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**FIRST
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**STRUMMER
SPEAKS**

CLASH



**Fad Gadget
Billy Idol
The Neighborhoods'
breakup
Boston Punk bands
Readers' Poll**

THE CLASH



THE FOUL-UP

BOND

Bonds, New York City



Photo: Michael Grecco

by Julie Panebianco

The lights dimmed. Dramatic Spanish bolero music from Clint Eastwood's *For a Few Dollars More* came on over the speakers, and the spotlights roamed from one side of the stage to the other.

Paul Simonon stepped out from behind the drum set, dressed in black leather. Then Topper Headon, then Mick Jones, then Joe Strummer. Thunderous applause followed them as they went to their instruments and faced the audience.

The bolero music stopped. Strummer hunched over his guitar, moving his body in anticipation. They nod their heads, counting silently... then slam out the first chords of "London Calling."

Outside, people were everywhere, wet from the pouring rain in Times Square. There were more ticket scalpers than buyers around so tickets for the Clash's opening night at Bond's were going for as little as five bucks. Police cars and barriers were lined up, as was a fire truck, a fire marshal, and groups of firemen.

At about 11:30 p.m. the security people started refusing ticket holders entrance, and there were at least 100 people on line outside.

Bond's was packed. A winding staircase leading up to the main level, decorated by

mummies wearing Clash t-shirts, was crowded and the bar was impossible to reach. Inside the hall, which resembled a high school gym, the crowd was tense, with no room to dance. The temperature was high; people were fainting, and a few people were leaving.

The official crowd count was around 3600, but one of the Clash's crew who was assigned to the door estimated the crowd at 4500.

Outside, to the strains of "London Calling," a guy was screaming at a bouncer, waving his ticket: "I waited ten fucking hours. I want to see the CLASH!! If I don't I will break every bone in your body."

The Clash ended the song, and Strummer stepped up to the microphone: "Welcome... How does it sound? We can't hear the music!"

On Friday night, the second night of the Clash's appearance, things were just as chaotic. Bonds, in an effort to appease the fire marshals by cutting down the crowd, was refusing Bonds' tickets, accepting only Ticketron's. Scalpers with Ticketron tickets were now getting forty dollars apiece.

Next to Bonds, under an *Outland* marquee, Channel 2 interviewed the fire marshal. "Last night 3649 people were at the premises. The legal limit is 1725. There were

people lined up here 10 to 12 hours and now they can't get in. This show should have been held in a larger arena. Then nobody would have been left out."

A guy in a Bruce Springsteen t-shirt screamed into the microphone, "What about me? What about people like me who waited in line for tickets? Bruce wouldn't do this."

"What's happening here?" a couple asked, confused by the crowds and the camera crews. Someone tells them there were too many tickets sold for the show, and now about 2000 people can't get in. They're shocked: "For *Outland*?"

The Mo-dettes, the opening band, was booed off after an attempt at performing, as was a group of rappers who danced dodging the cups being thrown at them.

An El Salvador table was set up, with pamphlets and t-shirts and freedom fighters. Rumor has it they are Joe Strummer's personal friends, but it turns out that they approached the Clash, who in turn invited them to come and spread the word: "U.S. out of El Salvador."

"WELCOME": First "London Calling," then "Janie Jones." Then Joe Strummer changing his guitar for bass, Paul Simonon up front for the frightening, apocalyptic "Guns of Brixton." As he sings, the

backdrop changes to slides of newspaper clippings, and a huge, scrawled, "THIS IS THE FRONT LINE."

The slides throughout the show—Thatcher, Khomeini, Carter, the Ripper Trial, colorful New York shots, huge red Cadillacs—underscore the songs, creating dramatic impressions.

The Clash, without Mikey Dread and Mickey Gallagher, sound spare, funkier. During a segue that includes "Lightning Strikes (Not Once But Twice)," "Charlie Don't Surf," and "Magnificent Seven," they seem far, far away from their "garage-land" days.

They play hard, fast and furiously for two hours, running through "Wrong 'Em Boyo," "Train in Vain," "Ivan Meets G.I. Joe," "Brand New Cadillac," "One More Time," "Police and Thieves," and a new song, "Radio Clash."

A song like "Somebody Got Murdered" sounded like it *should have been* on the album: frightened and desperate; "The Call-Up," featuring a possessed Mick Jones, turned into the anthem it wasn't before.

