

MUSICIAN

PLAYER & LISTENER

LINDSEY BUCKINGHAM

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THE CLASH

ROBERT FRIPP

INTERVIEWS

JOE

STRUMMER

MICK JONES

PHOEBE SNOW
JOHN MARTYN
R. S. JACKSON
L. TRISTANO
INDEPENDENTS
NEW GUITARS
RECORDING

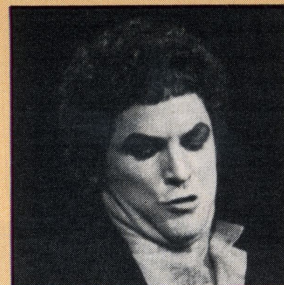


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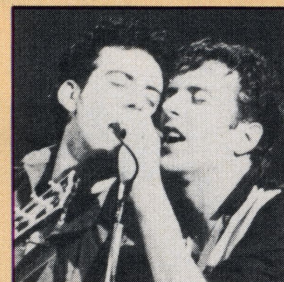
PLAYER & LISTENER

NO. 33, JUNE, 1981

Lindsey Buckingham has lately emerged as the moving creative force behind Fleetwood Mac both on "Tusk" and on their recent tour. Here he talks with Dan Forte about Big Mac's musical growth and directions as well as his own.



The Clash is without question the strongest, most creative group to come out of the punk revolution. In two in-depth interviews Clint Roswell, Vic Garbarini, Robert Fripp, Joe Strummer and Mick Jones talk about the Clash myth and reality, social directions and musical desires.



Ronald Shannon Jackson is the future of jazz drumming right now. He tells his own story, from the heartland of Texas through playing with Ayler, Ornette and Cecil to his monastic retreat learning to express the rhythms between the beats.



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Cover Photo by Steve Sandon

LETTERS

Letter From the Editors

It's strange how a thematic unity will develop in an issue without any specific forethought. This month the increasing difficulties in making a living while performing live music crops up again and again as a prime frustration for even the most seemingly prosperous musicians. R. Shannon Jackson's mystical autobiography continually alludes to press parties, Bar-mitzvahs, and his first duo playing redneck music as an easier and more profitable way of supporting himself than concerts and albums. Robert Fripp yearns to play to audiences of 250 people and begs for "one guy driving me around and two green boxes." Joe Strummer tells us in the same article that his goal is to break even on a tour, a task which he feels nearly as likely as capturing the Holy Grail. Phoebe Snow says flat out, "touring messed me up more than anything." John Martyn gives up working with his wife Beverly because he can do a single and she requires an unwieldy back-up band. One of the most spontaneous and purely personal musical experiences of the rockabilly era is an afternoon jam session with four giants who didn't know the tape machine was running. The scrappy pavement-pounding course of the independent record label project as the last recourse to self-expression is found to be no cakewalk. Lennie Tristano's recourse of retreat into academia pulls him so far out of the mainstream that his vital contribution to jazz is misplaced by historians and critics.

Clearly the economics of the business of "playing out" are more polarized than they have ever been. While the search for a "music of the heart" is a power-link among all the artists profiled this month, their economic support system is virtually unrelated to that aspiration, whether it's Strummer and the Clash playing a bad concert to fans who can't tell, Phoebe being told her niche by her record company, or Jackson saying that Elizabeth Taylor's press agent pays better than the *avant garde*. Sure, this is the oldest story, exploitation of musical innocents, but when it becomes as big a story as the music, when the economics define the art, we've got trouble. No radical suggestions here, just a deep sadness that things never seem to change.

COODER KUDOS

I'm new to your magazine, and I'm truly impressed by the caliber of your

interviews, jazz coverage, and *no-nonsense* album reviews. Especially eye opening was Chris Doering's insight into the nature of Ry Cooder's music and good music in general: "it recognizes silence as an equal, as the condition necessary for listening to the sounds of your heart." Superb!

Joe Bovenzi
Boston, MA

STEELY GUTTER

The interview with Steely Dan showed me that 1) Steely Dan has gone down the gutter; 2) they learned English in the gutter; 3) their album is sad. I'm a DJ at one of the top stations here...I refuse to play these losers...I think I'll listen to Dylan...

Unsigned
El Paso, TX

YES, MR. FABRIANI

My most heartfelt thanks for David Breskin's wonderful interview with Steely Dan in your March issue. It's always enlightening to hear what Mssrs. Becker and Fagen have to say, musically and interview-wise.

In the interest of accuracy, however, I must point out some minor errors. One of Becker's remarks alluded to Tristan Fabriani, a Dan nom de plume from the liner notes from their first album. Also, the correct name of the Ian Dury song that Fagen mentions is "There Ain't Half Been Some Clever Bastards." Also, perjorative contains one "r." I wish you had an interview with them in every issue! Nancy Sluiter
St. Charles, IL

TWEAK ON

Reading each issue of *Musician* is like walking through a house with a lot of rooms. The variety is extraordinary. Meanwhile, you have David Breskin lurking in the attic making the best interviews I've read anywhere recently. So what if he tweaks a few noses here and there. There's a lot more noses around the music industry that need tweaking. So sic 'em, Dave. Cameron Clark
Portland, Maine

C&W B'AR

Whatever happened to Rafi Zabor? I'm out here, living in a trailer with Iris, playing my ass off in C&W bars, cuz jazz won't pay the bills. So where's the rest of the story? The Bear
Tuscon, Ariz.

DANGER OF DOOBIE-IZE-ATION

Don't let your magazine turn into "just another R&R Magazine" to boost your sales to a young rock audience. After reading your Becker/Fagen interview, would big business and bucks mean

happiness? (Their thoughts on Michael McDonald of late.) What true artistic musician would thrive on playing it the same way, the same time, to the same crowd of rowdy kids, every night? No wonder McDonald wants out of a touring band. May "Corny" keep the jazz roots in the Doobies that McDonald started. You see, quality, not bucks and quantity, still stands.

Dave Pruitt
Petersburg, IL

A DREAM DEFERRED

To Don Van Vliet:

Don't tell me I'll never git to see ya, the man with the magic eyes who sees things I don't, to help me through this jungle of people tryin' to control me, they can't but they sure make life unlikelike. Do I have to live in their limitation until I can buy my own?

J. Porter
Sedro Woolley, WA

ROCK ON

I really liked the article on black rock 'n' roll in the Byrne issue. It was very informative, and many people needed to know the contributions black people have made, particularly during the beginning phases of rock 'n' roll. Also, the Eno article was excellent, as well as Robert Fripp's article on bootlegging. Please do an interview with Pete Townshend.

Kip Duvall
Columbia, MD

POET OF THE MONTH

They say that silence is a key to thinking
Yet music can be called upon to think also.
For music is the key to all comforts, a journey to the unknown.
The atmosphere of the world constantly changing it keeps me rearranging.
For I am a key to pop music and a passage to the galaxy for those who wish to be free.
Come along with me for the best is yet to be.
Stay wise and bold forget the old swing with the new tradition read *Musician*.
Champion L. Harris
Mt. Holly, NJ

ERRATUM

Last month we mistakenly credited the magnificent color photograph of Talking Heads on stage (pg. 40-41). The correct photographer is Waring Abbott. Our apologies also to Deborah Feingold who wasn't credited for the Brian Eno color photo on page 49.

