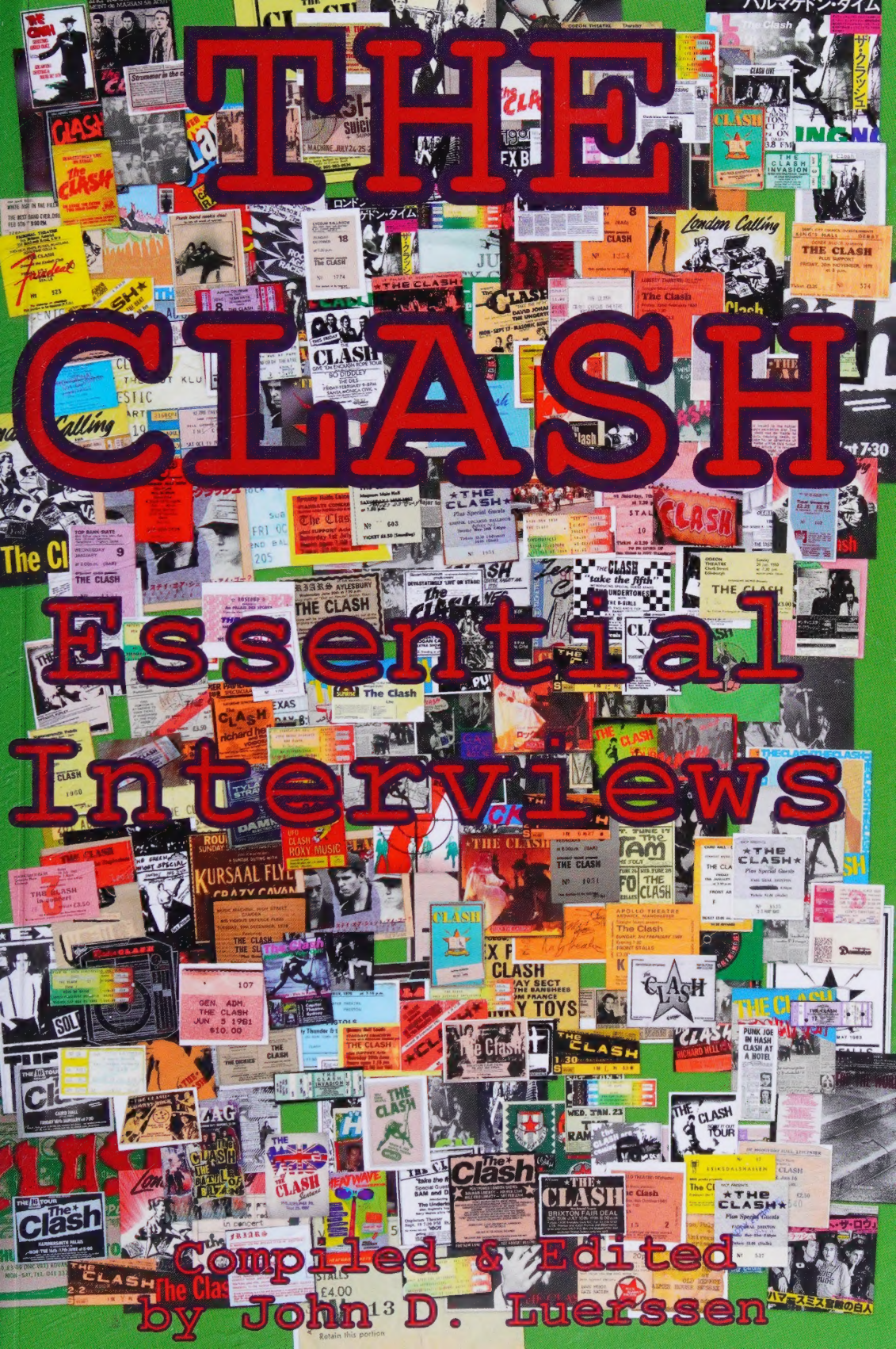




THE CLASH Essential Interviews

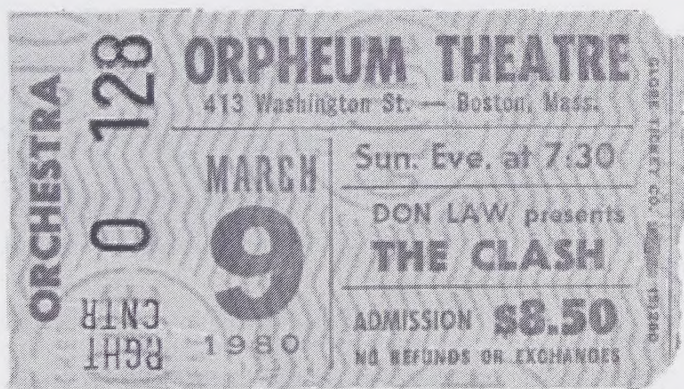
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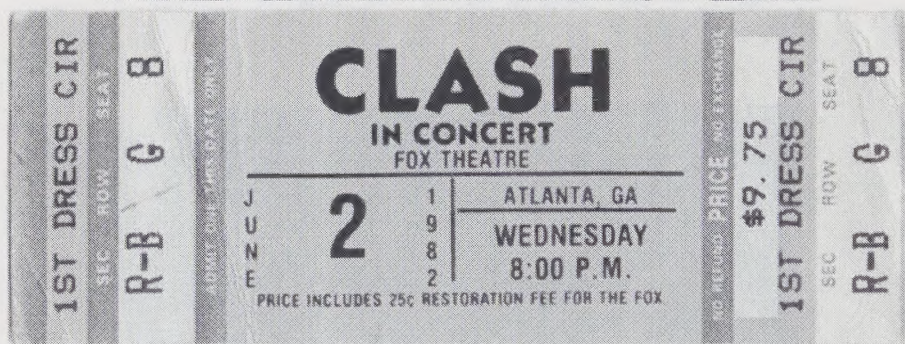
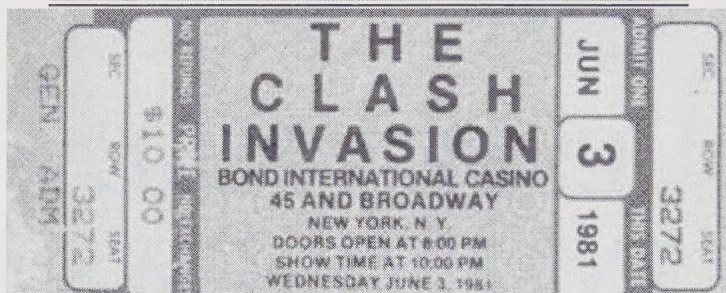
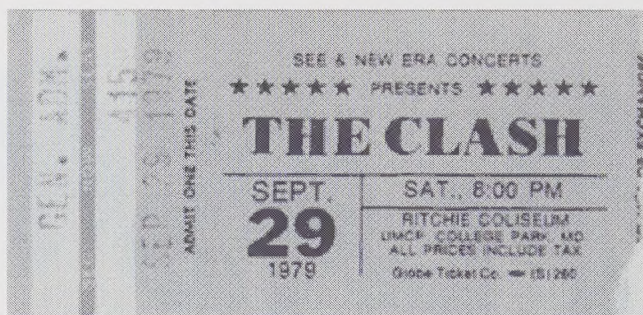
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the CLASH

ESSENTIAL INTERVIEWS



Compiled & Edited by
John D. Luerssen



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The Clash: Down And Out And Proud

By Caroline Coon, *Melody Maker*, November 13, 1976

Three weeks ago at London's ICA, Jane and Shane, regulars on the new-wave punk rock scene, were sprawled at the edge of the stage. Blood covered Shane's face. Jane, very drunk, had kissed, bitten and, with broken glass, cut him in a calm, but no less macabre, love rite.

The Clash were not pleased. "All of you who think violence is tough – why don't you go home and collect stamps? That's much tougher," roared Joe Strummer. Then he slammed into the band's anthem 'White Riot'.

*All the power is the hands
Of people rich enough to buy it,
While we walk the streets
Too chicken to even try it
And everybody does what they're told to,
And everybody eats supermarket soul-food.
White Riot, I wanna riot
White riot – a riot of my own!"*

The song, played with the force of an acetylene torch, is no less politically uncompromising than the other numbers in the band's repertoire – numbers like 'Deny', 'Protex Blues', 'Career Opportunities' and '1977'. To hammer home their impact, the Clash play with enough committed force to bring down the walls of Babylon, Jericho, Heaven and Hell if necessary. And their audiences go wild.

But, far from wanting people to hurt each other, Joe Strummer (vocals, guitar), Mick Jones (guitar), Paul Simonon (bass) and Terry Chimes (drums) insist that their aim is to shake audiences into channelling their frustrations into creative outlets. It's difficult, however, trying to maintain a balance between positive reaction and violence.

How easy it is though, when you examine the Clash's background (one only too similar to that experienced by the thousands of young people who identify with the new-wave rock bands), to explain their emotional intensity.

Aware that, like the rest of the band, he'd rather not talk about his childhood, I asked Joe (22) where he came from. "That's the trouble, see." He speaks fast, using words economically.

"The only place I considered home was the boarding school, in Yorkshire, my parents sent me to. It's easier, isn't it? I mean it gets kids out the way, doesn't it?" Then he adds defiantly: "It was great! You have to stand up for yourself. You get beaten up the first day you get there."

"And I'm really glad that I went because I shudder to think what would have happened if I hadn't gone to boarding school. I only saw my father twice a year. If I'd seen him all the time I'd probably have murdered him by now. He was very strict."

