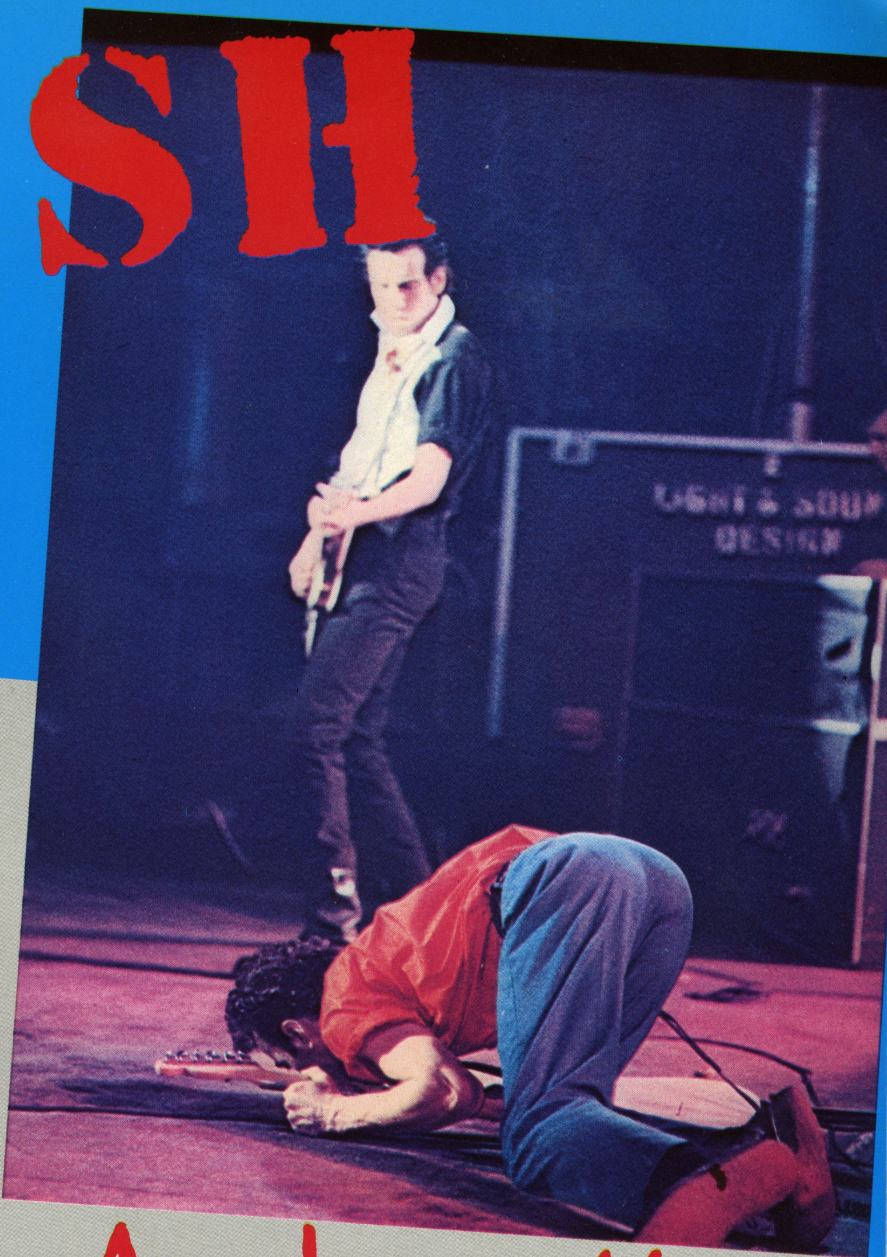
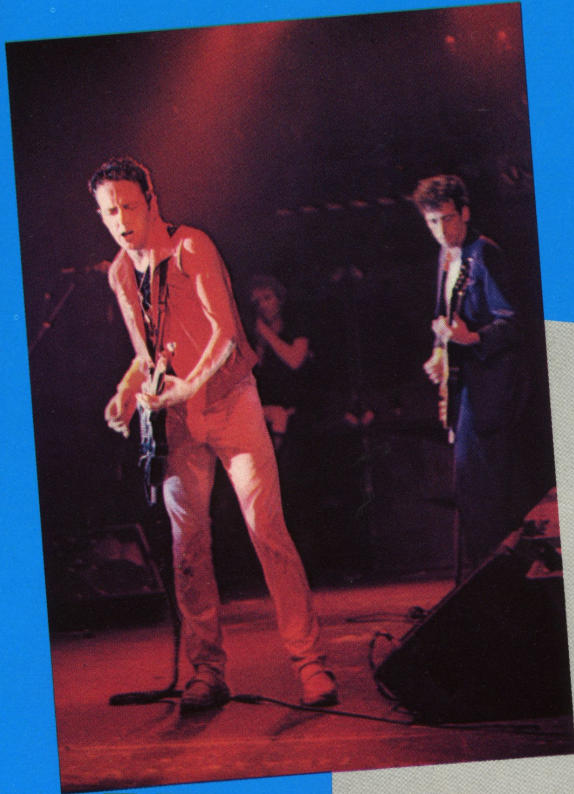
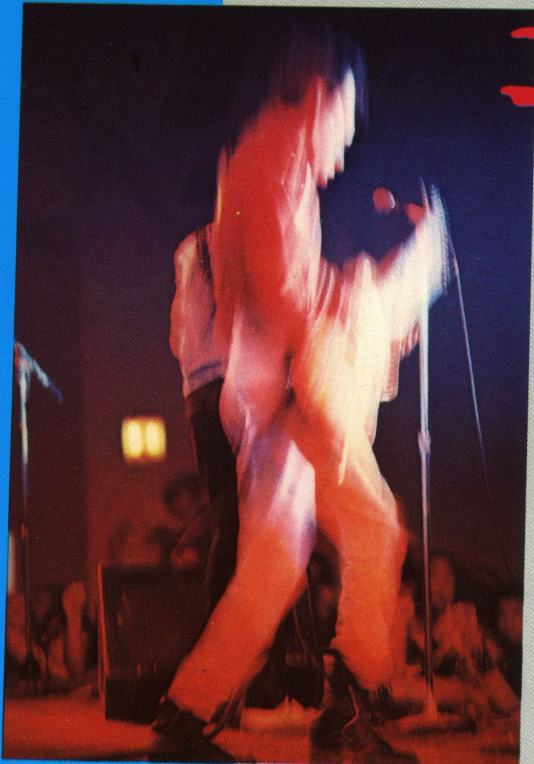