By now The Pattern is fairly well established; four frustrated working class types form a group, woodshed, then burst forth on a wave of awesome energy and intensity. They record *The Album*, and as critics fall over themselves searching for *The Adjective*, they become *The Next Big Thing*. And so it was for the Clash, considered

by many to be the finest rock and roll band of our times (by others merely an overrated garage band in overdrive). In the beginning they were crude, raw, politically acute, amateurish and unbelievably intense — the ideal personification of the original punk ethic. Maybe a little too intense for some; their American record companies delayed the release of their epo-

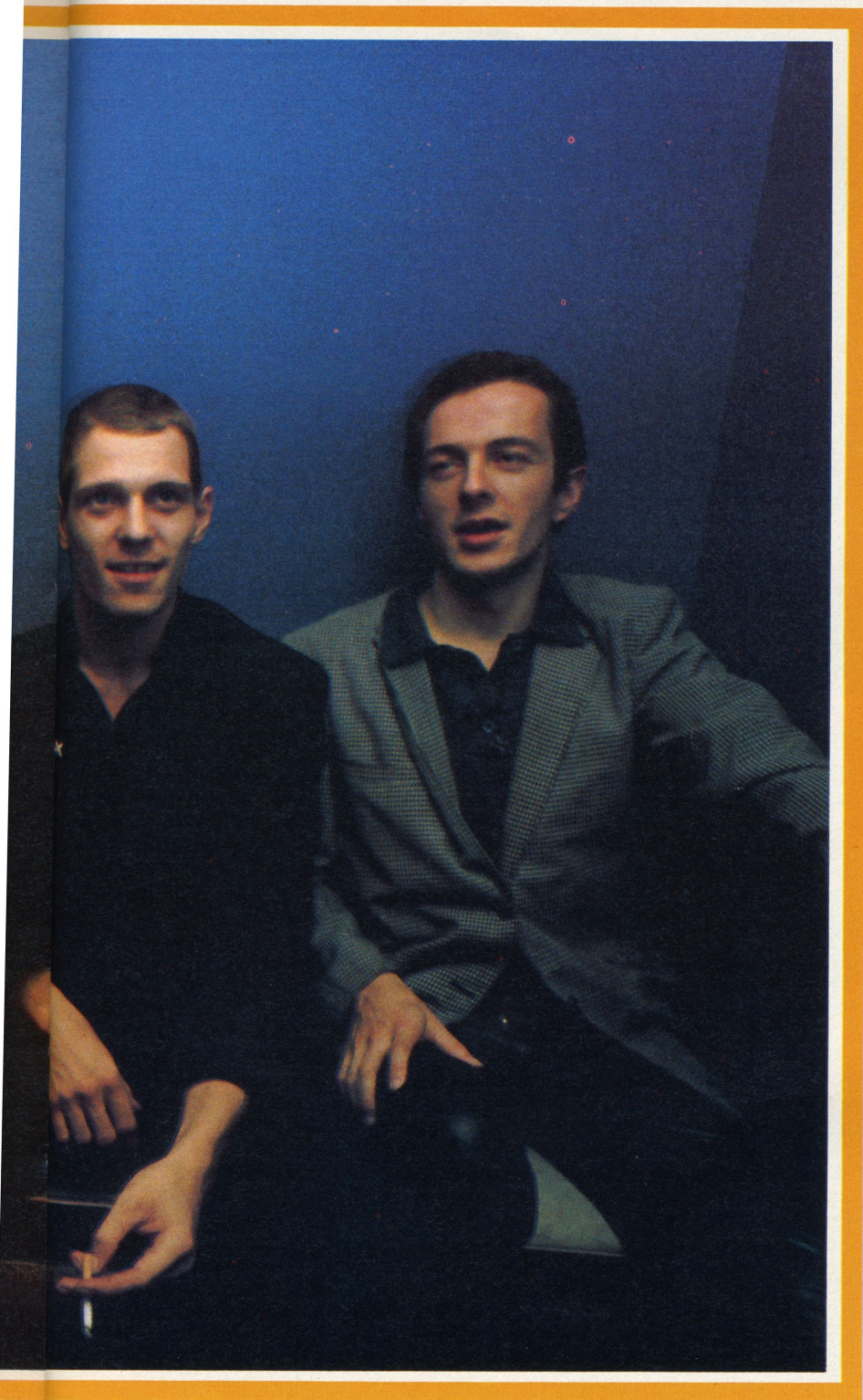


ADRIAN BOOT

nymously titled debut album for almost two years after its English release in 1977. Their second English (and first American) album, *Give 'Em Enough Rope* served up the same volatile amount of frustration, anger and hope as *The Clash*, this time buffed and shined to a gloss by American producer Sandy Pearlman. By the summer of '79 vocalist/guitarist Joe

THE

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Paul Simonon and Mick Jones



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

ROUGH BOYS

***"Rough Boys running the streets
come a little closer
Rough Boys gonna get inside
your bitter mind"***

P. Townshend

By Clint Roswell

Strummer, lead guitarist Mick Jones, bassist Paul Simonon, and drummer Topper Headon had reached a crisis point familiar to all students of The Pattern. That primal burst of creative frustration that had fueled the punk explosion was fast running out of petrol, and the pack was beginning to thin out. As the initial impulse waned, the so-called new wave bands were faced with a perplexing dilemma; how could they continue to refine and develop their musical abilities without losing contact with a creative spark that had made it all worth doing in the first place? What was to prevent them from gaining the world and yet losing their souls like the art rock bands of the late 60s and early 70s, whom they so roundly detested?

In early 1980 the Clash neatly resolved this paradox with *London Calling*, an album that was both a quantum leap in sophistication, and an essential re-information of the spirit and

values that had established their authority four years ago. In expanding their musical horizons, they raced freely over the entire history of rock, drawing on rockabilly, early R&B, jazz, folk music, and reggae — and even coming up with a hit single with "Train in Vain." Predictably, fickle British critics staged a white riot of their own, lambasting the album and the group for what they chose to construe as a sellout to the American market. But any doubts about the Clash's continuing vitality were settled by their third American tour. Onstage at New York's Palladium, the Clash was a literally stunning experience for many, roughly equivalent to meeting a runaway locomotive head on, or kissing a lightning bolt. How do they do it? What's the secret? If there's been one consistent, crucial factor in the Clash's attitude and approach of the last five years, it's been their unyielding sense of commitment — to their music, their public, and to their own sense of integrity. For

this band, that is truly the tie that binds. It holds them together and sustains their will, creativity, and essential identity, regardless of whatever outward transformations the band may undergo. It keeps them awake, alive, and honest, and provides them with the determination to withstand the continuing backlash launched by the English press against their latest release, *Sandinista!*, a three-record set consisting primarily of dubbing, reggae tunes, orchestrated ballads, and other esoterica. *Sandinista!* is a further departure from punk orthodoxy, and as such really has the English press up in arms.

"It's amazing, isn't it, all the bad press we've gotten in England," acknowledged Jones, the 25-year-old guitar-wielding rebel who founded the group in 1977. "We have been accused of selling out to the Americans, which is so untrue...our songs deal with England, the U.S.A., South America, Russia, China. England has turned against the Clash because a prophet is never welcome in his own home. We've come up with a pretty high prophecy quotient and they can't stand us for it, as if we're above it all."

But there is substance to their music that goes beyond the mouthing of juvenile anthems. They are punk without pretension. There is energy without hype. They are direct without being simple. The Clash are trying to get a message across, even if sounds sometimes as bracing as a slap in the face. They want to wake us up to the rhythms of the age.

Jones was an art student going nowhere six years ago, hoping to form a band when he met bassist Simonon at a rehearsal in which future PiL guitarist Keith Levene was also playing. Simonon tried out as a singer but couldn't hit a note, and he didn't fare much better on the bass. But Jones took one look at the gawky skinhead who was raised, like Jones, in the trenches of lower-class Brixton, and invited Paul to join the band.

"I grew up listening to reggae on a jukebox in my neighborhood where you could only hear the bass lines," recalled Simonon. "I think it was probably true that I wasn't a good musician at first."

"But I think that playing along to reggae records really helped me and now I feel very active on the bass. I've been working on reggae and dub with a fretless bass that gives me the feel I want. I think each of us contributes another dimension to the band."

It was Simonon who named the group the Clash, saying it was the one word he read most in the newspaper. "The Clash have always been different because no one has our outlook. We're neither left nor right, but we sing of the oppressed because that's who and what we are. Our music's about politics, sure, but it's spelled with a small 'p.' We're much more interested in making a social statement that will make people aware of what's going on."

"I know we've been criticized for doing reggae, but it's a very flexible musical form which allows us the freedom to mesh with other styles. People say white blokes can't do reggae, but that's a lot of shit. We grew up in Brixton, all the people I knew were black, we shared the same common experience. I didn't discover reggae in a book. I grew up with it. It's part of me. A lot of black people and Jamaicans get mad at us because we do it better than they do."

It was Junior Mervin's "Police And Thieves" that brought the Clash instant popularity as a fledgling club band. They played their first gig opening for the Sex Pistols, but it was "White Riot," delivered by a ferocious-looking singer named Joe Strummer, who had come over to the Clash from 101ers, that rocked the boat. That driving indictment of establishment rock became an anthem for the British punk movement, which now had a political conscience in the Clash.

The Clash created their own chaos wherever they went. They still are subject to their own inability or reluctance to deal with the outside world. Management problems have followed the band, partially due to their uncompromising distaste for record company business and their tightly-wrapped egos.

