else much. I got into music ... by default, you know? ... after trying everything else. That type of thing. I didn't grow up thinking I'm going to play music. I was just hardly old enough to listen to it you know in the '60s. I was a kid in the '60s and used to really get into listening to it. I've didn't want to seem to play it. And everyday after school, I could never find something to turn my hand to. And after a couple years of that, I started hanging out with friends and got my guitar off them. Then, when I realized that I could play, I was quite happy. I started very late. It wasn't until I was 21, that I tried to learn how to play."

Perhaps starting late attributed to Strummer being hard headed. It is common knowledge that the band stayed at odds with CBS. The band insisted on keeping their "Sandinista" recording a three-disc set for a discounted price ... and as Strummer put it, the label placed it in the back of the record bins to "teach them a lesson." Would The Clash be better off starting their own label. Were they that big, say like The Stones?

"Everyone knows what we're talking about here is distribution. We rely on the corporation and the structure and that to make it available all around the world. That is some feat of logistics. You know, we release a record in Britain and America at once. ... Want to make sure there is at least five copies in each record store so it's there for anyone who wants to buy it. Because it's too competitive out there, no one has the God-given right to assume that you're going to be listened to. You know, you can be drowned out and forgotten. Like Sandinista ... we said we wanted to sell at least three of these for the price of one and eventually we negotiated the price to above one but below two, you know. Like they sat on it, even though they were releasing it, they just sat on it because they didn't want to f* around with this kind of performance, they just wanted to get one record, one bit of vinyl, and charge you nine dollars or whatever it is for an album right? And so they released Sandinista and just sat on it and it didn't make any sales hardly. I mean, it sold a little. But that kind of taught me a lesson. I mean, if you really want to be heard, gotta be pretty damn clear about it. No one has the time to listen to a shrill piece. I mean Beethoven releases long pieces, but you know, he's been dead two hundred years."

Hmmm What about classical Joe?

"I'd like to get it. I'd like to know something about classical. Every time I try though, see I'd be thinking 'now look, I'm a bit more mature than I was last year, surely I'll be able to dig it now,' you know? So, I get someone to play me some classical. I can not. I have to look around. I can get into that "Rite Of Spring," you know that one that caused the riot . F*, I mean that's almost like rock music. In fact that is rock music, 1905 style."



Although the Amarillo date was fairly tame, punk concerts ... even Clash dates ... have been known to turn ugly, as mosh pits sometimes turn into brawls.

"Yeah ... most of the time it's kind of people wanting to get their energy, get their energy off or something like that, the music is going up and down ... they get into the physical movement to join in it but sometimes when they really start slamming like in Los Angeles, there's this big hole in the middle of the audience will open up to give these guys room. You can see that it's ... that it's nowhere and it does get distorted, you know? I just try to make my singing more soulful to tip the balance."

So, Joe, let's say the interview opened up ... if we just let the tape recorder run, what are some of the things pressing on your mind?

"Well I'd just like to say that if it takes 25 years for the old men to die from now, because I think everyone everybody has been conned in England and in America. We're all being conned. Well I just think that people in here eating themselves to death and the TVs killing them. There's too much *bleep* that comes out of the television. I can't stand it, you know. I really kind of changed. Cause when I first came to America, I used to think it was great. A lot of channels, you know, basketball and stuff like that. All the time, really good. But now I know, it's poisoning you, you know, your mind can only take so much information and everyone here is overdosed, and in Britain too. People watch TV just as much there.

"It should shut off at midnight ... it forces a short cut in your viewing time. Cause here it's on much longer. I think everyone here has been poisoned by what they're eating and by what they're watching. And I don't know what kind of young people are going to grow up in this atmosphere. Because, you have to bear in mind, two hundred years ago, all the most adventurous people in the world came here, didn't they? I mean you had to be pretty damn adventurous to sail for the new world with Indians to fight and who knows, God knows what could be out there, right, and went there with your wife, you kid and you and a couple of * ... and that's kind of an adventure. And 200 years later, all I see in America is these signs up right and these plastic buildings that, I mean, see these buildings, they're all over the place and I swear they're cast out of a mold of plastic and pretending to be a building. I know that's a way to be cheap but. I feel sick in my heart you know that nothing is real anymore you know. That might well be a building but sure would examine it and find out that it's made of plastic, not really a building. These signs, America just seems to be like, from coast to coast, it's totally depressing.