CLASH



AT THE

Apocalypse Hotel



"We're just waiting to be melted down have you ever seen a burning puma?" (Joe Strummer. 'Clampdown'. Paris. September '81. Before I commence with this, the story of one week in Paris and two days in Vienna, let me say immediately that The Clash still move me intensely. They have the ability to mesmerise, stun, stimulate (not simulate) and bruise. They provide thought and most importantly they mean exactly what they say. On a good night they are the greatest rock and roll band in the world. The new material is as powerful as any they've done, and the lyrical content is as biting sarcasm or as poignant as they've produced. Both Strummer and Jones are at an artistic peak and there's no messing. Headon and Simonon ('Ivan Meets G.I. Joe' and 'Guns of

Brixton' respectively) are forces to be reckoned with — their contributions are an integral part of a lengthy and crushing set. So if you're sitting comfortably then I'll begin.

Arriving in Paris on a cold and bleary 6am, I am immediately confronted with the mysterious disappearance of the 200 francs I had so safely placed in the deepest pocket of my Levis. I have 70 pence in English coinage - and the Bureau de Change does not deal with widows, their mites, or me. Consequently, after waiting for a slightly less untactful hour, I take a cab across town to a friend's, who pays the fare and gives me further francs. Bless her cotton socks!

Feeling somewhat better and fortified with rich, red wine — I take the metro to the

Rue de Theatre. The closest station is aptly named 'Emile Zola', but my destination is The Clash hotel, where I sleep in Topper's room till 4pm.

The hotel itself is a forbidding concrete tower set amidst an even more formidable futuristic jungle of the same. Very unParisian. Another thing to contend with are the roaches — as big as any I've ever seen — and the hotel lifts which are as erratic as human nature. I share a suite with Kosmo Vinyl (the Andrew Loog Oldham of the eighties), and Futura 2000, the New York graffiti artist who spray cans the huge white backdrop while The Clash perform.

The following evening sees the band's first show — sold out, as are all seven nights. Although the legal capacity for the Theatre Mogador is round about 2000, each night there are at least an extra 500 people crammed into the beautiful building. The place becomes a sardine tin with central heating.

Opening the show are 'Wah!', an interestingly original band who remind me somewhat of Pere Ubu, and then comes 'The Beat'. 'The Beat' are an incredible band by any standards. Their set includes Prince Busters' 'Rough Rider', the highly pertinent combination of 'Get A Job' and 'Stand Down Margaret', and their touching rendition of 'Tears Of A Clown'. They conclude with 'Mirror In The Bathroom' and leave the stage to tumultuous applause. I like them a great deal.