While Joe is talking, Paul (20) is sitting next to him pointing and shooting a realistic, replica pistol – bang – at the posters on the walls – bang – at Mick across the room – bang – at Gertie the roadie's dog – bang, bang – anywhere at all.

"I get on all right with my parents," he says. "But I don't see them very much. They split up when I was eight. I stayed with my mum but I felt it was a bit soft with her. I could do whatever I liked and I wasn't getting nowhere so I went to stay with my Dad.

"It was good training because I had to do all the launderette and that. In a way I worked for him – getting money together and that – down Portabello market and doing the paper rounds after school. It got me sort of prepared for when things get harder."

Paul liked school. "I never learned anything. All you done is play about...there were forty-five in our class and we had a Pakistani teacher who didn't even speak English."

Mick, (21) like Paul, comes from Brixton. His father is a taxi driver and his mother is in America. "They kind of left home one at a time," he says. "I was much more interested in them than they were in me. They decided I weren't happening, I suppose. I stayed with my gran for a long time. And I read a lot.

"Psychologically it really did me in. I wish I knew then what I know now. Now I know it isn't that big a deal. But then, at school, I'd sit there with this word 'divorce, divorce' in my head all the time. But there was no social stigma attached to it because all the other kids seemed to be going through the same thing. Very few of the kids I knew were living a sheltered family life."

When he was sixteen, Mick believes he had two choices – football or Rock 'n' Roll. He chose Rock. Why? "Because he couldn't afford toilet rolls," quips Joe. Much laughter. Mick explains: "I thought it was much less limiting. And it was more exciting and, I got into music at a very early age."

"I went to my first rock concert when I was twelve. It was free, in Hyde Park and Nice, Traffic, Junior's Eyes and the Pretty Things were playing."

"The first guitar I had was a second-hand Hofner. I paid sixteen quid for it and I think I was ripped off. But, I tell you something – I sold it for thirty to a Sex Pistol." Everyone laughs again, gleefully.

Laughter is a cheap luxury when, like Clash, you never have the money for a square meal and when, like Joe, you live in a squat – or like Paul, you 'crash' in your manager's vast unheated, rehearsal room (where this interview took place) with no hot water or cooking facilities.

After Paul and Mick left school, they both eventually ended up as casual art students. Mick was already in a group when a friend of his dragged Paul down to a rehearsal. "The first live rock 'n' roll I can remember seeing was the Sex Pistols, less than a year ago. All I listened to before then was ska and bluebeat down at the Streatham Locarno."

"But when I went to this rehearsal, as soon as I got there Mick said 'you can sing, can't you?'. And they got me singing. But I couldn't get into it. They were into the New York Dolls and they all had very long hair so it only lasted a couple of days."

Ten days later however, Paul had "acquired" a bass guitar, Mick had cut his hair, they had formed a group called the Heartdrops (although the

Phones, the Mirrors, the Outsiders and the Psychotic Negatives were also names for a day). Then walking down Golbourn Road with Glen Matlock of the Sex Pistols, they bumped into Joe.

The meeting was auspicious. "I don't like your group (the 101ers)" said Mick. "But we think you're great."

"As soon as I saw these guys," says Joe, "I knew that that was what a group, in my eyes, was supposed to look like. So I didn't really hesitate when they asked me to join."

How did Joe first get into a rock 'n' roll band? "Because I owned a drum kit. Someone gave me a camera and then I met this guy who had a drum kit in his garage and I had a go on it one day. And I thought 'this guy's going to swap me this little camera for all that kit.' And I said 'here you are.'"

"Then I went down to Wales and I ran into a band who had a drummer but no drum kit. But I didn't want to play drums because I wanted to be the star of the show, right? So I said 'if you use my drum kit you're going to have me as your singer.' And they had no option but to accept."

Before Joe joined the band they were called Flaming Youth. He changed their name to the Vultures. They did six gigs before Joe decided to come back to London to form the 101ers.

Joe broke up the 101ers directly as a result of seeing the Sex Pistols. A few months ago he told me: "Yesterday I thought I was a crud. Then I saw the Sex Pistols and I became a King and decided to move into the future."

Today he says: "As soon as I saw them I knew that rhythm and blues was dead, that the future was here somehow. Every other group was riffing their way through the Black Sabbath catalogue. But hearing the Pistols I knew. I just knew. It was something you just knew without bothering to think about."

What is it about punk-rock which is so important to Joe? "It's the music of now. And it's in English. We sing in English, not mimicking some

American rock singer's accent That's just pretending to be something you ain't."

Continues Mick: "It's the only music which is about young white kids. Black kids have got it all sewn up. They have their own cultural music. Basically young white kids are relying on a different time to provide for their kids."

But what's so different about youth today then? Silence. Joe stands up and, relishing the drama, he turns to reveal the stark, hand-painted graffiti on the back of his boiler suit. HATE AND WAR glare letters in red and white across his shoulders. It's the hippy motto reversed.

"The hippy Movement was a failure" is Joe's explanation. "All hippies around now just represent complete apathy. There's a million good reasons why the thing failed, O.K. But the only thing we've got to live with is that it failed.

"At least you tried. But I'm not interested in why it failed. I'll jeer at hippies because that's helpful. They'll realise they're stuck in a rut and maybe they'll get out of it."

The pervading, resentful feeling on the New Youth Front is that the older generation, squandering the opportunities of the rich Sixties, has left them with the shell of a disintegrating society. One of the reasons drummer Terry Chimes is notable for his absence is that he is having a serious argument with Joe. Terry wants to 'get out' of the country while there's still time. Jo thinks he should stick around to see IT – the political chaos they see as inevitable – through.

What do they feel about society today? "It's alienating the individual," says Mick. "No one gives a s – about you."

Says Joe: "There's nowhere to go. Nothing to do. The radio's for housewives. Nothing caters for us.

"All the laws are against you. Whoever's got the money's got the power. The Rent Act's a complete mockery. It's a big joke. I just have to f – off into the night for somewhere to sleep."

Adds Paul, with feeling: "At the moment what the Government should do is put licences on clubs so that kids can have somewhere to go. But they're clamping down on all that. But it's great because there's going to be kids on the streets. And they're going to want something to do. And when there ain't nothing to do you wreck up cars and that.

"The situation that is beginning to happen now is their fault. If we end up wrecking the place it's the Government's fault. They'll bring back National Service and we'll all be sent down to South Africa or Rhodesia to protect white capital interest. And then we'll all be slaughtered..."

They may knock society, but they're all on the dole aren't they? "Yeah. We get a little freedom from social security. Otherwise I'd have to spend 40 hours a week lifting cardboard boxes or washing dishes, or what ever I done in the past. But because we're on the dole – which is £9.70 a week – I can get a Rock 'n' Roll band together.

"If I got up at 4.00 a.m. and went to Soho and joined a queue I could get a job as a casual washer-upper. That's the other opportunity I've got. Or the opportunity to work in a factory!"

But someone's got to work in a factory? "Why have they?" demands Mick. "Don't you think technology is advanced enough to give all those jobs over to a few people and machines.

"There's a social stigma attached to being unemployed. Like 'Social Security Scroungers' every day in the *Sun*. I don't want to hear that. I cheer them. You go up North and the kids are ASHAMED that they can't get a job"

Aren't they being rather pious when all they are doing is playing in a Rock 'n' Roll band? "No," says Paul. "It's the most immediate way we can handle it. We can inspire people. There's no one else to inspire you. Rock 'n' Roll is a really good medium. It has impact, and, if we do our job properly then we're making people aware of a situation they'd otherwise tend to ignore. We can have a vast effect!"

Oh yes, I jibe, rock stars have usually started out saying they're going to change everything. Joe reacts first. "But you learn by mistakes. The

Rolling Stones made mistakes. But I want to do something useful. I'm not going to spend all my money on drugs.

"I'm going to start a radio station with my money. I want to be active. I don't want to end up in a villa on the South of France watching colour TV."

Do they want money then? "Yes," says Paul. "Money's good because you can do things with it. Bands like the Stones and Led Zeppelin took everything without putting anything back. But we can put money back into the situation we were in before and get something going for the kids our own age."

Not that there are any profits at all at the moment – which completely belies the resentment in some quarters that these new-wave bands are 'having it easy, and don't deserve all the exposure they're getting.' Apart from playing such – as Mick Jones himself so aptly puts it – "wonderfully vital" music, which deserves all the encouragement it can get, these bands are struggling harder than ever to stay on the road.

"We make a loss at every gig," says Joe. "It's the promoters who we want to attack. I bet you can only name one or two who really care about music and I'm amazed that there isn't one that really cares about what's happening at the moment. We're really having to get down on our knees and grovel for venues."

No doubt life will be easier when the Clash sign the contract dangling under their manager's nose. They are more politically motivated than the Damned, perhaps more musically accessible than the Pistols. Their lovingly painted clothes (the same on and off stage, of course), which are acrylic spattered with the ferocity of a Jackson Pollock action painting, have started one of the most creative fashion crazes of the year.

And, their acute awareness, and ability to articulate the essence of the era which inspires their music will ensure that their contribution to the history of rock is of lasting significance.

The Clash: Eighteen Flight Rock...

By Miles, *NME*, December 11, 1976

...AND THE SOUND OF THE WESTWAY

What do you think people ought to know about you?

Joe Strummer: "I think people ought to know that we're antifascist, we're anti-violence, we're anti-Racist and we're pro-creative. We're against ignorance."

Mick Jones: "We urge people to learn fast. "

We are in the Clash's huge, bare rehearsal studio in the railway yard near London's Roundhouse. Singer and guitarist Joe Strummer does most of the talking but Mick Jones, also on guitar, throws in some well thought out opinions. Paul Simonon, the bass player, says less. Drummer Terry Chimes isn't there.

