



**The Clash
confess!**
18 page special

**Bryan Ferry, Elvis Costello,
Tom Jones, Led Zep, Deviants**
Plus: Gomez, Roger Waters, Talking Heads...

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The Music Magazine



**EXCLUSIVE! UNSEEN
PIX OF FABS ON SET**

The Beatles

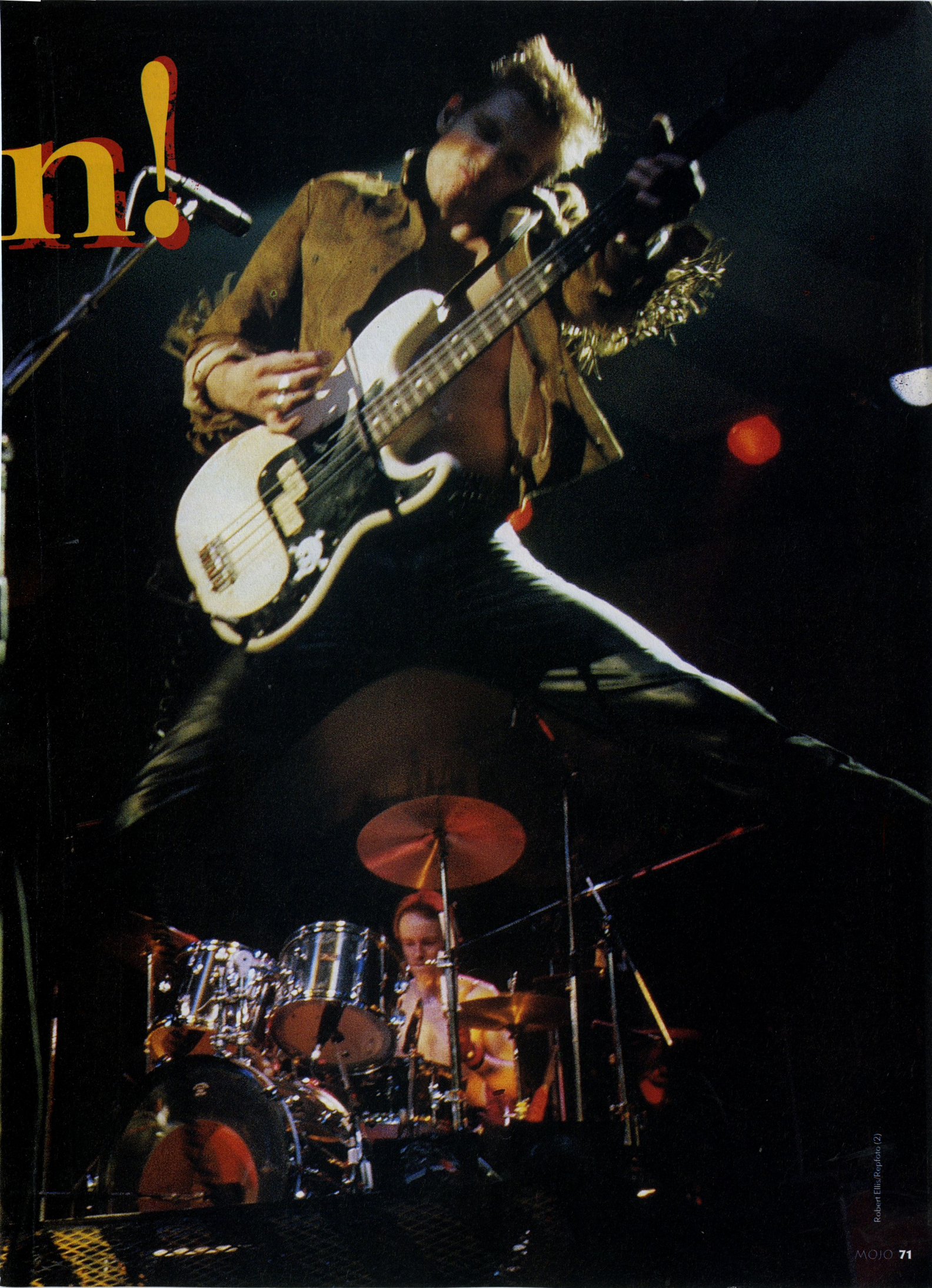
**"Yellow Submarine? The Flintstones on LSD!"
Paul, George, Ringo and crew tell the full story**

Meltdown



The rock'n'roll prima donna. The agit-prop public schoolboy. The frustrated painter. The heroin-addicted headmaster's son. Such an incendiary combination could not last forever. Now, for the first time since their acrimonious split, all four members of **The Clash** have agreed to set the record straight for MOJO. By **Pat Gilbert**.

m!



Robert Ellis Replogle (2)

THE ROAD TO BUDDY HOLLY'S LAST RESTING PLACE TAKES YOU THROUGH the less salubrious quarter of Lubbock, Texas, past railway sidings and grain silos, freight depots and faded one-storey warehouses. His simple grave in the city's municipal cemetery is marked by a modest marble stone set flat in the ground, dusted with the fine powder that blows in relentlessly from the surrounding cotton fields.

Little has changed here since the night in 1979 when the site

received some of its most enthusiastic and unlikely pilgrims. Dressed in black jeans, boots and leather jackets, four lean figures alighted from a Winnebago and set up a grave-side camp of ghetto-blasters, guitars and beer bottles. At first they maintained a reverential hush, as if worried that the spectre of Holly might disapprove of their presence, but as joints were rolled and Buds necked, a party started to swing into life. Before long, the revellers and their entourage were skipping across the tombstones, joined together in a drunken jig in honour of Lubbock's unassuming Prince Of Rock'n'Roll.



Buddy Holly's last resting place – and nearly Topper's. Below, Clash pal Joe Ely.

“Topper had OD'd and we were walking him up and down trying to keep him alive. How did we come to be in a field in Texas with maybe no drummer? What had happened?”

As the merriment subsided, each member of The Clash dug in his pocket, placed a plectrum on Holly's gravestone and started back to the house of their host that evening, Texan country singer Joe Ely.

“Joe Ely had put the squeeze on them and said, ‘Come to my home town, you can play my local honky-tonk and go see Buddy Holly's grave,’” recalls Johnny Green, the group's former road manager. “Any serious outfit would have said, Fuck off!, but against the advice of their booking agent they made a detour to play this gig, with minimum equipment, and put on a fantastic show. Then we all went up to see Holly's grave.”

Back at Ely's ranch the party continued, with more beer, spliff and music, before events took a dramatic and surreal turn. Topper Headon, the group's spectacularly gifted sticksman who, two years earlier, had beaten off over 200 contenders to occupy the Clash hot seat, had taken “some kind of opiate” and was outside in the fields turning a dark shade of blue.

“Topper had OD'd on the bus back to Ely's and suddenly there we were walking him up and down this dirt track in the middle of the cotton fields, trying to keep him awake, trying to keep him alive,” Green recalls. “We were this punk rock band from London and I remember thinking, How did we choose to be in this position? How did we come to be in the middle of a field in Texas with the possibility of having no drummer? What had happened?”

Yet, back in late 1979, the trials, tribulations and contradictions that would contribute to the legend of the group once justifiably described as “the greatest ever rock'n'roll band” had hardly started.



NO OTHER BAND HAS EVER APPROACHED their career quite like The Clash. Co-creators of the 1976 punk explosion with the Sex Pistols, their impassioned live performances and unswerving commitment to their fans were quickly to become mythical. While other groups sang of cars and girls, The Clash addressed the issues of the day: unemployment, urban unrest, racism, terrorism, gang warfare, imperialism, drug use, drug abuse, police corruption.

They were the first British group to cut a rap record, the first white faces to be pictured on the walls of Lee Perry's famous Black Ark studios in Jamaica. When they played New York in 1981 they caused a riot in Times Square – an achievement matched by one other recording artist, Frank Sinatra. Their third LP, *London Calling*, was voted best album of the '80s in America (despite its UK release at the tail-end of 1979). Their fourth, a triple, effectively bankrupted them when they insisted it sold at the price of a single album.

The Clash were the spiky-topped, low-slung, permanently token' punk-rock-reggae act which galvanised a generation into political protest, the group whose neat line in militaristic clobber and wiry, anglepoise bodies produced some of the most exciting and enduring images of their era.

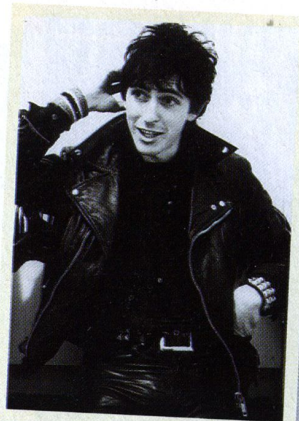
“When that band got on-stage there was nothing better in rock'n'roll,” states writer Caroline Coon, their early champion and one-time caretaker-manager. “They'd come off-stage and lie exhausted on the dressing room floor, unable even to speak. It was heart and soul, flesh and blood, total commitment.

“You've never seen rock'n'roll until you've seen The Clash.”

MICK JONES WAS BORN IN JUNE 1955 IN Clapham, south London, the son of a taxi driver and part-time bookie. His parents separated when he was eight, and he ended up living with his grandmother on the eighteenth floor of a council tower block overlooking London's famous Westway. From an early age Mick's passion was rock'n'roll – “an escape, I think, considering what was happening with my parents”. He started gig-going at 12, and became a teen devotee of Mott The Hoople, the Stones, The Faces. His real idols, though, were a relatively obscure US group called The New York Dolls. “The Dolls had a massive effect on me,” he says. “They were incredible. They blew my mind, the way they looked, their whole attitude... they didn't care about anything. They weren't great sounding by anyone's standard, but that didn't matter – their style transcended all that.”

By 1974, he was playing rudimentary guitar with a glam rock outfit called The Delinquents. Tony James, later of Generation X and Sigue Sigue Sputnik, remembers seeing them flouncing around London in their stack-heeled boots and flares. “They all had really long hair and stuck out a mile. Mick and I quickly got acquainted and discovered a shared interest in The New York Dolls. We thought we were the only people in the country who knew about that kind of music – the Dolls, the MC5, the Stooges.”

A few months later Mick was sacked from his group on the advice of music-biz swami – and future *London Calling* producer – Guy Stevens, who figured the skinny kid with the dark curly hair and large, doleful eyes was surplus to requirements. The blow was, according to Tony James, a defining moment for Jones. “Mick was devastated, but instead of giving up he said, ‘Right, I'm gonna learn to play properly’, and went down Denmark Street and bought a better guitar.” Not any old guitar, either, but a vintage Les Paul Junior similar to one used by his hero



Johnny Thunders. “I remember him at his gran's house spending hours picking out the solo to You Can't Always Get What You Want. Mick was determined to make it.”

Tony and Mick started their own group, the London SS, a rehearsal-room outfit that has since passed into myth as the *alma mater* of countless musicians to emerge from the New Wave, its Byzantine tangle of line-ups including future members of PiL, Chelsea, The Boys, Generation X, The Damned and, of course, The Clash. Personnel were lured via a series of ads that ran in the *Melody Maker* in the autumn of 1975 – “must be aware of MC5 thru to Stooges” – placed by the group's latest acquisition: a manager called Bernie Rhodes.

“We were at a gig at the Nashville Rooms in West Kensington, and I saw this guy with a cap on at the bar,” recalls Mick. “I used to go over to people who looked interesting and strike up a conversation, so I said, Are you a piano player? I'd seen his cap and was thinking of Gene Vincent And The Blue Caps... He said, ‘No, but you're wearing one of my T-shirts.’ We struck up a relationship and that's when I became aware of the Sex Pistols.”

Tony James: “Bernie was Malcolm McLaren's T-shirt printer, and I think he was looking for his own band to manage, as Malcolm had the Pistols. We told him we had a group called the London SS; he seemed to be impressed and said, ‘OK, I'll be your manager.’ From the word go his whole managerial stance was, ‘You know nothing, you haven't got an original idea. If you want to be another New York Dolls then you're wasting my time. You haven't made one statement that means anything.’”

