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Goodbye To The Who — A Tour De Force In Rock

By Ronald W. Powell Bee Staff Writer

OAKLAND — Goodbyes don't have to be sad.

And at The Who's Saturday afternoon concert at the Oakland Coliseum Stadium — part of their purported farewell tour — there were no signs of melancholy. If, indeed, the accomplished band of four is calling it quits, more than 60,000 fans here sent them off with a celebratory bang.

The Who, of course, is one of the few surviving bands from the so-

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called British Invasion of the 1960s.

Gone — for one reason or other — are the Beatles, Yardbirds, Animals and assorted other lads from the United Kingdom who took America by storm during those tempestuous years. The Who joins the Rolling Stones and the Kinks as the few rare acts to outlive the era.

In some ways, watching The Who perform was like peering at a grainy '60s freeze frame. Surly vocalist Roger Daltry, always the band's sexy beefcake, still struts cocksure and wields the microphone like a lariat. Bassist John Entwistle maintains his detached stage presence

while crisply thumping out the underpinning of The Who's driving sound.

Drummer Kenny Jones, an extremely talented musician, played as relentlessly as cranking pistons. But on a psychic level, some fans still discern a void behind The Who's drum kit. Eccentric Keith Moon, who joined a long list of rock 'n' roll drug casualties in 1978, is still missed by ardent Who followers. A banner draped from the second deck — "God Bless Keith Moon" — attested to the imprint the volatile musician left on some fans.

For this tour, which is estimated to draw 2 million fans and \$35 million, The Who also added keyboard player Tim Gorman. Adding a tasty overlay to several sides, Gorman was the band's only extra player.

But the biggest reason why The Who generated a feeling of '60s nostalgia and repeated flashbacks was lead guitarist Pete Townshend. Apparently rejuvenated after protracted bouts with alcohol and a pharmacy of various drugs, Townshend was in exhilarating form. Townshend, regarded as one of rock's few literati, played with the fervor displayed on The Who's first American tour in 1967. He was absolutely dynamite.

Townshend punched out those heavy, fuzzy power chords like a jackhammer, revving up for each

stroke of the strings as if preparing to deliver a punch. And when he wasn't walloping the crowd with guitar licks, Townshend drove it to frenzy with his patented jump splits. He vibrated with vitality.

But there were obvious departures from The Who of old. They have long abandoned their expensive trademark of busting up guitars and sound equipment (call it maturity?). There wasn't a hint of destruction in their 24-song, two hour and 15 minute set. They played with control, polish and savvy — the residue of 18 roller-coaster years in rock music. Their style was effortless.

Still, The Who has retained the high energy its fans thrive on. They are still explosive, able to latch onto a Beach Boys-like harmony, then suddenly zoom to the stratosphere on the wings of Townshend's guitar without a blink, sweeping the crowd right along with them.

HE CROWD. It was a story in itself. Many among the crowd were either unborn or toddlers when The Who recorded its first and most enduring hit, "My Generation." Still, the anthems of teen rebellion struck the gum-chewing set right in the solar plexus. Protest standards like "My Generation," "Won't Get Fooled Again," and "Baba O'Riley" — with Townshend proclaiming the rock



Bee file photo

Roger Daltry, left, and Pete Townshend mix it up at a Who concert earlier in the group's tour.

scene a "teen-age wasteland" — brought the white eclectic crowd to its feet. Clenched fists jutted skyward.

There were Punks decked in

their leather, spiked and dyed splendor, New Wavers, the high school avant-garde and even a few dino-

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A Gospel According To Clash

By Bob Sylva Bee Staff Writer

HE CLASH, rock music's reigning moral conscience from the United Kingdom, isn't above picking up a few extra quid.

Their surprise concert Friday night at Sacramento Memorial Auditorium was obviously a last-minute arrangement before their Saturday

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opening appearance for The Who at the Oakland Coliseum. But what the heck? If you're in the neighborhood, why not drop by?

Unfortunately, the \$10.50-a-ticket show often had the feel of a hastily arranged, take-the-money-and-run affair. The Clash's performance, though deftly executed, was none-theless a bit perfunctory and preoccupied — not at all like their explosive campaign stop in San Francisco last June. One had the impression that the raging lads were yawning behind their yells.

Still, The Clash is The Clash. And

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it's not every day that a band of its international musical stature and apocalyptic world view comes to Sacramento — even if the occasion was one of convenience. (That, admittedly, is the cynical view. It could be that The Clash, which sees itself on a rock mission, simply took an opportunity to spread the gospel. As Clash vocalist Joe Strummer says, "I want to tell people that we're all being conned.")

Whether it was convenience or conversion, The Clash attracted an impressive — though much less than sell-out — crowd of maybe 3,000, which hooted, hollered, clapped and stood on their seats the entire 90-minute set. There were enough fatigues and Combat Rock T-shirts in sight to outfit a battalion.

And when the audience wasn't on its feet and thumping the air with fists, it was out in the aisles dancing like crazy. The world may indeed be on the brink, but it's hard to resist that cataclysmic beat.

Among other things, a Clash concert is part civics lesson, part arm-chair cruise.

Simultaneously, as The Clash performs their provocative repertoire of compelling songs, which are rife with warnings of industrial decay, social collapse, economic inequality and various Third World themes, a huge screen at the back of the stage flashes multi-images of newspaper headlines, grim photographs and depressing accounts of myriad disasters around the world.

It's kind of fun, though a bit distracting, to sit back in your seat and figure out just where in the world you are — Saigon, Tehran, Belfast, or Times Square — and ascertain just what war or riot is taking place.

But message aside, it's the music that counts and The Clash plays and sounds as savage as the world scene it abhors.

Vocalist Joe Strummer — sporting a fierce Mohawk and a pair of impenetrable shades — quickly took stage center, repeatedly barked at the crowd like an enraged rooster and, as the scene erupted with a blinding dawn of white lights, viciously struck the first chords to "London Calling" like a diabolic alarm clock going off. From then on it was one assault after another.

The Clash, whatever the shortcomings of their first Sacramento appearance, is one formidable band that is as synchronized as the goose step. Joe Strummer claws his guitar so fast his hand is a blur. Guitarist Mick Jones is equally commanding on quick leads and boasts an almost delicate vocal quality that well

balances Strummer's outrageous bark.
Drummer Terry Chimes is ominous like
distant thunder, while bassist Paul Simonon is so loose and fluid he's like a
thumping marionette on stage.

Their 21-song set, which was directed like machine gun spray, included selections from nearly all of The Clash's five albums. Understandably enough, the most response was generated from "Combat Rock" (CBS), The Clash's latest album, which features such danceable crowd pleasers as "Rock The Casbah" and "Should I Stay Or Should I Go?"

Though The Clash's rendition of their current campaign anthem, "I Fought The Law," was unbelievably sloppy and carefree, they were faultless on such cuts as "Spanish Bombs" and "Running, Hiding," which well displayed Mick Jones' plaintive vocals. The rollicking rock-abilly of "Brand New Cadillac" and the bitter sarcasm of "Career Opportunities" also came through loud and clear.

The highlight of the evening, however, was their recent composition "Straight To Hell," a heartfelt reproach over the banished Amer-asian children of the Vietnam War.

Compositions like that, and the heightened political consciousness it represents, make The Clash one of the more profound and principled bands in rock music's often very superficial world.