

RAINBOW, City Hall, Newcastle

I HAD the feeling that this was going to be a rather special night as soon as the houselights faded and the taped intro of 'Land Of Hope And Glory' filled the hall. Then suddenly, Rainbow were on stage and the feeling hardened into reality as they sunk their teeth into a gritty version of 'Eyes Of The World'.

Following this goodie came the slower, almost-bluesy 'Love's No Friend Of Mine', with Graham Bonnet's intensely emotional vocals sounding more effective live than on the album cut. Things got progressively mightier as Blackmore produced a sensitive semi-acoustic solo rendition of 'Greensleeves' in traditional fashion that provided a strangely haunting entry into the superb 'Since You've Been Gone'.

Having concentrated on material from the most recent album thus far, the mood then changed from the earthy to the epic as old favourite 'Man On The Silver Mountain' and 'Catch The Rainbow' rained down on the hypnotised audience. However the coup de grace in the main body of the set was saved to last as the now-classic strains of 'Lost In Hollywood' were given the full pyrotechnic treatment, including scorching solos from Blackmore, Don Airey, and Cozy Powell.

Encore interpretations of 'All Night Long', 'Blues' (with some good bass playing from Roger Glover) and 'Long Live Rock & Roll' were duly dispatched before, in a fit of old-fashioned savagery, Blackmore decimated his axe against one of the balcony walls, during an instrumental version of 'Kill The King', throwing the wounded 'sacrifice' into the crowd to provide an instant collector's piece for one lucky worshipper, so with a last reprise of 'Long Live Rock & Roll', they were gone, the lights came on and the fans shuffled reluctantly out into the Geordie night air. MALCOLM DOME

THE CLASH Lewisham Odeon, London

THE CLASH are in the unenviable position of having little more than their undying, self-created myth/legend to live up to: now the air's cleared, 'London's Calling' doesn't really sound all that spectacular.

They've adjusted as well as possible; The Clash have become a slick, wet-luk dance band, with one eye on the States, t'other on the ever-calling London streets... bidding half the mums abroad, it must be one massive task trying to stay "relevant" in this country.

And The Clash are distant now; I don't see anything of myself in either them or their music. Their songs no longer have any bearing on the way my life works — it's like absorbing a sten-gun Coronation Street, with Strummer, through no fault of his own, now

something adjacent to an anarchistic Len Fairclough.

The Clash is an establishment in its own right, a postpunk phenomena vying with the Corporations from the insecurity of CBS, still fighting its fights from record and stage. They're as fallible and helpless as anyone else.

The Clash play with a lot of venom, still; they play 'White Man' loud and tacky, they play 'Guns of Brixton' ugly and cluttered, they play 'Jimmy Jazz' like heavy metal skiffle, and they play 'Stay Free' and 'Clash City Rockers' and...

This is a safe European evening in the company of The Enigma — a set built to please, rather than unsettle or incite, with all drama external, The Clash merely being as good as the audience want them to be. The Lewisham referendum made them invincible.

There are orthodox sub-metal guitar drones, sprawling versions of old numbers, a "guest" keyboard player, a "guest" bass player and switch of instruments for 'Guns of Brixton', thank-yous and such; overall pleasantness.

Still, the opening to 'Capital Radio' is prone to set sparks flying — momentarily, The Clash come to life, they become forceful and near-awesome, riding on a sudden wave of inspiration; but moments like this are fractured, sprayed unevenly and sporadically through the set, and often proceedings glibly slip back into dense ritual. Orthodoxy's calling...

And no matter how great their integrity, determination of conviction, they'll never find anywhere else to go; they'll never win. In essence, I don't understand what The Clash are here to do anymore. The Phenomena has been institutionalised... CHRIS WESTWOOD

THE ONLY ONES / SIMPLE MINDS / MARTHA AND THE MUFFINS

Lyceum, London

CONSIDERING it was their biggest ever date, this year's B 52's displayed a startling confidence and demonstrated that there is life beyond the Jefferson Airplane.

The two girls (both called Martha) vocalised in typical sixties fashion over some pleasant melodies and occasional shrieks of sax, which transferred the whole into a vaguely contemporary setting. Evocative songs like 'Saigon' and 'Echo Beach' show plenty of potential, though at this stage Martha And The Muffins appear to lack substance, a charge less easy to level at Simple Minds.

They have improved almost beyond recognition, perhaps due to having taken a crash course in Joy Division. As soon as we can ascertain the date of World War Three, the Scots should be commissioned to write the sound track.

Impressively dense, their music is all-consuming and