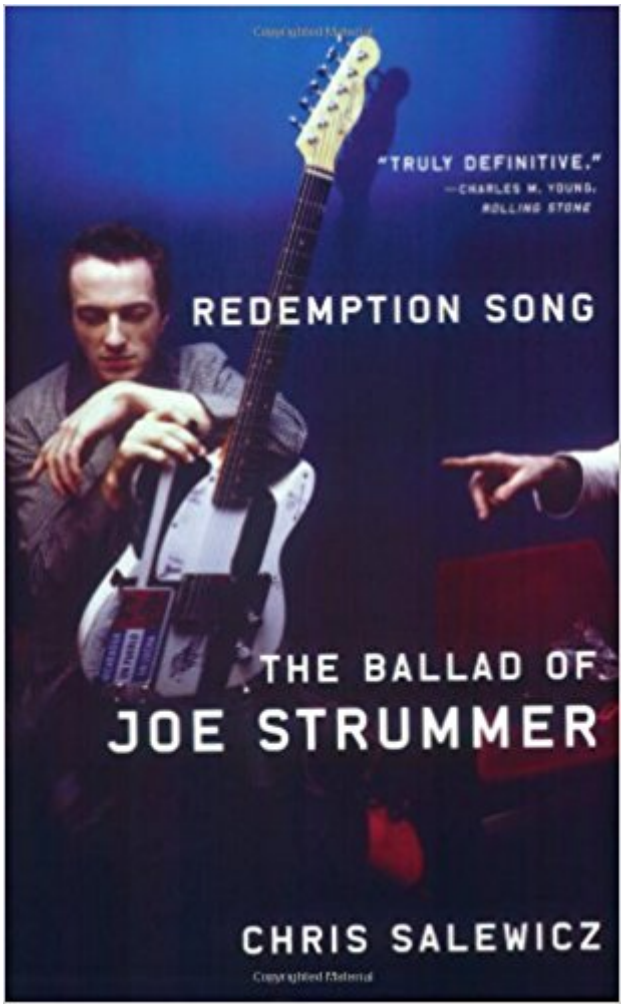
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Redemption Song: The Ballad Of Joe Strummer



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Synopsis

With exclusive access to Strummer's friends, relatives, and fellow musicians, music journalist Chris Salewicz penetrates the soul of an rock 'n roll icon. The Clash was--and still is--one of the most important groups of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Indebted to rockabilly, reggae, Memphis soul, cowboy justice, and '60s protest, the overtly political band railed against war, racism, and a dead-end economy, and in the process imparted a conscience to punk. Their eponymous first record and London Calling still rank in Rolling Stone's top-ten best albums of all time, and in 2003 they were officially inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Joe Strummer was the Clash's front man, a rock-and-roll hero seen by many as the personification of outlaw integrity and street cool. The political heart of the Clash, Strummer synthesized gritty toughness and poetic sensitivity in a manner that still resonates with listeners, and his untimely death in December 2002 shook the world, further solidifying his iconic status. Salewicz was a friend to Strummer for close to three decades and has covered the Clash's career and the entire punk movement from its inception. He uses his vantage point to write Redemption Song, the definitive biography of Strummer, charting his enormous worldwide success, his bleak years in the wilderness after the Clash's bitter breakup, and his triumphant return to stardom at the end of his life. Salewicz argues for Strummer's place in a long line of protest singers that includes Woody Guthrie, John Lennon, and Bob Marley, and examines by turns Strummer's and punk's ongoing cultural influence.

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Customer Reviews

In this biography of punk icon Joe Strummer, music writer Salewicz focuses on the heady days of

the punk explosion and Strummer’s long hiatus after leaving the Clash. Born John Graham Mellor in 1952 in Ankara, Turkey, to diplomat parents, Strummer enjoyed a peripatetic childhood before being parked at a British boarding school. An art school dropout, Strummer (who was known then as "Woody") lived a hand-to-mouth existence in London squats before rock impresario Bernie Rhodes selected him to head a new punk band, and Woody became Joe Strummer, the sardonic, gravelly voiced rabble rouser. For a long moment, the Clash channeled the most progressive elements in pop culture, blending punk anger, rasta vibes, bank robbers, cowboys and revolutionary traditions into music that remains compelling today. After the band’s breakup in 1985, Strummer fell into a long depression that Salewicz attributes to heavy pot smoking and a family legacy that included his brother’s suicide. Yet Strummer had revitalized his career and was making excellent music before his sudden death of heart failure in 2002. As a young writer in the punk years, Salewicz had plenty of access to Strummer, and does a good job of providing a blow-by-blow account of the tours and albums. However, Salewicz provides little historical context, thereby diminishing the importance of the Clash. Despite nearly 600 pages of analysis, Strummer remains an opaque figure. (May) Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Salewicz recounts the passage of John Mellor, aka Joe Strummer, front man for the iconoclastic punk band the Clash, who died in 2002 of a congenital heart defect. A diplomat’s son, he was born in Ankara, went to boarding school in London, and later became a squatter before singing with a pub rock band. After he saw the Sex Pistols in 1976, he was invited to join the Clash, which immediately drew attention for its adrenaline-fueled performances and "not overearnest" protest songs. The band produced a number of critically acclaimed albums, London Calling being the best known. After ill-advisedly firing cofounder-guitarist Mick Jones, which he regretted for the rest of his life, Strummer entered his wilderness years, recording soundtracks and acting in a few movies before finding his way back to critical success in the Mescaleros. Salewicz reveals a brooding, self-medicating manic-depressive, blunt but charming, thoughtful but reckless, both family man and womanizer. Salewicz’s scores of interviews with those who knew Strummer also reveal a well-loved, immensely talented man who died too soon. Benjamin SegedinCopyright Ã Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As a one hundred per cent Clash fan who has everything they ever recorded and has read every book available on the subject I must say this is the best book I have ever read on Joe Strummer. I

found out things I never knew. The highlights for me were on Joe's life before and after The Clash. Chris Salewicz was a personal friend of Strummer and has managed to make him into a real three dimensional person, like no book on him I have ever seen. Joe Strummer is not always seen that way, but more as an icon.Great read and I felt a little bereaved when I finished it.