Strummer paces the room nervously. He wears boots and a boilersuit painted with abstract expressionist slashes of colour. The group make their own clothes since they are too poor to buy any, transforming jumble sale shirts by painting on words and colours. Anyone can do it.

Joe directs his total attention to each question and I can see the boredom return to his face if I wait too long before asking another, like the shadows of clouds passing over a mountain, always changing. It introduces an un-nerving need for haste in speech and thought.

Mick and Paul seem more relaxed but are equally uncompromising in their answers, caring little for social niceties.

They talk of the boredom of living in the council high-rise blocks, of living at home with parents, of the dole queues and the mind-destroying jobs offered to unemployed school leavers. They talk about there being no clubs that stay open late, of how Britain has no Rock 'n' Roll radio stations, of how there is nothing to do. They speak of how kids who like Clash will get beaten up because of how they look. Joe has even been thrown out of a pub full of hippies because he has short hair.

I asked how their music was a solution to all this.

Joe leapt at the question: "Our music is a solution to this, because it's a solution for *us*, number one. Because I don't have to get drunk every night and go around kicking people and smashing up phone boxes which is what Paul used to do. I get my frustrations out on stage and in creating something like clothes or songs.

"Number two is for our audiences, because we're dealing with subjects we really believe matter. We're hoping to educate any kid who comes to listen to us, right, just to keep 'em from joining the National Front when things get really tough in a couple of years. I mean, we just really don't want the National Front stepping in and saying, Things are bad – it's the Blacks... We want to prevent that somehow, you know?"

It was their lyrics which first attracted me to the group – they seemed to be the only people coming right out and singing about how things really are in Britain today for young people. One song in particular summed it up: it's called 'Career Opportunities'.

"Career Opportunities / the ones that never knock / Every job they offer you / is to keep you out the dock / career opportunities.

"They offered me the office / They offered me the shop / They said I'd better take anything they'd got . / "Do you wanna make tea / at the BBC?" / "Do you wan-na be, do you wan-na be – a cop?"

"I hate the Army / an' I hate the RAF / You won't find me fighting in the tropical heat / I hate the Civil Service rules and I won't open letter bombs for y-o-u!"

Like Mick says, "These songs couldn't be written in any other year."

Joe: "We want to sing about what we think is relevant and important.

Mick: "We want to bring things to the attention of other people to help them learn faster. That's the important thing... to try and understand what's going down."

Paul, "This group is the pulse of the movement."

Mick is from Brixton. "I ain't never lived under five floors. I ain't never lived on the ground. Now I'm in Paddington. I'm on the 18th now." He still lives at home.

Joe "We got a song called 'London's Burning With Boredom' and we wrote it on the 18th floor, didn't we?"

Mick: "You can see the Westway. It's a celebration of the Westway..." (an enormous inner London flyover – the Notting Hill riots took place beneath it).

"Up and down the Westway / In and out the lights / What a great traffic system / it's so bright / I can't think of a better way / to spend the night / than speeding around / underneath the yellow lights / London's burning with boredom, baby / London's burning down, 999 999.

"Now I'm in the subway / looking for the flat. / This one leads to this block / and this one leads to that. / The wind howls through the empty blocks / looking for a home / But run through the empty stone / because I'm all alone."

MICK EXPLAINED how he sees the difference between Punk rock and Reggae. The music of The Clash has the emphasis on rhythm, just like Reggae but: "they all come from a sunny Caribbean island, right? They're all laid back. But our speed is the Westway speed."

"The speed of a car going down the Westway..." adds Joe.

Mick "... ours is like, the only thing that's speaking for young white kids.

Joe: "We listen to Reggae, we get a lot off Blacks, right."

Mick: "We know they've got their thing sewn up. They're it. They got their own culture but the young white kids don't have nothing. That's why so many of them are living in ignorance and they've just gotta wise up."

I told Joe some people had thought that the lyrics to their song "White Riot" were racist. Joe lunged at the remark like Doberman Pincher:

"They're not racist! They're not racist *at all!* I'll tell you the verses, right? It goes:

"Black people got a lot of problems / but they don't mind throwing a brick. / But white men go to school / where they teach you how to be thick / So everybody does what they're told to / and everybody eats supermarket soul food."

"The only thing we're saying about the Blacks is that they've got their problems and they're prepared to deal with them. But white men, they just ain't prepared to deal with them – everything's too cozy. They've got stereotypes, drugs, hi-fis, cars..."

Mick: "We're completely antiracist, We want to bridge the gap. They used to blame everything on the Jews, now they're saying it about the Blacks and the Asians... every body's a scapegoat, right?"

Joe: "The poor blacks and the poor whites are in the same boat... They don't want us in their culture, but we just happen to dig Tapper Zukie and Big Youth, Dillinger and Aswad and Delroy Washington. We dig them and we ain't scared of going into heavy black record shops and getting their gear. We even go to heavy black gigs where we're the only white people there.

"We'd just like to bridge the gap between the two things I'd like to have black people coming to hear us, right, but primarily we gotta be concerned with young white kids because that's what we are. But we ain't nothing like racist, NO WAY."

On stage Clash are dynamite, a continuous buzz of pure energy. They play for 45 minutes but it seems like 30.

Joe: "We don't want to be indulgent. We take a certain song and we do the subject for what it's worth and then we get on with the next one. We don't hang about."

Some people have made the connection between the high energy output of the punk rock groups and violence. The Clash rise up united. The kids, they say, just feel really bored and frustrated, get really drunk and then become violent.

Mick: "But we ain't advocating it. We're trying to understand it... It ain't hip. *We definitely think it ain't hip*. We think it's disgusting to be violent". He recalled their recent gig at the ICA where Jane cut up Shane's earlobe: "On that gig, it put me an' you off, didn't it? I mean, when I came off stage I didn't feel particularly good".

Joe: "but it's energy, right? And we wanna channel it in the right directions."

Paul Simonon had the words "Creative Violence" stencilled on his painted boilersuit. Since I wanted to know about violence Joe explained further: "Suppose I smash your face in and slit your nostrils with this, right?"

Joe has been opening and closing his flick-knife throughout the interview. He holds it close for me to see.

"...Well, if you don't learn anything from it, then it's not worth it, right? But suppose some guy comes up to me and tries to put one over on me, right? And I smash his face up and he learns something from it. Well, that's in a sense creative violence.

"And this sort of paintwork is creative violence too, right?" He points to Paul's white stencils and clashing colours.

Coming from the concrete jungle, they see society disintegrating, but instead of sitting back like Bowie and waiting for fascism to arrive and "save" them, they are fighting back. When Paul Simonon named the band The Clash, he meant it:

"In 1977 / There's knives in W11. Ain't so lucky to be rich. / Sten guns in Knightsbridge / Danger, stranger, you'd better paint your face / No Elvis, Beatles or Rolling Stones in 1977".

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The Clash on the cover of SOUNDS, January 1, 1977

The Clash: Konkrete Klockwork

Kris Needs, *ZigZag*, April 1977

At the moment there isn't a group in the New Wave that comes within spitting distance of The Clash, live or on record. Within a year they have become the most exciting live band in the country, and shortly they will release an album which is the most stunning debut for years...I believe it'll be as important as the first Rolling Stones album in shaping a new direction for rock'n'roll.

The New Wave groups who have so far made albums – The Hot Rods and The Damned – have been OK for party music, but The Clash are something far more important and vital. Not only is their music original and lethally energised, but it encompasses a whole new attitude of positive creativity which, if it rubs off on their audience, can only be a good thing. They are trying to wake people up to reality as well as plumbing the fine essence of ultimate rock'n'roll.

First time I saw The Clash was at their first out-of-London gig at Leighton Buzzard's Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre, about an hour's drive out of London. The hall was like a large hotel lounge, which encouraged the crowd to drape itself over the seating.

The Clash taking the stage was like an injection of electricity into the smoky air. They charged headlong into 'White Riot' with shattering energy, strutting and leaping like clockwork robots out of control. They never let up for half an hour. Despite sound problems they were astounding, almost overpowering in their attack and conviction.

The Clash are: Mick Jones (lead guitar, vocals); Joe Strummer (vocals, guitar); Paul Simonon (bass, vocals). They haven't got a permanent drummer, although Terry Chimes has done most gigs with them and plays on the album.

They are managed by one Bernard Rhodes and rehearse/hang out in this huge ex-warehouse he found in Camden Town between Dingwalls and The Roundhouse. They converted it to a rehearsal room downstairs, with pink drapes and old barber's chairs for added home comforts; and upstairs is where the group create their outfits, revamping jumble sale

purchases with acrylic paint splatterings and slogans...cheap and striking.

Mick: "We encourage the kids to paint their clothes. That way they get involved, feel part of it. Now they come along and show us ideas we like".

Back to the music. They write all their own songs, no Clash number is longer than three minutes, and not many exceed two. Each is fast, razor-sharp and rocking, with insanely catchy choruses. The songs are viciously topical and directly inspired by the group's London environment.

'White Riot', for example, was written after Joe and Mick got caught in the Notting Hill riots last year.

'Janie Jones' concerns the bloke with a boring job who gets off by being in love with Janie Jones (the imprisoned vice queen). 'London's Burning' ("with boredom") is "A celebration of the Westway under a yellow light" – Joe Strummer. '1977' is a cold look at the future/present: "No Elvis, Beatles or The Rolling Stones in 1977", and "Ain't so lucky to be rich; sten guns in Knightsbridge". There's loads...all vital, power-packed SONGS.