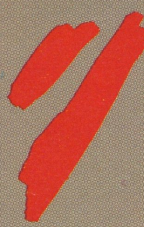
"We're just unmanageable," says Simonon, a 25-year-old matinee idol with blond hair framing a sculptured face. "We've

always like the managers we had, but the four of us are liable to do four different things when a manager tells us something. I don't know what it is about the situation.


"Maybe the tipoff came early after we had just signed with CBS Records and were coming back to London after a tour. A limousine was waiting to take us to the studio. A van for our equipment pulled up behind it. We all looked at each other, threw the baggage in the limo and got in the van. Something like a limousine has always been held up to ridicule by anyone who is poor or who comes from a neighborhood where you see only fat politicians inside."

The Clash have retained that lean and hungry look over the years because they have not fallen prey to the trappings of commercial success. Joe Strummer, the singer and prolific lyricist, sets the example. He has recently taken to squatting in his attempt to take up residence in overcrowded London, a major reason why the band has not toured for months after the January release of *Sandinista!*.

And although the band has five albums out, including three released in 1980 which contain 63 songs, the group has deferred the usual quantum leap in social status afforded rock stars for the cold comforts of still remaining within spitting distance of the street.



"A limousine was waiting to take us to the studio. A van for our equipment pulled up behind it. We all looked at each other, threw the baggage into the limo, and got in the van."



That doesn't mean, however, that musically the Clash has remained a three-chord garage band. Quite the contrary; they have invested all their money into studio equipment and have undertaken individual projects, including film. The most active has been Jones, the lead guitarist, who has become an accomplished producer. He has worked with England's Theatre Of Hate, plus former boyhood idol, Ian Hunter of Mott The Hoople, and most notably, singer and steady, Ellen Foley, as well as all the Clash albums.

"People think the Clash can't write love songs," says Jones, who returned to Foley's West Side apartment bearing flowers and three hours late for dinner. "Working with Ellen gave us a chance to do stuff we regularly don't do for the Clash. It worked out well all around, letting us expand our range a little."

But it's the combined efforts of the four musicians that make up the Clash that give meaning and direction to their lives. "It's something we all realize is very powerful and keeps us in tune with our viewpoints," says Simonon, an admitted insomniac, who has been handling the group's management and legal duties lately.

It is precisely this lack of prurient interest that keeps the band fresh and open to new ideas. Despite being the musical force whose thrashings ignited the politics of punk, they have defied classification as a musical band recognized as one of the most potent of its era. It is the diversity of styles, the strident lyrics of Strummer, and the understated power of their reggae-pushed backbeat that makes the Clash unique while still remaining true to its musical direction. It is a derivative band which has synthesized past musical formats into a new approach.

It is also their willingness to experiment with different musical concepts and incorporate them into galvanizing social anthems that keeps the Clash a step ahead of predictability. This is most evident on *Sandinista!*, titled after the Nicaraguan revolutionaries who successfully toppled the Somoza regime in 1979. There is barely a mention of *Sandinista* in this album, as will be explained later by Jones, but the music has a subliminal militant feel, summoned up by a pervasive dance beat which lends itself to the political fervor of Strummer's

lyrics. Songs from the rap-inspired, "The Magnificent Seven," to the freewheeling calypso of "Let's Go Crazy" and the searing militancy of "One More Time" to the sinewy reggae rhythm of "The Crooked Beat" are traversed with commanding expertise by the Clash.

"We may fool everybody and do a straight rock album the next time out," says Simonon, "but the first rule about punk is that there are no rules. We just want to keep moving forward all the time."

The Clash are calling out the music world. They have played their rebel hand to the fast and furious, and now believe *Sandinista!* is the ace in the hole that throws the cultism off their backs.

MUSICIAN: Are you going to be able to play *Sandinista!* live?

JONES: It's hard to say. It probably won't be anything like the record. What we're going to do is take numbers from it and we'll probably sound like the group from the first album playing the stuff like it came from the third album. It will probably be just the four of us on stage, as opposed to the last tour when we brought Mickey Gallagher (on keyboards, a member of Ian Dury's Blockheads). Maybe it will be a bit raw and maybe it won't... (laughs)... we're so sophisticated now it will sound more like the record than I first thought. I'm looking forward to it, myself.

MUSICIAN: You're laughing now because you brought up the word "sophisticated," does that seem pretentious for you?

JONES: Not pretentious. Just of all things, I never thought I'd end up "sophisticated." That's what the people said about the last album, *London Calling*, that "Spanish Bombs" was so sophisticated, so serious, and we said... well, we have a sense of humor, too. A lot of the stuff we do is funny as well. The appeal is to more than just one sort of people.

MUSICIAN: It seemed something was really happening on *Sandinista!*, that the band was enjoying its own chaos yet making a clear message.

JONES: We enjoyed the actual thought of it and the actual deed of it. We decided on this one that we wouldn't do anything which didn't mean anything, as far as the lyrics were concerned. It was great because there was a book of them by the end of it. It was really something to look at and read. That's how we put the information across.

MUSICIAN: Yet, you made the title of your album, *Sandinista!*, even though it's just a topic within "Washington Bullets" one of 36 songs on the album.

JONES: Yeah, because we set a precedent in making the title useful. We wanted to attract attention to it. That was the concept of the title. You have this really cultural work, much more culturally overbalanced than it is practical. Yet we made a practical use for the title.

MUSICIAN: Is that one of the reasons behind *Sandinista!*, to be a musical and political manifesto?

JONES: No. It's really just the passing of information. That's just another way of doing it. We're thinking about another way now. But that's really the reason behind it. If people can't handle it, in terms that it's too much to take, let them take a year over it like we did. That's what it comes down to. That's sort of the reason we're going to start thinking just about singles now, we've had enough of albums. We're going to pay attention to the singles market.

MUSICIAN: Do you think you'll ever have one in the Top 40?

JONES: Without a doubt... if we put our minds to it.

MUSICIAN: I'm interested in the progression of albums and how the group has changed its course.

JONES: On the first record, we didn't know what we were doing. And we hardly remember what we did, because we were way out there. The second one, we didn't know what was happening. On the third one, we knew exactly what was happening and we were doing it. It was like rehearsed practicing. On the fourth one, now... it's natural. The chemistry is great in the group and everyone is working hard because each of us is becoming more devoted to developing our individual skills to keep pace with the rest of the band. We all became sort of

synched in to each other, where we could anticipate the notes before we actually played them. That's what happened, musically, that's been the chemistry in which everyone is having fun again. That's been the process of change. We've come back, right, we've gone around a whole circle and now we're ready to begin anew.

MUSICIAN: What's the next step?

JONES: Now there's a need to compress it all again. That's how I see it now. We have to cut it right down. To get a new skeleton.

MUSICIAN: Now you didn't feel this way after *London Calling*, which was a tighter set of music. Do you feel freer because of the experience behind *Sandinista!*?

JONES: It's like we tried it on for this one. At least, that's the way I feel about it. This is more fragmented. We did it because people have a certain way of listening. That's why they can see *London Calling* more clearly. This is like a total challenge... it's more subtle yet it's more overt. It's more fragmented because we don't feel people should conform to what a listening standard is. A lot of those things we put in between the tracks we did out of our own cassettes and put them on because they were related to the tracks. Like the carnival stuff on "Let's Go Crazy." But we did it with no real concept. It's not a concept album. It's just like sharp sequences. Interesting things. It's not like three days in the life... or around the world in three days.

MUSICIAN: Yet, unintentional as it sounds, it comes across as the strongest political statement yet by the group.

JONES: The strongest one was probably the first one... in terms of impact. Once you get past what is a superficial difference, *Sandinista!* is intrinsically the same. You may come back to the first one, it's the new essence. I think the first one was the strongest in terms of a social or socio-political statement because it was the most effective at the time. Now, we're more experienced. We experiment in subtleness. We've done other things and now we're doing something else. It may work or it may not.

MUSICIAN: Is that a progression or a dilution?

JONES: Listen, the bottom line on *Sandinista!* is that you can dance all the way through it. The only thing is you have to dance a certain way. The record has one thing in common... and that's rhythm. It has different rhythms, sure, but they're all in common. The specific idea is that the sort of music we play, we can get away with because the lyrics pack the punch. Say you went to a club and they put on the record; it would sound as good in a club as it would sound at home. You put it on in a club, and all the lyrical meaning is lost, 'cause you're dancing. But it would serve just as well as any other dance record. Yet taking it home, it would serve as something else, serve as an information giver.