This book is a must for anyone who's a fan of Joe Strummer. It details his life, his projects, his personal struggles. It shows him as he truly was, with all the flaws he had. An amazing read, written by someone who closely knew Joe.

I have just finished reading this book and it took around 4 nights and a weekend. It is around 650 pages, the same length as Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness but I don't know whether anything can be inferred from that. I cried some tears at the last page, being a huge Strumnmer and Clash fan. It was great that he reconciled with Mick Jones at the end and also with Gaby. Mick joined Joe on stage in November 2002 in a benefit concert for the striking workers of the fire brigade union.The book does a great job in filling us in on Strummer's "wilderness years" which lasted from around 1985 to 1998. Also it fills us in on much of his romantic escapdes and his battles with depression. I almost came away wishing that I had not known some of this. If Strummer was still alive, I doubt that the biography would have exposed him so fully. He really has nowhere left to hide after this book. Salewicz clearly is confused when he recounts Joe's romantic associations during the Gaby years. He is unsure whether to moralise against Joe or to brush it to one side as just a great man's excesses of love for humanity. Although Salewicz comes off as somewhat confused and a fence-sitter, he does a fair job in tackling some difficult issues connected with his subject.The book presents many examples and stories of Strummer's genuine kindness and fraternal ethics. Many of the stories are new. I like the story of Joe buying Simonon an extra pair of sunglasses when both were broke in 1976 and of how he later paid 30,000 pounds to one of Topper's drug dealers to save Topper's legs. Overall, I feel the perspective we gain of Strummer in the book is probably a fair and balanced one although it leaves him hopelessly exposed and more vulnerable in death than he was even in life.The discussions of the boarding school years and Strummer's pre-Clash adulthood covers much ground already covered in Pat Gilbert's excellent Passion is a Fashion (see my review for that book on this site) and Savage's England's Dreaming. Salewicz adds little here. What is new is some revealing interview responses from two of Joe's multi-cultural rock chicks, Jeanette Lee and Paloma. Also new is some insight and information about John Mellor and the Croydon home. Don Letts plays a less significant role in the book than I feel he did in real

life. The Sex Pistols too are largely ignored by Salewicz suggesting that he has not placed the Clash within their true historical context. John Lydon shared many views with Strummer and should have featured more prominently in the book. Was he even interviewed?I preferred Gilbert's book over this one because the Clash was a cohesive whole and focussing on one member in particular takes away some of this. I feel that we gain a better picture of the unique association between the Clash's members and their favourite Notting Hill and Ladbroke Grove haunts from Gilbert's book (which oddly is not mentioned at all although Gilbert's name appears in the lengthy Acknowledgements at the back of the book). Probably no other band in history except for perhaps the Jamaican reggae artists have been so tied to a time and place as the Clash (although much of their message remains timeless).I feel that this book presents Mick Jones in a somewhat more favourable light than Gilbert's book. Somewhat oddly we gain a deeper knowledge of Jones (but not of Simonon, Headon, Chimes or the three Mark II guys)from Salewicz's book than from Gilbert's which is supposedly only a Strummer biography. Gilbert does a far better job than Salewicz regarding the Clash Mark II. The Mark II years are not covered well by Salewicz. Possibly he felt he did not need to re-invent the wheel here given Gilbert's brilliant look into this era.The book tends to be overly detailed and I don't rate it as a five-star book. Nonetheless, it is very good. Strummer should be remembered as one of the most important social commentators of the twentieth century.

This book is not an easy read. It is a chronological biography that is virtually day to day at some points. You discover what his child hood was like and how he ends up as a member of The Clash. Once you get into his music career things slow way down and we hear about every mundane thing he did from that point on. If you need to know every detail about Joe Strummer then this is the book for you. I still haven't made it through the entire book as I can only read a little at a time. Everything is written very matter of fact. No story telling here just the facts. Written by a very close associate, so he knows the details. but man add a little more pizzazz to the words so it isn't making me fall a sleep.

This book is really good but only if you're into the Clash. I think if you are not a fan of the band, you probably won't like this biography. Even as a Strummer fan I found some slow and confusing pages, but all in all,this is a good read.

mos xclnt

A touching and heartfelt, as well as nicely researched, bio of one of rock's most worthwhile characters. If a bit overlong, it certainly doesn't lack for either detail or focus. This is a fittingly fine bio of a man whose work touched those who cared quite deeply and profoundly.

Wow, it seemed like I had this book on pre-order FOREVER. It was well worth the wait. After reading the book I'm glad it wasn't rushed out and can see why it took a long time to compile. This bio is a monumental project and certainly wasn't thrown together in haste.If I were hypercritical I might complain that there were times I found it hard to follow just who was being quoted, or if the author was simply relating his own experience, but I won't dwell on that. The subject matter is simply too precious and the anecdotes told just too special to quibble over the small stuff. Though Joe barely made it past 50, the book relates the experiences of many folks in Stummer's life and certainly has a huge amount of ground to cover. I just couldn't put it down. When I reached the end I felt almost as sad as the day...well, you know.If you are a fan of Joe Strummer, The Clash, punk rock or grew up through the late 70's-early 80's, you cannot and should not avoid this book!

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