

SPECTATOR/ED KEATING

I'M NOT ANGRY: Elvis Costello, no longer attacking everyone in sight, is the closest thing his generation's got to Frank Sinatra.

Can rock and roll change anything?

By PETER CARBONARA

W.H. Auden wrote, "Poetry changes nothing." Joe Strummer doesn't buy that.

Last Wednesday, Strummer, wearing a Mohawk haircut and what looked like a yellow flak-jacket, led the Clash through a ragged, wandering set at Pier 86. Looking tired and pissed-off, Strummer stopped playing during a few songs, and sang with his hands on the microphone, eyes closed, as if he were trying to pretend he was somewhere else.

For a few months in 1977, the Clash were *the* punk band (just beneath the Sex Pistols, of course). This was working-class fury, this was teenage rebellion, this was rock and roll. But it didn't take long for the English music press to disown the Clash after they signed a contract with CBS records for what were big bills by punk standards. As the band branched out musically, trying to inject melody of all things into punk, they were reviled at home for heresy. "Train in Vain," a love song from the **London Calling** album was a hit in America, but English rock fans ignored it.

What had the Clash done wrong? They had strayed from the path of political correctness that they themselves had helped establish. English punk was supposed to be overtly political, meaning openly leftist. By writing songs that were less furious musically and with lyrics that were stories about people instead of political manifestos, the Clash earned the scorn of English fans and critics to whom rock is no mere musical form, but in fact a primary propaganda weapon in the ongoing battle against a nebulous *them*.

What used to be called "new wave" seems to have taken two paths. The first is the one the Clash have tried to follow through most of their career—angry, alienated youth speaking out against the system. The Clash cultivated an image of themselves as representative of the bored English kid, under-educated, unemployed, the little guy who had been screwed by *them*, the politicians, the bosses and factory-owners, the rich and the powerful. The other school of new rock that emerged in the late 70s, responded to hard times by ignoring them. The most talented practitioner is probably Elvis Costello. Writing songs that are self-consciously "pop" tunes, Costello will sometimes touch on politics, but usually as a metaphor for personal relations. The Clash concerned themselves with *the people*, the opressed masses. Costello is interested in particular people within the mass.

Both Elvis Costello and the Clash have released albums this summer and both played in New York in the last two weeks. The concerts said a lot about which vein of rock music seemed richer and also about what Auden said about poetry.

The Clash were listless on stage Wednesday night. Strummer seemed annoyed at the crowd, which had responded to a 10 minute-long set by rapper, Kurtis Blow with boos and shouting. The gesture of having a black act open for the band was lost on the white audience. The Clash should have expected no less. When Grandmaster Flash opened for them last summer at Bond's his reception was something less than warm. The way the audience abused Blow created a sour atmosphere that the Clash seemed unable or unwilling to dispel. The group played their old songs without passion and went into extended jams on some of their newer material. The crowd stood up and cheered (especially for the horrific hit single, "Should I Stay or Should I Go?"—another love song) but, the Clash could have cared less. They hurried through the obligatory encores and left.

Costello, who played Forest Hills two weeks ago and did two nights at Pier 86 last week, was in rare form. While some of the fury of his early years seemed to have faded, Costello was confident on stage and sang with power and subtlety. Almost all of the songs he did at Forest Hills were about love, usually love lost or otherwise gone wrong. While Costello ocassionally lets himself get cynical, at Forest Hills, both in song selection and performance, he emphasized the romantic aspect of his work. The guarded optimism of his new songs suited him well and his performance was earnest and to the point.

See *CHANGE*, 11



SPECTATOR/ED LAW

LET'S TWIST AGAIN: Chubby Checker, never one for false modesty, describes the Twist as "the most important song of the 20th century."

Chubby Checker twists at Wollman

By ANNE BRAKO

"I didn't want to do 'The Twist,' " Chubby Checker admitted—more than 20 years and 40 million copies later. But Checker doesn't regret his decision to record Hank Ballard's song.

"It was the most important song of the 20th century," Checker said. "It changed everything. It changed the way people dance."

Anyone who didn't go to the Orientation '82 Concert last Thursday night, which featured Checker, because they didn't want to see an 'oldie,' missed out on something new.

Instead of relying on old songs Checker offered the Columbia audiences cuts from his first album in 15 years, **The Change Has Come**. And Columbia loved it.

During the first of two shows, Checker appeared to have all the energy a human could possess. He belted out every song with his still powerful voice and twisted across the stage. For the second show Checker came out with as much if not more energy. The skeptical philosophy major might wonder what drugs this man took. The burnt-out pre-professional might want to know where to get some. Sorry, guys, this performer is natural.

Between shows Checker didn't succomb even to a beer. The singer drank mineral water. And Checker expects the same wholesome vitality from his band.

"I have young energy," Checker said. "I demand a lot of energy from my band."

The Chubby Checker Band supplies it, but these musicians are all younger than Checker, who is 40. James Holmes, a superb drummer, has been around for five years. The bassist, Joe Martinez, is another veteran, as is second guitarist Brian Zenun. Robert Walsh (lead guitar), Wade Hoeger (keyboards), and Don Raby (saxophone) have been around for only a year or less.

"My band's always coming and going," said Checker. Keeping up with this man is no small feat.