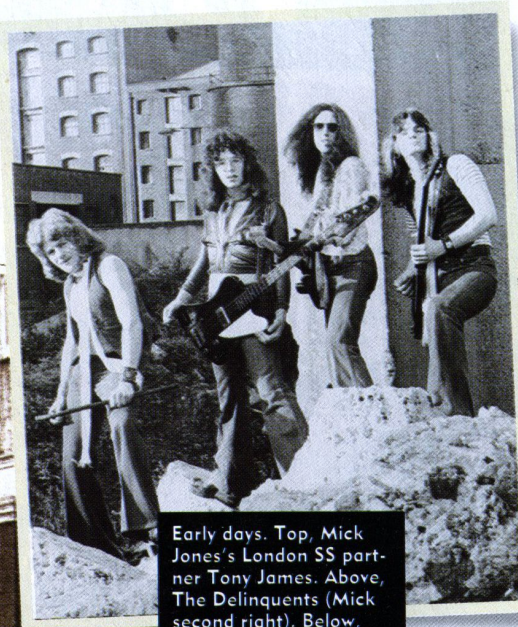
Bernie's hectoring was relentless. Tony: “He'd phone me at my parents' house in Twickenham and say, ‘James, you're too fucking soft! Tell your parents you're gonna spend Christmas with a hooker.’ His other one was, ‘Listen, you guys are wasting my time! Have you read any Sartre?’” Tony duly amassed a pile of Bernie-recommended titles on existentialism, modern art, Dadaism. “It taught us something really important: you have to have a bigger idea. That was Bernie's lesson.”

Auditions for the London SS were held in the dingy basement of Mick and Tony's HQ, a workmen's cafe in Praed Street, Paddington. Over the next few months a succession of hopefuls came and went, among them Keith Levene, Brian James, Rat Scabies, Topper Headon, Terry

Chimes and Paul Simonon.

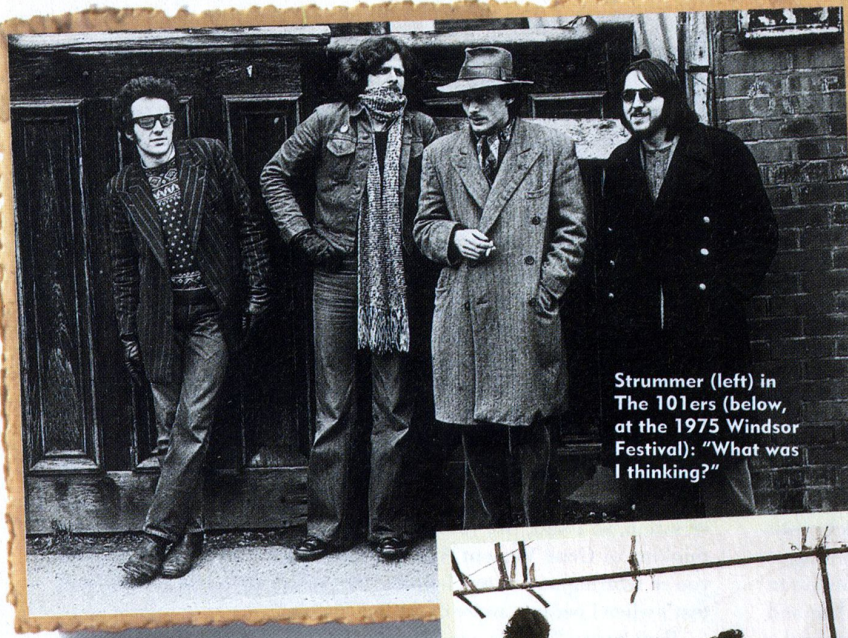
“I went down there with a friend,” Paul remembers. “There were four guys standing around and you couldn't see their faces because their hair was so long. They said, ‘Can you sing?’ and I said, No, but they got me to do this song, ‘I'm a young barracuda don't mess with me...’ I thought, God, what is this crap? I thought Mick had written it or something. Afterwards, I saw a bloke hunched up in the corner, and said, Are you the manager? And he said, ‘Why, what's it to you?’ And that was it, really, 'til I bumped into Mick a few weeks later on Portobello Road.”

Meanwhile, Rhodes' educational methods were seemingly yielding results. Tony James: “I was in the cafe one day and said to Bernie, I've got an idea for a song called Rockets For Sale – it's about selling nuclear warheads in Selfridges. He said, ‘Wow! That's a great idea, I like that! But what about writing a song about, I dunno, anarchy?’ What he was doing was giving me and Mick a correspondence course in rock'n'roll. Whether he got that second-hand from Malcolm McLaren, I really don't know.” ➤



Early days. Top, Mick Jones's London SS partner Tony James. Above, The Delinquents (Mick second right). Below, Davis Road, Acton, West London: Mick with Paul Simonon and Keith Levene (guitar, seated).





Strummer (left) in The 101ers (below, at the 1975 Windsor Festival): "What was I thinking?"



Strummer: "I thought there was going to be a bit of trouble. I was weighing up which one to punch first – I decided on Mick because he looked thinner; Paul looked a bit tasty."

BY THE SPRING OF '76 THE London SS had fizzled out, and a brand new group, featuring Mick, Paul Simonon and guitarist Keith Levene, had begun rehearsing at a squat in Davis Road, Acton. Paul was a gifted painter who, like Mick, was at art college in west London; however, his ambition to be a serious artist was starting to wane. "I'd become disillusioned. I couldn't see myself sitting in a room painting all my life. I wanted to do something more exciting."

Simonon's upbringing had been arty but unsettled; following his parents' split he'd lived with his mum in Brixton, where, "I could come and go as I pleased, which meant playing on the railways, going to people's houses, a bit of robbing", but later, after living in Italy for a year, he relocated to Ladbroke Grove to live with his father. Schooled at some of inner London's worst comprehensives – Sir Isaac Newton, William Penn – he followed skinhead fashions and immersed himself in reggae and ska.

"I'd walk past all these houses with West Indian music playing late at night and get pulled into parties when I should have been going home," he says. "Most of the kids I hung out with were black – I got to the point where I only spoke patois with my mates." However, like his father – a sometime insurance agent, market-stall holder, Communist leafleteer and book-shop proprietor – his chief interest was in art. "My bedroom was his studio; on the walls were hundreds of postcards and pages torn out of books – Vermeers, Caravaggios, Van Goghs... Like most sons I wanted to do what my dad did."

Though an invaluable visual asset to the 'Davis Road group' with his short spiky hair, rakish, Terry-Thomas grin and filmic, *Nouvelle Vague* good looks, Paul's musical abilities were initially non-existent. "I remember going round to Mick's gran's flat and he was trying to show me this E chord on a guitar. After about an hour of frustration on both sides, we decided to get hold of a bass instead."

"We borrowed a bass from Tony James and painted all the notes on the fretboard," says Mick of the catalogue guitar that Simonon would play until the group signed to CBS. "Paul turned out to be a fantastic bass player, but it was very frustrating at first."

The nascent Clash were still shy of a singer; Bernie believed the answer might lie in the charismatic 24-year-old frontman of turbo-charged London pub rockers The 101ers. Mick had seen them perform on many occasions, but Paul hadn't, so they checked out the group's next date at the Nashville Rooms – which, conveniently, had the Pistols supporting. "Joe was just fantastic," says Simonon. "He was really exciting to watch, the only reason to see them, really."

The next day Paul and Mick saw the singer in the dole queue at Lisson Grove labour exchange. "He caught us looking at him," remember Paul. "I think he was a bit worried he was going to be done over." "I thought there was going to be a bit of trouble," says Joe. "I was weighing up which one to punch first – I decided on Mick because he looked thinner; Paul looked a bit tasty."

After the Pistols' incendiary display at the Nashville Rooms, Joe had independently come to the conclusion that his own band "were yesterday's papers", and agreed to Bernie's request to meet his as-yet-unnamed, drummerless group. "Bernie took me along to Davis Road, and I realised it was the same two geezers who'd been staring at me," says Joe. "They had some practice amps set up, and we began playing. I went home and thought about it, and 24 hours later I rang them back and said, OK, I'm in. It meant

destroying two years' work with The 101ers, but I knew it was going nowhere."

Outgoing and likeable, with strong, handsome features and rotten dentistry, Strummer was the son of a Foreign Office clerk whose postings had taken his family to the Middle East, Mexico and Germany. (Joe was born John Mellor, in Ankara, Turkey). Despite his middle-class upbringing, Joe's childhood had been far from cosy; his older brother took his own life when Joe was in his teens, amplifying the feelings of abandonment he'd experienced at boarding school in Surrey.

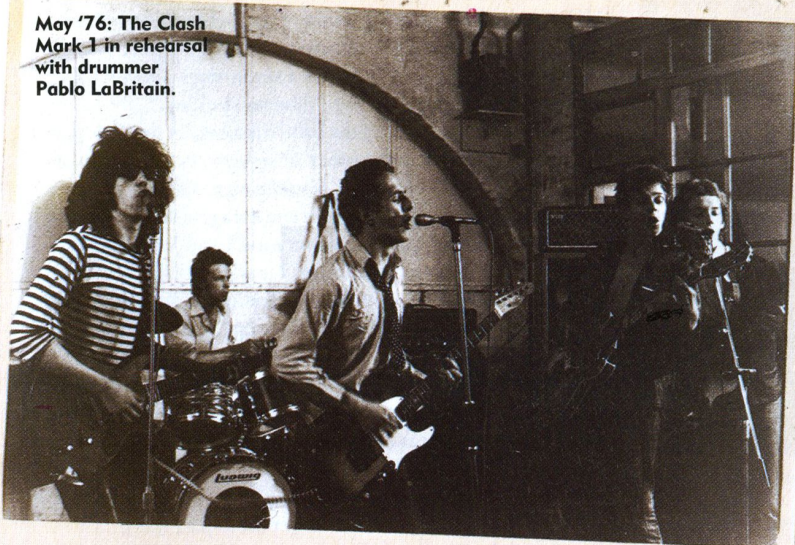
"Going to a school like that meant you became independent; you didn't expect anybody to do anything for you. There

was a lot of bullying, and I was one of the principal bullies. It was either that or be bullied; there was no-one there to protect you." He took his O Levels in 1968, "the year the whole world was exploding. There was Paris, Vietnam, Grosvenor Square, the counterculture. We took it all as normal because there was no other frame of reference. By the time I reached London the whole thing was over, which was a bit regretful. I didn't get to see the Stones, The Beatles, The Kinks, The Yardbirds."

Strummer – then styling himself 'Woody' (as in Guthrie) – tried art college, dropped out, bummed his way round Europe, and ended up playing in an R&B band in Newport, Wales called The Vultures. By 1974 he was settled in London's Maida Vale squatting community, a rough'n'ready world of bad plumbing, drug-busts and violent evictions. "I remember it as a black-and-white era, no colour. There were rows and rows of buildings boarded up by the council and left to rot; the only way you could start a group was to live in one, because we were penniless. We started The 101ers with one amplifier and one speaker.

"All through my school days I was completely unmusical," he adds.

May '76: The Clash Mark 1 in rehearsal with drummer Pablo LaBritain.



"I thought only mythical beings could play music and I had a big problem getting over that, which is why I called myself Joe Strummer – I could only play all six strings or none at all. When I finally got some chords together I was chuffed."

Back in the front room at Davis Road, Joe's resilient personality and primitive rhythm guitar style were proving to be the missing ingredient that Mick, Paul and Keith Levene were looking for – as was his bent for the intelligent, unsentimental political insights that would soon become The Clash's hallmark.