Now the crowd await The Clash and the atmosphere is sheer electricity. On either side of the stage is a single upright 12 ft. arm, complete with flashing lights set along it. As the band reach the arena sirens wail and the arms descend, almost touching at stage centre. Then they rise and The Clash are playing... 'On Broadway'. This is a stunning choice of opener as, apart from the gentle and subtle beauty of the song itself, it takes the crowd completely by surprise and sets the tone perfectly. They're quickly into 'One More Time' and 'Radio Clash', (a raunchy, angry and memorable song — to be the next single.) On with manic intensity. A sure-fire hit (if it gets played!). Swiftly on and it's another new one, 'Should I Go Or Stay', a hauntingly dramatic song with Mick taking the vocals, to be present on the forthcoming album. The persistent refrain

stays with you and makes its presence felt — another 'Train in Vain'. Next Joe and Paul swop guitars and of course it's 'Guns of Brixton', simply one of the best Clash numbers. Paul sings slightly higher than on the L.P. and the whole thing is somewhat faster, but this song never fails to knock me sideways. Into 'White Man' and 'The Magnificent Seven', then Jones takes the mike for 'Train In Vain', another personal favourite tho' it can also move me to tears (depending on how pissed I am). This is followed by Topper's song-writing and vocal debut, 'Ivan Meets G.I. Joe'. He finds it hard to keep a straight face whilst singing — an attractive quality that I find totally endearing — but just check those lyrics. The band swing into 'Clash City Rockers', and this sends the crowd doubly frantic, then comes 'Koka Kola' and 'Junco Partner' followed quickly by 'The Leader', (Joe's lyrics here are a prime example of the current maturity his writing has attained), then comes 'Washington Bullets', another 100% classic during which Joe hollers 'Don't come back!', and who could possibly disagree. Another new one follows entitled 'Ghetto Defendent', this too packed with vitriol. 'I Fought the Law' and then the superb 'Clampdown'. I recall Joe once introducing this as 'The angry one', but it actually speaks perfectly eloquently for itself. A song I truly adore, as the next one, 'Somebody Got Murdered', a pensive song that wounds with its casual intensity. The set concludes with 'London Calling' and the band leave the stage to a riotous Parisian response that ultimately necessitates three encores! In fact three encores are required for each of the seven nights — and none of them are gratuitous. Tonight they do 'Janie Jones', followed by an extended version of 'Armageddon Times' for which they are joined by Rankin' Roger who dances and toasts with charming conviction. Encore two is 'Safe European Home' and 'Police and Thieves' and the third contains 'Brand New Cadillac' and the final number of the evening, 'London's Burning'.

To witness The Clash in top gear is an almost orgasmic experience, exhilarating and devastating at the same time... they are unrivalled and unbeatable.

Upstairs in the dressing room, however, the band are not totally satisfied! Such is the perfection they currently

seek, but for me, the crowd, and the two gendarmes I saw dancing (!), that's just pedantic professionalism. On a mediocre night The Clash make The Rolling Stones seem as redundant as they are — I swear I've never seen a better band.

I should add here that each night somewhere during the set, Futura 2000 pauses from his art work to take the microphone for his own rap number 'Escapades', to which he also wrote the lyrics. It seems to slightly baffle the French punters, but they soon get the idea.

The evenings in Paris (the

This is The Clash forte: they have always possessed and still retain a dignity and pride that go hand in hand to produce something entirely exceptional, that they maintain a calculated and orchestrated musical and lyrical evolution, and that there is simply no compromise. None at all. The Clash are striving for something and they may never be satisfied. But then, who is? What is important is their persistence and courage in constantly reaching for something that may seem futile idealism to some, but is the very essence of life to others. Tho' the genre they use



SIMONON: "We're not men with the eyes of Sergeant Bilkol!"

show starts and finishes early so people can catch the Metro (home) are spent in various night spots/clubs, consuming vast amounts of alcoholic beverages and eating the delicious French food. All the band — et moi — are vegetarians, Mick not touching any animal produce and Topper occasionally wavering. This doesn't mar our enjoyment one bit, it actually enhances it as they know how to cook vegetables in France. Culinary comments aside, more serious matters are afoot.

Paul is having trouble. His hip has bone inflammation (similar to rheumatism) and is extremely painful. A doctor is required and prescribes pain killers — ineffective and completely unhelpful — so Paul suffers on in silence. It doesn't help that his left shoulder is completely raw, this a result of both his heavy Precision bass and the lengthy sets. Each night sees a thick wad of gauze strapped upon his shoulder with gaffa tape. Not once does he complain.

is limited by the nature of it being seen as merely 'the empty excesses of vacant youth', (quote from an Austrian journalist in Vienna), that is a severely blinkered view to say the least. Pass the white stick.

