

destruction after a concert by punk group, The Clash.

Punks at the Rainbow: an event

Clash/Jam/
Buzzcocks/Subway
Sect/Prefects
Rainbow

ROCK 'N' ROLL can be one of the few honest things left in this world.

Yes.
An event, a gathering of the clans.

Yes.
But it was all down to the Clash.

Yes.
Sensible billing: the bands and the audience got better and hotter as time went on. I missed the Prefects, first on (sorry)—and caught the second half of the Sect. It doesn't make too good sense talking about 'halves' with the Sect as one song merges into another and you can't hear the lyrics. Style v. content. They're so like a movie of a band playing at the Rainbow, being ridiculously static, that I love them. Lead singer Vic looks as though someone's hung their old school-clothes on one peg and accident-

ally left a body inside them. Still. They don't seem to care too much and the audience don't. Please — some sugar on the pill.

It's just strange seeing these bands at the Rainbow (with their titchy PA's) after being used to the view through an elbow at the Roxy, or the seedy funk of one-niters like the Coliseum. The Rainbow is inhibiting: it's so plush and massive, and there are bouncers as obtrusive as the police at the Carnival last year. I mean the stage itself is about the size of the Roxy basement.

At first, the Buzzcocks don't know what to do with it. Pete Shelley hunches over his Starway and spits out the lyrics; Steve Diggle just concentrates — bassist Garth tries a few lumbering runs that don't make it. But the music's great. The Great Lost Band — they aren't as assertive as other new wave bands, but another few months, plenty of gigs and (hopefully) record company investment and they'll be one of the best. Their sound is tight and controlled, carefully playing on their limitations. At the bottom is the drone of thousands of German Bombers flying high — a grumbling growl,

on top monotone vocals and rushed, desperate lyrics. Little inspired touches: the siren guitar in 'Boredom', and the car honks in 'Fast Cars'. Apart from the familiar 'Orgasm Addict' and 'Sixteen' a new song, 'Whatever Happened To...', sounds excellent. Pertinent. They encore with 'Time's Up' and everyone begins to get loose.

There's plenty of action at the bar during all this, which only stops when the Clash come on. A social occasion, a gathering. A rarity in public as the supply of sympa places dries up — a new venue, please. And while we're on about it, the Seat Shock Horror was utterly unavoidable: people don't want to sit down, the music isn't about that at all. Movement and Energy. I mean fixed seats are TOTALLY RIDICULOUS. In the planning of venues for these gigs it doesn't seem to be too much to ask that the few front rows be removed, as they were at Harlesden. They get removed anyway, very dangerously, so why not? And, furthermore, in contrast to the media idiosyncrasy, the atmosphere was very cool, relaxed even. They just aren't used to people leaping around and enjoying themselves actively.

As soon as the Jam arrive, we know that they're full of presence. They take that stage by the scruff of its neck and don't let go. The audience responds immediately. As usual, it's two-tone time — you could take these guys home to your Granny. Very commercial, and hot with it — they're incredibly tight, flash and ener-

getic. Non-stop bop: they revel in their and the audience's enjoyment. In fact the place starts going apeshit, with a real excitement. Impressive. Only one real criticism: they steamroller 'Midnight Hour' and lose most of it — 'Batman' gets to be very tedious very quickly. (And please not too much Conservative Party PR, hey guys?). But Positive rules.

And now we're in a different league. Simply, I thought the Clash performance here tonight was one of the best I've ever seen. Now — it's testament time. I last saw them in November '76 at the RCA. A classic confrontation. And to me, they were so real, so raw, that I was totally turned around, provoked, galvanised into action. For that, if nothing else, my undying respect.

Six months on, they haven't lost that. They can communicate just as directly and devastatingly with 3,000 people, as opposed to 300. An amazing feat. Obviously, they've knocked off some of the rough edges, and what was once spontaneous has become a little more stylised. That's fine: to conquer the Rainbow, you just can't amble on — some elements of a SHOW are needed. One of these is staging: at the back of the stage is a 25-foot backdrop, a blow-up of the back cover of the album or a similar shot. Next, lights — burning pink and orange as well as the more conventional colours — they flash. As soon as the band come on, there's and incredible electric tension — they're so much a part of London-England-1977 that it's painfully intense. An awe-

inspiring 'London's Burning': '1977' with Strummer framed for an instant in ice-blue for the last word — "1984". Most of the material is from the 1p: they didn't do 'Pressure Drop' (shame) and there was only one new song — 'Capital Radio'.

So—their performance. They've changed from their three-front-men days: Strummer is much more to the forefront. That leaves Mick and Paul much more room to play: and they do, beautifully. One neglected aspect, among the sociology and mythologising of the album, was the playing. I mean great rock 'n' roll, man! a sensibility second to none. 'Police and Thieves', where they stretch out, is a real moment. Strummer is emerging as one of the great front-men. I could isolate it, briefly, to four moments. His involvement and encouragement of the drummer, the new kid, Nick, hidden almost behind the drums. His rush to the backdrop behind the band at the end of 'Police and Thieves' — mingling with photopolic, he stands apart yet WITH the rest of the band. Suddenly, he holds the mike out to the audience offering it to them. During the first encore, 'Garage Land' he reaches out into the audience, shakes hands, and swaps his shirt for some guy's T-shirt. Look: the audience/performer barrier has been smashed, in a rare moment of tenderness and solidarity.

A triumph...I'm thinking they could just have that once-in-a-generation thing. Today North Ken, tomorrow the...

Jon Savage.



THE JAM: they took the stage by the scruff of its neck

Pic by Dennis O'Regan

LETTERS

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PUNK WRECK!



AN EXCLUSIVE picture of the 'horrific' scenes outside the Rainbow last week after 'punk rock' fans had gone on an 'orgy of destruction' after a 'concert' by 'punk' group, The Clash.