"We had a song called I'm So Bored With You," says Mick, "and Joe suggested we make it I'm So Bored With The USA. It immediately became something else, a song about the Americanisation of England. Though we were brought up on American TV we were always saying there were too many McDonald's here, too much American influence. That was what the song was about."

As confirmation of Joe's full band status, the others "sort of did him up, got him a jacket, dyed his hair". "The day I joined The Clash it was very much back to square one, back to year zero," explains Strummer. "We were almost Stalinist in our approach. Part of punk was shedding all your friends, everything you knew, everything you'd played before, all in a frenzied attempt to create something new – which isn't easy at the best of times. We were insane basically, completely and utterly insane."

The Sex Pistols now had a serious companion in their bid to shake up the musical establishment – and Bernie Rhodes a group every bit as extraordinary as that of his old friend Malcolm.

WHEN MELODY MAKER JOURNALIST Caroline Coon first met The Clash in the summer of 1976 they were beginning to look, sound and – chiefly thanks to Bernie – *think* like the thunderous, anti-establishment rock outfit which would unbottle their punk brio on the infamous White Riot single the following spring.

The group were rehearsing in their new HQ, a dilapidated warehouse in the railway yard near The Roundhouse in Chalk Farm, which the band had brightened up with a lick of emulsion and a 'car dump' mural painted by Paul. Taking the lead from the image-conscious Simonon, the group customised their clothing with Rauschenberg/Pollock-style splashes of paint, and later added slogans from militant reggae records and their own songs: "Sten Guns In Knightsbridge", "Hate And War", "Under Heavy Manners", "Heavy Duty Discipline".

"That first ➤



On the eve of their debut album release, early 1977: "They'd come off-stage and lie exhausted on the dressing-room floor, unable to even speak. It was total commitment."



Posing outside Rehearsals with new boy Topper Headon, spring '77.

remembers the early practices at Rehearsal Rehearsals (as the HQ was dubbed) as being a mix of masochism and bravado. "When I met those guys I remember them being hell-bent on success and very focused. It was a seven-days-a-week thing; we decided early on that there'd be no slacking."

Chimes's description of the band members in the early days tallies with those of most other observers: Paul straightforward, shy, "didn't say much", Mick "easy to talk to" and ever enthusing about music, Keith Levene antagonistic and "quick to take people out of their comfort zone", and Joe... "I never knew what the hell to make of Joe. He was very distant. You'd never know what he was thinking." Meanwhile, Bernie seemed "like he was trying to harden everyone up", so they were ready for the outside world and "weren't going to get caught out".

"I used to argue with him because I didn't buy what he was selling," Terry explains. "He seemed like this peculiar person with odd ideas and I didn't trust him. I thought he'd be happy when I left but he was quite upset. He said, 'Look, you're the foil, you say what the man in the street would say."

If they can get their ideas past you they can get them past them..."

Having supported the Pistols at a low-key gig in Sheffield, The Clash — named by Paul — made their 'official' debut to a select cabal of journalists at Rehearsals in August 1976. It was the first of their cauterising appearances during that summer and autumn at venues like the Screen On The Green, the Roundhouse, the 100 Club, the ICA and the Royal College Of Art, rounding off the year with the ill-fated Anarchy tour [see MOJO 37]. At the RCA, the band's hostile attitude translated into physical violence when Paul and Joe leapt into the audience to ruck with some hecklers; Mick remained on-stage: "Well, someone's gotta stay in tune," he quipped.

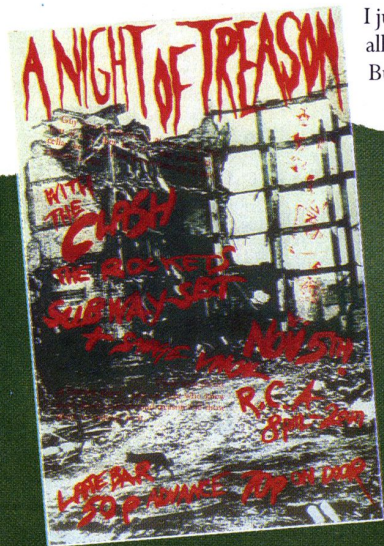
Levene was long gone by this point, dismissed for reasons that still remain unclear, though substance abuse, laziness and an internal power struggle have all been mooted. "I was quite shocked," Chimes recalls. "We turned up one day at Rehearsals and Keith was late. We had a conversation and Mick put forward the idea, in a very roundabout way, that perhaps we didn't really need three guitarists. So Joe said, Shall we get rid of him? I jumped, and thought, you can't get rid of him on a whim. But they all agreed. I think they'd all been thinking the same thing for a while. But afterwards it seemed easier to get things done. He had been slowing it down."

← interview with The Clash was crucial," says Coon. "They were saying to me, 'You old hippy, the hippy movement has failed.' They were anti-drugs, anti-denim, anti-Top Of The Pops; there was this wonderful dialogue as the two generations clashed. I took a photo of them up against the wall with their hands up, and there on Joe's back was 'Hate And War', which was what punk was, the negative to peace and love. It was a hard, protesting, angry, anarchic full-stop to all that overblown mainstream rock'n'roll."

"It was exciting because around that time there was a feeling of betrayal, that rock'n'roll had become the Establishment," she adds. "The richer bands like the Stones became, the more they sung about what it was like being in a band, rather than expressing feelings about wanting to change society. It was like they'd changed sides."

"I felt that people like Rod Stewart had let us down," Mick concurs. "There was never any relationship between the group and their fans. It was like they sold out. When a group you like goes off the rails, you feel personally betrayed..."

Another figure to walk into the cross-fire of The Clash's political and ideological polemic was Terry Chimes, a working-class east Londoner who'd "survived" the group's rigorous auditions to become their drummer. He



Never mind the Jackson Pollocks: November 5, 1976, Royal College of Art, a night of punk violence.



During that summer, The Clash started to dabble in the musical genre that would lend their subsequent material a tough, rhythmic edge: reggae. At Rehearsals Paul would practise his bass to The Ramones' first album – "the first work of punk", according to Strummer – but also to reggae songs like Desmond Dekker's *The Israelites* and The Rulers' *Wrong 'Em Boyo*. Albums by The Ethiopians, Tapper Zukie and Prince Far-I were also never far from the turntable.

On August 31, 1976, on the last day of the Notting Hill carnival, the group got their chance to express their consolidation with the Rasta cause, in a dramatic event that would not only inspire their first single, but also forever enshrine The Clash in the public imagination as authentic rebel

rockers. Joe Strummer takes up the story. "That summer had been very hot and there'd been some very heavy police pressure on the black community. Paul, Bernie and I were walking along when this conga line of policemen came through the crowd. Someone threw a brick at them and all hell broke loose, and I mean hell! The crowd parted and we were pushed onto this wire netting and nearly fell down this hole where they were doing some excavations under the motorway. A police motorcyclist came down Ladbroke Grove and one of our posse [Paul] threw a traffic cone at him; he only just managed to keep going.

"I decided to set a car alight, and it was ludicrous, us standing around it with the wind blowing out the flame on this Swan Vesta. This big fat woman was screaming, 'Lord, they're going to set the car alight!'" Straight afterwards, Strummer wrote the lyric to *White Riot*. "In its clumsy way it was saying that white people had to become activists, or else they'd get plastered over in society."

The complex issues thrown up by The Clash's participation in the riot were underscored later that day. Paul: "We were cornered by these kids in this alley and they wanted to mug us – I suppose being white in the middle of this carnival... They searched through our pockets but we didn't have anything, just a load of bricks. The Rasta generals saw what was happening and came over and told them to clear off. I think that's when we realised it wasn't really our story."

In the following months, the group began appropriating Jamaican music and giving it their own punk spin. The first song they attempted was the contemporary hit, *Police And Thieves* by Junior Murvin, for which Jones adapted the bass line and added two cross-cutting guitar parts. "Now I think what a bold brass neck we had to cover it," says Strummer. "But I'm glad we did because it worked, and it led on to great things in the future with Lee Perry and Bob Marley hearing it, and being hip enough to know we'd bought our own music to the party. It must be said that Mick Jones is a brilliant arranger of music: any other group would've played on the off-beat, trying to assimilate reggae, but we had one guitar on the on, the other on the off. I mean, he really set it up. He's a genius."

WHITFIELD STREET STUDIOS OFF TOTTENHAM COURT Road in London's West End has had several makeovers since it was CBS Records' central London recording venue in the 1970s. It was at these inauspicious premises, lined with hessian carpets and bereft of any natural light, that Iggy And The Stooges cut their legendary *Raw Power* in 1972 – and here in February 1977 that The Clash were booked to record their debut album over three weekend sessions. The group had signed to CBS for £100,000, after a Bernie scam that had everyone believing (the band included) they were inking a deal with Polydor for £25,000 that very same morning. Incensed at the move,



February '77, recording the first album; Bernie Rhodes, to Mick's left, listens.

the influential punk fanzine, *Sniffing Glue*, cried "sell-out", famously observing that "punk died the day The Clash signed to CBS".

Meanwhile, Mick, Joe and Paul shrugged off their critics and celebrated their coup by going to the pictures to see Glen Ford sink a few Japanese carriers in *The Battle Of Midway*.

"With the *Sniffing Glue* thing, I thought, Well that's nice for you, but we were never your toy to begin with," says Strummer. "I can see the point that we could have stayed home-made, started our own labels, the stuff people do nowadays, but it needed to break out and reach America and be global. Someone had to take that bull by the horns and shake it."

Nevertheless, despite their sizeable advance and legit status, The Clash maintained their combative attitude, even while recording. "They wouldn't shake my hand because I was a hippy," recalls Simon Humphrey, the Whitfield Street engineer who oversaw *The Clash* sessions. "They turned up in full battledress; there was no let up. Joe Strummer wasn't really interested. He'd turn up late, and sing with his mike facing the wall and play guitar at the same time; he couldn't divorce the two. The first time I met him he was setting up to record and he put his Twin Reverb [amplifier] next to the drum kit. I said, You can't put it there, and he said, 'Why not?' I said, Because it's gonna affect the drums, it needs a bit of separation. He said, 'I don't know what separation is and I don't like it.'

"There was a rivalry between Mick and Joe. One of them would turn up and say, 'Who else is here?' And I'd say, Actually Mick you're the first one. He'd say, 'Fuck that!', and bugger off, because it would be uncool to be the first one there. Then Joe would turn up and say, 'Where's Mick?' And I'd say, He was here earlier but left. So Joe would say, 'Bloody hell!' and storm off. Then they'd all reconvene later on.

"Mick picked up on the studio vibe very quickly. He was the one running the show, teaching Paul what to play on the bass. Mick had about three different guitars even then, including his Les Paul Junior, which was really classy and he loved it. Then one day it fell over and the neck snapped. He was absolutely devastated, so upset he had to go home."

Jones's own recollections of the sessions are hazy, explaining "it was basically putting down the set we'd been playing live for a while"; but Humphrey remembers Mick sparking with ideas. "He quickly recognised the possibilities of overdubbing and double-tracking solos; he was the one driving it forward." His abilities as a musician at that time did, however, leave room for improvement. "Mick would play a solo and shout through, 'What was that like?' We didn't know what to say because it wasn't very polished – we didn't know what was a good punk solo or a bad one, we didn't have any reference points. But it turned out to be a great album."



April '78: The Clash turn out for the Anti-Nazi League in Hackney's Victoria Park.



JOHNNY GREEN BEGAN WORKING WITH The Clash in October 1977, when he was asked to drive their mini-bus and, later, prepare their backline on the Out Of Control tour. A tall, gangly ex-Mod from Gillingham, with a well-sculpted quiff and a degree in Arabic studies, Johnny quickly graduated to road manager and faithful lieutenant, tussling – often physically – with promoters, bouncers and inept roadies in a bid to keep The Clash on the road. For the first half of 1978, however, the group were mostly holed up in Rehearsals, writing and rehearsing material for a second album. It was an uncertain time – the Pistols and The Damned had already succumbed to punk's self-destructive spirit – and Johnny noticed tension within the Clash camp. Matters weren't helped when Joe and Mick were despatched to Jamaica to write some songs, leaving a "really pissed off" Paul behind.

