

was just around the corner in the English Civil War"

Clash Aswad The Members Bongo Danny

Rainbow

Clash are alive. The myths and symbols are vaguely echoed; the vulnerability of the attack on the massive obstacles — of everything from falling in love through struggling for survival to wondering what is the 'cause' — is more obvious than it has ever been.

But Clash are alive.

Alive because caught within the flash where most people aren't even able to blow their noses, Clash are willing to blow their lot. Clash's significant resignation is manifested as the ultimate defiance. And that's positive enough and primitive enough to be actually liberating.

Clash are alive because they refuse to congratulate themselves, could never isolate themselves and because their confusion doesn't render them impotent but infuses the whole being with practical resistance and the urge to uncover.

The Clash are dangerous and alive because with quiet

industry they've reached a stage where they are something a lot more than simply 'scandalous' within the rock'n'roll network. And they operate with a strange value on the perimeters, avoiding fake pulp publicity, making all sorts of mistakes — showing themselves up and being realistic enough to offer no hope. Because there is no hope.

So who sits back?

Clash are the real sound and

fury. They're the first rock'n'roll band you could call 'dangerous' without chuckling at the same time.

Clash explode through everything once they're on stage. They know more than anybody that that's where it matters.

You only have to look.

I used to blindly follow what everybody else whined about The Clash, what they've read into it; about the frills and the poses and the slogans. Now I

will decide for myself, and I'm going to be right.

They're a sort of blank screen on which the entire history of rock'n'roll achieves a comprehensive focus; corny, splendid, and, er, *rebellious*. They've got all the clichés and all the soul; all the poses and all the grunts.

When Mick Jones keeps his face and body straight and slashes his right hand across his guitar — *that* is rock'n'roll. And it's not silly. It's great!

Before Clash — sharing the bill and the spontaneous, pained outcry against the Southall debacle and completing a moving union — three acts entertained with that mixture of toughness, tenderness and triviality that makes you glow inside.

Bongo Danny And The Enchanters played that busy, droning drop reggae that can easily bore unless you wander around and chat and occasionally drop inside the

rhythms. Part time attention is what you need for this stuff. In the seatless Rainbow that was easily attained; it was a light way to start.

The Members were even better than I hoped for.

You can tell they've been playing a lot lately. Their set was taught and right; pop song after pop song, some verging on the epic, some bumping around an immediately identifiable reggae feel. Nicky Tesco seemed angry and J.C. was in his element. Who needs anything more?

Aswad, despite hints that the event was running well over time, (a deserved Members' encore was apparently out of the question), played a long set.

At first I was bored, my mind kept wandering. But then I noticed my right leg was moving and my fingers clicking. So I concentrated: Aswad are not as languid as a casual listen would suggest. There is depth and strength that you might have to move in close for.

Their music drifted into pokey jamming and choppy doodling, floated around a little, but didn't seem out of place. When Aswad finally left, the atmosphere was thick and sticky and just right.

Clash run out onto the stage, towards a mass of multicoloured hair, sweaty faces and pounding fists, and everything is as it should be. Topper is shoved away. Paul Simonon is loose limbed and beautiful. Mick Jones is a red guitar hero. Joe Strummer is a contorted leader.

Clash are a hard rock group, but calling them that — and inadvertently incorporating all the traditions of rock'n'roll

that are really irrelevant — it must be said that no one else deserves the title.

Clash are *hard*, but it goes far beyond a mere label, a simple cosy dismissal.

They do what has to be done — thinking about the plectrum, thinking about a clenched nose — and play each moment for all it's worth. You don't know what this really means until you see Joe Strummer inching towards the drum stand, side on, legs twitching, guitar on hip, face wrecked, fingers flurrying.

They thrash time, do it for themselves (which accounts for some of the posing), and push it so that everything threatens to collapse and there are a lot of holes. But the spirit keeps it together as much as needs be.

And faced with an audience whose responses are as mechanical as everyone says The Clash's poses are, they need that spirit.

The Clash are audacious, natural, contrived: everything and nothing. The moment matters, and no more. The moment can hurt. But perhaps only because I wanted it to (and at the moment I'm making the rules).