The Clash are very much a London band. They couldn't live anywhere else or their music would suffer.

"We love the place – blocks of flats, concrete", says Joe. "I hate the country. The minute I see cows I feel sick", says Mick, who says he has never lived at ground level.

The Clash formed a year ago this month. Originally Mick, who like Paul comes from Brixton, was a member of the London S.S., arguably the first New Wave group. The line-up also included Brian James (now with The Damned) and Tony James (bassist with Generation X). They were rehearsing in 1975, and Paul came down to a rehearsal one day and met Mick, who got him singing. "I'd never sung or played bass before in my life".

The S.S. "didn't work out" and split before they'd done a gig. Mick got together with Paul and formed The Heart-drops, which later became The Clash. Paul learned bass by sticking white dots on the fret board of the machine he'd acquired.

There was another guitarist too...Keith Levine, who left mysteriously last autumn and is getting his own band together.

They needed a singer, and one day when Mick and Paul were walking down a street in Shepherds Bush they bumped into Joe, who was still with the 101ers. Mick told him that he was great but his band stunk, and asked him to join The Clash. Joe was bored with singing pub rock standards, and despite that fact that the 101ers were rising fast, he broke them up and joined The Clash (on April 1st, to be precise).

By the time the 101ers single 'Keys To Your Heart' came out, Joe was firmly involved with The Clash. Goodbye rhythm & blues, hello 1976: When they were ready The Clash unveiled themselves to a rehearsal room full of press and friends. The date was Friday 13th. Reaction was immediate and they got rave reviews.

There followed a select series of London dates at places like the 100 Club (they did the p*nk rock festival last summer), the Sex Pistols all-nighter at the Screen On The Green, and two at the Institute Of Contemporary Arts (the last one being the time when Patti Smith leapt on stage during 'I'm So Bored With The U.S.A.').

The Clash have always taken gigs seriously, never being content to just trundle round the circuits night after night. They've only done The Roxy once (January) and they often organise their own gigs...that way everything's right and it becomes a complete event. They might lose money, but it's made for some great gigs. There've been the ICA gigs, one at the Royal College of Art, where hippy art students threw glasses at the stage, and the last one, which was on March 11th at Harlesden Colosseum (more later).

The Clash were also part of the Sex Pistols ill-fated "Anarchy" tour last December, along with The Damned and The Heartbreakers. As you must know, most of the gigs were blown out by timid moral guardians after the Pistols said naughty things to the baiting Bill Grundy.

Mick: "That was soul-destroying. We thought we were the greatest rock'n'roll bands, conquering the world. Everyone was really excited...but the day before it started, the Grundy thing went down and gigs started being cancelled".

Paul: "It was really bad it was cancelled. The tour turned into a cause, in a way...us kids just wanted to play. We were stuck in hotel rooms for a couple of days waiting to play, then we'd be told the gig was cancelled, and we'd wait for another three days in the hotel room. It was good fun to read about it in the papers, though".

Mick again: "The Pistols suffered quite terribly. It was really tragic, but we learnt so much from it. You knew the time had to come".

The bureaucratic petty opposition The Clash encountered on that tour solidified one of the things they are against – oppression.

"There's a lot of oppression around today", says Mick. "We're making people aware of it and opposing it".

One of the best gigs I've been to recently was The Clash's self-organised one at Harlesden Colosseum. It was a lesson in organisation (only a ten minute gap between bands!).

It was an important gig for each group on the bill. The Slits, the first all-girl p*nk band, were making their world debut; The Subway Sect hadn't played since November; The Buzzcocks were making their first appearance since reorganising the line-up after singer Howard Devoto's departure; and The Clash were playing their first gig in three months since signing with CBS.

Harlesden Colosseum usually serves as a Pakistani porn pit, attracting vast crowds of up to three a night. The Clash noticed the place when they were rehearsing for the "Anarchy" tour at the Roxy theatre up the road. They liked the look of it and thought it would be a great place for rock gigs. Bernard decided to have a go and see how it worked out.

Inside, the Colosseum is the classic definition of a flea pit, all peeling paint and stained seats. The owners seemed rather bemused by the sudden invasion of p*nks.

When I got to the Colosseum at about 2.30, all the bands were there apart from The Clash, although Mick has come down early 'cos he's so excited about the gig.

While the roadies build the stage and groups wheel in their gear, Mick and I adjourn to the balcony and look down on the bustle of activity going on below.

"It's great isn't it", enthuses Mick, "our own gig...I'm really excited. This is more than a gig, it's an important event!"

Mick is also bubbling over about the forthcoming album. It only took two weeks to do and CBS, who signed The Clash for a six figure sum, gave them complete control.

As soon as the group made their marks on the CBS contract they knew they'd be accused of selling out – "I've been numbered wherever I go", says Mick.

But the deal hasn't turned them into big-spending superstars. They got some new equipment, Joe got a place to live, Mick got a stereo, but they're the same group, except with a means and outlet for their music. CBS is one of the biggest record companies in the world, so it follows that more people will get to know and hear about The Clash album than if they'd signed to a small label, or done a private pressing job.

Mick: "I think it's important that we don't change. What is happening right now is that at last we've got a chance to make records. It all comes down to records...that's why we had to do one. You've got to make records.

"You can do your own label and not many people will hear it. This way more people will hear our record...I don't care if they don't like it or don't buy it, as long as they hear it.

"We've got complete control. Everything is our own ideas. We knew what we wanted to do, so we went in the studio and learnt as we went along".

The Clash did some recording at Polydor studios, and at one time there was a running battle for their signatures between that label and CBS. Guy Stevens, the infamous loony who produced Mott's early albums, did those sessions.

"It was great recording with Guy Stevens...fantastic when we were doing it. He was really inciting us, but when it came down to the mixing, it was a bit untogether".

So the next sessions saw The Clash's sound mixer, Micky Foote, in the producer's chair. 'White Riot' and '1977' were recorded. Compared to the album, 'White Riot' has a very raw, chaotic sound and slightly buried vocals, but it's still a real scorcher.

Mick: "It's not as brave as the album production, but it's still a great rock 'n'roll song".

And the album?

"Well, we're really excited about it...I mean, AN ALBUM! It's destined to be a classic!"

Paul added later: "It sounds really good...so much better than the single. I think we've definitely captured the live sound".

Mick agrees, but says that the album has also succeeded in being a real studio product, rather than just a reproduction of the stage act. "We used the studio to make it sound good".

It's got 14 tracks, including stage faves like '48 Thrills', 'London's Burning', 'I'm So Bored With The USA', 'Protex Blue', 'Hate And War', and another "more wild" version of 'White Riot'. There's also a big surprise in the form of a six minute rock version of Junior Murvin's huge-selling reggae hit of last year, 'Police & Thieves', which is going to surprise a few people.

I can't mince words here. I've only heard it once, but I know this is the most exciting album I've heard in years. I can't think about it for more than a minute without feeling like I'm going to explode (let alone write about it!). You can hear all the words, there's the hardest guitar/drum

sound ever, various studio tricks enhance the production and make some songs even more effective...but most important, it's captured the essence of The Clash. Their intense conviction is here in all its blazing glory. The whole thing's magnificent! If it don't sell, I'm Hughie Green. Even if you don't buy it, at least HEAR it...it's one of the most important records ever made.

I asked Mick about the daring inclusion of 'Police And Thieves'. He replied: "It's a logical progression. There's obviously a lot of links between us and what's happening with the Rastas. It just seemed right to do it. We had lots of our own material, but we wanted to do one song by someone else. What would we do? Not a 60s rehash...let's do something which is '76, right? Let's try and turn people on. This is a rock'n'roll track in 4/4, but it's experimental. We've incorporated dub reggae techniques. We'll probably get slagged to bits for it, but we don't care. They can't understand that what we're trying to do is redefine the scene and like make it clear to people the way to move...You've got to take risks all the time. That's why we did it...as a risk". (And it works – you wait and hear it, you'll be amazed!)

Mick says his favourite track is a new song called 'Garage Land' – the last track – "Where we're moving on next. The chorus is "We're a garage band and we come from garage land"...That's just what we are. It's also commenting on the current situation with all the groups being signed up".

How will The Clash move on?

"Well, it'll always be rock'n'roll, but we're hoping to improve the aura of the sound".

The Clash would like to do something about an alternative radio station as well. There are plans, but they need money.

Harking back to Mick's point about all the bands being signed up, I asked what he thought of this situation.

"It's a snowball. You form a group and the next week you've got a recording contract. That's great if they make great records, but so far they haven't made great records. No really good groups have come up just recently...just average groups. They don't move me to the point

where it's rock'n'roll. The general quality of the music is a bit rough. They're like TV films...but I'd rather hear them than a shopping list. It's certainly growing".

Mick's really happy to see people making the effort to form groups. So's Paul: "What's great about this scene is the way kids are starting up bands. The only thing is, they have to do something original, and that's really hard. If you try and be like another band that can really slow you down".

What about the New Wavers who've got records out at the moment and enjoyed some success with 'em? (Rods, Stranglers and Damned in particular.)

Mick: "They're obviously going to clean up, but they've got nothing to do with us. That's all there is to it. I don't consider them important groups. They're cleaning up at the moment because there isn't any great alternative, recording especially".

We turn off the tape to check out what's happening down below. Mick takes the stage and plugs in his new plexiglass guitar. Paul, who is sporting newly-bleached yellow hair, and I have a chat in the ladies loo...well, it was the only quiet place (apart from when ladies came in!).