When the Clash, (Strummer, Jones and Simonon with their backs to the audience) started to play those familiar chords, and Strummer turned around to yell "What are we gonna do now?," all the anger and frus-

tration came together in a frenzy, with people yelling "CLAMPDOWN," fists in the air.

Outside, the fire marshal gave another interview. "In an event of a fire, we estimate that only about 900 people could evacuate safely." No shows was the word.

By Saturday, the Building Department had joined in on the fun, obtaining a court order effectively closing Bond's until further notice for building code violations.

The kids lined up for the matinee were told the news as police on horseback with billyclubs waited for a white riot—about 75 kids yelling "We want the Clash!" and blocking traffic in Times Square was all they got. Word from the Clash was "Stay cool, stay together."

The press conference was called for Sunday at 3 p.m. and the mood was not optimistic. No one expected the shows to go on as scheduled. A rumour circulated in Boston last week was that Bond's had oversold each night by about 2000 tickets, and that the fire department was planning to close down the show. A premonition? Words like "set up" and stories of a mystery phone call to the fire department were repeated, over and over again.

The table set up for the conference was in the concert hall, decorated with red and orange "Clash on Broadway" posters. Kosmo Vinyl, their press aide/assistant manager/friend, ran around nervously, drinking out of a bottle of Remy Martin, yelling "Those of you who are not photographers please sit down." Nobody moved.

The Clash walked out, to complete silence. Paul Simonon was in a "Lords" leather jacket, completing his very cool, James Dean look; Jones in an El Salvador shirt, and Topper and Strummer in Clash t-shirts, all sat down nervously and faced the press.

After questions like "Do you like New York?" and "Who are you?" (to which Strummer replied, "Andy Schwartz, I'm the janitor"), Topper Headon finally revealed that yes, they would be playing, yes, adding eight more shows.

As Simon, a Clash crew member, mumbled that "We're hoping to finish this in 1981," the New York Building Inspector was brought in and seated next to Strummer.

Mr. Building Inspector told the press that Bond's was safe and that everyone was now satisfied as long as the crowd is kept to 1725, the legal limit. Strummer, smirking and combing his hair, offered the comb to



Photo: Michael Grecco

the Inspector, who didn't notice. After drinking some Remy Martin, Strummer offered the bottle to the Inspector, who immediately took a swig, to loud laughter. Exit Inspector.

The press wanted to know what happened. "That's the \$64,000 question," Strummer said, sarcastically.

Joel Heller, the general manager of Bond's, was brought in to claim that the problem was caused by a lot of gate crashing. 2000 gate crashers?

"You have to remember, this is the biggest group in the world. They are bringing a legitimacy to Times Square."

Press: "Why did you choose Bond's?"

Strummer: "We wanted a place with no seats. There is a big rule. When people get out of their seats, monkeys shove 'em back in. This way you can mingle, walk around."

Bernie Rhodes: (Their re-instated manager) "We heard that a band had 4000 people in here and blew up a Cadillac. We didn't

think we'd have a problem."

Strummer: "We thought people here liked music."

Press: "Why did this happen? Your politics? New York club politics?"

Strummer: "We've exposed what's going on in New York."

Press: "What's going on in New York?"

Strummer: "I'll tell you under the table [climbs under the table, whispers, then gets up]. I judge by the smell of it to go to the fisheries department and find out there. As visitors we could never get to the bottom of it. Maybe a New Yorker could."

Jones: "Or Sam Spade."

Press: "Isn't just playing New York an elitist attitude?"

Strummer: "This is a bonus, not the tour."

Jones: "We're giving everyone a summer holiday."

Rhodes: "We hope everyone will have a good time when they get here."

Heller: "I just want to say, thanks to the

Clash."

Strummer: [to Heller] "Here's your ten dollars."

The crowd disperses. Topper Headon is laughing about the 2000 gate crashers story.

"All the clubs do it, that's no secret." Topper explains. "It's OK for us on stage, we have room. But in the audience [imitates a squashed person in crowd] there's no room, it's too hot, you can't dance."

An eager reporter runs up to Mick Jones. "Hey Joel!" Jones looks disgusted. "I'm fuckin' Mick" he mutters, turns around abruptly, and walks away.

Kosmo Vinyl, in control again, cleared Bond's of most of the remaining press.

Joe Strummer is still talking to a few people when someone runs up and asks: "Play 'Stay Free' tonight?"

