## D: Arts and Entertainment

## Young Japan turns politely punk for

TASAE Kurimoto, a 19-year-old student, spent most of last week haunting the lobby of a Tokyo hotel and the frozen pavements outside concert halls, dodging security guards and trying to glimpse the four members of a rock band whose music is never played on Japanese radio

She spent 30,000 yen (\$A120) of her meagre allowance to buy tickets. for every one of their shows, and melts at the thought of touching and talking to one of her idols.

and who have never been

here before.

One eye on the elevators at the Keio Plaza Hotel, she explains that she has bought and memorised every record put out by The Clash, the most enduring exponents of the punk rock movement that started in England about five years ago.

Masae breaks off as a sudden flurry in the lobby warns that two members of The Clash are dashing for a car. Masae is headed off by a staffer of the group's Japanese promoter, Tatsuo Takahaski. Dressed in tight jeans and bikie jacket he tells her: "You come into the lobby again and I'll slap you around the face."

"Ooh, he's so mean," sighs Masae. "He kicked one of my friends this morning."

The next night at the Kosei Nenkin Hall in Tokyo's racey Shinjuku district, Masae is more in her element. It's the Saturday night concert by The Clash, and in the subways/and streets converging on the hall it's as if a transformation has been made of young Japan.

The look this winter in Japan is strictly ivy league preppie: fawn slacks, classic sweaters, blazers, pleated skirts, moccasins and college boy haircuts above glowingly wholesome faces.

But here in Shinjuku it's suddenly white, half-starved faces, hollow eyes, pants gathered at the ankles to emphasise the boots, spikey hair, and black leather. Chains, safety pins, silver swastikas are the jewellery.

Sullen expressions are kept in place. And as the skinny figures of The Clash dash on stage and open up with London's Burning the 5,000 strong capacity audience is on its feet and jiving, as it will through nearly two hours (including three encores) of such numbers as Yankee Pigs and White Riot.

Something is happening. Can it be that Japan at last is developing

an angry youth? Despite the enthusiasm the audience is incredibly polite, orderly, obeying instructions to stay in their place and not climb on the seats. They disperse quickly and quietly after the show. Not a whiff of marihuana, not a sign of a beer can even.

Or can it be that The Clash, who continually stress the political content of their lyrics (and stress it with slides of American soldiers, napalmed Vietnamese, etc) and believed to be succoured by the boredom and hopelessness of unemployment, are just entertainers after all?

Japan has been a puzzling encounter for The Clash. Backstage after the show, the lead singer and chief ideologist, Joe Strummer, is huddled over his newly acquired portable humidifier, trying to ease his vocal cords. "These few days in Japan have changed my life, or at least I hope they have," he says.

The adulation of his Japanese fans contrasts with the seen-it-all coolness of London crowds or the straight-out aggro of England's industrial north, he said. "The kids here show me their photos to, sign. They've got all the records. But they don't say what they think,

"For years I've been telling myself that at least 95 per cent of audiences got my message, but in New York last year I realised that on a good day it wouldn't be more than 25, per cent. A lot of them thought we were heavy metal like Van Halen.

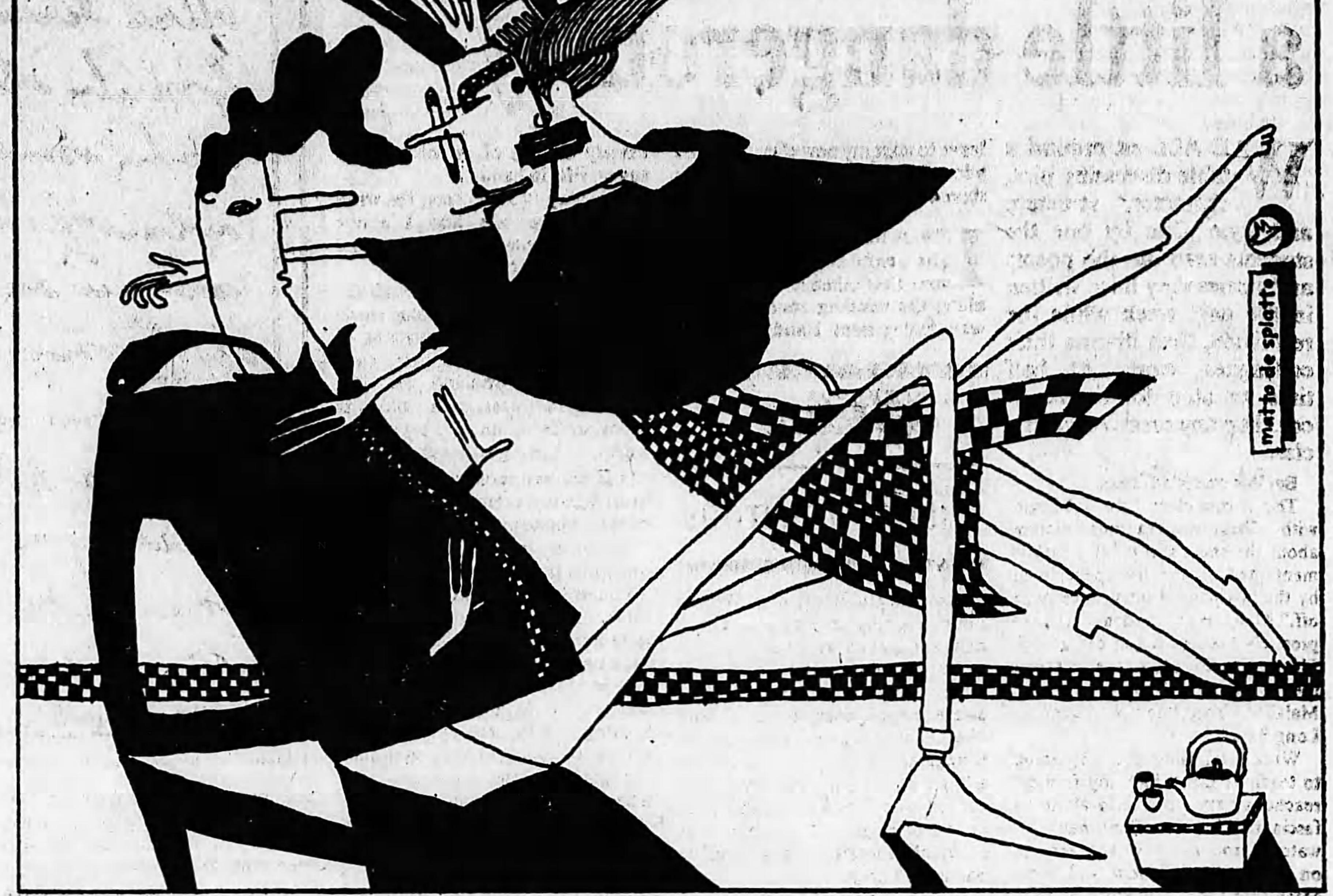
"People say the Japanese have three faces: one for the outside world, one for their friends and one for themselves. There seems to be a tremendous amount of repression here - fried chicken is good for you, go to New York for your holidays. Maybe the face they show for themselves is not so happy.