It was soon time for The Clash's sound-checks. They ironed out the sound problems with 'London's Burning' (twice), 'Garage Land' (which on first hearing sounded like a corker), and...I recognise those chords!...Jonathan Richman's 'Roadrunner', with the chorus changed to "Radio One"! Sounds fantastic Clashified. Mick says they may do it as an encore, but it doesn't happen. "We couldn't get it together". Paul says he hates the song anyway.

As The Clash retire to their dressing room – the place where they do the projecting from! – the people start to come in. Considering the place is in deepest Harlesden and it's raining there is a good turnout. The atmosphere builds up all evening...it's electric by Clash time!

First on were The Slits, who were great, making up for their sound problems with pure energy. 14 year old singer Arianna, who was alluringly decked out in black leather mini-skirt and fishnet tights,

stamped and screamed like a little girl throwing a tantrum at a party...she reckoned we couldn't hear her, but we could! It was great when she came on in a big mac and flashed her legs like an old tosser before throwing it off.

The Slits careered through half an hour of their songs, propelled with astounding force by a drummer called Palmolive, who kept flattening her floor tom-tom. I'm looking forward to seeing The Slits again.

Next were Subway Sect, who are now managed by The Clash's Bernard. They'd changed from the rambling, two-chord outfit I'd seen in November. They've been rehearsing a lot at The Clash's studio and have a whole stock of unusual new numbers, which are complicated and a bit weird. The singer, Vic, ended the set by stumbling backwards and falling over – he'd been motionless for the whole set.

The reorganised Buzzcocks went down well. Pete Shelley, the bloke with only half a guitar, is centre stage front man now. He wore black, while the rest of the group sported hand-painted Mondrian shirts (i.e. they had squares on them, if you're not arty). With Pete loosening up (he played some weird guitar solos) the 'Cocks have got a lot of potential.

It was The Clash's night, though, and they played a blinder – despite little obstacles like one of the hired hippy sound men accidentally pulling out a lead.

It was great seeing them back on stage, in new zip-festooned outfits to boot. The crowd in front of the stage went potty, pogoing right up into the air, screaming the words, shaking themselves to death and falling into twitching heaps. They couldn't have been able to see what was going on though, which is a show in itself!

There were some great announcements from Joe. Someone yelled something about the CBS contract. "Yeah, I've been to the South of France to buy heroin", he said. Another time: "I'm Bruce Lee's son", he declared, before slamming the band into another devastating two minute burn-up. It was a great set.

Next day I saw a video recording of the gig. A bloke called Julian is making a video film of The Clash. He's a student at the London Film School, and, using their equipment, has been filming gigs and interviews since the "Anarchy" tour. It's not certain that the film will be shown, but I hope we get to see it somehow, 'cos it's dynamite!

Watching the recording of Friday's gig showed just how impressive The Clash are onstage. In the excitement you're bound to miss some things, like Mick's guitar strap breaking, and him holding up the guitar like a machine gun to finish the number; Joe jerking across the stage like an electrocuted piranha fish; or Paul ripping a giant chord from his bass with a violence so intense that his arm is nearly torn from its socket.

That's The Clash...pushing themselves to the limits. The least you can do is give them a listen...you'll never be the same again!

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Clash Landing, **By Annette Weatherman and Vermilion Sands** ***Search and Destroy, 1977***

The Clash were interviewed in a Camden Town pub on a Saturday evening following rehearsal, a brief pastiche of new songs. Drummer NICKY HEADON was not present. ANN and VERMILION interviewed JOE, MICK, and PAUL. Friends and crew sat about, joking and laughing until the questions started.

MICK JONES, guitarist and second vocalist, was wearing an all-black outfit, relatively "plain" (meaning only a few zippers sewn in at wild angles). His hot pink socks were as conspicuous as neon against black.

PAUL SIMENON(sic), bassist, wears a skinny ripped t-shirt with Clash-style slogans painted on. One is "I Am A Prostitute." Over it is a cheezy-looking suit coat, black pants and shoes, and his socks are neon lime green.

Vocalist JOE STRUMMER, who also plays rhythm guitar, is wearing a black leather jacket, black zippered Clash-style pants. All three wear the same curious style of heavy black shoe.

It's important to know that this interview was taken in the height of (relatively unpublicized) summer "punk bashing" violence perpetrated towards people in punk gear by reactionary, 50's style Teddy Boys and other 'citizens' in an effort to squelch the burgeoning punk nation.

Questioning starts with:

VER: (!) Hey aren't those the shoes that the Teds wear?

MICK: Yeah. They're called brothel creepers

ANN: Joe, do you think Mick is a "brilliant guitar player"? (this is the remark made so often in the press)

JOE: No, not right at the moment! I think he has been and can be again. I do think he was brilliant on "Police and Thieves" on the album.

VER: What has been your favorite gig?

MICK: Birmingham. That was the greatest laugh.

ANN: It was not, it was terrible! (the gig was a last ditch, late night disaster of letdown feelings and half-operant conditions including two mikes and various amps shorting in and out, virtually canceling the possibility of good music)

JOE: What did you expect? The whole town was against us. Police and Town Council everywhere. More cops than kids! Would it have been better if we hadn't even showed up?

ANN: No, but the whole thing could have been more unified somehow. More organization, communication....

MICK: People don't get together like that anymore. They did that in the 60's. (sneer)

ANN: Well, they should. "People get ready!"

JOE: Well anyway, my favorite gig was Sweden where we played the fastest set ever. We did a 50-minute set in 34 minutes, it was great.

VER: Has your music disturbed anyone?

MICK: Besides my grandmum? No, I don't know about disturbed. *Spurred!* maybe. (Mick lives with his grandmother on the 18th floor of a tower housing block near the Westway, London's gargantuan freeway}

VER: Describe yourself and your band politically.

JOE: We aren't political.

ANN: Oh no?

JOE: Ok, listen: what are YOUR politics?

ANN: My politics haven't come into being yet!

JOE: So, you don't have any politics. We don't have any politics either. Right now we're a- political (In the *Melody Maker* and *Zig Zag*, the PISTOLS slagged them off for "dole" lyrics and claim the CLASH's attitudes are confusing. Most fans do not agree)

VER: Is this really the "Summer of Hate?"

JOE: It's no different than any summer. You have to be prepared to *punch*, that's all. If you want to exist as *yourself*, you have to be prepared to punch. Or don't go out on the streets, which is about what it's coming to these days. It will be better when summer's over. One way it's different: Cops are now the old enemies. This year the new enemy is the people.

ANN: Do you still get into fights?

JOE: Yes.

ANN: When was the last time?

JOE: 2 nights ago.

ANN: Do you care to talk about it?

JOE: Nah, I don't like to talk about it. It's just something you have to do.

ANN: So what do you do when they try to pick fights with you?

JOE: I Run! I fuckin move it on down the high street!

VER: How do you relate to your fans on a one-to-one basis?

MICK: We listen to what they have to say, if they have something to say. But lately they've started to punch me. They come up and say, "Why aren't you doing this and this now?" "Why have you copped out?"-- this sort of thing. We call them "Social Conscience Brotherers."

ANN: You've said your songs were "paintings in yellow light" (referring to the yellow lights over the Westway). Will your new songs change color?

MICK: We said *that*?

JOE: RED. Red for STOP!

ANN: How conscious are you of the military stance of your performance?

JOE: I wouldn't call it military. *Militant*.

VER: Would you have the courage to quit this band and make it another way?

JOE: Yes - - I'd be a gun runner. Organize the sale of guns.

PAUL: Sure, if it got boring.

MICK: I'd stay in rock & roll til I was 28 and then I'd pop off. But I'd stay in art. I can paint, draw real good.

ANN: Your self-created clothes style, spray-painted slogans and "clashing" colors started a youth fashion movement last fall. Do you still create your own clothes?

MICK: Sure, some of them.

JOE: Now we have someone to sew in all the zippers and stuff.

ANN: Haven't you found, thought that sometimes your clothes stand between you and your fans?

JOE: No. How do you mean?

ANN: Well, I know I'm not the only one to feel this way. Especially when you first started wearing that really incredible leather jacket, black with red shark's tooth insets, or whatever you call them. I thought, "Oh Joe, don't wear such fantastic clothes when your fans can't

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possibly afford them." We want to keep you as one of the people, you know. One of us.

JOE: No, it's up to me to set an example, if I have to put it this way. If I'm gonna feel great, I have to look great. Goes for anybody!

ANN: Mick, what is that one shirt you wear performing, the black and white one with the interesting face?

MICK: Oh, you mean Brigit Riley, Britain's lady painter of optical things. You could call it Op Art, but actually, she's gone beyond that.

JOE: It's toothpaste art!

ANN: What does poverty mean for you now?

JOE: Right now, 54 pence in your pocket means poverty. And that's just what I've got.

ANN: Do you expect this to get better?

JOE: It better! Or else we're gonna fade away.

ANN: Are you afraid of poverty?

JOE: No. I've lived with it too long.

ANN: Do you think the PISTOLS really can't play anywhere? We seem to have found out otherwise.

MICK: Oh no, they can play. It's better business not to play.

ANN: What do you think of Malcolm McLaren?

MICK: He is the one visionary of the time.

ANN: Will your new songs progress the dialogue with your old fans, or will they present the same ideas aimed at attracting more new people?

BOYS: (seem baffled by question) Our songs are for everyone.

VER: Why aren't you friends with the other bands?

JOE: We like the PISTOLS. We just aren't very close.

MICK: Because most bands, we just don't like as people. We can't go along with what they do or say. They dribble about like....wet fishes!

ANN: What about the DAMNED?