MUSICIAN: Is that what punk is all about?

JONES: In England, punk is something different now. Real punk...

MUSICIAN: What is it?

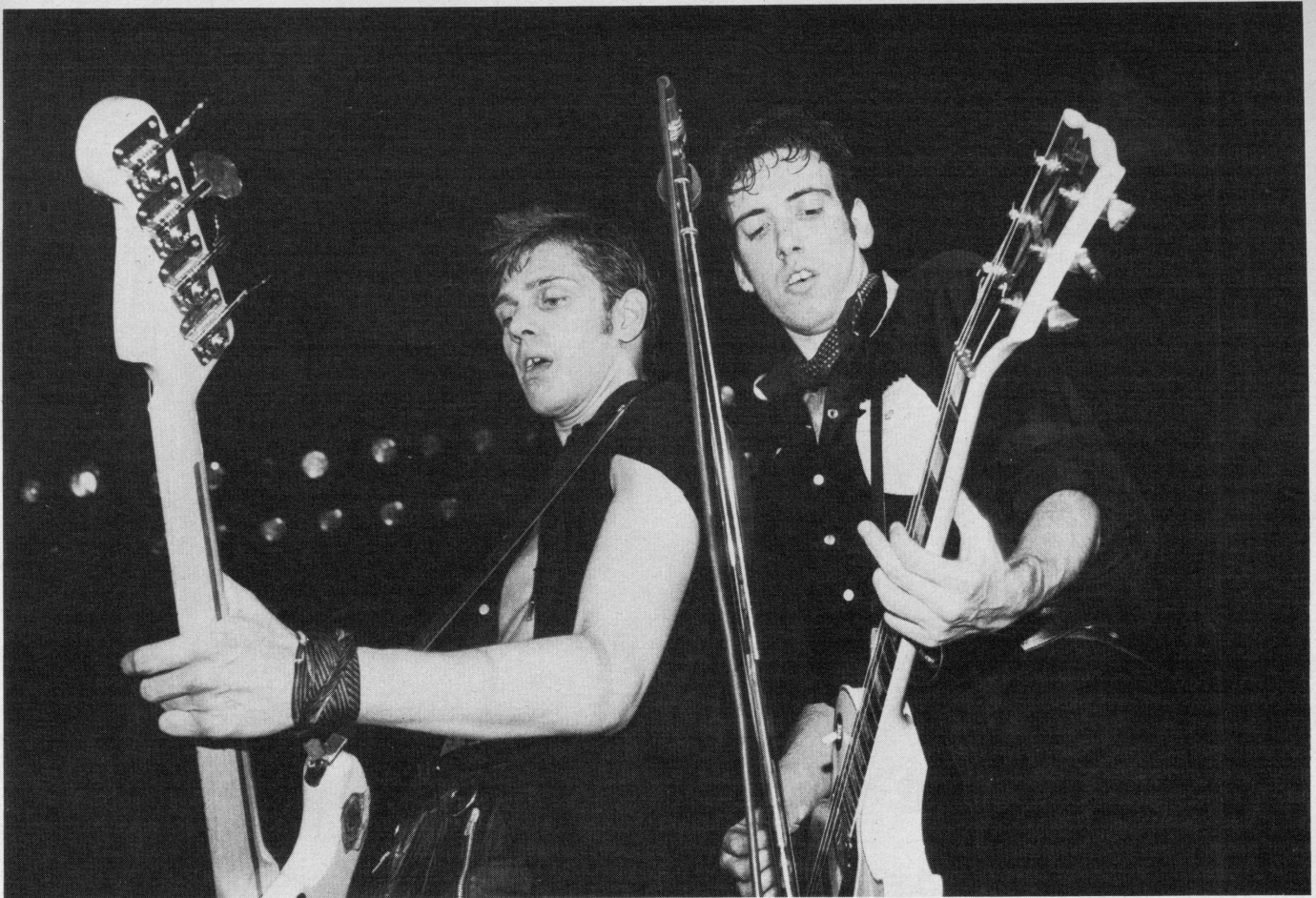
JONES: I don't know. I'm not involved in it. I'm involved in the Clash. You know what real punk is? It's what we were on our first record before it came out in America. Actually, real punk is what we were before we signed to a record company. But many groups who could be included in that category are signed to major record labels.

MUSICIAN: I would venture the Sex Pistols were the first real punks.

JONES: Yeah, they were real punk.

MUSICIAN: But they're gone and you guys are still around making anti-establishment, rebel with a cause, social-conscious music.

JONES: Well, you've got to see things from our point of view. When the Sex Pistols came to America, we hadn't yet been to America. What happened to the Sex Pistols was something that we observed. We saw what was happening. A few of us are real friends of theirs. We saw this thing with them, and I suppose it made us quite wary. Yeah, and we went about it in a different way. We kind of thought having an immediate impact



Simonon and Jones on tour: "It's like going to war. Sometimes we're a little scared, sometimes real brave, sometimes we're real stupid."

"This group doesn't go for groupies because we have respect for women. We try and have that because everybody says we can't write about women. We could be the greatest Casanovas travelling the Earth, believe me."

wasn't worth what you had to give in exchange for it.

MUSICIAN: In the beginning, punk was violence and rage and the tone of the music was inherently defiant. Now, with the new album...

JONES: It's the same thing.

MUSICIAN: Yes, it's political, but the music is not as raw-edged even if it carries a militant beat.

JONES: You're making a comparison with the first album. That's what you're doing, right? But we can't deny it and I say it's inevitable. Four years have elapsed and think what would have happened if we hadn't...if we had just done the same thing.

MUSICIAN: You would have been the Ramones.

JONES: Right. The reasons are obvious. The thing is, you want to move with it. It's going to go forwards or backwards.

MUSICIAN: A lot of people will say that you should move backward to your "White Riot" days.

JONES: They do...that's what they probably say. That's all they bloody go on about. I wish we could give that song to the public domain. It's like a joke anyway because all the new bands do it anyway. So we'll give it to 'em. Joe doesn't think it makes any difference. We disagree on that one. Live... why not play it... what the hell. But I feel we're just going through the

motions when we play that song.

MUSICIAN: Punk seems so cultist in many respects, yet with the new album, it seems you have broken away from it.

JONES: It's always been a very elitist thing, y'know. We wanted to get away from that as well. I suppose there has to be some demystification going on. You say, well, how come so many people are scared of you, because they shouldn't be really. But sometimes they should. There's some shitty, evil people around and they should be scared of us. They mustn't think we're pushovers. They you get all kinds of people, these social scroungers, who think we're nice guys because they read in an article that said we let people sleep in our hotel rooms. So the next date there were hundreds of them...hundreds of blokes who wanted to stay in your room...right? We don't do that anymore. The same goes when you put in the paper that we let people in our dressing rooms and after the show there's a queue outside the fuckin' size of the auditorium. They're extras, they don't want to see ya...all they want to do is nick your shirts. And the shirts are hanging up, soaking wet, and they put 'em in their bags. They eat all the sandwiches. It's a take, y'know. The same goes for the press corps, a lot of them come in like a mass herd, flash at us, and after a while they're taking it out of us. We're like wasted. And it's not drug abuse. It's like they take energy from you.

MUSICIAN: You mean like parasites.