"How is it the Japanese have got all together here? If I was Japanese I would be worried. I think we in Europe and America might drag them down. If I was in charge here I would ban all this American stuff. I would ban all this Mickey Mouse notepaper, baseball and Farah Fawcett-Majors...

"I've been learning here more than anywhere else. I wasn't prepared for the Martian aspect. We are all so into drugs in the West you want to throw up. I hadn't realised how far into drugs we were.

"Maybe they should send the entire western world here in twoweek shifts, so they can clean up.'

Strummer and lead guitarist



## Rock

## Hamish McDonald

Mick Jones said they were a little bemused by the tiny, indigenous punk rock movement in Japan which has thrown up (perhaps the right word) such groups as Stalin, whose stock-in-trade is hurling garbage at the audience, urinating off the front of the stage and molesting female fans.

Japan's leading punk rockers are a group called Anarchy, who recently turned out at a London studio while The Clash were recording. "We lent them our instruments," said Strummer, "Then we sat and watched them play Clash numbers better than we can.

"I don't know if they know what they are playing with that name. I think you have to be very heavy

with that name." Added Clash manager Bernard Rhode: "They looked like a nice middle-class lads to me. If they are just interested in selling millions of records they should call themselves the Nolan Brothers or Charlie Easton."

Is punk in Japan just a fashion? "It could be true," said Strummer. "But who knows what is going to hit the fan here in two or three years' time?"

Is punk dead anyway? "Only from the neck up.

"Punk to me is kicking against something, or not lying down and doing what you are told. We like calling ourselves punk because it infuriates the people who don't like

Strummer has packed away his humidifier and, ever careful of his throat, is winding a spotted cravat around his neck. Suddenly with his licked pompadour hairstyle, he looks more the lounge lizard than rock singer.

I showed him excerpts from some of the pre-publicity for The Clash's Australian tour. The Clash, a brochure says, "will never be equalled in their radical approach and raw honesty. To convey the

excitement and chaos of this awesome band and their live performances, I must attempt to hurl words at the silence of this page like hand grenades."

Moreover, The Clash are broke from selling their records too cheaply out of kindness to their fans and are always in trouble with authorities: "Hassles surround The Clash like over-sexed iron filings around an electro-magnet. A band of extremes still obsessed with the romantic notion of the rock and roll outlaw, their every action is garnished with a side order of wind-ups."

Phew! Strummer groans as he reads it, then calls in Cosmo Vinyl (sic), the group's publicity manager. "Go and sit down and read this. Then get your pants down." More groans: "They might as well have tied a millstone around my neck. I was looking forward to going to Australia, but I don't want to go there now.

"No, we give a damn (euphemism), but we don't give money away," he said. "We have very keen leg-ins sensors any loading)."

Strummer admits he gets a kick out of performing and applause, and keeps a meticulous note in the front of his diary of the number of encores at each concert. "Bvesy performer has the same ego nightmare: what if I don't get any encores. You don't get up there unless your ego is way out of control."

Outside in the corridor, half-adozen stunningly good-looking girls have gathered, mostly western. There is talk of a champagne party back on the 34th floor of the Keio Plaza hotel. The Clash and their followers pile into Mercedes-Benz

On the pavement, Masae and about 30 fellow fans are standing virtually lassoed by a rope held by straining guards. Strummer stops his car and wades into the crowd. disappearing among clutching arms, and sobs of "Joe, Joe." After five minutes, two burly roadies, one a fair-haired cockney bruiser and the other a West Indian in dread locks, extricate a reluctant Strummer from his communique and bundle him into the limousine.