MICK: One of the wet fishes. The DAMNED in America - all that got back here from that trip was how many girls they laid. Waagh!

JOE: Wankers! ("Wanker" - a masturbator)

ANN: But what about the DAMNED's music? We think their songs have depth - dark, mystical, even poetic. The more we listen the more we hear.

MICK: It's just Comedy Horror Rock.

ANN: But the songs have some great imagery - "Can't afford no candle, can afford no gun at all." This is a great line for me. "Be a man, be a mystery man...."

MICK (politely): You're mad as a piece of grey matter! The DAMNED are just not....essential.

JOE: They are like Hammer Films Productions.

ANN: Well, we think that's terrible. We think you should realize you're more together than all that.

MICK: Why? We're individuals. If you're an individual today, you don't get along with other people.

VER: Speaking of films, have you thought of doing them?

MICK: We like doing Video's.

VER: Favorite films?

MICK: *The Harder They Come*, *Mean Streets*, *Lafayette*, with Jack Hawkins, about the American War of Independence. *Les Enfants Terribles*, by Jean Cocteau.

VER: Favorite books?

JOE: *Narc*, a pulp by Joseph Greenbaugh, cause it's got lots of action.

ANN: Did it embarrass you when you were arrested last month? (Twice, once for stealing hotel keys and pillowcases, once for spray-painting "CLASH" on a wall).

JOE: No. It was boring. Irritating! Spending the night in jail! Oh yeah - add another book to that list: *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. Just finished it.

PAUL: Looks like you've cleaned your teeth today.

JOE: I've been smiling into the mirror.

VER: What do you think about Wilhelm Reich?

JOE: Who's he?

VER: He wrote books linking sexual repression with fascism....

MICK: He died in prison. Don't know much about him though.

ANN: This question is hard to phrase. You know how members of bands are always talking about "pulling chicks"....

MICK: We don't call them chicks, to start with. Girls. Women. Birds.

JOE: When we get drunk we call them Tarts.

MICK: The fact is we don't go to bed with all that many women. We're not into it like that. Too much of the blatantly sexual gets boring.

ANN: (to a quiet Paul) Do you read much?

PAUL: Oh yes. The last book I read was by Germaine Greer.

ANN: (!) Did you like it?

PAUL: It was great. Some of it I didn't agree with. Some of it was great.

VER: Do you ever think about Source?

MICK: Yeah, we think about Source. But we don't know where it is. We steal most of it!

ANN: Don't you consider yourselves original?

JOE: Mick steals his stuff; me and Paul are totally original. No, really we all steal a lot of our stuff, that's just the way it is.

ANN: Do you ever get frustrated by the limitations of your art form - guitars, rock & roll songs? Don't you ever feel like doing something else up there?

MICK (look incredulous): What?

JOE: Yeah, I want to do something else but I want to do it in dark corners. Not where people can see.

ANN: Won't people eventually get saturated by your singing style?

JOE: Yeah, well I'm changing my singing style. But I ain't telling you where I'm getting it!

ANN: "Getting it"? There you go again. Isn't it your expression, taken from your life experience?

JOE: Well, you get it from everywhere and everybody. But it is often like a direct steal!

ANN: So where are you "getting it" from?

JOE: Black men.

ANN: Do you ever get tired of reggae?

JOE: Yeah. When they go (mimics sing-song complacent sounds). Or when they go, (sings) "Do you remember the days of slavery?" We want to shout

3 BOYS IN UNISON: "No!"

VER: Favorite records?

JOE: *Story of Ska*, Trojan Free LT Package Reggae.

MICK: MOTT THE HOOPLE: All the Young Dudes. (?)

ANN: Your song lyrics - do you ever see the original words mutate and change into something better?

MICK: Well, it's funny what people hear sometimes. Like this one bloke thought for months that we were singing "QUITE RIGHT" instead of "WHITE RIOT"! (Boys laugh hysterically at reminiscence and sing choruses of "QUITE RIGHT")

ANN: Yeah, well for ages I never knew you were singing "HATE AND WAR - The only thing we got today" My positivism, I guess, colored it and all I could ever hear was "PAINT A WALL! - The only thing we got today!" (Boys laugh uproariously and sing "Paint A Wall!")

ANN: Would you mind if I bootlegged one of your concerts?

MICK: We won't speak to you again if you do.

JOE: No, no. We don't care.

JOE: People don't understand our song about being on the dole. We're not saying the dole ain't OK. What we're saying is on another level.

ANN: Am I glad to hear you say that! I'm always telling people there's another interpretation. "I've been too long on the dole" means to me: I've been too long dependent on the pacifying food of this society, food which is absolutely without nourishment. Now "I can't work (think or do anything for myself) at all."

VER: Are you worried?

JOE: Yeah.

MICK: We are despondent, uh 8 out of 10 days. Print that.

VER: What do you do about it?

PAUL: Do something creative.

MICK: Play records.

JOE: Watch TV.

ANN: (!) But who wrote that great line in "London's Burning" - "Everybody's drowning in a sea of television"?

JOE (sings): "Everybody's sitting 'round watching television" is how I actually sing it....I wrote it. Mick wrote the first line, "Black and white, turn it on, face the new religion..."

PAUL: I don't write 'em.

VER: Do you plan to tour America?

JOE: We haven't really thought about it.

VER: Would you rather call it Punk Rock or New Wave?

JOE: Punk Rock! Dung Rock!

MICK: Red Light Rock.

ANN: A lot of people are into "Sex Rock" now.

MICK: Sex Rock, what's that?

VER: It's what they yell at us when we walk down the streets like King's Road. They, yell "Sex Rockers!" I think it's great.

ANN: Lately, in the night clubs there's been a real move on this idea among the new kids joining in. All these virgins, pinheads and shy types, deciding that repressing sex is for the Real idiots. The problem is there aren't enough girls coming out that share the idea. You know, you got 300 guys pogoing together now.

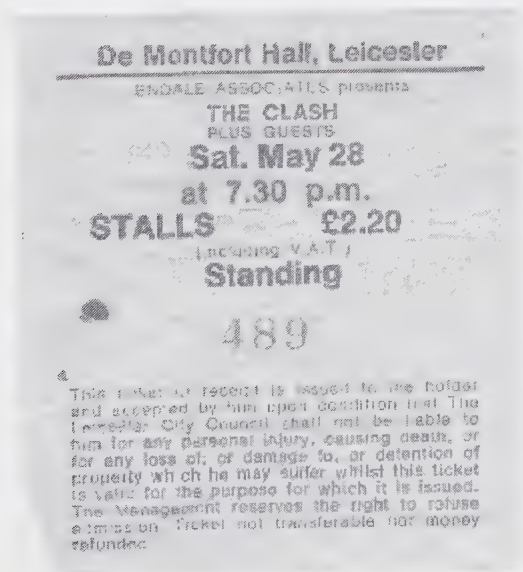
MICK: Well anyway, I think there should be a one word answer to punk rock.

ANN: Well, give me a one-word answer to this: Are you a punk?

JOE: No.

MICK: No.

(PAUL gone by this time)



The Clash in Stockholm after the gig at Gröna Lund *Rock, Weed & Booze, June 1977*

I met four tired punk rockers after the Stockholm gig. Smell of weed and reggae from a tape recorder in the dressing room. Paul Simonon rolls a joint, Micky Jones takes a puff, Nicky Headon just walks around and Joe Strummer also share the joint. We were really bad tonight says Joe but I haven't slept for several days, Nicky and I have been in jail for three days, what am I doing here? His eyelids are heavy and he needs help to find the thread in the conversation. When he smiles you can see his teeth are black almost rotten.

Why where you in jail?

Joe - We just stole some things... [Suddenly Joe jumps up and starts to dance to a Jimmy Cliff song]

Joe - Reggae is good, the black man's music, you can't sit still, do you get it?

How did the band got together Joe?

Joe - I played on the streets, then I played in the 101'ers after that I met Bernhard who formed The Clash

What are your intentions?

Joe - Intentions? What? The intentions? We just want to play music and write songs, do you get it?

Are you political?

Joe - We're not into elections and political parties and things like that. We hate facists, what kind of idiots wear swastikas? We are political in our struggle to survive.

But your lyrics are critical against the establishment

Joe - We write about our reality. We write for the kids on the streets.

Couldn't you do anything with your contact with the audience?

Joe - You mean "Shouldn't we do anything useful with our energy and contact with the audience"?

Something like that

Joe - No and do you know why? We don't believe in pointing fingers. We don't want to give orders. We don't want to preach, do you get it? We give you our music and says "here it is, do what you want with it"

It sounds mixed-up Joe?

He's just shakes he's shoulders and starts to dance

You are a typical English band, isn't hard to get contact with a foreign audience?

Joe - England is the best, the audience knows what we are about they are like us...working class...oppressed. France is ok but the French are nuts you can tell them everything, they are mad. And the Dutch are..you're not Dutch? The Dutch are so drugged and passive.

As you are against everything established how come you are signed to an established record company like CBS?

Joe - We have to get the records out (Joe gets quite for long time) But it's a struggle with CBS from the morning to the night. [Smiles].

Q - The new wave bands are not all against the establishment, a band like the Jam even likes the monarchy

Joe - The Jam!?? Don't talk about the Jam, bloody faggots! A bunch of 19 year olds who do what their father tells them, he's also their manager. I'm 24 and I know what I want. They don't know nothing. The Jam haha...don't talk about the Jam!

The Clash: Who's In Love With Janie Jones?