"We've forgotten the words," Strummer says, straight-faced.

"Wing it." Strummer laughs. "Uh, I think it's in G."

The rest of the band reappears, and begins tinkering on stage, tuning guitars, playing bongos.

Strummer doesn't join them, instead begins to pace the hall, stopping at the mixing booth momentarily, walking slowly out into the foyer and around the main level. He seemed tense, in deep concentration, and was humming softly.

A woman from a communist newspaper stood at the doorway, watching him. "I think this fiasco was caused by people who oppose their revolutionary politics," she announces. Nobody answers her.

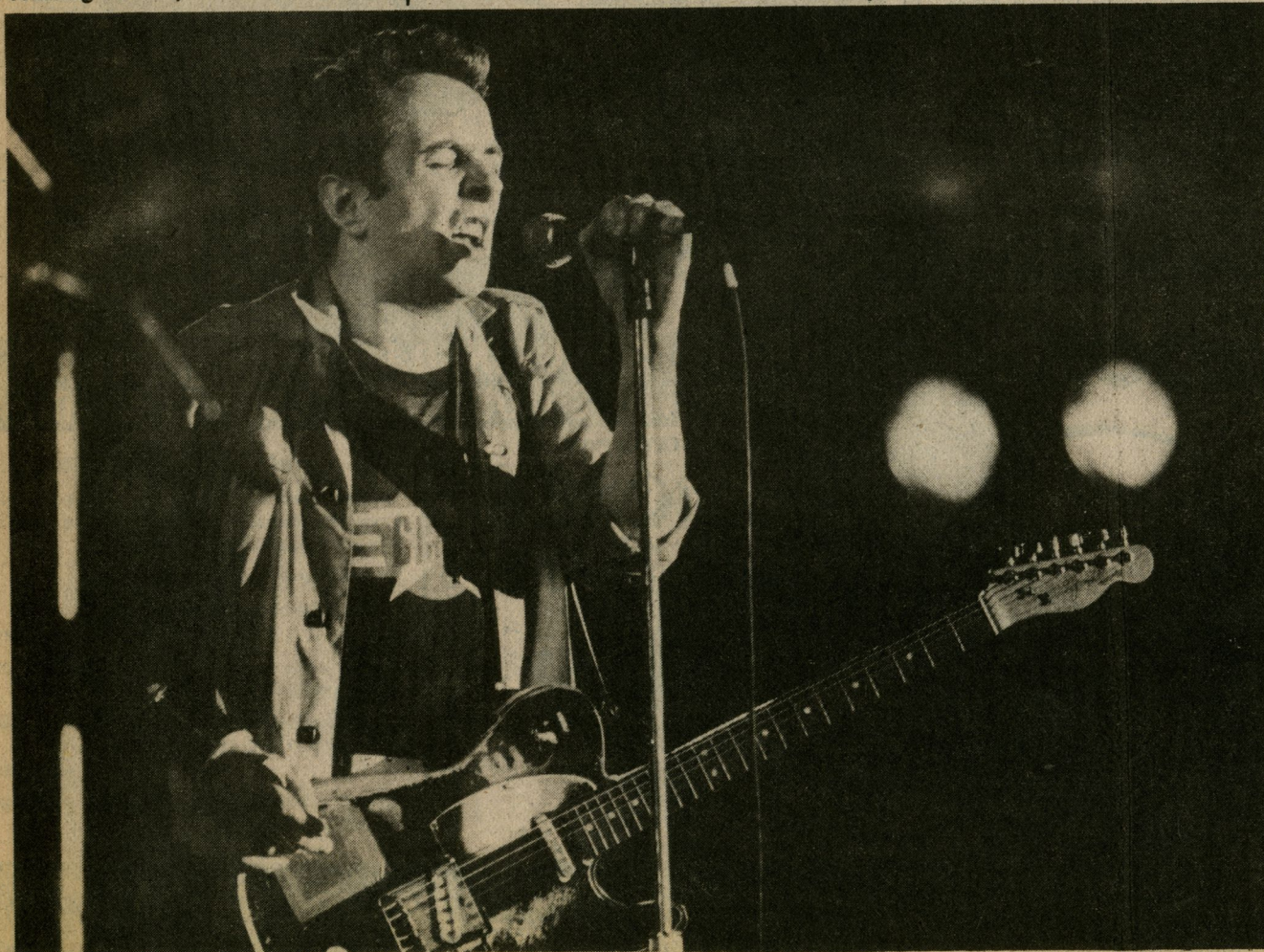
Strummer returned to the stage. After what seemed like endless tuning, the Clash began to play, one riff over and over as it slowly built into a revved up instrumental. The chords reverberated around the empty hall until it becomes "The Call-Up." The power evident in their playing is startling.

