ON STAGE

PAUL SIMONON: who said Quasimodo?

Clash in a flash

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY
Zig Zag Club, London

STRIP away the deceit, forget about the 'Stones' at Wembley, consign 'Combat Rock' to the dumper, forget about rock'n'roll. In short 'rock', its bloated 25 year history and all those who sail in her — is declared totally irrelevant.

Take the Birthday Party. What a mess, such excess; better put them down they'll make your hands dirty.

I'm not saying the Birthday Party completely subvert rock traditions; for at their heart is a minimalist dynamic, familiar to punk rock when it had edge, and the scuzziest late Sixties New York rock. Yet the Birthday Party don't steal, they simply stretch and savage reference points and remembered moments, until their 'rock' is mutant, until their appetite is devoured.

Driven by mayhem and primitivism, Birthday Party music, takes the listener deeper and deeper into a world where the very surface of 'rock' music is cut and bruised. Guitars moan and screech, vocals scratch, and catch a pained venom. If the guitar is the scalpel, then the drum is some kind of vicious hammer, unsubtle, unloving, but effective.

Surrounding this cut and fury, is a bass that throbs and moves with a wicked sexuality, and a leather troused bass player who bumps and grinds with comic gay-bar overkill.

If the Birthday Party strive to pull rock 'n' roll apart at the seams, and it needs to be done, then the result is not always very comfortable. Expect to be disturbed!

For this writer great music needs a sense of soul, light and optimism that the Birthday Party are simply unable to offer. Birthday Party's music is rooted in the dark scabrous underside of urban rock, an ugly neurotic world for sure — but one which great music can manage to expose and uplift. The rant and glory of the Birthday Party, wallows in this darkness, fails to illuminate, and ultimately accepts defeat.

The Birthday Party shook me up, turned me over — but they didn't win my heart. Rock'n'roll is set up for the kill, but when it dies I want a celebration not a funeral.

Birthday Party? That's an ironic name, eh? Are you beginning to understand what I mean?

Jim Reid

BAUHAUS
Lyceum, London

THOSE WHO decry Bauhaus ought to ask themselves what drew others in droves to see them at the Lyceum on Sunday. Let this be a hint . . .

The set opened with 'Bela Lugosi's Dead' which had Peter Murphy drawing his coat up into simulated bat-wings and flitting intimidatingly across the stage, his face spot-lit from below,

THE CLASH
Fair Deal, Brixton

IT'S FIVE and a half years since I first saw The Clash and times have changed. Fundamentally The Clash are still pretty much the same. The fact that they remain a wildly contemporary rock band is a tribute to their subtle shifts in musical and visual styles. Here's how they've gone about it.

Image-wise it's a case of from urban guerrillas to suburban cruisers. Neat body-hugging sleeves sawn-off-at-the-shoulders numbers carried with a swagger and perpetual 150 degree angle twist of guitar. The summer's definitive way of broadcasting a public service announcement.

Politically, they're still not afraid to leave themselves open to accusations of naivety. And why not? Not only was Paul Simonon's 'Guns Of Brixton' crudely prophetic, but so were 'Career Opportunities', 'Complete Control', 'Stay Free' and even 'Garageland' to name but a few. For this reason they all merited inclusion.

But politically, The Clash have also broadened their horizons. As every post — 'Safe Europeam Home' fan will realise, it is the world which is now their oyster, from San Salvador to Siam (where the 'Combat Rock' sleeve was photographed). Hence the frequent use of slides portraying all manner of international news, from silhouettes of commandos to mug-shots of autocrats. They are still humanitarians, After all.

But politicians The Clash are not. Their approach should more realistically be interpreted as that of would-be journalists, pointing out rather than pointing at. After all, this past 12 months in particular has seen them undergo their fair share of travel in their capacity as Trans-Atlantic troubadors.

Which brings us to The Clash as musicians, not their most inconsiderable role. The Clash, as it happens, didn't play a duff song all night, but then they're not renowned for their turkeys. Neither did they go out of their way to promote the new product, but then they never were suckers for such obvious rock 'n' roll traps.

Still, 'Overpowered By Funk' wouldn't have gone amiss, especially since they don't indulge in a whole lot of dub these days (well they have to keep abreast of fashion, don't you know). No, the excesses of last year's tour have been rectified, and it was down to a wide selection of short sharp stabs (cuts) from each phase of their career.

Delivery is still exciting yet a lot more controlled, the almost calculated calmness inevitably introducing a lot more tension into the playing. That this did not spill over into the audience is some indication of the greater maturity they now encourage and adopt. In fact The Clash could almost have been described as laid back.

I guess in 1982 The Clash are still playing real cool lovers' rock.

Mike Nicholls