JONES: Some. Some just want to find something out. Some want a guitar pick. Nothing else, just your guitar pick. Some of them want information...to give us something in exchange. It's like we've got some people who come to us with that...our creative corps of people...and we think that exchange is necessary. When we started it was different. Because then, no one liked us. Then when we were playing, we were playing to make a point. People would throw things at us and we had all this aggression. And now, it seems people come and give ya a

continued on page 72

RICHARD E. AARON



RUDE BOYS

*An Interview with
Joe Strummer and Robert Fripp*

By Vic Garbarini

The basic idea was fairly simple: you get the two foremost proponents of the idea of music as a force for personal and social change, sit 'em down together for a few beers, and see what happens. Now let's look at the potential problems: on the surface, polite, articulate Robert Fripp and acerbic, street-wise Joe Strummer don't appear to be the most compatible duo in rock history. I mean, you wouldn't expect them to bunk together at summer camp, would you? As musicians they seem to follow widely divergent paths, with the classically

trained Fripp exploring the oceanic textures and laser-like solos of Frippertronics, or the fractured, geometric etudes of *The League of Gentlemen*, while Strummer the street poet and musical innocent bashes out three chord symphonies, or heads further up river into the dark, sensual heartland of reggae and dub. But I had a strong feeling that things were not what they seemed on the surface, and that these two had more in common than might be apparent at first glance. What links them goes far deeper than style, personality, musical

"Now I'm not a born musician like maybe Robert is..." "Not at all! I was tone deaf and had no sense of rhythm..." "I got kicked out of the choir..." "...they wouldn't even let me join the choir!" "Well, that's quite an achievement, Robert."

taste, or social background. It's a question of sharing a sense of commitment, both to their music and society at large, and having the courage and integrity to back up their ideals with action. It involves a willingness to risk everything — including career, financial security, and public approval — to pursue their visions without compromise. In short, I believed that Robert Fripp and Joe Strummer were tapping the same well-spring and aiming for the same goal. Originally, I had wanted the two of them to meet by themselves. When I sprang the idea on Fripp while waiting for a Manhattan subway (real men of the people, eh?) he readily agreed, provided I come along as moderator. We planned to meet in London, where Robert was going to begin rehearsal with his new band Discipline, a dream aggregation consisting, besides Fripp, of ex-Crimson mate Bill Bruford on drums, former Bowie and Talking Heads sideman Adrian Belew on guitar, and session ace Tony Levin (Peter Gabriel, Paul Simon, John Lennon, among others) on bass. Strummer wasn't so easy to pin down. It took us two weeks to locate him in the small London studio, where he was rehearsing with his band for their upcoming U.S. tour, and he was hesitant at first when I mentioned bringing Fripp along. "Okay, fine," I said, "If you'd rather not I can just come over and do a straight interview." "No," answered Strummer, "I guess we can try it. After all, Fripp's probably closer to what we're trying to do than anybody I can think of." Within a week Fripp and I were standing in a funky, garage-like London studio, watching the world's greatest garage band work through some decidedly funky rhythms. (Actually, Fripp insisted on going downstairs first to watch Top of the Pops and get his hair cut by the lovely Mary Lou Green. Foreigners are like that.) Strummer seemed polite but reserved, and suggested we retire to the friendly neighborhood pub for refreshments. Once there, we positioned ourselves strategically in front of some massive stereo speakers that were connected via some cleverly concealed wires to ohmygodno! a massive turntable, which in turn was connected to a massive discjockey. THAT WAS ABBA WITH DANCING QUEEN AND NOW THE NEW WEST SINGLE FROM DIRE STRAITS!!! Swell. Strummer ordered beers all around, one of which he shoved in my direction. As I pushed it away he smiled and asked, "what's the matter, too big for 'ya." I decided not to explain about my gallstones and how I'm not supposed to drink, especially on an empty stomach... oh, oh, what the hell, why not? It'll probably loosen me up. It was a decision that I would later regret, to say nothing of the chap whose shoes I would barf all over in the 'loo and the transcriptionist who would type up the tape. ("Here's your money back. Please do it yourself... and who the hell is that drunk guy and why didn't they turn down the music!?") In any case, I liked Strummer. He had a no-nonsense air about him, but also a considerable sense of warmth and humanity. And I was genuinely impressed by how he went out of his way to put me at ease as we started the tapes rolling.

MUSICIAN: One of the reasons I wanted to get the two of you together is...

STRUMMER: You're a bully, you know.

MUSICIAN: What?

STRUMMER: Bet you had to bully him (pointing to Fripp) as much as you had to bully me to get him here.

MUSICIAN: How did I bully you?

STRUMMER: Well, you know, you bend my ear and give me an earache, and then you probably forced him to come here and get it just as well. You don't think he'd want to be here, do you? Only you could come up with such dumb ideas!

MUSICIAN: (Smiles and nods vigorously)

STRUMMER: Not that I'm saying they're dumb completely, mind you. They might have something in them.

MUSICIAN: Look, he loved the idea. When I mentioned it to him as an aside, he immediately said he'd love to do it, right Robert?... Robert?

FRIPP: I wonder if we can get something to eat here? Maybe a ploughmans lunch, just some cheese and bread...

STRUMMER: (Conspiratorially to Fripp) He bullies people, this one.

MUSICIAN: Okay, let's start again. One of the main things you two have in common is the belief that music can actually change society. How can that happen?

STRUMMER: Because music goes directly to the head and heart of a human being. More directly and in more dimensions than the written word. And if *that* can't change anybody, then there's not a lot else that will. Music can hit as hard as if I hit you with a baseball bat, you know? But it's not an overnight thing; you can't expect everything to change quickly. I figure it's an organic process. Insidious. Look how listening to all those hippie records has affected everybody in general: everybody feels looser about things now.

FRIPP: I did a radio show in New York with Bob Geldorf of the Boomtown Rates recently, and he said he didn't believe rock and roll could change anything. And I said to him, I disagree. So he said, well, if you build up hope in Joe Bloggs in some 'slum in Northern Ireland, he's just going to wind up disappointed. And I said, look, if there's Joe Bloggs in his appalling social conditions in Northern Ireland with no hope, and that becomes Joe Bloggs at No. 8 in his appalling social conditions but *with* hope, you have two entirely different situations.

STRUMMER: That's right. Good point that.

FRIPP: Then it's possible for the geezer at No. 10 to get some hope, too. And then it spreads up the street, and you have a community. Then you're talking about something which isn't dramatic and exciting, but which contains the possibility of *real* change. It's easy to miss because it's essentially personal, and it's very quiet. And like Joe says, it takes time.

MUSICIAN: Is it the music itself that can do this, or does it merely serve as a rallying point?

FRIPP: Both, really. It serves as a rallying point, but it can work more directly too. I think sometimes at a really good gig when there's a certain quality in the music, a kind of liberation can take place, and you don't go home and take quite as much crap from the news as you did before, because you've actually tasted a different quality of experience which changes how you think about things. So to a degree you've been liberated.

MUSICIAN: How did you both wind up choosing music as your means of expression? How were you feeling about things in general, or what made you decide it had to be a band? That there was something you needed or could accomplish through rock?

STRUMMER: Well, I started playing music around '73. I'd tried everything else, and I couldn't find anything I wanted to do or anywhere to be. So I got into music because it seemed like the best thing around. You could say it was the thing that had the least laws and restrictions about it.

FRIPP: I was trained as a guitarist. So I took lessons and I suppose I eventually could have become a classical guitarist. But it seemed that I was spending years and years working incredibly hard to have the opportunity to play other people's music. In terms of even serious music, the guitar repertoire is pretty second rate. And it's anachronistic. Hearing Hendrix hit one chord said infinitely more to me than the entire classical guitar repertoire. And I realized that rock was very malleable

— that within it you can play classical music or jazz or blues or whatever you cared to, and it was still rock. If you went outside the form in jazz or classical you were selling out. But if you did it in rock music you were gifted!

MUSICIAN: What about you, Joe? If you had to point to your major source of inspiration who or what would it be?

STRUMMER: Bo Diddley.

MUSICIAN: Anybody else?

STRUMMER: *Bo Diddley.*

MUSICIAN: Right. Incidentally, the stuff I heard you playing at rehearsal tonight sounded a lot closer to George Clinton than to "White Riot".

STRUMMER: That's one of the most important things I've come to over the last few years — feeling more into funky music. In the beginning I just couldn't take it at all. I thought it was a waste of time. Putting people to sleep.

MUSICIAN: Do you find something in funk and reggae that rock and roll doesn't have? On *Sandinista!* you did "Police On My Back" and a few...

STRUMMER: But rock and roll doesn't exist now!

MUSICIAN: What do you mean by that?

STRUMMER: That was heavy metal — that was something to do with other people and has nothing to do with me. I don't even understand what it's all about.

MUSICIAN: Alright, what do you call what you were doing on your first two albums?

STRUMMER: That was punk rock. Which still exists, but I'm not interested in that either.

MUSICIAN: Why not? Because it's lost its creative impetus?

STRUMMER: Yeah, the fans killed it. They wanted it to stay the same, and that ended our interest in it. Now they got what they deserved: a lot of rubbish, basically.

MUSICIAN: Were you surprised by the reception you got in Jamaica, Joe? I heard that things didn't go entirely smoothly down there.