Twenty-two years later, *The Clash* remains the definitive punk statement: fast, urban, adrenalinised, an expression of frustration and anger driven along with simple Ramones-like bass lines and souped-up Johnny Thunders guitar licks. One classic follows another: Janie Jones, I'm So Bored With The USA, Garageland, Career Opportunities, London's Burning. "The only difficult decision was whether to include Police And Thieves," reveals Humphrey. Luckily they did. "Everybody at the record company was shocked when the album went straight in the charts. They hadn't realised the extent of what was happening."

The Clash's first nationwide jaunt, the White Riot tour, witnessed enthusiastic and often violent scenes across the country; at London's Rainbow Theatre several rows of seats were trashed, much to the fascination of Simonon's father who turned up to check out what his son was up to these days. Terry Chimes missed the fun – having already quit before the Anarchy tour and been drafted back in to do the album as a favour, he'd left for good in March. Joe, Paul and Mick cited political differences, and exacted their revenge by crediting him on the album as Tory Crimes. "He wanted to buy a Lamborghini," says Paul; Terry contends he "found the constant hardening up unnecessary and wearing".

Terry's replacement was the son of a grammar school headmaster from Dover, Nicky Headon, a ball of pent-up energy who'd learned his chops on the 'chicken-in-a-basket' circuit, playing back-up for visiting US soul acts. "Topper" – as Paul renamed him, because he thought he looked like a character out of a kid's comic – was by all accounts "a terrific drummer" and "really good to have around". His arrival transformed The Clash. "The rules of rock'n'roll say you're only as good as your drummer," asserts Strummer. "We became an interesting musical unit after he joined, because funk, soul and reggae didn't faze him. Finding someone who not only had the chops but the strength and stamina to do it was a breakthrough. If we hadn't found Topper, I don't think we'd have got anywhere."

The first Clash product to feature Topper was Complete Control, a song inspired by one of Bernie's managerial mantras: "I want complete control!" Reggae magus Lee 'Scratch' Perry was drafted in as producer: "A big thrill for us," says Strummer, "a dream come true." Perry told Bob Marley about these four white boys who carried the baton for reggae, and Punky Reggae Party was born.

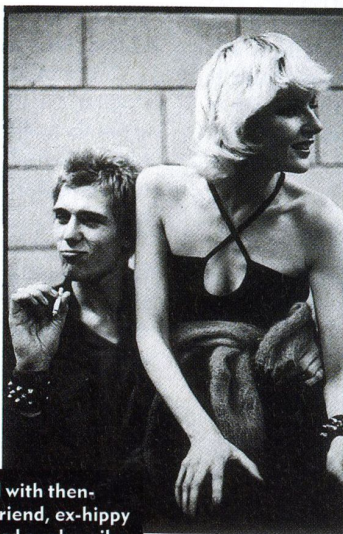
"Mick would have a girl there, and I'd bring him in a drink and chop him a line. It was a bit like the Court of Louis XIV: you had to bring him round slowly because he could be very unpleasant."

"Paul was a sharp bloke and a lovely guy," Johnny explains. "What I realised very quickly was that he put up this thick, Fuck-off-you-cunt front as a protection to stop people getting at him; he'd even do it within the framework of the band so he wasn't at the cutting edge of the decision-making. But he didn't like being removed from it either. So he goes off to Russia with Caroline Coon. By then, the others are back at Rehearsals whacking down the songs with

Mick doubling up on bass and Topper learning very fast. They worked very quickly, didn't jam. When Paul got back he was a week behind and had to sit in the office upstairs and learn his parts from a tape recorder like a special-needs kid. They didn't want to slow down to his level because they were on a roll. Meanwhile, Mick's slipping off to play with people like Elvis Costello, which Paul and Joe didn't particularly approve of."

What struck Johnny most, though, was Mick's growing decadence – he hadn't cut his hair since the photo session for the first album cover, over a year earlier, and was making little effort to toe the band's public line of punk-style austerity. "One of my jobs was to get him out of bed in Westbourne Grove and get him to Rehearsals," Johnny recalls. "He'd usually have a girl there, and I'd bring him in a drink and chop him a line. It was a bit like the Court of Louis XIV: you had to bring him round slowly because if things weren't going the way he liked he could be very unpleasant. His hair was thinning, so I'd get all the stuff ready to dye it to beef it up a bit. He was living a very different lifestyle to the others: Joe was living quietly with his books in his room near Regent's Park, while Paul was living this culturally rich lifestyle with Coony, going off to see Frank Sinatra and stuff."

"My most vivid memory of that time was when Mick bought a video machine with his advance," recalls Tony James, Mick's flatmate at Pembroke Villas. "He had a tape of his favourite film, *Zulu*, which would be playing 'til three o'clock in the morning. People would hang out and be taking drugs; the partying would be going all night, every night. I'd go to bed early and be lying there listening to the Rourke's Drift bit and Stanley Baker's great speech. Mick was becoming Keith Richards, yeah, but his lifestyle was no more swankier than Joe ➤"



Paul with then-girlfriend, ex-hippy turned punk scribe Caroline Coon.

Rex, Caroline Coon/Camera Press, Pennie Smith, Paul Slattery

During that summer, The Clash started to dabble in the musical genre that would lend their subsequent material a tough, rhythmic edge: reggae. At Rehearsals Paul would practise his bass to The Ramones' first album – "the first work of punk", according to Strummer – but also to reggae songs like Desmond Dekker's *The Israelites* and The Rulers' *Wrong 'Em Boyo*. Albums by The Ethiopians, Tapper Zukie and Prince Far-I were also never far from the turntable.

On August 31, 1976, on the last day of the Notting Hill carnival, the group got their chance to express their consolidation with the Rasta cause, in a dramatic event that would not only inspire their first single, but also forever enshrine The Clash in the public imagination as authentic rebel

rockers. Joe Strummer takes up the story. "That summer had been very hot and there'd been some very heavy police pressure on the black community. Paul, Bernie and I were walking along when this conga line of policemen came through the crowd. Someone threw a brick at them and all hell broke loose, and I mean hell! The crowd parted and we were pushed onto this wire netting and nearly fell down this hole where they were doing some excavations under the motorway. A police motorcyclist came down Ladbroke Grove and one of our posse [Paul] threw a traffic cone at him; he only just managed to keep going.

"I decided to set a car alight, and it was ludicrous, us standing around it with the wind blowing out the flame on this Swan Vesta. This big fat woman was screaming, 'Lord, they're going to set the car alight!'" Straight afterwards, Strummer wrote the lyric to *White Riot*. "In its clumsy way it was saying that white people had to become activists, or else they'd get plastered over in society."

The complex issues thrown up by The Clash's participation in the riot were underscored later that day. Paul: "We were cornered by these kids in this alley and they wanted to mug us – I suppose being white in the middle of this carnival... They searched through our pockets but we didn't have anything, just a load of bricks. The Rasta generals saw what was happening and came over and told them to clear off. I think that's when we realised it wasn't really our story."

In the following months, the group began appropriating Jamaican music and giving it their own punk spin. The first song they attempted was the contemporary hit, *Police And Thieves* by Junior Murvin, for which Jones adapted the bass line and added two cross-cutting guitar parts. "Now I think what a bold brass neck we had to cover it," says Strummer. "But I'm glad we did because it worked, and it led on to great things in the future with Lee Perry and Bob Marley hearing it, and being hip enough to know we'd bought our own music to the party. It must be said that Mick Jones is a brilliant arranger of music: any other group would've played on the off-beat, trying to assimilate reggae, but we had one guitar on the on, the other on the off. I mean, he really set it up. He's a genius."

WHITFIELD STREET STUDIOS OFF TOTTENHAM COURT Road in London's West End has had several makeovers since it was CBS Records' central London recording venue in the 1970s. It was at these inauspicious premises, lined with hessian carpets and bereft of any natural light, that Iggy And The Stooges cut their legendary *Raw Power* in 1972 – and here in February 1977 that The Clash were booked to record their debut album over three weekend sessions. The group had signed to CBS for £100,000, after a Bernie scam that had everyone believing (the band included) they were inking a deal with Polydor for £25,000 that very same morning. Incensed at the move,



February '77, recording the first album; Bernie Rhodes, to Mick's left, listens.

the influential punk fanzine, *Sniffing Glue*, cried "sell-out", famously observing that "punk died the day The Clash signed to CBS".

Meanwhile, Mick, Joe and Paul shrugged off their critics and celebrated their coup by going to the pictures to see Glen Ford sink a few Japanese carriers in *The Battle Of Midway*.

"With the *Sniffing Glue* thing, I thought, Well that's nice for you, but we were never your toy to begin with," says Strummer. "I can see the point that we could have stayed home-made, started our own labels, the stuff people do nowadays, but it needed to break out and reach America and be global. Someone had to take that bull by the horns and shake it."

Nevertheless, despite their sizeable advance and legit status, The Clash maintained their combative attitude, even while recording. "They wouldn't shake my hand because I was a hippy," recalls Simon Humphrey, the Whitfield Street engineer who oversaw *The Clash* sessions. "They turned up in full battledress; there was no let up. Joe Strummer wasn't really interested. He'd turn up late, and sing with his mike facing the wall and play guitar at the same time; he couldn't divorce the two. The first time I met him he was setting up to record and he put his Twin Reverb [amplifier] next to the drum kit. I said, You can't put it there, and he said, 'Why not?' I said, Because it's gonna affect the drums, it needs a bit of separation. He said, 'I don't know what separation is and I don't like it.'

"There was a rivalry between Mick and Joe. One of them would turn up and say, 'Who else is here?' And I'd say, Actually Mick you're the first one. He'd say, 'Fuck that!', and bugger off, because it would be uncool to be the first one there. Then Joe would turn up and say, 'Where's Mick?' And I'd say, He was here earlier but left. So Joe would say, 'Bloody hell!' and storm off. Then they'd all reconvene later on.

"Mick picked up on the studio vibe very quickly. He was the one running the show, teaching Paul what to play on the bass. Mick had about three different guitars even then, including his Les Paul Junior, which was really classy and he loved it. Then one day it fell over and the neck snapped. He was absolutely devastated, so upset he had to go home."

Jones's own recollections of the sessions are hazy, explaining "it was basically putting down the set we'd been playing live for a while"; but Humphrey remembers Mick sparking with ideas. "He quickly recognised the possibilities of overdubbing and double-tracking solos; he was the one driving it forward." His abilities as a musician at that time did, however, leave room for improvement. "Mick would play a solo and shout through, 'What was that like?' We didn't know what to say because it wasn't very polished – we didn't know what was a good punk solo or a bad one, we didn't have any reference points. But it turned out to be a great album."



