

The Clash play Eric's for the first time



The Clash

Following on from the 40th anniversary of The Clash's debut Liverpool performance, *Getintothis'* Banjo looks into the legend

The Clash were undoubtedly Liverpool's favourite punk band. While the [Sex Pistols'](#) debut gig at Manchester's **Lesser Free Trade Hall** has been acknowledged as the starting point of that city's punk scene, [The Clash's](#) first gig at **Eric's** performed a similar magic for Liverpool.

The gig was witnessed by Jayne Casey, [Julian Cope](#) and Ian McCulloch, who went on to form **Big in Japan**, **The Teardrop Explodes** and **Echo & The Bunnymen** respectively, amongst other bands.

Also in attendance was one **Pete Wylie** of **Wah!** fame who, legend has it, approached **The Clash's Mick Jones** after the gig to tell him how he had been inspired him to form a band.

The story goes that **Jones** handed **Wylie** his guitar with the words “*Pay me back when you’re famous.*” **Wylie** later stated “*That day everything changed... nothing in Liverpool was ever the same again*”



The Clash in 1977

It wasn't that Liverpool didn't love **Sex Pistols**, but that, apparently, they just weren't that good when they played [Eric's](#), for what would be the only gig the band ever played in the city.

Also, this was only the 3rd gig at **Eric's**, so both band and venue were still unknown quantities, which meant that only around 50 people were present.

Of course, over the years the number of people who have since claimed they were there is probably over 100 times the number that actually attended, such is the impact punk has made on history.

By the time **The Clash** played on May 5 1977, things had changed. Punk was exploding all over the country, attracting the outcasts, the curious and those in search of *something* to match how they felt and to give voice to the noises in their heads.

Liverpool at the time was not in a particularly good place; financially in the trough of an economic slump following the decline of its docks and shipping industries and culturally still looking for a way out of the shadow cast by **The Beatles'** unprecedented success.

Musically, Liverpool had yet to find a post-**Beatles** identity, although **The Real Thing** had kept the city's flame burning in the charts.

When **Roger Eagle** and **Ken Testi** decided to open **Eric's, Roger**, perhaps sensing that change was in the air, asked those members of his club he took under his wing not to listen to **The Beatles**, for fear that the past would infiltrate the new present.

Jayne Casey, One of those who were so instructed, remembered “*A couple of years ago we'd been to a funeral and we were all sat round a table. There was me, Ian McCulloch and Pete Wylie. Ian looked at me and said, “Have you listened yet?” And I said, “No, have you?” And he said, “No” and we both looked at Wylie and said, “Have you?” And he said, “No” and we both in the same second said, “Yes you have! We know you have!” And he was like “I haven't, I haven't” but we were like “We can tell from your composition that you've listened to them for years!” So we're convinced that he listened, he pretends he didn't but he did.*”

But the music that was being made by the new generation paid no heed to the likes of **The Beatles**. **The Clash** themselves penned a song called *1977* that famously claimed “*No Elvis, Beatles or The Rolling Stones in 1977*”.



The Clash (Copyright: Chalkie Davies)

The Clash were everything a band should have been at that particular point and place in music. Young, good looking, well dressed, confused and even contradictory.

Their songs combined political thrust with killer riffs, signing about hate, war, being bored and riots. Live they were described as being like “*three James Deans coming at you*”, as the front line of **Mick Jones**, **Joe Strummer** and **Paul Simonon** charged and attacked, backed up by the mighty **Topper Headon**.

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That gig revitalized the city’s music scene. People met there and were jointly inspired to *do something*.

What nobody could have predicted at the time was how much they could go on to do. There are times in life when the stars just seem to line up and things work out right, a one in a billion meeting of minds and talents, and this seems to have been one of those occasions.

People formed bands before they knew what kind of musicians they would turn out to be, taken by **The Clash**’s messianic call. We can thank the gods of chance, or perhaps some other agent of destiny, that this crowd included the extraordinary voices of **Ian McCulloch**, **Pete Burns**, **Pete Dinklage** and **Holly Johnson**, along with the mercurial talents of guitarist **Will Sergeant**, drummer extraordinaire **Budgie** and art prankster/cultural terrorist **Bill Drummond**.

It may be the case that this astonishing pool of talent would have come together regardless of this particular gig, but the point remains that **The Clash** lit the touch paper and the firework duly went into the higher atmosphere and exploded.

The Clash were one of the first bands this writer saw at **Eric’s**, a few months on from their debut appearance, on their *Tommy Gun* tour.

As confession is alleged to be good for the soul, I will hold my hand up and say that I was never a massive fan after their initial run of singles, nailing my colours to the **Pistols**’ mast instead. T

hat said, this was without question one of the most thrilling gigs I have ever seen, **The Clash** were undoubtedly at their best live, unmarred by the

poor production of their first album and the American sheen of their second.

To this day I can remember the energy of the gig, along with the heat, the packed crowd and the feeling that, somehow, this was a gig that would stay with you long after we had left the venue.

I had never seen Eric's so crowded, perhaps the fullest I ever saw it, with the possible exception of **Iggy Pop**. The size of the crowd was such that people had spilled out from stage front through to the bar area, making even a glimpse of the stage tricky.

[The Specials](#) were supporting them on this tour and, although I tell people I saw them it is probably more honest to say that I glimpsed them, through a doorway and over people's heads. The crowd looked hot and we didn't fancy getting caught up in the heat and mess of it, just for a support band.

If I had the chance I would tell my teenage self to get in there and catch one of our era's most important bands while they were still unknown. I was amazed at how popular they seemed to be despite few people in my social circle having heard of them.

As **The Specials** left the stage and people headed to the bar, we saw our chance and pushed our way in. Thankfully we got to within a few people of the front of the stage and **The Clash** burst forth and blew our teenage minds!

Playing their first album and early singles, they already had a run of songs to make most new bands weep with envy.

With the **Sex Pistols** banned from almost everywhere and soon to split up, **The Clash** were head of the punk pack at this point, and made a nonsense of the myth that punk bands couldn't play their instruments.

The people inspired by their first Liverpool, gig have achieved much in the years since and have doubtless inspired other people in their turn.

Perhaps this is the ultimate compliment for a gig, or even a band – that they create these ripples in a pond to such an extent that they are still being felt. Liverpool and the whole world, would be so much worse without them.

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