STRUMMER: If you're a white band and you want to use Channel 1 Studio, they think you're rich, which you are, really, compared to them hanging about there. And you've got to 'bounce up' the local population, you know? We didn't have anything to give them, so we had to leave. It's really tough down there now. There's not really a lot of money about.

MUSICIAN: Speaking of evolving musical forms and working in different styles: I got the new Ellen Foley record recently and I noticed that you and Mick wrote most of the tunes, and that you all (the Clash) back her up on the record. I played it for a few people and asked "now, who do you think this is?" Most people thought it was Abba...

STRUMMER: That's a compliment!

FRIPP: Abba are very, very good.

MUSICIAN: I agree, but I'm surprised to hear you both say that. What do you like about them?

STRUMMER: They hardly ever lay a turkey on you. They've kind of hit a rut these days, but they were in there just blammin' 'em onto the charts for ages, which is admirable...also the girls are nice looking!

MUSICIAN: Since *London Calling* there's been a marked change in your musical approach: more emphasis on melody, increasingly sophisticated song structures, even a few ballads. Is this something you guys felt capable of all along? How did it come about that at that point in time you blossomed musically?

STRUMMER: It's a bit like weight lifting, in a way. If we met every day and did some weight training, in a year we'd be the heroes of the beach. We were just flexing our muscles in a musical sense. Obviously, if you absorb yourself in music and practice every day, you become more capable.

MUSICIAN: And you feel that you don't have to stick to that three chord screaming punk intensity in order to keep your creative spark alive?

STRUMMER: Yeah, that's how we see it. But will the audience accept it?

MUSICIAN: Well, that's the question. What do you think? How long will it take your audience to understand what you're

doing?

FRIPP: Two to five years, right? (general laughter) Seriously! It takes about that long to disseminate. It's like throwing a rock in the middle of a lake and waiting for the ripples to get to shore. And in our industry, I've noticed it takes two to five years for an idea to be accepted.

STRUMMER: God, that's depressing. Our records will be deleted by then!

MUSICIAN: It seems that during the punk era there was a tremendous release of energy, and it didn't matter how the music came out because everybody could feel the intensity...

STRUMMER: Correction. It *used* to not matter.

MUSICIAN: Alright, now it does. So you come to a point where you want to refine and develop your music, but you don't want to lose that energy. How do you do that? How do you keep it alive? How do you avoid becoming like those 70s bands, just going through the motions?

STRUMMER: Well, that's where everybody winds up, isn't it?

MUSICIAN: Are you going to end up like that?

STRUMMER: Someone would give you odds on that.

FRIPP: With the early Crimson, we were all desperate geezers...

STRUMMER: (To Fripp) Do you remember a tent in Plompton?

FRIPP: Yes!! And do you know why we played there?..

STRUMMER: I was in that tent, Robert.

FRIPP: Really? What was it like?

STRUMMER: It was terrific...*really* terrific.

FRIPP: Can I tell you why we played there? The agency that booked it hadn't been completely straight with us, so we said, you're no longer our agents. So instead of putting us on front stage — where we'd wipe out anything they had — they stuck us in the tent, so we wouldn't touch anyone. It was a deliberate agency move to fuck up our careers.

STRUMMER: And the Who were dead boring that night.

FRIPP: I remember there was a girl still there an hour after we packed up. She was still there, and suddenly she says "Is it finished"? An hour after it was over.

STRUMMER: Yeah, it was like that in that tent.

MUSICIAN: Speaking of live gigs, I was just telling Mick before that I saw you the second time you came to New York, and to tell the truth I wasn't very impressed with the show.

STRUMMER: That's not illegal.

MUSICIAN: But I kept hearing fantastic reports about you in concert, so I came to the Palladium the third time you played there and suddenly...

STRUMMER: ...A GIANT BOUNCER GRABBED YOU AND DASHED YOUR HEAD AGAINST THE WALL!! And then it all made sense. No, go on...

MUSICIAN: Actually, it was something like that. Suddenly it all came into focus — it was like a hole opened up and you guys were a channel for a high quality of energy. I was literally stunned.

FRIPP: It was the best rock and roll show I've seen in six years.

STRUMMER: Sometimes I think it's equally shitty every night and it's the audience that changes in their perception of it. I remember once Devo got a hold of Sandy Pearlman when he was mixing our sound at the Santa Monica Civic. They didn't come around and say hello to us, right? They snuck around back and got a hold of Sandy at the mixer and said "How do you get that sound? Tell us how it's done!" And they didn't realize it was just the way we were going like this (hunches and strums intensely) on the guitars, you know what I mean? It wasn't particularly what *slave* amps you had in the P.A. or the equalizers or whatever. It was the way we were going at it.

MUSICIAN: Do you ever feel that an audience is just sucking you dry of energy, and not really participating in the experience?

STRUMMER: Yeah, I feel that sometimes, And I get angry and tell them about it when I do.

FRIPP: Do you feel sometimes that people want you to be up there doing what they expect, and if you go off on another



RICHARD E. AARON

Unruly boys: "We have self-discipline in the studio, we have none on stage. A lot of the time it's decadent."

"We have a horror of becoming the new Rolling Stones. We felt like they'd caught a buzz off London and it had made them. This whole place is lousy — what are they doing about it?"

course — like if you do a record which isn't what they think you should do — you're going to get clobbered for it? Do you feel misinterpreted at times?

STRUMMER: Yeah, sure. There was this one journalist who described us as "the best amphetamine rush in town", right? And so I went to the press reception to see what it was all about, because I felt like we were being discovered as some new kind of *drug*. I found it a bit offensive.

MUSICIAN: If you had to put into 25 words or less what it is you're trying to say when you get up on stage, what would it be?

STRUMMER: LOOK AT ME!

MUSICIAN: (Laughs) Yeah, but lots of bands do that and they don't get the same response you do. What's the difference?

FRIPP: Anything a performer does on a public platform is significant, even just scratching your ass. When I go on stage as 'Robert Fripp' it's more real, more alive. I can do stuff I can't do as 'Bob Fripp from Wimbourne, Dorset' and it has a significance quite apart from me. When I was with the Crimson team, and even now, as soon as ego gets involved in it or when the audience are dumping their egos on me, and saying "you have to be our ideal of what we think you should be", it becomes masturbation rather than consummation. It feels dirty. But when you do a gig, and maybe it's not even a good gig, but somehow there's a relationship between the audience and performers that's right, then no one's ripped anyone off. And it feels good. It feels clean. It feels like an honorable way of

working. Now, both the musicians and the audiences have responsibilities to each other. For instance, sometimes you don't want to get up and play, but you said you would so you do it. You have a part of you that makes that commitment and the rest of you follows. It's like this: I don't have to do this for a living, but because I decided to do it for another three years...

STRUMMER: ... This is interesting to me. What would you do for a living if not music?

FRIPP: I'd probably still do it, but in a non-public context.

STRUMMER: You mean just for your mates?

FRIPP: Yes. And some guitar teaching. Actually, I'd like to be able to go out and play 250 seaters with other musicians. At the moment, I can only afford to do it on my own. I don't want to play 3,000 seaters because I feel I can't make contact with the people I'm playing to. I told my management that today and they said "you can't do it your way; you can't pay the bills that way."

MUSICIAN: Isn't this similar to what you're doing with *Sandinista!*: keeping the price down to the point where you're not going to make any money off it unless it sells 200,000 units?

STRUMMER: Yeah, that's the specific deal for the U.K., which is going really badly now. It's a big flop. The thing I like about making a stand on prices is that it's *here and now*, and not just a promise. It's dealing with reality: how many bucks you're going to have to part with at the counter to get it. It's one of the few opportunities we have to manifest our ideals, to make them exist in a real plane. To do it in Thatcher's Britain during a recession was a kind of flamboyant gesture.

FRIPP: Can you make money just from doing gigs?

STRUMMER: No. A *big no!* It's like throwing money away. That's our ultimate aim, to be able to break even on tour. No matter how carefully you do it, you always come out in the red.

MUSICIAN: Robert, you were saying yesterday that if you went out alone and did Frippertronics on the road, you could make money. Is there any way of doing that in a group context?

FRIPP: Well, the traditional answer is yes, providing you play

3,000 seaters. But my response is that if you play 3,000 seaters, your expenses will rise accordingly. And so you say you'll play 1,000 seaters, and your expenses match that. But even so, to break even — working with four musicians — is a work of art. If I go out and play with one guy driving me around and two green boxes, I can make more money in one month flat than for all the work I've done in the past twelve years.