The New York Times reviewed the Clash and said they were not the greatest rock and roll band; if they are not, they came awfully close to it on Sunday night, kicking and dancing and playing and singing with an unmatched intensity.

The sound problems plaguing the band were gone, the slide show perfected, the audience and band in a frenzy.

After "London Calling," Joe Strummer points to the audience: "How many people are in here tonight?" He points. "1725, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30. SSSHHH!!!"

The stage crew stood on the side of the



Joe Strummer

Photo: Michael Grecco

stage and danced. Kosmo Vinyl danced in the hall, singing along at the top of his lungs. "I go on stage with them sometimes," he laughed.

During "Somebody Got Murdered" a self-conscious, ponytailed Ellen Foley appeared in the audience, dancing and nodding her head in approval. When she was recognized, she smiled, then disappeared in the crowd.

The Clash's encore was "Washington Bullets." Towards the end of the song, an El Salvadorian freedom fighter, dressed in full combat regalia, joined the band: "Support the Sandinistas. Help the Salvadorians. The Washington bullets have got to stop. We thank you, we thank the Clash!" As he finished, hundreds of leaflets were thrown up, into the crowd.

The band kicked into "Armageddon Time," "A lot of people won't get no supper tonight." People grabbed the leaflets, which screamed "U.S. Out of El Salvador," and began fanning themselves, or making paper airplanes. "A lot of people won't get no justice tonight..."

Pearl Harbor was backstage, holding hands with Paul Simonon. Warner Brothers dropped her from the label, and her band couldn't afford to make the trip and open for the Clash, so they hired her as disc jockey and emcee. "Paul offered to pay for his brother—my guitarist, but the rest... we have no money." Kosmo Vinyl's backstage too (with "Pearl" tattooed on his arm), singing autographs.

Joe Strummer is sitting on a couch, elbowing his friends when two bizarre looking women go by and try to get his attention. He starts laughing with Dave, one of the road crew, who is still nerve wracked after going on stage to tape the microphone and monitor wires. "You were kicking me," he tells Strummer.

Strummer just smiles. His hair is very black, and against the bright colors of his clothes, his skin looks very white; his eyes are dark and shine with humor and intelligence.

When he is told that the rest of the band is in the bathroom taking pictures, he gets up to join them. When he finds only Topper, he chants "Liar, Liar," until they are all finally gathered in the room.

Topper Headon, who is even smaller, and skinnier than the others is spraying beer at everyone. Jones grins broadly and bares his not so great looking set of teeth as Paul Simonon just leans on the edge of the sink.

A friend looks into the bathroom and laughs, "How come you guys are so photogenic for such ugly geezers?"

People are crowded around the table, which is filled with Remy Martin bottles and strange looking tidbits that are apparently edible.

"Fried egg sandwiches," says Simon, one of the Clash's crew. "All Mick Jones eats is

eggs and chips. When we were in Paris he sent out a roadie in the middle of the night to drive around looking for eggs and chips."

Strummer has stayed in the bathroom and is sitting on an open window sill.

"No one minds playing the extra eight shows," he says. "We get wound up, we really want to play. We just toured Europe. We played all over France, Italy, Spain. In Milan we played to 20,000 people in a bicycle stadium. Anyway, I get to be here, in New York."

Doesn't anyone think this could have been prevented, perhaps by proper management?

"No," Strummer says emphatically. "We've rehired Bernie Rhodes and I think he's doing a real good job. Kosmo and Bernie came to New York first, to see the place."

"2000 gate crashers!" We laugh, and look out the window. "This was a set up," he says, quietly.

I tell him there was a rumor in Boston before the shows that Bond's had oversold the place by two times the capacity, and that the fire department was going to close the show. Strummer is surprised.

"Why didn't you bring it up at the press conference? You would've opened a can of worms!"

He calls over Mick Jones and tells him the story.

"Oh, is everyone in Boston psychic then?" Jones asks. "Can they all see into the future?"

They start talking about Boston, and mention Oedipus.

When told their record breaking escapade at WBCN is infamous, they deny it.