"From coast to coast big parking lots with these horrible cheap buildings and signs and it's all there is in America and the big car moping around. Totally, just depressing. And it ain't any better in England either. We got a different kind of sickness. Kind of a repressive, mental, emotional psychosis.



Hmmmm ... There is a place on the "Sandinista" LP where the recording has a Rastafarian deejay talking it up on the air ... and a British guy calls in to the radio station. The deejay suspects the caller wants to rant and rave and express his opinion to the world on talk radio. In a thick British, almost *bleep*ney accent, the caller says, "... Yes ... I'd just like to say, can we have some more music?"

In several hours, over a couple of days that I spent around The Clash, there was always reggae music playing ... backstage, on the bus, you name it. As Paul Simonon told me, they liked the heavy content, mixed with the sweet tunes.

"Well, we had this one song, goes back five years, called Complete Control. The song was really about us fighting with our record company. Okay, now Mick wrote the song, the music and the words and I went up to his flat and he said come here and I went into his bedroom and he played me complete control. And I thought you can't do that. You know, I thought, the world doesn't want to know about our petty little arguments with our CBS. Ad then, uhm I was kind of humming it, it attaches somehow and we recorded it and it's one of the best on record that came out of London, I mean the finished thing you know. Just shows that, showed me that you can't make a snap judgment about anything really. It came out to be a really good track. We don't play it in America very much, it's more of a British thing. Last night, when we played, I asked my tour manager, haven't seen him since October, you know, he's an American guy. I said, 'Well Chuck, what did you think after the show?,' right? He said, 'Hum, set needed some work.' I said, 'In what direction Chuck?' and he said, 'Well that was too adventurous for the audience.' He thought, ...I don't know, the reggae stuff a bit sort of ... people wanted rock there."

"They said release 'Remote Control'

But we didn't want it on the label

They said, Fly to Amsterdam

The people laughed but the press went mad

Ooh ooh ooh someone's really smart

Ooh ooh ooh complete control, that's a laugh

On the last tour my mates couldn't get in

I'd open up the back door but they'd get run out again

At every hotel we was met by the Law

Come for the party - come to make sure!



Ooh ooh ooh have we done something wrong?
Ooh ooh ooh complete control, even over this song
They said we'd be artistically free
When we signed that bit of paper
They meant let's make a lotta mon-ee
An' worry about it later
Ooh ooh ooh I'll never understand
Ooh ooh ooh complete control - lemme see your other hand!
All over the news spread fast
They're dirty, they're filthy
They ain't gonna last!
This is Joe Public speaking
I'm controlled in the body, controlled in the mind
Total
C-o-n control - that means you!"
"Complete Control"

This tribute to Joe Strummer and The Clash will end with me telling how I met The Clash. I heard they were playing in Amarillo, and immediately I called their record label. "No way!." I was told by a publicity rep. at the record label. "No interviews!" So, I jumped in my car and drove a couple of hours to Amarillo. I knew a guy who played in a new wave band in Amarillo ... The Amatones – very cool group ... Surely he would have a lead on the band. As fate would have it ... my buddy knew someone who worked at a hotel ... in which The Clash just happened to be staying. I drove to the hotel and out around the swimming pool, I found these four pale Brits, getting some Texas sun. They were friendly, open and invited me to come backstage for their concert that night. And, Strummer also invited me back the next day to spend the morning in an interview, after his daily swim.

Seeing the mellow, thoughtful, almost gentle side of Strummer – which seem to so-ooo conflict with his macho stage persona ... now, 20 years later, it seems so perfect that he is up for The Grammy for a reggae rendition, with Johnny Cash.



"But we're kind of tired of people think ... 'Oh just play reggae just have to go (sings) ... ya know? But we want to learn something from reggae that can't be put into words, something about the whole sound of it, not just the ... Who wants to hear a song about pressurized water reactors, you know? Sometimes I get into like bad moods and I think, 'they just want to hear (sings Boy George/Culture Club song) 'Do you really want to ...' which, there is nothing wrong with that that and that was a great record but then when I hear ... when I turn to a reggae record, and I hear a guy on the air, like Marley and some sort of rustic soul songs that gives me bit of uhm, what do you say?, encouragement."

For more, see what Bono, Geldof and others had to say about Joe Strummer:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/music/2601287.stm>

And, finally, here is the obituary from The BBC:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/music/2600955.stm>

Rock The Casbah!