STRUMMER: I believe you!

FRIPP: King Crimson only made money *after we broke up*. After six years of hard work we had a deficit of \$125,000. When we disbanded the records went on selling, and that's how we finally made some money. Nowadays, I spend more time working at approaches to business than I do to music. I reckon I spend 1% of my professional life actually playing guitar. And that's not an exaggeration — that's literal!

MUSICIAN: While we're on the subject of the marketplace I wanted to ask you both about success and recognition. In terms of the deeper values of the music, does it mean anything to break into a Top Forty. Is that any kind of victory?

STRUMMER: I'll tell you when it all went sour for me: When I realized that the chart was only compiled in the straight record shops, not in the specialist shops where the real fans go. It's the housewife market, really. It's a cross section of grannies and teenyboppers and mummies buying it, you know? When I saw that I lost interest in it completely. But before that, I was quite keen to make the charts. I mean, why should Bob Geldorf be Top of the fucking Pops?

FRIPP: But getting back to this thing about live gigs, Joe, do you do anything to build up energy before you go on?

STRUMMER: Yeah, I like to get into a mental panic before the show — to really wind myself up before I get onstage.

MUSICIAN: Anything else?

STRUMMER: I drink a lot of orange juice.

MUSICIAN: When the punk thing started a lot of groups were espousing a new set of ideals, but in many cases it was just words, or they couldn't sustain it. What keeps you guys honest?

STRUMMER: The horror of becoming the new Rolling Stones. We stood there in 1976 and thought, "this whole place is *lousy*. The Stones started here — what are they doing about it?" We felt like they'd caught a buzz off London and it had made them. And they could have come back and done... I don't know what... but I just felt they weren't there. And we really didn't want to become that. We saw that as the way *not* to turn out.

MUSICIAN: There's a lot of leftist ideology in your lyrics, but you're obviously not doctrinaire Marxists.

STRUMMER: Toeing any line is obviously a dodgy situation, because I'm just not into a policy or I'd have joined the Communist Party years ago. I've done my time selling *The Morning Star* at pit heads in Wales, and it's just not happening.

MUSICIAN: In the song "The Equalizer" you talk about everyone having equal income...

STRUMMER: I'm not saying that. I read this thing in Marx that really hit me about why is the person who owns the factory allowed to take more of the profits than the person who does all the work? It's an equal input — you own the factory and I do the work — so we should split the profits.

MUSICIAN: And yet on both *London Calling* and *Sandinista!* you admit that just money alone isn't the answer.

STRUMMER: Well, the Beatles said it years ago, money can't buy ya love.

MUSICIAN: Have you ever read E.F. Schumacher? He says that obviously income should be more equal, but we have to go beyond that. In America we have more wealth than anyone else and we're still miserable, because the work we do stifles our natural creativity and provides us with no sense of purpose or inner satisfaction. Reading it reminded me of the feeling I get from what you're doing: giving hope to people who are trapped in these situations and are looking for an alternative.

STRUMMER: Yeah, it's horrible to think that people spend their whole lives in a rubber factory, pulling the rubber along the belt because the machine doesn't work. I couldn't have

done it. The hell with it! Is that what we have to have? I just can't believe it, and yet it seems irreversible. Maybe it's too late to say, small is beautiful, and all that.

MUSICIAN: Maybe it's too late to save the system as we know it, but maybe that's the point — that if things fall apart, there'll be a chance to build something better. That's the kind of hope I hear in your music.

FRIPP: If I can address some of these questions: Marx was something of an old fart. He was an authoritarian and a centralist, and what he proposed was essentially the same as capitalism, except with a different set of people in charge. In any kind of realistic political change you have to start on the inside, by changing the central value system. You can't start by changing the structure, change has to be a personal choice.

MUSICIAN: Meaning you can't have a just and equitable structure if the individuals that comprise it are still operating from greed and egocentricity. So no matter how well you design a house it won't stand if the individual bricks are defective.

FRIPP: Right, so change therefore has to be a personal choice. And it's got to be gradual, because normal political life has to do with changing externals by force, and any kind of force is going to breed it's opposite reaction. So, if you force a welfare society on people, but their personal values and way of life haven't changed for the better, they're going to wind up disliking each other even more than they did before. Another important thing is that if you have an aim in mind, you have to work as if it's already achieved. You can't create a democracy by imposing a dictatorship on people until they're ready for democracy. You have to be democratic yourself. Your way of going there is where you're going.

MUSICIAN: I wanted to ask Joe about his attitude towards violence. You use the imagery of violence, but I don't think you really believe it's the answer. Am I right or wrong?

STRUMMER: Of course not! Violence isn't an answer to anything. Do I want some jackoff to jump on my back right now? Of course I don't. It's so *sordid*.

MUSICIAN: What about in the case of *Sandinista!*? Obviously, Somoza was overthrown by force.

STRUMMER: Sure, but that's practical violence. Somoza ain't going to go unless you shoot a few hundred of his guards. I'm not saying that I could get into that here in Britain, but I think in Nicaragua the situation certainly demanded it. Think of how

ROUGH TOYS

Back in the studio Paul Simonon holds his Fender Fretless Bass up to the light. "See, no frets. But there are little dots on the side. Sometimes, I can barely see 'em on stage, which is why we need a good lighting bloke!" Simonon favors Ampeg Bass Cabinets, and has recently switched from a Sunn to an Ampeg top. "The Sunn is more treble and topky so you can hear yourself better on stage, but I'm into the more bottomish sound of the Ampeg now. I've got a graphic equalizer up there so it works out fine." Topper Headon's traps consist of Pearl Ambassador drums (Mirror Finish Kit), with Evans Hydraulic Heads and Zildjian cymbals. Lead guitarist Mick Jones' arsenal includes a '58 Les Paul Sunburst, '60 Les Paul Junior and white twentieth Anniversary Model (Les Paul, of course), and a Gibson Semi-Acoustic. On stage he utilizes a brace of MXR gadgets, including the 100 Phaser, Flanger, Analog Delay, Noisegate. They're all run through a Roland Chorus Echo and on into a Mesa Boogie 1x15 100 Watt Combo (with speakers disconnected), and finally into two Marshall 4x12 Cabinets. (Whew) Joe Strummer prefers a Fender sound, specifically a venerable '52 Esquire and two Telecasters, circa '63 and '64. He's currently using Music Man amps because, in his words, "I don't have time to search for those old Fender tube amps. The Music Man is the closest thing to that sound I've found." Anything he doesn't like about them? "Yeah, that plastic motif on the front is repulsive. Those little guys in bellbottoms. Ugh!"



You see, Joe, music is a lot like swimming... without constant motion and a fluttering of the hands one tends to sink... but then ... as the clear viscous surrounds one...

many campesinos were slaughtered there since 1919. It must run into the *millions!* In that situation, I condone picking up a gun.

FRIPP: I've found that American bands aren't politically aware.

STRUMMER: Yeah, why is that? There's only one I know, called Prairie Fire, and they're so heavily Communist it turns you off.

FRIPP: I think English musicians are more politically acute because our social system is so crazy over here that you feel you have to explore it and find out why. America's a commercial culture, and I suppose it's nearer a pure democracy than we are, 'cause if you want to vote you just put your dollar in and it counts, and there's a great deal of social mobility as a result. Over here, if you open your mouth and you come from the East End of London, or Wales, or Dorset, you're immediately stuck

in a social caste. My dad would let me know that if I did anything that prejudiced his position in the town, I would really get it. I realized later it was because he's made the transition from the working class to the lower middle class...

STRUMMER: ...and that's the most important thing in the world to people in that situation.

FRIPP: Exactly. I think the main difference between my generation and yours is that in the 60s it was "everything seems mad, therefore I question my sense. Now it's everything seems mad, therefore I *approve* my senses because everything is crazy. So my lot are a bit more schizophrenic than your lot, who are a bit more down to earth and politically directed.

MUSICIAN: Is it really necessary to suffer in order to produce something worthwhile?

STRUMMER: A great man wrote about "the lips of a poet being strangely formed, so that when he uttered cries of help people gathered around him saying, "More, more, say it again!" (general laughter) So there must be something in the soul that makes you want to make that sound.

FRIPP: Do you have to suffer for that?

STRUMMER: Happy people don't create anything. I find creation hinges on being well-fucked-up.