During the seven nights in Paris the actual set differs little. Other new songs are added at random and these include the often present 'Know Your Rights', an utterly caustic condemnation of the limited freedom under which we all exist and to be on the new album. Also there are 'Long Time Jerk', which possesses a pathos and subdued anger that hurts, and 'The Inoculated City'. It's gonna be some album.

Off-stage things do not run so smoothly. One night sees a dressing room row essentially caused by reinstated manager Bernard Rhodes, evolving from his apparent concern over 'the condition of Topper'. This is completely unnecessary paranoia as Topper is probably the most physically fit member

of the band — I didn't see any of the other three do 50 pressups before the show — but the fracas occurs and perhaps it served some purpose, tho' precisely what eludes me. Rhodes is back and he certainly keeps the band on their toes despite the fact that his methods can sometimes seem devious. It is also true that he has been a sporadic but genuine source of intellectual stimulation upon the group, tho' within his own lifestyle there are contradictions. I like him but no longer respect him as I mostly certainly did thru' 76/77. This one bitter argument sees Topper (and the

doesn't affect the sound quality, but there's no way you'll get a Cincinatti situation where The Clash are involved.

Meanwhile, just down the road from the venue, the Turkish Embassy siege takes place. It escalates from the initial seven hostages to something like forty, and we hear the police sirens blaring past. The entire area surrounding the embassy is quickly cordoned off — and although the 'terrorists' eventually give themselves up — the one condition being that the French police don't shoot, it seems a weird and somehow pertinent backdrop to The

Paris — an exit that befits the entrance with more than justice — we encounter a show that transcends the realms of rock and roll and becomes an unforgettable 'experience'. I ain't joking. Pearl Harbour, Ranking Roger and Mikey Dread (who just suddenly arrived!), are all on stage at some time during the set — Pearl making the major contribution. Her delicately feminine attire and subtle beauty do nothing to prevent the sheer power of her sensitive rendition of 'Hit The Road Jack' shining through. And this on a night of beaming light. Ranking Roger toasts on 'Armageddon Time' and Mikey launches into a version of 'Bankrobber' that compresses eight minutes so tightly they could just as well be one. All in all The Clash are on stage for two whole hours — and the crowd still want more!

collection of Peter Bruegel's work in the world. An incredible experience.

Then comes the shock. Not only have the two trucks (containing all the equipment necessary for the show) been busted on the French/Swiss border, but all the gear has been impounded! So for a bit of coke and a tiny piece of dope the whole Clash show is in severe jeopardy. Rhodes immediately threatens to sue the trucking company while the personal road crew rush around the town trying to sort out some alternative equipment. Thankfully for all concerned they are successful.

The show is at the Vienna State Hall and considering the circumstances the hurriedly hired and borrowed equipment turns out fine. Topper has a white Pearl kit, smaller than his normal one but good enough. Joe has a Strat

TOPPER: "I haven't been dead since 1976!"

No other band could reinforce or substantiate what The Clash attempt and succeed in doing. They erode the empty and putrid barriers of racial mistrust and establish a positive and creative force that is a genuine threat to the evils of the so-called establishment. The Clash will persist until the reality they so succinctly portray either obliterates the illusion most people choose to dwell in or the band die of old age. Never will they acquiesce and tolerate human beings continuing to have their choices made FOR them. For that alone they have my respect.

So after that final stunning show we all head for Vienna — me in a Volvo estate shared with the technical road crew, a great bunch of guys with an amazing collective sense of humour. The 22 hour drive becomes quite an experience, especially when due to a noisy exhaust we are not permitted entry to Switzerland! We turn back and find an obliging mechanic who quickly fits a new exhaust and off we go again.

We reach Vienna around 2am and after a lightning raid on the drinks cabinet I feel compelled to go to bed. The morning discloses that the streets of Vienna appear to have been vacuumed... it really is the cleanest city I've ever seen. It is extremely beautiful and all the same (tho' I wouldn't like to live there), and Paul and I make an early morning sojourn to an intown museum that has the largest

instead of his usual Telecaster and Paul his usual Precision bass borrowed from a local shop. Mick as a Les Paul borrowed from the support band. Thankfully the P.A. and lights are also fully functional and the show emerges as one of the absolute blunders that The Clash seem so often to produce under conditions of adversity and over 4000 tickets have been sold. Among the other material they include tonight is 'Charlie Don't Surf', 'Junco Partner', 'Spanish Bombs', 'Jimmy Jazz' and 'Janie Jones'. Once again they're on the stage for nearly two hours and it's simply brilliant!