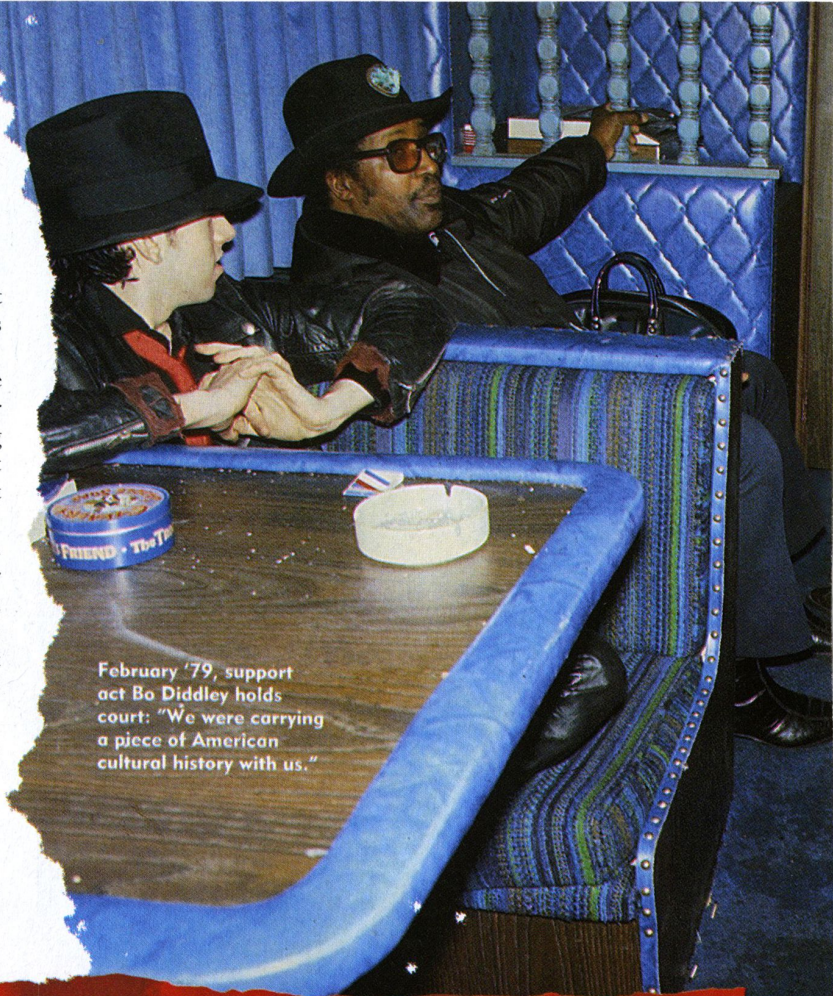
Paul, autumn '78:
"a sharp bloke
and a lovely guy."

← Strummer living with [Terence Conran's son] Sebastian."

But Johnny recognised the positive aspects of Mick's self-obsession. "Mick had his own little rituals that had to be observed, but the moment he walked into Rehearsals it was serious business. What strength, what purpose, what vision! Mick never dreamed of a holiday, just rehearsing day in, day out, an absolutely driven man. And yet he was still very pleasant to be around; if you got to know his routine – tea and biscuits at 4pm – it was fine. He was the driving force behind that band; everything good about them musically was down to Mick Jones and Topper."

"Jonesy was a diva, and I liked that," says Caroline Coon. "He was the one who wanted to be on Top Of The Pops because it was the stage for reaching the masses. Part of the band had this conceit that it was wrong to embrace fame with open arms and there was a lot of rhetoric about not being pop stars, but if you saw their rider or their hotel rooms... At least Mick was open about it."

The Clash found the opportunity to let off steam on April 30 when they were invited to play in front of 50,000 people at a free open-air Anti-Nazi League concert in Hackney's Victoria Park. Immortalised in the Clash rockumentary *Rude Boy* by some of the most exciting live footage ever shot, the band – with Mick looking like Jimmy Page – put on a turbo-charged performance in broad daylight, before the plugs were pulled on them by the promoters. Around the same time, the band began work on their summer single, (White Man) In Hammersmith Palais, a triumphant, groundbreaking reggae-punk hybrid in which Joe's complex lyric sniped at The Jam – "they got Burton suits, you think it's funny/Turning rebellion into money?" – and right-wing fans – "if Adolf Hitler flew into today, they'd send a limousine anyway". "They'd improved a lot musically by then," says Simon Humphrey. "We were getting into acoustic guitar, piano, percussion, backing vocal harmonies, triple-tracking. Their approach was a lot more professional."



February '79, support act Bo Diddley holds court: "We were carrying a piece of American cultural history with us."

"We started to feel very alien. In America no-one knew who we were and people didn't like us. Then we heard Sid Vicious had died, and all of a sudden it felt a bit bleak and desperate."

Meanwhile, Rhodes had settled on an unlikely, if not totally perverse, choice of producer for the next album – Sandy Pearlman, the Californian Svengali behind arty AOR act Blue Öyster Cult. Pearlman had an unpleasant introduction to the world of The Clash when he flew in for a pre-production meeting. "He came to some gig up North and knocked on the dressing room door just before we were supposed to go on-stage," Mick recalls. "My mate Robin [Crocker, self-appointed minder] answered the door and this bloke said, 'Hi, I'm Sandy.' Robin explained that he couldn't come in, and as Pearlman said, 'No, you don't understand...' Robin just decked him. We stepped over him to go on-stage and I think Bernie went over and mopped up the blood."

The Pearlman incident set the tone for the recording sessions, which all concerned recall as a fraught and enervating experience, as the producer attempted to piece together a precise, US FM-radio-friendly rock record. "The Clash used to laugh at everybody, and offended people they shouldn't have, like Sandy Pearlman," recalls Jack Hazan, the cameraman on *Rude Boy*. "I remember Paul Simonon playing table football at the recording sessions and he got so over-excited he started spitting on the table. Then he climbed up and started jumping on it like a child, and no-one said a word. Inexplicable! They'd even laugh at Maurice Oberstein [the head of CBS who signed them]. He loved them, but they treated him appallingly! They thought they were rock'n'roll commandos but sometimes I don't think they could differentiate between who was good and who was bad."

"Paul treated Pearlman like he was some wimpy American tourist," chuckles Johnny Green. "Like someone who was really thick in rock'n'roll terms, because on a musical level what he said had no relevance under Paul's value system. If he didn't know anything about

ska music, what did he know about rock'n'roll? But I don't think they ever over-stepped the mark, and I think there was a certain caution and awareness that they could blow it. That was a very unstable year, they didn't want to rock the boat too far."

Asked why they co-operated with Pearlman, Green has an interesting theory. "I think they realised it was a learning experience, though it was never expressed as succinctly as that. Mick was right over his shoulder all the time, watching what he was doing, and then taking tapes home every night and playing them over and over to see what was happening. If Pearlman needed to do 32 takes, why did he need to do 32 takes? They were watching so next time they didn't need these people. Once that door is open you can retain control."

The songs that finally emerged – Safe European Home, Tommy Gun, English Civil War, Last Gang In Town – were treacly and heavily overdubbed, but had a depth, power and scope far beyond *The Clash*. One track, Guns On The Roof, was based on a slice of real-life drama that had occurred at their HQ.

Back in the spring, Paul, Topper and some mates had been hanging around at Rehearsals waiting for Mick to arrive when someone had the bright idea of taking some newly acquired air weapons onto the roof and shooting some pigeons. "The next thing I knew two mechanics come over and whacked me with a monkey wrench," says Topper, who like the others didn't realise they were downing some valuable racing pigeons belonging to a worker in the yard. "Then some policemen appeared over the wall pointing guns. Someone had reported an armed gang on the roof firing at trains – it was around the time the IRA were active in London, so it was pretty scary when the police popped up and said, 'Freeze!'"



which they couldn't honour because Joe and Mick were mixing *Give 'Em Enough Rope* in the States.

Caroline Coon believes his dismissal saved the group. "Paul Simonon came to me and said the band were going to break up; they were unhappy among themselves, bickering because [Bernie] had said one thing to one band member, another to someone else. They were ringing each other up, saying, 'You said this about me...' This was an absolute tragedy. It was better to change management than split up."

Yet, despite his ignominious departure, no-one interviewed for this piece underestimates what Bernie brought to The Clash. "Bernie turned them round 180 degrees," Johnny Green says. "Instead of writing songs like 1-2 Crush On You [an early Mick Jones number] they started writing about real things. He had ideas and style, which was a very charismatic combination, and he'd be into philosophy and politics, mixing it all up and branching into areas that most people wouldn't connect – cars, travel, attitudes of mind. His mind incorporated lateral thinking and absorbed things very quickly. He was always aggressive, coming at you all the time, making you question your attitudes."

Paul: "It was Bernie who had the foresight to bring me in, even though I wasn't a musician. He got John [Lydon] in the Pistols as well. He saw how that could work."

Joe Strummer, who was arguably more sympathetic to Bernie's tactics than the others, adds: "Bernie was the mentor, he constructed The Clash, and we repaid him by being good at what we did. It was Bernie who told us to write about what we knew – housing, the lack of education, the dead-end future. If Bernie hadn't introduced us and we'd met ourselves, I don't think we'd have been able to gel. He was a wise head that had seen it and done it all. Bernie put us in focus."

There's an interesting postscript to this debate. While researching this feature, MOJO traced Rhodes, who declined to be interviewed at length, but agreed to answer three questions – of his own choosing. In an echo of the interview he gave to NME in 1980, he admonished this writer for calling him 'Bernie' – "call me Bernard, please" – and began an interrogation about the nature of this piece; eventually, he settled into an entertaining and combative hour-long conversation, the gist of which follows.

Rhodes's origins have always been cloaked in mystery, but he says he was brought here from Russia in the '50s by his mother, whose parents had been killed in the Revolution. His mother worked as a seamstress in Soho, tailoring clothes for Hollywood stars like Cary Grant. "I was on the street when I was 12," he adds. "I was living in a one-room shack in the East End; prostitutes used to take me in, and that's where I heard Amos Milburn and all the greats, because American servicemen used their services."

He claims to have known Mick Jagger at the LSE and introduced Guy Stevens to the pop scene. Malcolm McLaren he saw as "a good marketing man, but he stole all my ideas", while Def Jam's Russell Simmons was given "the idea for Public Enemy" by Bernie while he was in New York in the early '80s.

Of The Clash he says: "Their talent was to represent the kids, but they didn't. Do you know how the Americans started jazz? They found all this stuff on the floor after the Civil War – trumpets, drums – and made music with it. All I had was those four blokes and I did as much as I could; obviously one would have wanted more. I didn't realise that Joe was such a coward. Mick I didn't realise was such an egomaniac. Paul was this pussy-whipped guy and the other one [Topper] I couldn't stand because he was such a provincial tosser."

So why did they sack you? "Because of the censorship that exists in this country, you're telling me something you don't know. The Clash were offered money by their record company to get rid of me. They were bribed because I was too dangerous. Listen, those guys are wimps. When I met Joe he was an arsehole. He doesn't know what to say, ➤



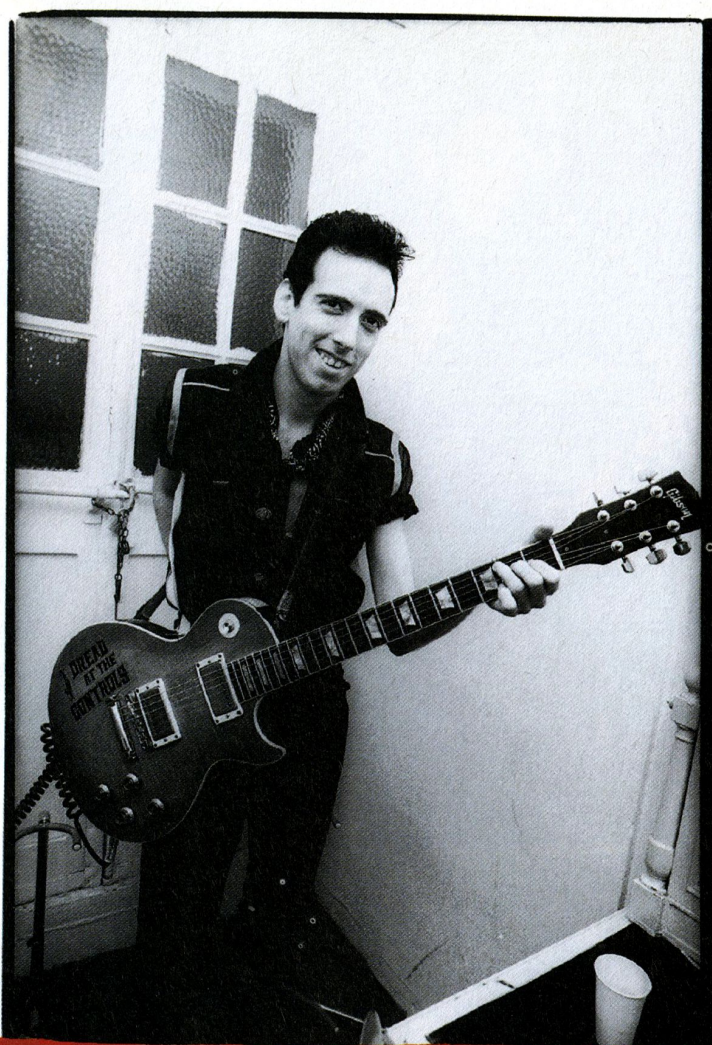
Paul and Topper were charged and taken to Brixton jail; Bernie seemed happy to keep them there, but Caroline Coon – founder of Release, the organisation which aided people arrested on drug offences – leapt into action, arranging bail and picking up the shaken miscreants from prison. "I thought [Bernie's inaction] was evil," says Coon. "Your band has been arrested and Bernie thinks it will do you good to be in prison for a couple of days."