FRIPP: I think we're dealing with two different things here. If you suffer it does create friction and that gives you energy, but there are some kinds of suffering that are not necessary. Like the geezer who gets into coke and it gives him trouble, or he's used to having his picture in the paper so he's paranoid at the end of the week when it isn't there.

STRUMMER: Yeah, pride and vanity get you nowhere.

FRIPP: But then there's a kind of suffering where you put all you've got into a record, and you believe in it, but no one likes it. Then you still say I'm sorry, my name's on it, this is my work. And that creates a good energy.

MUSICIAN: Isn't there a kind of inner joy if you're suffering for the right reason?

FRIPP: If you know it's worth doing. If people are booing but you *know* it's a fuck of a set, you don't give a shit who boos. But when you know you're not playing well, if you know you've copped an egg, you can't face it...

STRUMMER: Yeah, there are times when I haven't played well that I ran back to the dressing room and I wanted to...just...

FRIPP: ...say I apologize. I'm sorry!

MUSICIAN: Okay, the right kind of suffering can produce something transcendent. What about anger? Joe, you wrote in "Clampdown" that anger can be power...

STRUMMER: ...Because you can either destroy things with anger, or it can motivate you to learn about your situation and follow things through. A lot of people just thought the whole punk movement was negative, but that was just a superficial reading.

FRIPP: When I first heard about punk back in '77 I'd been waiting for six years to hear that kind of commitment: to hear some geezer hit a drum as if *all he wanted to do in his life was hit a drum*. And to me it was all a great political statement. Because the movement that I'd been a part of went off course.

MUSICIAN: What went wrong?

FRIPP: It went off because a bunch of working class guys tried to move up to a middle class level of income by aping middle class traditions. Supposedly technique was important, but it became a facile technique — it wasn't real. People weren't in charge of all those endless displays of notes. They were becoming programmed, playing charts and licks, and it wasn't human.

MUSICIAN: And yet both of you get criticized by people who don't believe you can maintain your commitment and still evolve into different musical styles.

STRUMMER: Maybe they're right, but how do they arrive at that conclusion?

MUSICIAN: Well, they can feel the energy and intensity from things like "Schizoid Man" or "White Riot," but not necessarily from subtler mediums like dub and Frippertronics.

FRIPP: Yes, but when you lose your virginity there's an inno-

cence that you're never going to recapture. But that doesn't mean you're going to give up screwing! You learn to experience your innocence in a different kind of way.

STRUMMER: Great point. Listen to what he's saying...

FRIPP: When you lose your virginity it doesn't matter that you don't know what you're doing, because it has to do with innocence. So for me, art is the capacity to re-experience your innocence. How do you lose your virginity every time you make love? How do you do that musically every time you go on stage?

MUSICIAN: Okay, you asked the question. How do you?

FRIPP: You have to know what you want, and you have to have the wish. One night at the Marquee in 1969 King Crimson went out on a tangent, — maybe just for five minutes — and you never knew where the hell it was, but I was telepathic — I knew everything that was going on, and what people were thinking. Because there was that energy in the room, and... I became a human being in such a way that... if that's what it means to be a human being, then *I want to become a human being!* Once you've had it, you *have* to find a way of living like that again. Otherwise there's no point in anything. And so you go for it! You have to go on till you find a way to do it. And if you want it enough, you get nearer. There are a lot of techniques, disciplines, and inner and outer practices that can help make you open to that quality of experience. I think that mastery of a technique or subject for a musician means being both a virgin and an accomplished lover at the same time.

MUSICIAN: What's the role of technique in all this?

FRIPP: Technique is part of what you do in order to get there. But when you're there, you really don't give a shit about technique.

STRUMMER: Right, it's a combination of innocence and expertise.

FRIPP: ...and the more technique you have the more you throw away, and that gives you more authority. If you can only play one chord, and you play it with all you've got, that's pure. If you can play 10,000 chords, but you play one that's pure, it has an authority which the others don't.

STRUMMER: As Kierkegaard says, "Don't fall in the cup of wisdom that you drink from." What he's saying applies to music too. All those flurries of notes and runs are like falling in, when all you have to do is drink.

MUSICIAN: (To Strummer) That reminds me of that great line in "The Sounds of The Sinners": "Waiting for that jazz note..."

STRUMMER: ...Right, looking for the great jazz note that destroyed the walls of Jericho. You hit it. That's what we're after.

MUSICIAN: In a way, that's what I felt happened that night I saw your show at the Palladium. There was this extraordinary energy coming through — a real feeling of oneness and unity. Is that what music is capable of? Is that what you're aiming for?

STRUMMER: Well, gosh, (laughs) maybe it has something to do with the price of the hot dogs that night. I don't know, maybe you're asking the wrong people.

FRIPP: About finding that great jazz note: I think the Western tradition of teaching music is pretty screwed up. Because you learn all the externals, the laws of harmony, the laws of counterpoint, the laws of rhythm, but nothing about music. On the other hand, there's a tradition among the Sufis where you play only one note on the bass end of the flute for 1000 days. You can think about as many notes as you want, but you can't play them. Just that one note for 1,000 days. Then there was that Sufi drummer you introduced me to...

MUSICIAN: Yeah, from Istanbul. Nezh Uzel.

FRIPP: That's the guy. He told me that he had to prepare himself for three years before he could even start to learn his instrument.

MUSICIAN: If you had to put into words what it is you'd like to give people through your music, what would it be?

STRUMMER: That they feel they could start to play, too. When I was a teenager I felt that musicians were a world apart — a secret society I could never join. So I didn't bother to try

until I was almost too old. I just hope it doesn't seem so impossible like it did for me watching Eric Clapton at Wembley and thinking *I could never do that*. It's not that hard, really. Now, I'm not a born musician like maybe Robert is...

FRIPP: Not at all! I was tone deaf and had no sense of rhythm...

STRUMMER: ...I got kicked out of the choir...

FRIPP: ...they wouldn't even let me *join* the choir!

STRUMMER: Well, that's quite an achievement, Robert. I really enjoy and appreciate what you've done.

FRIPP: Sometimes — and this is only a theory — I think that music needs a musician to play it. That the music itself is alive, but you have to be out there to know it. And at that point it may be possible that the music is waiting to be played. So it needs a musician.

STRUMMER: I've been thinking about this recently. I find that when I write a really good song, it's a blur in my mind when I actually wrote it. I know the song exists, 'cause I can play it for

"I was listening and I heard the next note I had to play. And I played it. Then I heard the next note and I played that one... and it's funny, but I had to trust it, trust the music to play itself." — Fripp

my friends, but I just can't remember what happened between thinking of the idea of the song and finally playing it for my friend. Something happened that I don't remember.

MUSICIAN: That's a classic description of the creative process. The ordinary faculties are suspended in a way while something greater comes through. Is there anything you do to be more open to those moments?

STRUMMER: Every man has his own rituals to get you into the right state of consciousness. I like to have four typewriters in a row and then I feel everything is prepared.

FRIPP: I think you have to learn to listen to the music. I don't know many musicians who even listen to what they're playing — it's never automatic, you always have to make an effort to use your ears. A funny thing happened in Philadelphia a few weeks ago during my Frippertronics tour. I was listening and I heard the next note I had to play. And I played it. Then I heard the next note, and I played that one. I'd been waiting 23 years for that to happen...

STRUMMER: ...that's *real* music...

FRIPP: ...and it was the first time it ever happened to me. And I started to cry while I was playing...

STRUMMER: That's it. To know where it has to go...

FRIPP: ...and it's funny, but I had to trust it. I heard the next note, and I thought well, I'll try it. Then I heard the next one and thought well, this is shit, but I thought I should trust it. So I did. And it's a question of trusting the music to play itself.

STRUMMER: It's like that feeling when you're just sitting there and playing, and you're not conscious of it. You start doodling and your hands just take over, and your conscious mind is no longer saying you must practice, or you must play this. Then something else tunes in and I'm playing something special. My mind's not involved, and I know I've been playing real music.

MUSICIAN: One last question: What's the most important thing you've learned about playing music over the last five years?

STRUMMER: That unless you're prepared to give your heart and soul to it completely, *forget it!*

MUSICIAN: That seems like a good place to stop.

FRIPP: I'm up for some pinball. Do you play, Joe?

STRUMMER: Are you kidding? From Soho down to Brighton, I must have played them all... 