CLASH

Just Joe

So the Clash say goodbye to Reggae
No, there's reggae in there but it sounds like us now, not like us playing reggae. All the ingredients of the music are in there — the beat, the danceability ...

There's one track called 'Red Angel Dragnet', where Paul does his version of a Jamaican Marlene Dietrich. He wrote it too, it's about the killing by the police of one of the Guardian Angels, the subway guards in New York. There's another track called, 'Death Is The Star', which is a bit Raymond Chandlerish. It's actually about the movie where women are attacked on screen as an accepted part of the story. I do a classic rock and roll number, 'Should I Stay Or Should I Go', which shows we're not set in our ways. I always get the wimpy songs to do but I don't mind. Joe Ely and Joe sing the chorus on this one in Spanish.

Who else guests on the album?
Ellen (Foley) sings on one track, 'Car Jamming', Futura, does something-somewhere in the middle. Allen Ginsberg chants in Swahili on a number called 'Ghetto Defendent' — altogether, it's a great record.

What was Ginsberg like?
Very interesting. He and his friend would come to the studio every other day. Then he would sit down with Joe and work on the words while I looked on with 'keen admiration'.

So Ginsberg is the latest Clash adoption case.
Well it's true, we do adopt causes or people — because no one else wants them. Why not use your group to do something worthwhile? It's important to hear what they have to say. We get our information from people, more than we do from newspapers and magazines.

TROPIC OF

Joe Strummer Gets Physical

AT lunchtime on a beautifully clear Sydney day, Joe Strummer is hard at work in his hotel room trying to prove that he exists. The Clash have designated 1982 'The Year Of The Body', so Strummer is trying to build up his muscles to give himself shape and definition: flesh, muscle, strength, life.

"There's nothing in this room heavy enough to lift," he complains to me. I suggest he try the TV set. He immediately rushes over to the set, grabs it and lifts it up — then spends the next 15 minutes trying to re-assemble it . . .

This is the first official Clash day off in Sydney and Joe Strummer can hardly wait to get close to the sea. We go for lunch at a restaurant on the beach and he tears over to the water. He's wearing a black leather vest, no shirt, with black trousers, day-glo orange socks and Doc Martens ("The Clash Go Tropical").

We sit down at a table, me with my tape-recorder, Strummer with his mini-notebook, pen poised at the ready to catch any passing Australian colloquialisms or cultural info.

What's brought on this body consciousness then?

In 1982 The Clash have decided, and this is especially for the *NME* reader, The Clash have decided that this is *not* the year of the closet case, meaning that you put your cards on the table and say what you think and anyone who doesn't is a closet case and deserves what he gets. And secondly, 'the cult of the body' — none of this weedy, pop-star image, you know? Piss on that — just because the country is falling apart that means we have to build ourselves up.

Get strong for the Revolution?

Right, if you're going to stay in England, at least build your body up, be serious or emigrate. There's plenty of room in New Zealand, they've only got a few million people there and the whole country is empty.

Emigrate? Isn't that a bit like deserting ship?

It's OK to desert ship. Try being a rat in the hold and see if you don't think it's cool to desert ship, you know. I'm talking about something positive for the rats in the hold. I didn't know it was like that here. They told me that New Zealand was like England and I imagined — grey skies, grey streets, grey buildings, grey people, rain, boredom, misery, no money, no excitement, no action, no future . . . all these things to me are England and should be written out on the Union Jack so we can't see the colours.

But then I got to New Zealand and it's like you're in blasted California. There are people walking around with knickers on in the street and the sun beating down, and the most beautiful scenery you've ever seen. A lush tropical paradise.

But emigrating there?

(Angrily) Look, if you're 17 and you're in England — the message is, there ain't no need for you. So if there ain't no need there — fucking emigrate. I don't believe in countries any more, I've decided that.

Aren't you looking at it from behind rose-coloured glasses?

I'm looking at it through a grey, miserable Englishman's eyes and it's very important that this message gets back, because I didn't know about it. To me Australia was some baked desert with a few tin shacks and a few drunks glugging tubes of Fosters and beating up anything that doesn't look exactly like they do. I'm not ready for this sophisticated metropolis. Sydney is like Beverly Hills, I'm not ready for it.

Culture shock?

Well, 'culture' is right at the back of things; remember we're talking to a 17-year-old youth who can't even get one square meal a day and culture is very low on his list of priorities. Anyway, culture is what you make it and places are what you make of them. I'm only saying "You don't have to rot to death on a wet, black day if you don't want to". I'm saying there is room to move out here, it don't feel like a desert full of kangaroos, at all. You know, they're keeping Australia a very good secret . . .

Let's put it another way, would you tell people to emigrate to South Africa?

I don't know about that. I mean, I've never been to South Africa but I have been to Rhodesia and experienced segregation. And if that's like that here with the aboriginals, then they're doing an even better cover-up job.

What was Japan like?

They don't need us Westerners there. Mick said, 'I feel like a part-time Western God', because it was like being in The Beatles, the way you get mobbed by the girls there. I ran through Osaka station, like a replay from *A Hard Day's Night* and I've never done that before. We're supposed to be building it *different* style; in 'London Calling' I sing it every night: *"Phoney Beatlemania has bitten the dust."* But not in Japan it hasn't.

My message to them is, 'To hell with us'. They're all soaked in Americana and they worship anything American and Western in tight trousers. To hell with that, they've got to look to themselves.

You only like it when they hate you?

I know, that's just another of life's charming paradoxes. But what's the purpose of going to Japan and being fondled? The message of punk was 'Do it yourself'. The bands were home-made, the fanzines were home-made, even sometimes the guitars and the instruments. You did it yourself and somehow it's been distorted along the line.

Now you just get carbon copies of skinheads and punks in far flung corners of the globe. They're not dealing with their own town, they're just wishing they could be somewhere else. It's a screw-up and I have to ponce through and they shout "Rock star" at me, and I'm thinking, "Too damn right — rock star". I'm not really snivelling, I'm just saying that it's a screw-up.

Why do you keep referring to punk when punk is finished?

I keep going on about punk because I always think about it. Because when the Chinese/Jap journalist from *Pravda*, asks me, "Are you a punk?" I say, "Yes", because I like all the aggro that comes with that. It's something to knock against because, this is really important, *they follow the punk party line when there was no party line*. But then, I was nothing to do with the start of punk anyway. You say punk is finished but maybe you don't have to deal with it as much as I do, I have to deal with it all the time. But I think that's a very rash thing you just said.

OK but you've changed musically since then.

Yeah, but it's not like we could run away and become Eno or Robert Fripp.

What was 'Sandinista' about then?

We were only trying to wind up the punks to be quite honest, only trying to destroy the party line. On 'Sandinista' we were deliberately playing the most unacceptable music to a punk that we could.

I thought punks liked reggae.

Yeah, but there you are. There's two opposites that came together; a peace loving, stoned Jah Rastafari, compared to a drunk, anarchic boot boy. I can't think of more polarity than that. Paradoxes exist and live and breathe. I mean, I am one.