If I was you I'd make your reservation at The Apocalypse Hotel right now. It's gonna be a very heavy season.

ROBIN BANKS

Pennie Smith



JONES: "If people spit on me it simply shows they have absolutely no idea of what we're about."

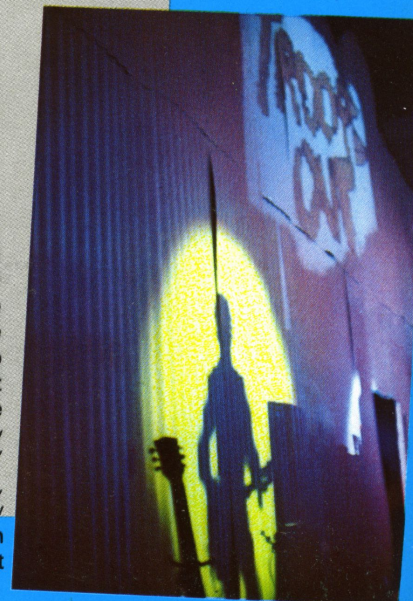
other three) defending and/or attempting to rationalise a situation that doesn't exist. A French farce if ever I saw one.

But back to the Mogador shows, and The Clash only sporadically get a sound check, this because on several occasions it becomes necessary to open the doors early as the throng outside the theatre seem likely to enter — willingly or unwillingly — thru' the glass doors at the front of the building. Whether they're open or not. Fortunately this

Clash's week in Paris. Comparisons though are obviously redundant, The Clash use a gentler and hopefully more persuasive method of projecting their own ideals.

During their stay the group do a photo session with '60's trendsetter David Bailey. He works with an intensity and authority that compels one to quickly realise he has successfully made the transition from '62 to '81. The Clash are pleased with the results.

Leaping to the final night in

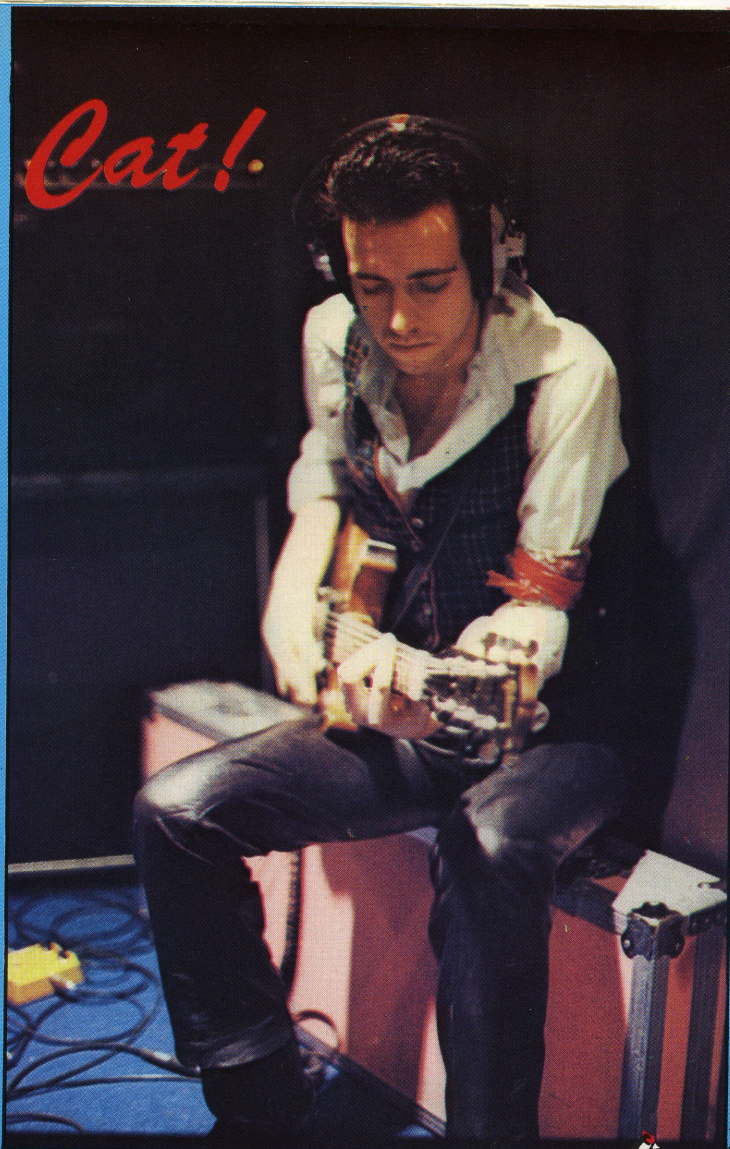


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