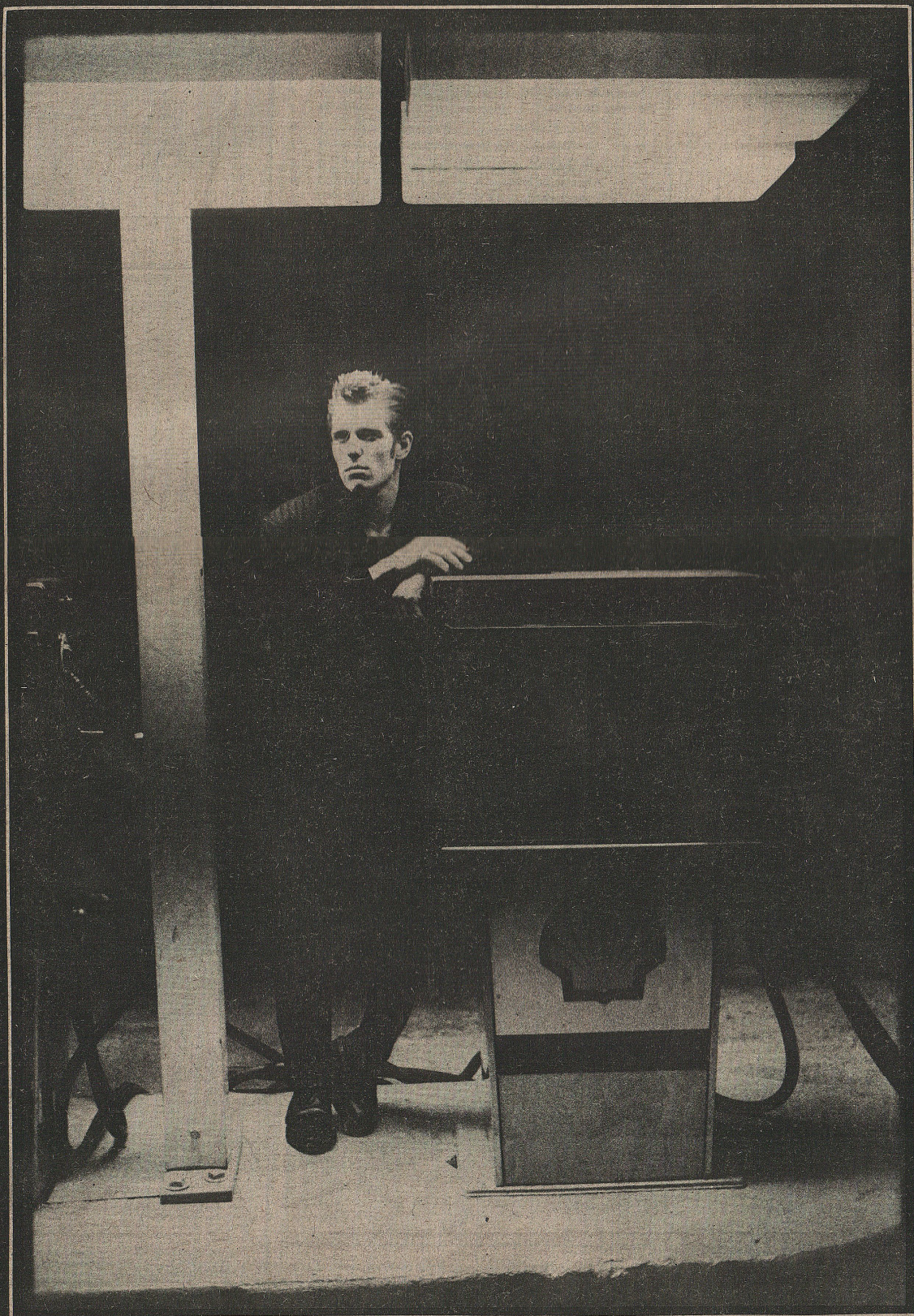


NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

New Sex Pistols

Line-up & album-exclusive details

"I was a Stranglers kidnap victim"—first hand account



Clash USA '79



The Last Gang In The West Leaves Town

Details: PAUL MORLEY

Photography: PENNIE SMITH

DETAILS: The Scene.