But things haven't changed that much. Checker's new album includes yet another remake of "The Twist," entitled "T-82." Ballard may have written the song, but "The Twist" belongs to Checker. His motions turned it into a revolutionary dance movement. Checker explained, " 'The Twist' was a very dirty dance. No one ever did that before." They haven't stopped since, according to Ch~cker; "Today in '82

See *CHUBBY*, 11

A Nobel laureate's visions from California

Visions from San Fransisco Bay by Czeslaw Milosz, Farrar Straus Giroux. $14.95 (Hardcover).

The Seizure of Power by Czeslaw Milosz, Farrar Straus Giroux. $6.95 (Paperback).

By ROGER B. BLUMBERG

Visions of San Fransisco Bay, a collection of essays by Nobel Prize winner Czeslay Milosz, was first published in Polish, in 1969. At that time the author was a California resident of 9 years and the essays showed Milosz, a man nearing 60, reflecting on his life and describing the world from a single viewpoint. "I am here," he writes in the opening essay, "and everyong is in some 'here'—and the only thing we can do is try to communicate with one another."

The essays, with few exceptions, are light. Milosz, by his own admission, is more comfortable writing poetry than prose, and **Visions from San Fransisco Bay** often seems talked into the typewriter.



Czeslaw Milosz

But the "talking" does not make the reading dull. Milosz discusses everything from his boyhood love for the colorful illustrations of birds and insects in nature books to his emigration in middle age to America.

From his seat in Berkeley, California, Czeslaw Milosz presents the world-in-sight as a metaphor for the direction of Western Civilization. He speaks of American technology embodied by the nuclear power plants beyond the hills that overlook San Fransisco Bay and he communicates a feeling of courage and acquired hope by describing a visit to the home of the poet Robinson Jeffers in an essay entitled "Carmel."

Perhaps the most entertaining aspect of **Visions from San Fransisco Bay** is Milosz' imagination; his sense of fantasy and humor. In "A Short Digression on Woman as a Representative of Nature," he writes, "And does not the adolescent in us, while envying us, smile with bitterness too—he who would wish to be loved for himself alone and not for manly biological exterior attributes which are either granted or denied by chance? Does he not long for a brotherhood of pure spirits, for the sword placed in the bed between Tristan and Isolde?"

The casual tone in many of the essays is aided by quotations which appear at the start of several of the pieces. Although many of the quotations are made with serious intent, the author's device is irony, not assault. Most of the quotations come from familiar writers, but Milosz begins his essay "The Agony of the West" with a line of graffiti from a Berkeley student restaurant: "Due to lack of interest tomorrow has been cancelled."

Published in August in a translation by Richard Lourie, **Visions from San Fransisco Bay** is easy to pick up and put down at leisure. The essays are short, the language smooth and, though some may find it difficult to relate to more than a few of Milosz' "Californian" descriptions of nature, his viewpoint is very appealing.

See *VISIONS*, 11

Le Beau Marriage: Is marriage more important than sex?

By ERIC LAURSEN

If there were such a thing as the "quintessential " European director, Eric Rohmer would be it. Most of his films are sophisticated comedies about relations between the sexes, the most famous of which are **Claire's Knee** and **The Marquise of O**. When critics praise them they use adjectives like "polished", "witty" and "civilized." Not surprisingly, American audiences, used to fast-paced entertainments like **Star Wars**, often find Rohmer's films very dry.

Le Beau Marriage, which opened in New York last week, is Rohmer's latest movie. It's about Sabine (Beatrice Romand), a young French art student who has just broken up with her lover, a married man. Sabine decides that the only way to make sure she will never be in the same situation again is to get married herself.

First, of course, she has to find someone to marry. At the wedding of a friend she meets Edmond (Andre Dussollier), a Parisian lawyer who is "handsome, young, rich and . . . free." The rest of the film describes Sabine's efforts to make Edmond fall in love with her—as opposed to seducing him.

There's something a little old-fashioned about **Le Beau Marriage**. Though it deals with love and the need to be loved, sex hardly enters into the story at all. Sabine wants Edmond to fall in love with her and ask her to marry him without sex becoming an issue first. How often in the past decade has a romantic comedy come out in which marriage is a more important subject than sex?

Le Beau Marriage is really about growing up. Even though she's had affairs before, Sabine hasn't quite gotten over the teenager's desire for attention. She breaks up with her lover because he still cares about his family, then decides to get married because wives presumably don't have to share their husbands' attention with anyone else. Edmond is a busy man and doesn't really want to get involved with a woman, but Sabine acts as though she's doing him a great honor by being attracted to him. By the end of the movie nothing special has happened— except that Sabine has learned that in a "well-made marriage" one partner's feelings are never more important than the other's.

A critic, commenting on **Claire's Knee**, said that "watching a Rohmer film is like watching paint dry." He should have continued the sentence, "compared to the movies Americans are accustomed to." Like Rohmer's earlier films, **Le Beau Marriage** is very conversational. Most of the events are talked out by the characters, and nothing ever happens in a totally spontaneous way.

This is because of who the characters are, though, not because the story isn't interesting. **Le Beau Marriage** could almost be called an upper-middle class slice-of-life movie. Sabine and Edmond aren't like the people you see on the street everyday, but they aren't too different from the people at an average cocktail party or college campus. Rohmer's characters seldom do much that's out of the ordinary. They go to weddings, go shopping, throw birthday parties and eat in nice restaurants.

Sabine, Edmond and the other characters are affluent, educated people. They tend to intellectualize and discuss their problems and seldom let their emotions take over. That's how upper-middle class people behave, and Rohmer treats them no less realistically than a director like Martin Scorsese would treat Italian-Americans.

It's hard to believe that 20 years ago

See *MARRIAGE*, 11