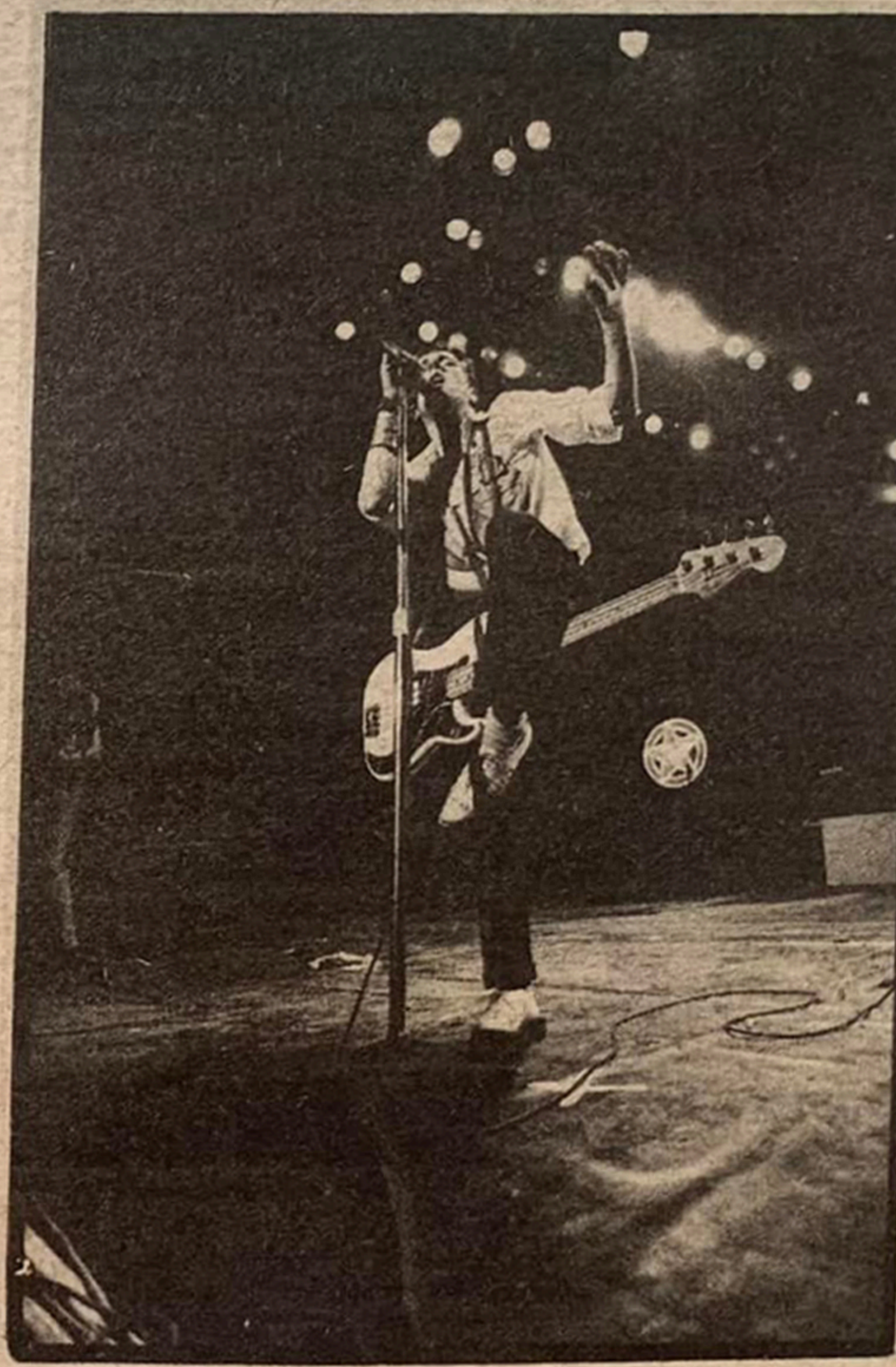
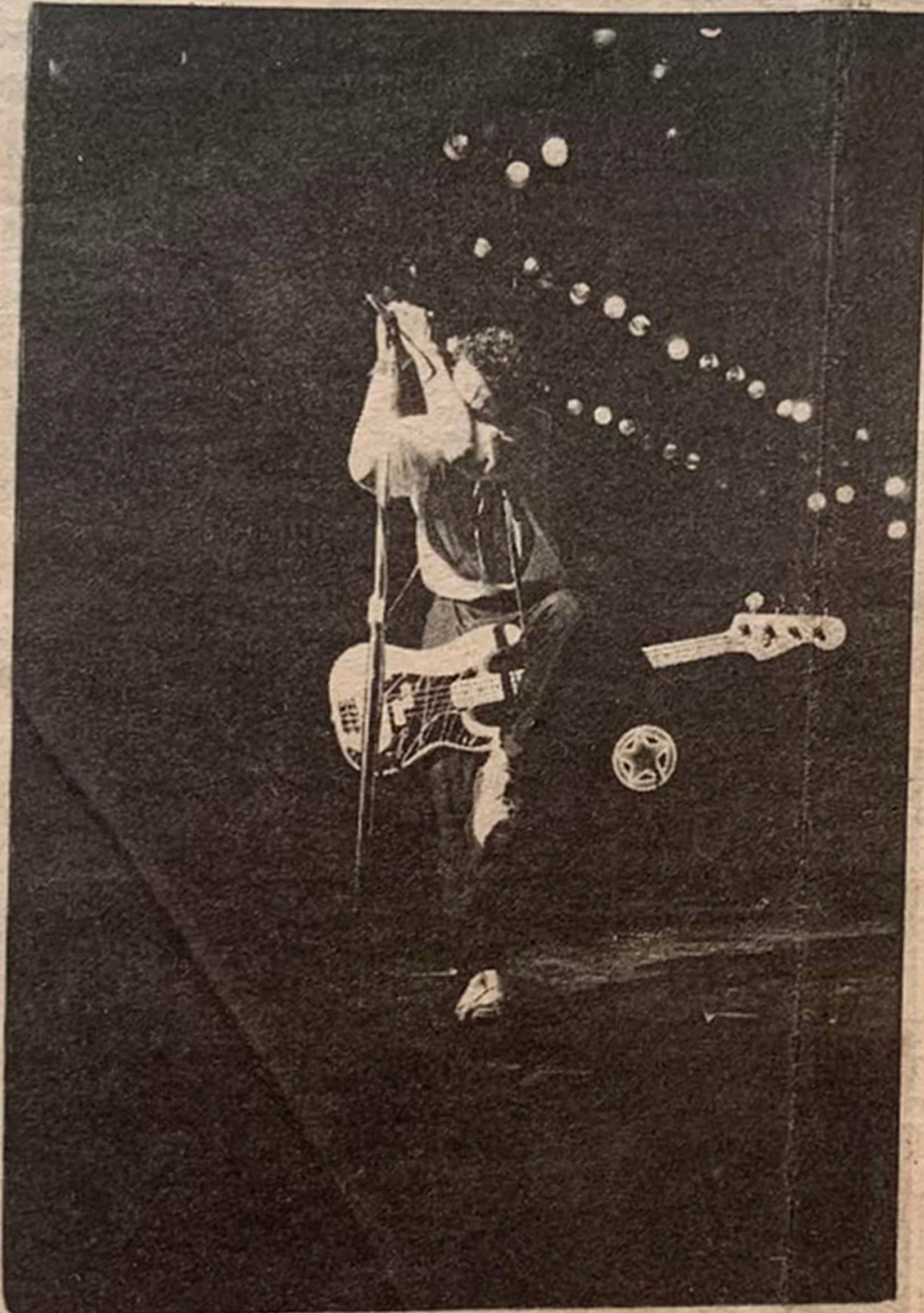
This was a ragged sort of gig, but I think that it's the totality that is far more important than a single event. It started off like something important, but soon wilted. Perhaps it was because there were lots of new songs, and people just weren't familiar with them.

I thought the new songs sounded like masterpieces, but then you've probably learned not to trust me by now.

The Clash have a long way to go, but they're closer than anyone else that I can think of. No one knows what to do with them these days, but I've made my mind up.

The Clash are alive!

Paul Morley



Pix Pennie Smith



Joe Strummer wreaks havoc upon his favourite Woolworths Top Twenty 'axe' (Not good enough — what sort of guitar does he really play? — Ed.) (Awful — T-Zers Ed.) at the Rainbow Southall Kids benefit. He spent the rest of the time using a bass — though strictly as a prop. Full report P.47/8. Pic: Pennie Smith.

The general tone of the event can best be summed up as Good Chaps Doing Good Deed, but on the Saturday night Joe Strummer was Not Particularly Amused at the continual deluge of hi-velocity saliva that sullied his person, instrument and general environs during The Clash's set. Is there any way we can entice these turkeys into a time machine and send 'em back to '76 where they can go about their strange tribal rites without upsetting sensitive artists?