"We didn't break any records," says Strummer innocently. He and Jones look at each other, and start laughing.

Jones and Ellen Foley leave, and Strummer starts playing with a tennis ball, bouncing it around nervously, and starts talking about "squatting" in London.

"I'm disappointed, I got evicted after three months."

From squatting? Isn't that impossible?

He laughs. "No, I was on tour in Europe and they came, marshals with papers and all, and evicted me. Living in London is so expensive. I like squatting. It makes me remember where I come from."

He shifts around on the window sill. "Tonight was my favorite show," he says. "We re-worked the slides around, and they all came together. The music we come on with is from *For a Few Dollars More*. Do you like Clint Eastwood? I love Clint Eastwood."

"No, only *Play Misty for Me*."

"Oh, that one was terrible. If you don't like Clint Eastwood you don't know anything," he teases, still bouncing the tennis ball.

"I'm into guns," he continues.

"It's obvious—the gun imagery, the

Clash's obsession, it seems, with guns. But why?"

"Because they're there—I've seen hundreds of thousands of people being shot on the telly. So it's there, and we show it."

Politics come up and we talk about Northern Ireland. I ask him why the Clash ignore it, instead championing causes that are far removed from England.

"Do you want to die?" he asks. "Do you want to die? I don't."

"Are you saying you think you'd be putting your life on the line?"

"Do you want to die?... I don't want to get involved. It's too volatile. It's been going on since the 1700's. I don't want to get in the middle of it. I'm not Irish."

"You're English though."

He looks at me, and is silent for a few moments.

"The Sandinistas needed publicity, it needed to be known."

"Is that why you wear a t-shirt like the Red Brigades one? Dozens of kids wear them to the shows and have no idea who or what they are."

"Oh, I know, I know. I don't agree with the Red Brigades... it gets too deep." He stops.

"I like to play music. I don't know about the rest of it."

The subject goes back to the press conference.

"Do you know," Strummer says, "the only part they showed on TV was the building inspector slugging away on the Remy Martin." He laughs, shakes his head.

His girlfriend, Gabby, a pale English blonde, comes to get him, and he packs up a shopping bag with clothes and vodka and leaves, but not before signing autographs for a bunch of kids waiting at the side door.

After a week of shows, things slowed down. The Clash stopped doing sound checks, leaving their indomitable roadie, Baker, to bang away on the instruments.

Much of the excitement for the band and crew has come from throwing passes out the window to the crowds below, the acquisition of a new and different Clash t-shirt, and the appearance of someone famous in the dressing room.

Every night, backstage, there is a party where the famous visitor, Keith Levene/Robert Gordon/Joe Ely/Lee Perry, takes pictures with the Clash. The rest of the people wait for autographs and gobble the endless supply of Remy Martin, Heineken, and of course, fried egg sandwiches.

When the band leaves they go out into Times Square and pile into a stationwagon driven by their crazy Rastafarian roadie Ray; then they drive off, into the night.

Kevin is the assistant producer/writer/cameraman for the movie the Clash are making about their stint on Broadway. After a week of filming he's seen the rushes and is excited about what they have.

"This is a political movie. Some people don't believe that music can cause change, but it can. Music reflects what is going on... which causes an awareness... which causes change."

"The Clash have a song like 'Magnificent Seven,'" Kevin explains, "That you can hear all over the city, blaring out of kids' boxes—whites, blacks, hispanics—it's transcendent."

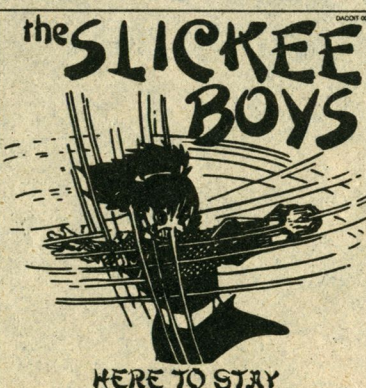
"What we're also trying to show, and what is important is, a belief that the Clash took from Mikey Dread and reggae. That music can heal."

So what the movie will portray, and what people like Kevin, Joe Strummer, Paul Simonon, Topper Headon, and Mick Jones believe is that when people come to see the Clash, they come with a lot of anger, frustration, and negative feelings. When the Clash get on stage, they are in pain—but, like emphatic healing, all the anger and frustration goes through them and then... disappears. And people go home happy.



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