In fact, from that point onwards Bernie's relationship with the band started to deteriorate, as his behaviour became ever more erratic and his plans for the band increasingly secretive. "Mick and Bernie would have furious screaming matches," says Johnny Green. "Mick would say, 'Where's the money?' But Bernie wouldn't answer. Joe took quite a passive role – his public person was this powerful man, but off-stage he would be a bit *que sera*. Mick wanted more involvement in the decision-making; but Bernie would have a go at him behind his back."

After the Guns On The Roof incident, Paul painted a huge mural of Bernie being shat on by some giant pigeons; Bernie ordered Johnny to paint over it – Paul insisted he do no such thing. Consequently the pigeons stayed and, according to Green, Rhodes subsequently stopped visiting Rehearsals. With the lines of communication weakened and the power struggle between Mick and Bernie getting fiercer, the group's future looked in jeopardy. Eventually Rhodes was sacked, nominally over a gig he'd arranged at Harlesden Roxy without the band's consent,



Left, Clash roadie Johnny Green. Above, first time in the US, Mick, Paul, Joe and a St. Louis slugger: "They could be very mean to people who worked for them."



Bernie Rhodes: "Joe was a coward, and Mick was such an egomaniac,

◀ he doesn't know what to do. They're an embarrassment! All these stories that I took their money, I took nothing, they took from me. I've made my own money.

"Every group has a mad man. The Pink Floyd had Syd Barrett. That horrible band from Wales trying to be The Clash... That's it, The Manic Street Preachers, their guitarist was the nutty one. The Stones had Brian Jones. The Beatles never had a nutty one, that's why they're so horrible. I'm the nutty one in The Clash, but I'm not a victim, I'm a winner."

Perhaps, deep inside, The Clash knew that. For, after a golden period of two years during which they recorded some of their greatest work, they would ask Bernard to manage them for a second time...

WHILE JOE AND MICK WERE IN SAN FRANCISCO overdubbing *Give 'Em Enough Rope* they frequented a neighbourhood bar with a jukebox in the corner, stacked with some of America's finest music from the '50s and '60s — Otis Redding's *Sittin' On The Dock Of The Bay*, *I Fought The Law* by The Bobby Fuller Four. "It made a great impression on us," explains Mick. Overdubs complete, Joe and Mick set off separately across America, agreeing to meet up a week later in New York; the trip was to kindle a fascination with the culture they'd once protested they were "bored with". "Joe had done the drive across to New Orleans, straight roads for miles, car radio," remembers Johnny Green. "He was gushing about it all, in this really unsophisticated way; it was lovely."

Bob Gruen's shots of The Clash's first US tour, six months later in February 1979, show a group relishing their experience of the land that brought us Elvis, the hamburger, Humphrey Bogart, Jack Kerouac. Dressed in James Dean apparel — white T-shirts, leather jackets, slicked-back hair — the group wield a baseball bat, while roadies Johnny Green

and Baker Glare sport white Stetsons and brothel creepers. Later, Joe would buy a Sears, Roebuck security guard outfit, the cap from which he'd wear for the rest of the visit. Support was provided by R&B veteran Bo Diddley: "It was symbolic and important that we were carrying a piece of American cultural history with us," Green explains.

The Clash were getting America, but America didn't always get The Clash. "After we left LA we started to feel very alien," says Green. "Whereas everybody in England was a punk rocker, no-one knew who we were and people didn't like us. Then we heard Sid [Vicious] had died, and all of a sudden it felt a bit bleak and desperate. The band didn't like the people from CBS, either. There was a moment in Santa Monica when they were lined up to have their picture taken with some executives, then got fed up of waiting and walked off. A bad career move."

"The Clash had this complex relationship with people they saw as being authoritative," says Caroline Coon. "They could be very mean to people who worked for them."

The trip gave the group a fresh sense of purpose. On their return to Blighty, they were desperate to work on new material — including a cover of *I Fought The Law* — but Bernie's departure had left them without a base. Johnny Green and Baker scoured London looking for suitable premises, and finally found Vanilla, a long rectangular, window-less rehearsal space in a quiet mews in Pimlico. It was here The Clash began work on the material that would become *London Calling*. This time the regime was herbal not chemical — a constant supply of tea and prodigious amounts of spliff — with a new-found *esprit de corps* and an open-minded attitude towards what to play. "I remember Mick strumming country songs, Paul reggae, Topper disco music," says Green. "They started swapping instruments; Mick would play drums, Paul would add on some smooth kind of funk thing. There was a high level of

Paul Slattery (4)



Paul was a pussy-whipped guy, and Topper was a provincial tosser."

communication, people talking about their lives and circumstances."

Each day the group would limber up with a game of footie in the playground opposite, with the numbers made up by visitors like Robin Crocker, journalist Kris Needs and Rude Boy stars Ray Gange and Terry McQuade. Green: "It was a kind of cameo for the group. Paul was quite hard and enthusiastic, going in with no fear for his own safety; Topper was skilled and nimble; Joe would be well-meaning and try hard but wasn't very good; and Jonesy was really flash, but we all laughed at his style, because he wasn't quite as good as he thought he was..."

"As soon as they were back inside they'd roll a joint; rather than sedating them it had the opposite effect – it would fire them up. Very unusual for white boys."

The rehearsals produced Paul's first solo composition, the trashy white-punk reggae of *Guns Of Brixton*, thick with sound effects and shimmering vibrato guitar. It became a staple of the band's set ever after. "I realised that being in a group you got money for writing songs," he says. "I was doing the artwork and clothing but not getting paid for it. So I thought, Sod that, I'm going to get involved in the music."

In July, The Clash booked into Wessex Studios in Highbury to record their new album; the producer was none other than Guy Stevens, the legendary '60s DJ who'd turned The Who on to R&B, christened Procol Harum, been the 'ideas man' behind Mott The Hoople, and instigated Mick's dismissal from his glam rock group. By 1979, the balding, frothing Stevens was on the skids, crippled by a drink problem. Yet it was his mercurial genius and personal madness that brought *London Calling* to life. The first song they ran through was a cover of British rock'n'roller Vince Taylor's *Brand New Cadillac*; Guy had the tape running and informed them, "It's a take!" Topper pointed out it sped up halfway through: "So what! All great rock'n'roll songs speed up!"

"Guy was great, he made me feel really at ease," enthuses Paul. "We were doing *Death Or Glory* and he just lost it. He ran into the room, picking chairs up and throwing them against the wall. Another time, we looked into the control booth and there was Guy wrestling with [engineer] Bill Price over the mixing desk. He liked to get a mood going."

Mick: "He'd come into the studio while we were playing, pick up a ladder and start swinging it around. Joe would be banging on the piano and Guy would be going, 'Play like Jerry Lee Lewis, play like Jerry Lee Lewis!', spitting in Joe's ear. One day he came in and poured beer in the piano. He said it would improve the sound; which I think it did."

On one occasion, Guy turned up with a mysterious companion whom he plied with beer all day. At the end of the session the man left, demanding £67 because he'd left his meter running; he was a taxi driver. "It was the opposite of *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, it was all about energy levels," says Johnny Green. "But after a while Guy became a liability; nobody said it, but it was true. That's not to denigrate his contribution to that record – he set the inspiration up – but Guy would do what drunks have to do every night: nod off and pass out. Eventually, we'd ring him up and say we weren't working over the next few days so they could concentrate on overdubs. But it was Guy's record – and Mick's; Mick showed real humility not taking the credit."

Buoyed by the stellar cuts of punk, soul, rock'n'roll and reggae already in the can, The Clash headed out on the legendary second US tour with which they stormed America, an epic 42-date trek whose support acts – Sam And Dave, Bo Diddley, Screamin' Jay Hawkins – were chosen as a reminder to white rock audiences of their black musical heritage. "I've never seen anyone go down as badly as Screamin' Jay Hawkins when he was carried on-stage in his coffin," remembers Johnny Green with a shake of the head. "The audiences gave them ➤

No Elvis, Beatles...

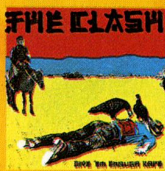
A punky reggae party... with bozo jazz a speciality. MOJO browses the Clash catalogue.



The Clash

Recorded: CBS Studios, Whitfield St, London **Released:** April 1977 **Personnel:** Joe Strummer, Mick Jones, Paul Simonon, Terry Chimes (Tory Crimes) **Chart:** UK 12

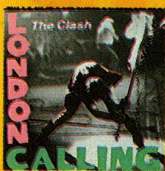
UNLEASHED A full six months before *Never Mind The Bollocks*, *The Clash* patented punk's urban guerrilla stance and anti-establishment agenda. Full-throttle guitars and nimble bass lines counterpoint Strummer's images of dole offices, riots, "kebab Greeks", "bullshit detectors" and skag-addicted Vietnam vets. The later US version added early singles.



Give 'Em Enough Rope

Recorded: Island Studios, Basing St, London **Released:** November 1978 **Personnel:** Strummer, Jones, Simonon, Topper Headon **Chart:** UK 2/US 128

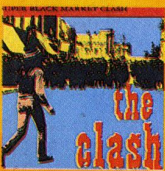
ROCK LORE tells us that "Bernie Rhodes taught The Clash what to play, Sandy Pearlman taught them how to play it" – and, indeed, the US producer's meticulous attention to detail transformed the band into a solid rock act. Strummer considers terrorism, war, Third World poverty – though Jones's *Stay Free* showed growing emotional depth. Pearlman dubbed Topper "the Human Drum Machine" for his one-take precision.



London Calling

Recorded: Wessex, London **Released:** December 1979 **Personnel:** Strummer, Jones, Simonon, Headon **Chart:** UK 9/US 27

ARGUABLY THEIR greatest moment, this low-priced double tackled rock, reggae, ska, soul and jazz with a new-found fluidity. Producer Guy Stevens created the spontaneous vibe, the Blockheads' Mickey Gallagher supplied Hammond and cartoonist Ray Lowry pastiched Elvis's UK debut album for the legendary cover. A last minute addition, *Train In Vain* didn't make the sleeve. Voted 'best album of the '80s' by Rolling Stone.



Super Black Market Clash

Recorded: Various studios **Released:** November 1980 **Personnel:** Strummer, Jones, Simonon, Headon **Chart:** US 74

ORIGINALLY A beat-the-bootleggers import 10-incher, with Capital Radio (One) and unreleased attempts at Booker T. And The MG's 'Time Is Tight and Toots & The Maytals' *Pressure Drop*. This souped-up CD edition omits some of these crucial tracks.



Sandinista!