By Caroline Coon, *Sounds*, October 15, 1977

During the hot summer of 1976, a No. 31 bus jolts through Notting Hill Gate. On the top deck is Mick Jones, humming a riff. He is pleased. The riff sounds great and a song shapes up as the bus rumbles on. Then, as Mick's eyes flicker over his fellow passengers, two words jump out of the columns of an evening newspaper and, like typographical guerrillas, invade his thoughts. Janie Jones!

Until that moment Mick had been composing an unspecific rocker about the little guy who gets ground down by dead-end, nine to five office routine. Unexpectedly, and quite spontaneously, Janie Jones sent the song headlong into another dimension.

The Strummer/Jones writing team has a masterful knack of picking images which rub home the Clash's pointed view. Driven along by sounds like a prophesy of the clamour demolition men will make when they start tearing down tower blocks, their songs are direct and eloquent testimonials to 'ordinary life' and street level oppression. Despite critical sour grapes from some quarters, the band remain committed to emotive lines like "Making tea for the B.B.C", "Being too long on the dole" or "drowning in a sea of T.V." But despite classics like '1977' or 'White Man In Hammersmith Palais' they have yet to evoke the drab lot of the ordinary person more vividly than when, in 'Janie Jones', an office worker is juxtaposed against a rich man's sex symbol.

*HE'S IN LOVE WITH ROCK'N'ROLL, WOOH!
HE'S IN LOVE WITH GETTING STONED, WOOOH!
HE'S IN LOVE WITH JANIE JONES, WOOH!
HE DON'T LIKE HIS BORING JOB NO!*

*AND HE KNOWS WHAT HE OUGHT TO DO
HE KNOWS HE'S GOTTA HAVE FUN WITH YOU
AND HE KNOWS WHEN THE EVENING COMES
WHEN HIS JOB IS DONE
HE'LL BE OVER IN HIS CAR FOR YOU
YOU LUCKY LADY!*

*IN THE 'IN' TRAY LOTS OF WORK
'CAUSE THE BOSS HAS THE FUN
ALWAYS THINKS HE SHIRKS
BUT HE'S JUST LIKE EVERY ONE
HE'S GOT A FORD CORTINA WHICH
JUST WON'T RUN
WITH OUT FUEL
FILL HER UP JACKO!*

*EVERY INVOICE THAT JUST DON'T QUITE FIT
NO PAYOLA IN HIS ALPHABETICAL FILE
SEND FOR THE GOVERNMENT MAN!
HE'S GONNA REALLY TELL THE BOSS
GOT TO REALLY TELL THE BOSS
GOT TO REALLY LET HIM KNOW
EXACTLY HOW HE FEELS
IT'S PRETTY BAD!*

*HE'S IN LOVE WITH ROCK'N'ROLL, WOOOH!
HE'S IN LOVE WITH GETTING STONED, WOOOH!
HE'S IN LOVE WITH JANIE JONES, WOOOH!
HE DON'T LIKE HIS BORING JOB NO!
LET THEM KNOW, LET THEM KNOW,
LET THEM KNOW...*

Mick wrote 'Janie Jones' three years after Janie herself hit the headlines and, like the rest of the band and countless fans who now graffitied her name across their t-shirts, he knew almost nothing about her.

Janie slipped into mythology as The Queen of Vice, the epitome of decadence in high places and suburban titillation via the Old Bailey and the *News Of The World*. Instinctively however, Mick knew she was very different from clichéd sex symbol/objects like Monroe and Bardot. Enough had filtered through between the media lines for him to realise that she had experienced a personal tragedy played out in political terms. Her name evokes precisely those elements of establishment hypocrisy, class discrimination and double standards which are the Clash's *raison d'être*. It amuses Mick to think that Janie's ex-"friends" and peers of the realm are among those calling for a ban on "Obscene!" punk rock.

In fact, Mick had stumbled across (for want of a better description) another heroine of our times. Janie is in good company. Other names in the Clash pantheon include Anna Mendelson, Leila Kaled and Bernadette Devlin. (No nubile there! The Stranglers, as usual, have a particularly one-sided view of life.)

Even so, Mick didn't write ABOUT Janie. "Her name just got slotted in," he says. "But when it did, the song evolved into something that wasn't really meant in the first place. The energy of the song got directed to her."

As it happened, when the Clash first stormed through the triumphant "wooooh's" of the song in question, Janie Jones herself was on her knees scrubbing floors in H.M Prison, Holloway.

In May 1973 she was sent to jail for seven years for running a call girl system.

"I knew too much about too many people and of course, I took the piss out of the Judge in court all the time..." says Janie, trying to give some rationale to her very severe sentence.

You would have thought four years in Holloway and Style prisons had left some obvious mark on Janie. But no. When she opened the door of her bijou Kensington house, I was surprised. She is thirty-eight, but what few lines there are on her face curl upwards giving the impression not only of youth and laughter but irripresible good fun too. And resilience. No wonder tired business men and superstars found her such good company.

While her companion/bouncer Denise (anex-prison warden) mates tea, Janie curls up on the white demask sofa in her gentle sitting room. She talks about her trial as if she had been staring opposite Brian Rix in a Whitehall farce.

"The prosecuting council says to me 'you've had a secretary for seven years and you're married. I put it to you Miss Jones that you're bisexual!'"

"I said 'no I'm not. I'm tri-sexual. I'll try anything once'. You see, all the way through I was just cracking jokes.

"The prosecutor said 'all the stars came over to your show business parties and they brought their girlfriends. If they had sex in your bedroom you'd know about it wouldn't you?' And I said 'not really. Unless it was anything unusual'.

"And the Judge boomed 'what do you mean UNUSUAL!?' And I replied 'Ah well, my Lord, if they had sex swinging from the chandelier I'd probably know about it'. And he said 'wouldn't that worry you'. And I said 'No, I wouldn't be worried about the sex, but I'd be worried about the chandelier'. And the whole court burst out laughing. You see, every time I said something like that it was a couple more years down. Judge King Hamilton (who presided over the *Gay News* Trial) is completely puritanical – the you-shouldn't-have-sex-before-marriage type."

Did she expect to be sent to prison? "Not in a million years. Never that. I couldn't believe it when he said seven years. SEVEN YEARS. I thought he was joking. The judge thought I was terribly wicked. He said 'of all the women I've ever tried, you are the most evil. I thought one woman was really evil, but you leave that woman in the shade'. Well, then I started laughing. It was completely sick. I called him a hypocritical bastard and he demanded an apology. But I refused and they had to drag me from the court".

Should prostitution be legalised? "Of course. I don't think what I did was a crime. I knew call girls who wanted to make money so I introduced them to men. And I got seven years for that".

Janie was born in Durham, the daughter of a coalminer. He died fifteen years ago of phneumacosis. She liked her parents and still has a steady warm relationship with her mother. "But when I saw all the poverty in the north, I thought 'no, this is not for me. I've got to get out of it'." Her father put up mild resistance and before she finally settled in London she worked for a time as a nurse in a Bedfordshire mental hospital.

Her first real show biz engagement was at the Windmill Theatre, Soho. The girls there were troupers in the good old theatrical sense of the word. They danced through five shows a day, smiling and flashing

flesh into a sea of leering male faces. The Windmill had the girls under exclusive contract, but Janie, always enterprising, felt restricted. The Cabaret Club was conveniently close and soon Janie was starring in her own show there as well. Her younger sister joined her and for a while they did a double act. Naturally, rich and titled groupies would chat her up but, since she was already well looked after by "The Colonel" – a sugar daddy who bought her the house in Kensington – Janie passed most of them off to other girls in the show.

In 1966 she recorded a song, written by her sister, called 'Witches Brew' and it went to No. 7 in the chart. She married Long John Baldrey's friend, song writer Christian Dee and together they went into business promoting his songs, her records and a few groups. Later she found out that her husband was "a crank" (he's now serving ten years in a German jail for attempted murder) but for a while life was very glamorous. If Janie wasn't exactly knocking Shirley Bassey off her cabaret pedestal, her hospitality was much in demand.

Her house had become a meeting place and hot-bed of extra marital activity for the sporting elite of showbusiness.

"It was a kind of private club where they wouldn't be disturbed," explains Janie. "I held parties every two weeks and everybody who was anybody and their friends came. They had a fantastic time. People said they were the greatest parties in London."

The good times lasted for about five years until Janie, probably to dodge various clouds looming on the horizon, and certainly because a Japanese millionaire had taken her under his wing, left London for Hollywood.

She set up as a P.R. on premises just vacated by Ronald Reagan (ex-film star and ex-Governor of California) and she'd ferry between the office and her exclusive Hollywood Hills home in a Cadillac. Very nice.

TWO YEARS later the phone rang and an old "titled friend" was on the line in hysterics.

"Janie, your parties are on the front page of the *News Of The World*," he gurgled. "If you don't come back to London on the next plane I'll have a heart attack. It can't come out that I like girls dressed up as school girls with teddy bears. It can't! I'll give you £10,000 to fight the *News Of The World* and to tell them that the prostitutes are lying."

Janie came back to London. But, far from winding down their enquiries, Janie's stand against the *News Of The World* only made them more determined to run their expose to the limit. You can read about it in Janie's autobiography, suffice to say that central to the whole luric story were allegations of payola involving BBC disc jockeys.

It was alleged that Janie got DJ's to play records in exchange for feminine (or male) favours. Eventually the Beeb made their own enquiries and the people involved got a clean bill of health. But Janie wasn't off the hook. She was charged with running a call girl racket and the police got four girls, in return for total immunity and anonymity (the first time this ever was allowed), to act as prosecuting witnesses. They were know in court as Miss A, B, C and D. The titled gentleman was called Mr. Y.