The Clash on tour of America. There's a glamorous image, with a confident, crusading edge to it.

The Clash: a lot of hope and responsibility there.

America: it still means a lot.

Clash's current six week coast to coast tip to toe tour of the United States Of America is their first major assault upon the stupefied standards of the land. It follows a few months after their exploratory dip into the stagnant, dense culture waters of America — a six date trip definitively chronicled by Joe Strummer's own frantic pen in the *NME* of March 3rd, 1979.

The tour — titled 'Take The Fifth' — possesses a resistance and direction that sets it well apart from the soft centred, soft hearted British invasion of Sniff 'N' The Tears, The Records, Ian Gomm, Bram Tchaikovsky, et al. The Clash are in America following destiny. The tour has taken on the spirit of a quest. The Quest: abstract words

with a definition much the same as 'punk'. Newchange and choice . . .

In America this is about working towards less Kansas, Styx, Foreigner and Boston and more reggae and Clash on the radio; towards replacing the glazed look in the eyes of American youth with a glint of purpose and passion, towards staying alive, towards saying 'look out'. The Quest is a battle requiring non stop concentration, humour, flexibility and understanding. Blind faith, even.

Joe Strummer will refer to the unknown American audience as the great grey people, maybe something ultimately unreachable. "You know how we can get through here," Strummer will reflect, "I want to get through to the person in high school; you know, all the people that we've got to in the cities, they're sussed, right, it's the kid in the high school who doesn't know anything about it even yet. I hope ultimately we get through to him. Because he's the one at home in his bedroom, he's got Kansas albums and racks of Kiss and all that, and I feel like he should have a dose of us."

But perhaps, paradoxically, it's a victory that The Clash must never complete: "To sell something like Rod Stewart here, that's going to mean that we reach all the nuds, they're gonna have to go out and buy a copy, right, and they ain't even gonna do that because they never heard of us. . . but maybe that's why we are never going to get there; because once you get there, you're fucked. You know what I mean? Maybe we'll never get there."



♦ From page 39

pauses. Strummer screams and clears his throat: "IT AIN'T ABOUT PLAYING THE RIGHT FUCKING CHORD FOR A START!"

What is it about?

"I can't quite put my finger on it," Strummer sneers.

How do you feel about people buying your album? The commercial success?

Strummer: "Well, there's about three people who've bought our album so far."

Jones: "I'd rather they bought ours than somebody else's."

Strummer: "We've sold three records and after this tour we'll sell another three."

What are you trying to do? You're on a tour of American and lots of people are seeing you, far more than three.

Strummer: "If we come to an American city there are approximately 2,400 people who come to see us, who know about us. On the other hand there are ten million zillion people who've never even heard of us in the city, especially those people who go to high school or low school or any other kind of school. I've been in their bedrooms in Virginia or Texas and I've seen their albums stacked up by the bed, and there's Kansas, Boston, Foreigner and I try to say to them, 'These records ain't no good, doncha know about The Yardbirds?' And they say 'Who?' And I say 'Doncha know about The Clash?' And they say 'Who?' And that's it. How are we going to get through to these people? They ain't rushing over to the radio station saying 'Put on a Clash record PUT ON A CLASH RECORD!' They ain't doing that."

Jones: "A lot of the radio stations in America aren't even playing black music ..."

Strummer: "Which is even worse! Never mind The Clash, what about where the music came from!"

Jones: "You're sitting in Minneapolis and you don't even know what reggae music is!"

Strummer: "For every satin-suited platform-soled macho-strutting guitarist, for everyone of those up there in the lights sniffing coke, right, there's like 50 or 60 blackmen starving in the same town who invented the music with their own sweat, and this guy is ripping it off and posing away. It's shit!"

Jones and Strummer had by now successfully succeeded in pulling the conversation away from the confines it looked like it was keeping to. The conversation jumps through discos and theatres and things, Strummer and Jones really wanting to go but keep getting worked up by the questions. They have to answer. Who else will point these

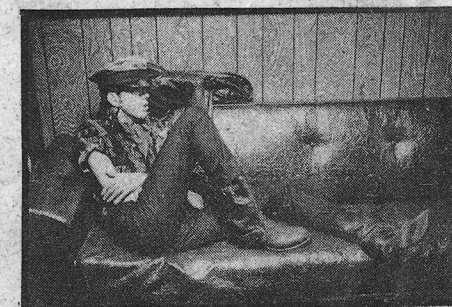
things out? Eventually the careful female voice asks for some final words of wisdom.

