Great American Greases

Los Angeles 10/9/79

What am I doing here? I got on this tour because I wanted to do some paintings about rock and roll. About what shows are like. The light and the lights, the audiences, the performers from the audience point of view, the stage. I had an idea that I could convey something that the camera, and the kind of heroic, icon-like images that most rock and roll paintings have been concerned with, perhaps couldn't. That was a month and a continent ago and I've had plenty of second thoughts along the way. Simply being out of England at a time when things are getting tougher is obviously guilt-inducing. I've stood among American audiences or at the side of the stage on many nights through this tour wondering what the hell I was doing here and why the Clash were away from England as another Winter and all that entails, closes in. I'm massively compromised of course, but it's never going to be 1977 again, there's such a transparent desire by the band that they galvanize the audiences out here into doing something for themselves, (what they've always striving for in England) and the fact is that if there is anything honest and worth caring about in contemporary rock and roll, it's still best embodied in this band. And paintings. Do paintings matter at all? At the moment, I don't know.



SINCE ATLANTA

From Georgia, through Texas to Los Angeles the band have played five shows in seven nights, taking in the Armadillo World Centre in Austin, Texas (one of the few American towns I've seen that I could imagine living in) Dallas and it's Schoolbook Depository, horrible Houston and Lubbock with Buddy Hollymania. Joe Ely has been supporting again, through Texas. It's supposed to be heresy to say so but he could be a great rocker if he got a tight band instead of the usual pedal-steel, accordian, kitchen sink and all mod cons arrangement that he has at present. After the Austin show on the 4th., he did a spot of jamming with a local band plus one M. Jones and one N. Headon for one number (BeBop A Lula) running through a bunch of straight old rockers like 'That's Allright!' 'Whole Lotta Shakin' etc., in a local boozebar. Good stuff which I'd like too see him do with his own band. The Clash show in The Armadillo was a good one - the Club has a nice atmosphere and I nicked a Coors beer jug.

★ By Houston, on the fifth, I was walking in my sleep and I vaguely remember a college show. Pennie Smith flew back to the NME with vast numbers of Clash photographs. It's a great pity that only a small percentage can be used by the weekly music press.

DALLAS, on the sixth, was another big city, another small gig, but a well won audience and a look at the spot where John. F. Kennedy was assassinated. The book depository is far closer to the point where the bullets hit the Presidential limousine than films of the event ever indicate and standing on the road in bright sunlight it's hard to believe that dozens of people wouldn't have spotted Oswald and any accomplicies and nabbed them within minutes. A very surprising place and oddly disturbing to see traffic trundling along the short stretch of road and into the underpass as though nothing special had ever happened there.

P.S. I believe they're cramming these despatches into smaller spaces. Write to complain! Now.



★ What happened in Lubbock on the seventh, was that after the show at the Rox nearly everyone got wasted in their chosen fashion and made a middle of the night visit to Buddy Holly's grave-stone. This was my great error of the tour because I was in such a zombielike state that I went to sleep right after the show and missed what to me, should have been an essential trip. Dreadful time to get knackered but I'm completely well again now and rode the famed Route 66 to Los Angeles on the famous Arpeggio rock and roll bus. The band flew it. What a bunch of softies!

NEXT WEEK: I WALK HOME