

MUSIC MOVIES STYLE

# THE FACE

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PHOTO JANETTE BECH



# SCAPEGOAT PRODUCTIONS

## THE CLASH AND THE RETURN OF CREATIVE PARANOIA



*Joe, Paul, Topper & Mick warn the world of the return of Bernie.*

**I**N HOT humid New York City, the eight Clash dates at Bonds discotheque had their number doubled following a first night raid by the Fire Dept that revealed the

Times Square joint contained more than twice the legal 1,750 audience limit — such overcrowding being standard practice in Manhattan clubs.

Though Mick Jones was moved at one early point in the proceedings to murmur mournfully, "It looks as though the bad guys have won again," the blanket media clamour that

subsequently surrounded the on/off nature of the shows was so intense that it left no doubt whatsoever as to the considerable popularity of The Clash on the US East Coast.

## A BRUSH WITH THE PAST

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The seasoned Clash-watcher could make out at the centre of all this brouhaha the diminutive figure of a character restored once again to a central position in The Clash story. Bernie Rhodes, the band's first manager who assisted Mick Jones in 1976 in the band's formation only to be dismissed by the outfit in the early autumn of 1978 in a flurry of acrimony, is now once again loosely holding the reins of this most passionately human of rock 'n' roll bands.

The creatively paranoid Rhodes, a sometime cohort of Malcolm McLaren, has no doubt that there were dark forces at work behind the Fire Dept raid. "It was definitely a set-up job," he claims. "I've done a bit of research and I know who tipped off the Fire Dept to visit the show. It was definitely down to club wars. People didn't want a specific club to have The Clash for a week and tie up the scene in this city."

"But so many of the clubs in New York are run by gangsters and the city's run by conservatives, and we've just been trying to operate in the middle area between the two."

The Bonds dates were, in fact, all that remained of a 60 show US tour that had been scheduled to open on April 28. Following a refusal by Epic Records, the group's US label, to underwrite the tour, a European set of shows was slotted in and the New York dates were regarded very much as the final leg of that tour.

The Epic decision was an odd one: a series of 60 gigs would have cemented the already colossal Stateside Clash popularity once and for all; the audience they've picked up is very similar to that from which Bruce Springsteen draws his US devotees.

It's open to conjecture as to how much of this greater friction between the group and their American record company — with whom they've apparently enjoyed a better relationship than with English CBS — is due to the return of Rhodes. Bernie claims, though, that there were record company machinations behind the group's dispensing with his services in '78: it was during the making of the second Clash LP, the Sandy Pearlman-produced "Give 'Em Enough Rope", that Rhodes' relationship with the group fell apart.

"CBS wanted Pearlman in to do it," he explains, "because they said they thought he'd get them an American hit album. But I'm certain they wanted him to manage them as well — that's the way Pearlman works anyway: he both produces and manages Blue Oyster Cult, for example."

"CBS couldn't understand the way I work. See, I like the idea of performance art, of seeing how far you can push something. It's like blowing up a photograph and finding out how long people see it as an image before they start seeing it as dots."

"Every situation needs a scapegoat and I became it. But I was totally prepared to be the scapegoat. I cared for the group. And I knew being a scapegoat wasn't going to be a fulltime career."

"Actually, I'm thinking of setting up Scapegoat Productions — you could take responsibility for goof-ups and send invoices in for payment. So people could keep their careers clean."

Bernie claims that the reason The

## COOKERY CORNER



"Why aren't you eating your boiled kelp?" Yuka Fujii asks her pop star boyfriend, Mick Karn. "It keeps climbing out of the bowl," the bashful bass player replies.

**T**HIS IS Japan's Mick Karn, wielding a wooden spoon instead of a bass guitar, at the opening of a new afternoon eating place. Run by him and his Japanese girlfriend, Yuka Fujii, the eatery is at the October Gallery, 24 Old Gloucester St., W1. Karn's face was nearly as red as his dinky apron and chef's hat as he explained that working in the gallery kitchen was the fulfillment of a long-held wish to run a restaurant. Karn will be there himself, as often as Japan's schedules allow, giving him the opportunity to indulge in his speciality — edible sculpture — while serving Japanese and European home cooking. Karn twittered to his girlfriend in apparently fluent Japanese, pausing to inform the full-mouthed journalists that he's off to the land of the rising microchip in September to exhibit his highly successful — and definitely inedible — sculptures in a country that's obviously close to his heart as well as his stomach.

JILL FURMANOVSKY

Clash have experienced continual contractual difficulties with CBS (not until he was out of the way did the four members appreciate that their five-album deal also gave the company five further options on LPs) is because he wasn't around to continually nurture the situation he himself had created.

"I wasn't allowed to finish a job I'd started," he complains, and compares the £4,000 production costs of "The Clash" with the £150,000 to which "Rope" tabbed up. Bernie stepped aside, however, and cared, for varying lengths of time, for the careers of The Specials, Dexys Midnight Runners, Vic Godard, and Johnny Britton.

Clash affairs in the interim were looked after first by Caroline Coon, then by Blackhill, and from early summer of last year by Kosmo Vinyl, the group's inspirational PR, whose

current function seems to be to act as Bernie Rhodes' conscience. With the four members of the group, Kosmo became part of a creative cooperative effort to further The Clash Quest.

"It was too much to take on," Kosmo now claims. "For example, as well as looking after their own business affairs, Joe and Mick have to write songs, rehearse, tour and talk to the press. It's not necessarily an enjoyable experience for a musician. They're not businessmen, and neither am I. In the end, my time as manager turned out to be just a matter of keeping the whole thing going."

By the beginning of this year, group morale had sagged to an all-time low, largely caused by the critical pounding handed out to "Sandinista!" Joe

Strummer apparently threatened to quit unless Rhodes returned to take control of the group's direction. It was up to Mick Jones, at one time the greatest opponent of Rhodes' policies, to personally visit the group's first manager and ask him back.

Bernie, though, doesn't necessarily see his future as being inextricably linked with that of The Clash. "I want to get the group back on their feet," he says, "so that they're thoroughly established and totally immovable from that position."

"But I certainly don't see it as a permanent position. In fact," he threatens, "Malcolm McLaren and I have plans for something quite big that we'll probably get underway in about a year or so."

PIC: JOE STEVENS/WORDS: CHRIS SALEWICZ