Jones: "Keep on complaining." Strummer scrawls TRUE on the wall behind Jones' head as he speaks. "If you want to give us a hand you've really got to do it ... if you want to hear things on the radio you got to ring up the radio station ..."

Strummer: "In Detroit they've got a free radio organisation ... free radio for the '80s, they ain't being passive ... I'd just like to say don't be passive ..."

Jones: "Don't be apathetic."

Strummer: "And we highly recommend that



you go to a show and if you don't like the show you've got to bottle them off stage, you gotta make your feelings felt. That way everybody knows what you want. If you don't tell anybody how they gonna know?"

OK. One more question can I ask: You're signed to CBS, and Columbia and all that stuff, are they trying to put any pressure on you?

Jones: "They try."

Strummer: "We've been on Epic, we've been an artiste on Epic Records for two and a half years and for the first two and a half years they didn't even know we were on the label, and then they found out and they come and shake our hands but they never make with the chequebook baby. We want some cheques, otherwise how we gonna get petrol in the bus to get down to Kansas?"

Jones: "So come on. Hey this is on ABC not CBS!"

Strummer: "CBS never come crawling..."

DETAILS: THE FANS

*Don't ask me to be your hero
I will only let you down*

*Don't ever sleep with your hero
Things will never be the same
All the heroes, like they say*

*They're all dead out of the way
If you see me on the street
Don't attempt to speak to me, cos
If you see me on the street
I won't want to know you*

— Patrik Fitzgerald. Copyright Control

Mick Jones likes the Patrik Fitzgerald song 'Your Hero.' He says that Fitzgerald has got it exactly right, which is odd because Fitzgerald must never have experienced, perhaps only anticipated, what Jones has to go through ... as a new hero.

Even in America, walking down the street, visiting clubs, in the dressing room, teenagers and people in their twenties clamour around Jones, clutch his hand, offer bits of paper for autographs, attempt conversation ... Jones always seems a little unsure ...

"I find the laying of hands a very strange thing. No one's come along and wanted to shake my hand in order to heal me, but they often look to be healed ..."

"Yeah, I know what you mean," agrees Strummer, "they want to shake your hand, but they want to take something, I don't know what ..."

"They never offer anything, or very few do," continues Jones. Even so, Jones often looks for something.

After 20/20 have used The Clash, Jones and Strummer move back to the nearby dressing room, overflowing with New Yorkers. The previous night's New York performance had seen a post gig dressing room filled with slick liggers and empty smilers. For the second night, Jones wanted the fans to be let in.

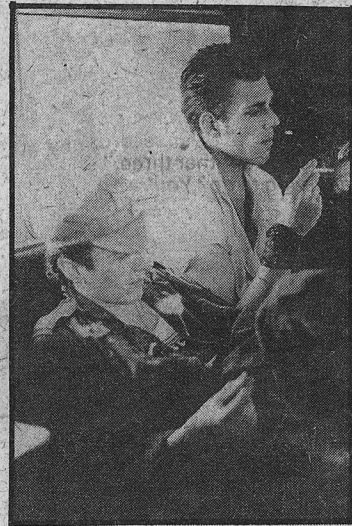
The fans are let in. Stern but not impassive schoolteacher Kozmo Vinyl organises them in batches. Jones never really knows how to handle them, but he wants the experience.

Jones back in the dressing room, fans move in for the kill. Jones, is, unusually, frowning. He's not pleased with the tv performance. He's not as comfortable as the others with Clash's tendency to lark about. "I think we were a bit like Morecambe and Wise," he mutters, "it's like a comedy. It wasn't right, what we're talking about isn't comedy, it's tragedy, the story is a tragedy. Still by the time they've fucking finished with it ..."

