

STRUMMERFEST



“WHY NOW?” “WHAT FOR?” & “JOE WHO?”

It was 40 years ago this year that John Graham “Woody” Mellor (nicknamed after Woody Guthrie) started down the path that would lead him to international fame. That was the year (1976) that he officially took on the name “Joe Strummer” as front man for a fledgling rock band that was soon to be known as “the only band that matters,” *The Clash*. For almost ten years *The Clash* both dominated and defined the genre that came to be called “punk rock”, contributing a prolific and diverse array of music for which they were admitted in 2003 to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Unfortunately, that honour came just months too late for Mellor to enjoy, as he had died of a congenital heart defect on December 22, 2002, at just 50 years old.

Prior to his death, Mellor, still using the Joe Strummer name, was on the cusp of reclaiming a level of recognition like the one he had achieved with *The Clash*. After years of dabbling in acting, producing movie soundtracks and releasing a solo album, his new project – *Joe Strummer and The Mescaleros* – was touring the world and releasing albums with catchy, original songs, some of which were used in movies including *Black Hawk Down* and *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*. Blending aspects of pop, disco, folk, funk, reggae, rock and world music, Mellor was again defining a style of his own just prior to passing away.

STRUMMERFEST celebrates the music and memory of Joe Strummer; but, more than this, it seeks to celebrate the attitudes and ideals that he consistently tried to share. Joe Strummer was not one of those stereotypes of the punk music scene full of unchannelled angst and nihilism. Instead, his wife, Lucinda, said of him, “Joe always had a twinkle in his eye... He was fun, the Pied Piper of

Happiness.”¹ He was also the one who said, “Punk rock means exemplary manners to your fellow human being.”² It is that attitude of loving life and respecting people that Strummerfest seeks to extend and exemplify. These are amongst the reasons that Strummerfest primarily supports suicide prevention charities.

Another reason those charitable causes are so appropriate as we commemorate Joe Strummer’s life, is that one of the events that motivated him to live life fully and positively was the early, untimely death by suicide of his older brother, David. This profoundly affected him, just as the fact that suicide is the 9th most common killer in Canada should motivate all of us to seek to do what we can to stem this most avoidable of all causes of death.

Suicide is a brutal but rarely talked about killer. It is the 9th leading cause of death in Canada, yet it receives little attention, possibly due to its discomfiting nature. Suicide is often a result of mental illness and depression, subjects that many people have difficulty discussing.

Strummerfest commends and is pleased to support the work of groups such as the *Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council* and *Your Life Counts*, which seek not only to make resources available to help people struggling on the edge of some of life’s great precipices, but also seek to inform and inspire everyone who is at risk, or whose loved ones may need their support and hope.

We appreciate your interest and support. For music, for memory, and for charity. Thank you.

¹ Source: Salewicz, Chris *Redemption Song: The Ballad of Joe Strummer* (Faber & Faber, 2006) p. 612.

² Source: *CD Now* (September 1999) with Jason Gross.