Recorded: Electric Lady, New York; Channel One, Jamaica. **Released:** December 1980 **Personnel:** Strummer, Jones, Simonon, Headon **Chart:** UK 19/US 24

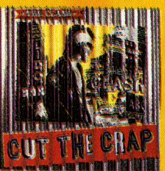
THE NEW York setting lent this sprawling triple a moody, cinematic atmosphere, as rap, bebop, funk, rockabilly and gospel were added to the palette, with help from several Blockheads, Tymon Dogg and Mikey Dread. Military themes abound; *Apocalypse Now* was a big influence, Robert Duvall's observation that "Charlie don't surf" inspiring the song of that name. Would have made a stunning double.



Combat Rock

Recorded: Ear Studios, London; Electric Lady, New York **Released:** May 1982 **Personnel:** Strummer, Jones, Simonon, Headon **Chart:** UK 2/US 7

AFTER PAUL and Joe rejected Jones's initial mix, veteran producer Glyn Johns edited the album down to two sides of tight, vibrant rock. Heavy friends make an appearance yet again – Allen Ginsberg, Joe Ely, Futura 2000 – while Strummer is at his poetic peak on the haunting *Death Is A Star* and *Straight To Hell*. Stateside sales top a million.



Cut The Crap

Recorded: Munich **Released:** November 1985 **Personnel:** Strummer, Simonon, Nick Sheppard, Vince White, Pete Howard **Chart:** UK 16/US 88

WITH MICK and Topper gone, Strummer and manager Bernie Rhodes took the musical reins, flying to Munich to cut a hi-tech, futuristic punk record, with few instrumental contributions from the band. Subsequently disowned by almost all involved.



The London Calling sessions, Wessex Studios: (from left) Bill Price, Guy Stevens, Paul Topper, Mick, CBS boss Maurice Oberstein.

hell. The promoters didn't want them, the audiences didn't want them, but The Clash did."

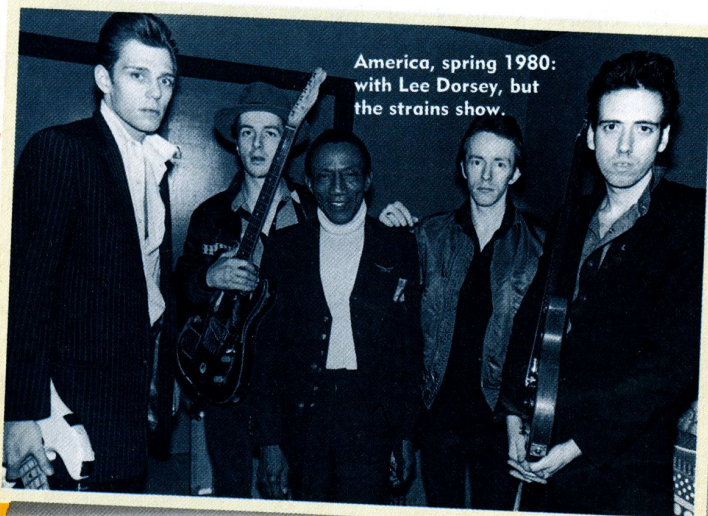
Photographer Pennie Smith captured the mood of the trip with her book of superlative black-and-white shots, *The Clash: Before & After*, prefaced with the immortal line, "being on the road with The Clash is like a commando raid performed by The Bash Street Kids".

"They didn't want to do the normal places," explains Joe Ely, another of the supporting cast, who accompanied them across the South-west. "They wanted to play the places they'd heard about on old Marty Robbins records, like Laredo, El Paso or San Antonio. At some of those joints the audience looked at them like a pig looks at a wristwatch. They didn't understand what was going on."

"The Clash loved finding themselves in the wrong end of town," agrees Pennie. "I remember Mick and I going to do a radio show in the middle of America, and Mick had broken his window-winder. We stopped at this petrol station and we knew it was trouble. There were two guys looking at us like they wanted to kill us. The cab driver vanished and Mick was pretending to rest his arm on thin air; these blokes got nearer and nearer and I thought, 'We're dead. Then the driver suddenly reappeared with a gun, shouting, 'I'm armed!' It was full-on like that all the time."

Then there was the night Simonon trashed his bass at the New York Palladium... "He looked totally pissed off all night," Pennie remembers. "I just watched him and realised his guitar was going wrong, that that end shouldn't be uppermost. He started coming straight for me, so I took three shots and ducked. When I saw the negs I realised it was out of focus, but Joe insisted they use it for the album cover."

The punishing itinerary, however, began to take its toll. "Mick loved to smoke dope, a fairly harmless thing when you think about it," says Johnny Green. "We had to do a run from Toronto in Canada to the border at Niagara Falls, less than hour's drive – but he wouldn't board the bus until he had a joint. It was a matter of principle to him: he was all dressed up in a Johnson's suit and straw boater, but he wouldn't budge. We were grabbing punters and asking if they could go and score us some dope, while Mick sat in the cargo bay of the bus. We're not talking drug addiction or serious withdrawal, but this was pretty



America, spring 1980: with Lee Dorsey, but the strains show.



Pluto Studios, Manchester, 1980, recording Bankrobber: "like Bowie backwards," said CBS.

extreme behaviour. Yet people respected it: it was the same look of determination on Mick's face that had carried The Clash through problem after problem. He was the rock on which the whole thing was built.

"For someone who always kept people waiting he was a remarkably precise man. He was very polite but very demanding. He knew what he wanted, asked for it and expected to get it. 'Southampton tomorrow? Wake me up at 11.10am and I'll have a freshly squeezed orange juice.'"

"There are some things worth waiting for," adds Strummer. "And talent is one of them."

BY THE MIDDLE OF 1979 Peter Jenner and Andrew King's Blackhill management were looking after The Clash's business affairs. Their chief problem was that, despite being a successful live draw and selling a healthy number of albums, the band were massively in debt to CBS. "The situation was chronic when we got hold of them," explains Jenner. "What was never recognised is that we were running a business. The Clash were turning over hundreds of thousands, if not millions, at the box office, and at the heart of this was a band that couldn't come to grips with this."

"The one thing that really confused me was the Great Cost Of Gigs phenomenon. We were only allowed to charge £3 or something a ticket but they insisted on having two support acts and all sorts of unnecessary crap in the way of lighting. They also wanted to live the life – stay in posh hotel suites, have a big crew – all of which meant that they lost money. You could never talk serious business with them; once they were in the same room together they'd start rolling joints and cracking jokes. We'd all laugh, but it lost the chance of us resolving these problems. They needed some boringness to balance out the chaos."

Indeed, Paul only agreed to attend management meetings if they met with his deliberately unreasonable demand to provide a rabbit outfit. Blackhill were so desperate they went out and bought him one. "Oh, yeah, the rabbit suit... it was this limp sort of costume," remembers Simonon, "So I said, Right I'll get you back for this and went outside and put it on. I came back in and just started hitting everyone and swearing and ended up disrupting the whole meeting anyway. Blackhill were so boring; you go on tour, you record, you go on tour. There was none of the excitement you had with Bernie."

Johnny agreed: the chaos he'd thrived upon had, he felt, all but evaporated and he quit after another US tour. "That last tour was so sweet and effortless it felt bland and I got bored. Lee Dorsey

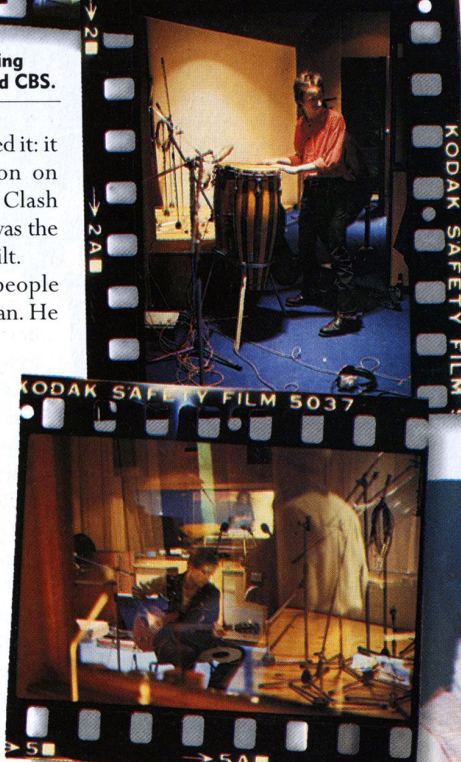
was the lead support every night and he was wonderful; I was in the bar with him all the time, a living soul legend, pissed as a fart! And where were The Clash? Upstairs in their suites watching TV."

Meanwhile, having had a hit with London Calling, CBS were refusing to release the next single, the dub-reggae-ish Bankrobber, allegedly because they said it "sounded like David Bowie backwards". The Clash responded by going on strike, decamping to Electric Lady Studios in New York to record *Sandinista!* (named after Nicaragua's Marxist forces) with the help of Ian Dury's Blockheads. Jenner recalls the sessions as another testing period. "By *Sandinista!* it was all getting a bit weird. There were white powders of some kind going round in certain quarters of the band – I didn't know what and I didn't want to know. I felt we had some drug problems, but I was told to go and mind my own business."

Jenner also found the group's attitudes frustratingly inconsistent. "Mick was a pop star, that was his thing, but at least he was up-front about it; it made it easier because he wasn't carrying around so much political baggage. Joe I could never work out – he looked confident and as if he knew the answers but I don't know that he did. He had very strong views that might change from day to day, which was hard to cope with."

"There was no rationale. Why can't we do Top Of The Pops? 'Because we never have.' Why not play arenas? 'We only do small venues.' In the end, we had the ridiculous situation of Pan's People dancing to Bankrobber."

The Clash insisted that *Sandinista!*, a sprawling ➤



melee of rock, dub, reggae, rap and gospel, be released as a triple album, selling for the price of a single [*London Calling*, a double, had been similarly marketed]. "I thought it was nonsense," says Jenner. "I was trying to be rational, but Joe was rational and emotional. They were asked to waive performance royalties [to issue it in that form], which was a folly. I thought it would make a killer single or workable double, but I was kindly told to fuck off. That was the terminal issue."

Joe Strummer: "The great thing about that record was it was churned out in three weeks, being written right there on the studio floor. I never went to a bar or nightclub; I used to sleep under the piano. I built a Spliff Bunker [from flight cases] in the main studio, where you could smoke weed, hang out and talk, so sanity could reign in the control room. We were going day and night, and that's why it had to be a triple album, even though it would've been better as a single or double. The fact is that music was recorded in one spot, at one moment, a document of what happened."

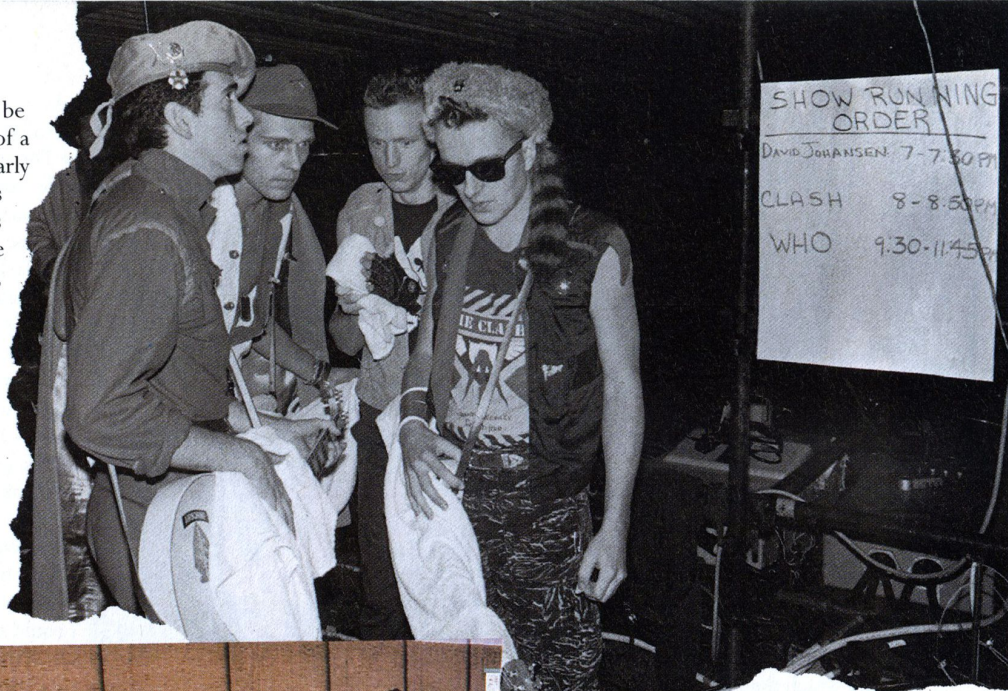
In the first weeks of 1981, The Clash dispensed with Blackhill Management and did the unthinkable: they phoned Bernie Rhodes and asked him to come back on-board. He was only too pleased to oblige, and his first dazzlingly unhinged scheme was to take The Clash back to America; only this time he decreed the continent should come to them. To wit, he organised a seven-night stand at Bond's Casino on New York's Times Square, finally stretched to a two-week residency after the Fire Department declared the venue was over-selling tickets [see MOJO 9]. Angry fans responded by clashing with police in the streets; the first time there'd been a riot in Times Square since Frank Sinatra's bobbysoxers overheated back in the '40s.