All the time Jones is talking to me in the crush of the dressing room he's obliged to sign autographs and put on a brave face through his fretting. "I can refuse, but I feel that I need to explain why I am refusing. In the streets I refuse; it feels like a mutually humiliating experience. This is why now I'm talking to you I'm signing, it takes time to

explain to everybody that it's not worth it. In a situation like this it's better to keep signing. I just hope it doesn't do too much harm."

Doesn't he see it as a sign he's achieving something I ask, as another autograph has to be signed?



"Not at all. If all we've achieved is someone wanting my autograph then I think we've gone wrong."

Jones seems in an emotional mood, a little pensive, so it is a good time to ask him what he wants to achieve. He looks into the distance, oblivious for the moment to the congratulatory hubbub and cry of New York's finest all round him and the people close to looking for a look. The grin has gone.

"What do I want to achieve ... I want things to be different here ... I want things to be different in England ... I want stupid things like people happy ... and real music ... and an end to all the shit ... I just feel to be able to contribute, that's an achievement in itself. Change? Little things do change but it takes a bloody lot longer than people think. In a way that's what I mean when I say there's too many smiles, because although I enjoy the playing I don't want people to think I'm all 'Ha ha ha how you doing let's boogie!' y'know, cos that's no challenge for the audience, that's exactly what they're expecting, and then they get what they expect. Well I hope that we're gonna be something that they don't expect."

He emphasises the *don't*. People around are beginning to listen. I ask him about The Clash

clowing.

"I think there's too much. I do want people to have a great time and enjoy themselves, and I think that's what it's all about really, as far as the concert is concerned right, but somehow I don't feel good unless I feel that they've gone away and thought about it or something ... the after effect, the after taste is what I'm really after."

A small bearded person nearby has been listening. He speaks: "I think everybody buys your record after the show and they get the text."

Jones isn't satisfied. "I don't want everybody to buy the record just because that's what you do after you've seen a group, although I do want people to have the records, but that like ain't the be all and end all of it, it's like only the start when you've got the records. That's where it starts. You've got to hear it and really listen and then maybe there'll be a change. Maybe that's just my imagination ..." Jones is often very self deprecating about his passion.

"Maybe there won't be a change. How does it affect you?" he asks the small bearded person.

The small bearded person comes on like a university lecturer. "I can say that in Belgium there's a lot of people listening to these records and discussing about it, they're saying this, they're saying that, anti-capitalistic things, discussing starts it and then it goes further and further and it starts to change your life, things other than things like money are important, saying everything's beautiful and I love you ... things to change."

Jones pulls a face: "Sounds like George Harrison to me."

"No," retorts the small bearded person, "I'm not an optimist."

"No, I agree with most of the things you say," says Jones, "We're living in the material world! Good old George! I'm going to join a monastery, Paul."

He's alright, I say. He has financed *Life Of Brian*.

Jones' grin twitches. "George Harrison is a good bloke after all! Hey look!" he lunges away and grabs a boy a couple of yards that he'd been talking to before. "Tell this guy what you were saying before about Bored With The USA and New York"

The boy draws at me, with as much a garble as possible with such a slow accent. "They were bored with the USA until they came over here and realised that the fans loved them, realised that The Clash are the ones so we figured that you weren't bored with us no more and you wanted to come here, and then

you play the song.

You've got to keep coming! ... all are.

Jones is pleased that he is having a conversation with a fan that seems quite constructive. He's getting information. He continues reliving the previous conversation they'd had. "What about if we started to sound a bit strange to you, playing all acoustic numbers or something, what would you think of that?"

"That's ok."

"What about jazz?"

"Hang on, you said two things, before you just said acoustic ... acoustic work I like — 'Groovy Times', that is really special maaan ..."

"If we played jazz ..."

"Naaah ... I think we'd fade away a little."

"But they love us now," Jones smiles. The future takes care of itself.

"Aaaw I really love you now," the fan is a fan again. "It's not like The Ramones, they keep playing the same sound!"

"And we are always different!" triumphs Jones. The grin returns. For now at least.



Next Week: More Details — The Show: Before During and After; The Interview, The Radio Show, The Experiencing, The Tedium And Where Will It End? — "You've got to think of it in terms of fifteen rounds. One or two people are finishing the fifteen. We've just finished the first round, but we had a big introduction."