The Bond's support acts included Grandmaster Flash, the star of Joe and Sylvia Robinson's Sugarhill Records, the pioneering rap label with which Mick Jones had become enamoured. "I was so gone with the hip hop thing that the others used to call me 'Wak Attack'," smiles Jones. "I'd walk around with a beat box all the time and my hat on backwards; they used to take the mickey out of me. I was always like that about whatever came along, sort of get excited for a while."

"Mick was always looking for the new thing," says Strummer. "There are mixes of Radio Clash with typewriters going like machine guns all over them. People hear it and go, Is this a new remix? Who remixed it? And I say, No, that's The Clash in 1981. We didn't realise we were doing something big by putting that stuff together."

The Clash — who with characteristic perversity always opened their American shows with I'm So Bored With The USA — were falling deeply in love with New York. "We used to stay at the Iroquois Hotel, where James Dean stayed in the '50s," says Paul. "Just off the lobby there's a hairdresser, who remembered cutting his hair, so me and Joe got our hair done there too. Later on, me and Kosmo [Vinyl, PR man, 'ideas man' and vibes merchant] started hanging out with De Niro, who'd take us out to bars." Pennie Smith: "New York was like that — Futura 2000 would be doing a graffiti backdrop, Scorsese would be popping in, De Niro would be using the loo..."

Work began on a new album, *Combat Rock*, in London and then in New York. Paul and Joe were unhappy with Jones's initial mix, and veteran producer Glyn Johns was brought in to help out. "I remember having a two-hour argument with Mick about the level of the bass on Know Your Rights," muses Paul. "I wanted it a bit louder and deeper, like a reggae sort of sound. I think he'd got bored of playing guitar by then; he had various shapes of equipment that would make it sound like a harpsichord, or an orchestra."



September '82: with Topper sacked, Terry Chimes rejoins for shows supporting The Who at the Shea Stadium.

The Friction between Mick and the others was exacerbated by the state of Topper's health; by now, it was an open secret he had a heroin problem. Headon was much-loved by his bandmates, but with his playing deteriorating, The Clash took the difficult decision to fire him on the eve of a UK tour. "In the jazz days the saxophone section would be addicted to heroin," says Strummer. "It suits horn playing because you can float over the music; but it doesn't

suit drumming, it's a precise thing. We couldn't play any more." There was another aspect to his dismissal, too. Paul: "He was making a mockery of what the band was about, and what Joe was writing about."

"We were shooting the album cover in Thailand and I knew something was wrong," says Pennie Smith. "Normally they'd instinctively pull shapes together; they had a sixth sense about what would look good. But that wasn't there, something had gone."

Today, a contrite Headon admits he "lost the plot" and concedes that "action had to be taken". "I feel a lot of guilt about it, because after I left they were never the same. If I'd kept my act together I could see the band possibly still being together today. I'd like to apologise to them for kind of letting the side down."

Combat Rock finally appeared in June 1982, reaching Number 7 in the States and going on to sell over a million copies worldwide. Ironically, its most successful single, a funky dancefloor tune called Rock The Casbah, was Topper Headon's first and last songwriting contribution to The Clash.

THE BAND'S NEXT MOVE REITERATED A BY NOW familiar pattern: they re-employed Terry Chimes as drummer. Chimes rejoined in time for the group's dates with The Who on their US 'farewell' tour, culminating with two nights at New York's Shea Stadium. "The Who were turning up in limos," Chimes remembers, "but being The Clash we didn't feel comfortable being ferried around in cars like that. We couldn't turn up in a Mini Metro, either, so Kosmo hired us this classic vintage Cadillac; cool, very different"

Since *Combat Rock* Paul and Joe's relationship with Mick had soured, and the pressures of touring opened old wounds. "They had a difference of opinion on a range of issues, and had arranged a system where they didn't have to confront each other all the time," explains Terry, who was replaced in early 1983 by Cold Fish's Pete Howard. "But it's true: there were times when Mick could have been accused of being unreasonable. I remember him asking for a banana and the bloke came back and said, 'I can't get one, there are none in the building.' To get one would have meant hiring a car. Mick got very angry and said, 'All I

lbt Roberts/Redferns, Bob Gruen/Star File

The *Combat Rock* photo shoot, Thailand, early 1982: "Normally they'd instinctively pull shapes together. But something had gone."



"I want a banana!" So the bloke said, 'Look, I'll get you a case of Scotch instead', and Mick goes, 'I don't want a case of Scotch, I want a fucking banana!'

"I remember saying to Paul and Joe, What's this problem between you and Mick? They said, 'You don't understand, you haven't had it all these years we've had.' They couldn't work with him any more."

In April, The Clash played the enormous Us Festival in LA for a fee of \$500,000. "On-stage, that's how it was backstage – Mick all the way over there, me over here, Joe in the middle," comments Paul. "Me and Mick didn't talk." "Mick was intolerable to work with by this time," adds Strummer. "I mean no fun at all. He wouldn't show up, then when he did it was like Elizabeth Taylor in a filthy mood."

Paul: "Me and Joe had been talking about it, and we got to the point where I said, We're grown men, I can't take any more of this. We were both in agreement that we were fed up, we wanted to get on with the job, rather than wait around for Mick. We were in this rehearsal room and Joe said, 'We want you to leave.' Mick said to me, 'What do you say?' and I said, Well, yeah. I think he felt let down by that."

Mick: "What did it feel like? I don't know what it felt like. I didn't feel anything."

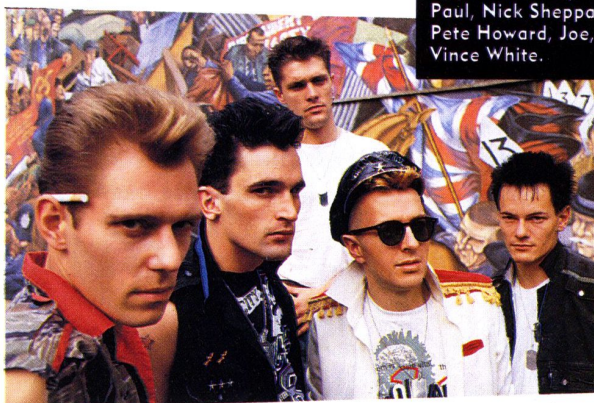
Tony James was one of the first people Mick rang. "It seemed inconceivable. You don't sack Keith Richards from The Rolling Stones. OK, Joe had the lyrics and was the great poet and performer, but it was Mick's passion for rock'n'roll that drove it all along. Mick lived for music, still does, he has no other life."

"I subscribe to the George Best school," says Johnny Green. "A nicely balanced well-rounded human being wouldn't have had the drive and hunger than Mick Jones had. He was a consummate prima donna, insufferable to the others, but that was also what powered that band along."

Terry Chimes: "I remember thinking, If they sack Mick Jones, then they haven't got a band."

STRUMMER AND SIMONON CARRIED ON FOR another two years with a five-man version of The Clash, featuring guitarists Vince White and Nick Sheppard. They toured the world playing large venues and festivals, and even embarked on a back-to-basics busking trip round the UK.

After releasing a sixth album, the Rhodes-produced *Cut The Crap*, a hi-tech mix of punk, reggae and funk, they split. "I know Joe was disappointed with the album," recalls Nick Sheppard. "I think he felt betrayed by Bernie's production; a lot of those ideas were ahead of their time, but because



The final line-up: Paul, Nick Sheppard, Pete Howard, Joe, Vince White.

Bernie isn't musical they weren't successful."

Their last gig was in Athens, Greece, on August 27, 1985. "I knew then the whole thing was going down the tubes because of the atmosphere between Joe and Bernie," says Sheppard. "Just before we went on stage, Joe gave Bernie a look of pure contempt. ... I'm not sure what had been said exactly. I knew then it was over. I think Joe realised it was a mistake to have got rid of Mick. It was like, Oh fuck!, I've dropped the plate. The next thing I knew Joe had buggered off to Spain for a month. Bernie was tearing his hair out, phoning me every morning. It was never the best way to wake up, having a lecture from Bernie. Then Joe came back, said it was all over and gave me some money."

"We put out a press release saying the other three guys had left," says Paul. "Joe said, 'I've got this song, Shouting Street, let's work on that', and I said, Fine, but I didn't get another call. I think Joe wanted to avoid any confrontation, which didn't bother me. I wasn't exactly looking at my watch."

"We messed with the original four," is Strummer's summation. "It was limping to its death from the minute that Topper was sacked."

THE CLASH FINALLY GOT THE NUMBER 1 HIT THEY deserved in 1991, when Mick's Stonesy R&B number *Should I Stay Or Should I Go?*, originally on *Combat Rock*, climbed to the top of the UK charts on the back of a Levi's jeans TV ad. Yet even that triumph was tainted by arguments among the former members as to whether Mick's group Big Audio Dynamite should appear on the B-side and whether The Clash ought to be flogging trousers in the first place. Yet divisions in the band have slowly healed, and the last few years have been rife with rumours about a reunion. Some insiders claim they came closest in 1996, but that the appearance of the rejuvenated Pistols queered the pitch; since then, however, Paul, Joe and Mick have all either publicly or privately declared that a re-formation is now unlikely to happen. Who knows? Today, they seem content doing other things: Paul paints full-time, Mick produces and still records, while Strummer has a new group, The Mescaleros. Meanwhile, a live album, *From Here To Eternity*, is set for release in October.

Peter Jenner points out that, "as ideologues, The Clash made a rod for their own back"; but their passion and integrity and grand sense of purpose left an indelible mark on British rock music. "Despite everything, they were a fantastic group to work with," he says. "There was a magic between Joe and Mick, a Lennon-McCartney thing – they complemented each other, the toughness of Joe and the musicality of Mick."

"Though they were diffident about it in public, they were absolutely committed to being the greatest musicians in the world," concludes Caroline Coon. "They brought music down to the people and made it intimate again. As grand as their sound was, it was folk music. Theirs was the defining music of their decade."

"You should be thankful if even once in your life you find a group with that weird thing that no scientist could ever measure," says Strummer, "that thing that all great bands have – Booker T And The MG's, The Meters, Creedence Clearwater Revival, the Stones. We had it, we messed with it and we learnt from that bitterly."

"There are two types of groups – romanticists and classicists," says Pennie Smith. "The Clash were romanticists. The way they dressed, that whole mythology they built around them. Everything was chaotic, nothing was planned, it was always full-on. The whole of The Clash was like one huge unscheduled stop-off. That's what made them great."

Thanks to Johnny Green, Marcus Gray and Tricia Ronane. Additional interview material from the Clash documentary *From The Westway To The World*, to be screened on October 3 on BBC 2.

Pennie Smith