'Well', thought Janie, 'if that lot are going to be protected, then all my friends will be too'. Not one of the stars who came to her parties were mentioned by name but, the list was so long that the Clerk of the Court had to go through the alphabet twice – Mr. F, Mr G, Mr. AA2, Mr.BB2 etc...

If the trial had its funny side, then Janie makes prison sound like a visit to Butlins.

"I had to make the best of it. I had to see the funny side of it. If you don't have a sense of humour... Well, I would have committed suicide over and over again. I was in there so I thought I'd see how the system worked. Then I helped the other prisoners do something about it, the legal way. We wrote hundreds of petitions to the Home Office about this and that. Which is perhaps why they kept me in longer. They saw all the petitions and they thought 'she fights the system all the time and she's not conforming. We'll keep her in till she stops'. But I didn't stop."

"I'd see girls going mental and cracking up. The physical hardship is bad. But prison is really only and completely mental torture."

"On the other hand I think you do have to suffer hardships before you can be a good artist. You've got to go through hard times before you can go on a stage and know that every word you sing means something. And I think that will come out in my singing now."

Janie was released suddenly on May the 2nd. She left Holloway Prison in a battered old mini to escape the hordes of press and TV cameras. On her way up North to her mother's she turned on the car radio – and nearly jumped out of her seat. 'Janie Jones' was blaring over the airwaves. Coincidentally, the Clash album had been released the same week.

"They timed it beautifully," Janie laughs. "I'd just got through the prison gates and I heard that. It was incredible."

To-day she has an affectionate admiration for the Clash and she was looking forward to meeting them. We motored up to their rehearsal studio after the interview.

Janie taps her feet as the band polish up the numbers they'll play on tour. For Mick and Joe, however, singing about someone and meeting them in person are two very different levels of intimacy. They are both shy and nervous. It's the wordly Paul Simonon who takes charge.

"Let's go over to the pub," he suggests to everyone's relief.

After a round of drinks the ice is broken and Janie has the band bugged with her racy stories.

"She's great," says Mick later, regretting even more that 'Janie Jones' was not the Clash's second single.

When 'Remote Control' was released instead, Mick and Joe reacted by writing their latest epic, 'Complete Control'. Now they are planning to write a song for Janie. 'Vice Is Nice' is the working title. Let's hope Janie will be free to sing it when she goes on the road next year.

You see, there is a slight hitch for her future plans. Not content to send her to prison for seven years, the Judge also fined her £16,000 – £12,000 court costs and £4,000 for the prosecution – with another year inside if she can't pay.

Where are all her rich friends now? Commuting between their landed estates and the House of Lords, perhaps? Or flashing from stage spotlights into their limousines and more show biz parties and paid-for fun? A woman's lot is not always a happy one...

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The Clash: Greatness from Garageland

Peter Silverton, *Trouser Press*, February 1978

Unannounced, to say the least, a kid in boots, suspenders and short-cropped hair clambers through the photographers' pit and up onto the stage of London's Rainbow Theatre. Benignly ignored by band, stage crew and security alike, he wanders around the stage a little drunkenly, uncertain quite what to do now that he's made it up onto the hallowed, sacrosanct boards and is not making quite the impression he thought. Decision flickers across his face, lit by the giant spots, and he grabs hold of the sing-er's mike and prepares to join in on the harmonies. When the singer wants his mike back, the kid's frozen to the stand in fear-drenched exhilaration so the singer has to shout the lines over the kid's shoulder while the kid pumps in the response lines on perfect cue.

The encore over, the band leaves the stage and the kid's stuck there in front of two and a half thousand people and unsure what to do next. With the merest jerk of his head the bass player motions the kid to join the band backstage and everyone goes home happy.

Sounds like some fantasy of what rock 'n' roll should be about or at least a case of a cunning audience plant, doesn't it? It wasn't. It was the Clash. And it happened just that way at the first of their three nights at the Rainbow in December.

That's the thing about the Clash; they can break rules you hadn't realised existed till they trashed 'em. That's why, in a year, without any kind of Springsteen-like hype – except from zealot journalists like myself – they've gone from empty college and club halls to three nights at a major London venue. Like the Pistols, they're so special that they've created not only their own style but also their own rule structure. Only the most carping would say that the Clash are like anybody or anything else.

Because of events like the one just described, the Clash command an awesome respect, even adulatory deification from their fans. Some of them really do seem, expect the Clash to slip 'em the meaning life in a three minute rock 'n' roll song. Mind you, full-grown rock writers have been known to make the same mistake. And to think, all that achieved

with only two national tours of Britain and but one album and three singles (in total 17 songs, 19 tracks) in general circulation.

And I still don't think the Clash realise themselves what kind of position they're in. It's as if they're (very understandably) scared of facing up to the fact of that worship and its implications.

Here's another little scene which might help explain what I'm getting at. A few days before I sat down to tap this through my crappy little Smith-Corona portable I found myself at a gig, competing with Clash meistersinger Joe Strummer for the bartender's attention. (Incidentally, I won.)

Having known Strummer for almost two years, I wasn't too surprised when, after exchanging the usual pleasantries, he turned on me a little drunkenly and demanded know who my favourite English band was. More than a little embarrassed, I told him:

"Your lot."

"Nah, come on," he replied, "Tell me who you really think's the best."

"The Clash," my voice getting louder. "Honest!"

Joe didn't believe. "I bet you'll tell the Hot Rods the same thing tomorrow."

So, here in cold type, let's set the matter straight with an open letter.

Dear Joe,

The Clash are not only the best band in Britain. They're the best band in the world. (I think that for a magnitude of reasons I'll explain in good time.) For me, you're the latest in a straight three-act lineage: Chuck Berry, the Stones, the Clash. No one else comes near. The Beatles may have written better songs but...The Pistols may have been a bigger force of change but. . . Ferchrissakes, if I didn't believe all this stuff, you don't think you'd catch me spieling out all these cascades of yeeugh-making praise, do you now? There's a whole lot more becoming things for an adult to do, you know.

Yours,

Pete

P.S. But I still don't believe that you're the saint, let alone godhead that some of your more impressionable fans crack you up to be. I know you're just as big a head-case as the rest of us.

Good. That out of the way, I can move on to telling you good and patient – you must be if you've got this far – readers just how and why the Clash have come to occupy such a prominent place in my – and a lot of other people's – affections.

The Clash at core are three people. Mick Jones on lead guitar, vocals and Keef lookalikes. He was in the London S.S., about whom the myths outweigh the facts at least tenfold. Paul Simonon plays bass, smiles a lot, lopes around like a grossly underfed gorilla on a vitamin B-and-methedrine cure for malnutrition and catches the fancy of more women than the rest of the band put together—Patti Smith, for example. Joe Strummer sings in a manner that some find so unmusical as to be repulsive (you find those kind of philistines everywhere) and others reckon is compulsive and entrancing. Joe was the leading light in the "world-famed" 101'ers and still plays the same tortured, demonic rhythm guitar that was the highlight of that band.

And then there's the fourth man, Nicky "Topper" Headon, the drummer. He gets left out of the central three because he's the last in a long line of skin-beaters with the Clash – Terry Chimes (a.k.a. Tory Crimes) plays on the album – and, although, Nicky's occupied the stool longer and deservedly so than anyone else, he's still relatively unimportant in the overall image of the band. But who knows, a year from now, he might be as important as Ringo was to the Fabs.

How did they come together? Well, not to put too fine a point on it, the line they usually hand out to gullible journalists is a heap of shit. They claim that Paul and Mick were trotting down Portobello Road one balmy Saturday, already intent on forming their own band, when they chanced upon Joe Strummer and, knowing him from the still-in-existence-at-this-point 101'ers, asked him to be their lead singer. After a couple of days to think it over, he junked the 101'ers and threw in his

50

lot with Mick and Paul. That's the fantasy. The reality, as usual, is both more complex and much less romantic.

To explain for the benefit of future historians of the social mores of the seventies, I must backtrack to the first time I encountered Mr. Strummer.

I'd been writing for this rag for a bit and I'd decided I wanted to do a short piece on what it was really like for a struggling band in London, supposed Mecca of rock 'n' roll. On the recommendation of a friend who'd known Joe since schooldays, I went down to a truly scummy college benefit to check out the 101'ers.

At this point (two years ago) I was just emerging from a five-year period where I was so disgusted by the rock 'n' roll scene that I spent all day in bed listening to Chuck Berry and reading Trotsky. I'd come to like quite a few of the current pub rock bands but however much I enjoyed them, I knew in my heart of hearts, there was something lacking. And, although, if pressed, I'd say it had something to do with lack of stage presence, it wasn't till I saw Joe that night that I realised just what was lacking – full-blooded desperation to become a star and communicate with your audience and the sense to realise that not only is that a far from easy task but that, if you don't find your own way of doing it, you might as well junk the idea right there and then.

The 101'ers were an immensely loveable but generally pretty ramshackle bunch who'd rip through Chuck Berry and R&B numbers with not a trace of genuflection at the altar of the greats. What they – or rather what Joe took – was theirs/his.

I became so enamoured with the 101'ers that what had started out as a short article ended up as a veritable thesis which *Trouser Press* has on file (and I hope they don't dig it out, even if it is the definitive work on the subject). The day I mailed the piece, the band broke up. The rest of the 101'ers dropped into the limbo of obscurity but Joe, with much flourish, hair cutting and clothes altering, hooked up with Paul and Mick.

That something of the kind had been the offing I'd suspected since I'd been with Joe watching the Pistols (who were at this time supporting

the 101'ers). As someone else put it, he saw the light and the Sex Pistols simultaneously.

Meanwhile Mick Jones, Brian James (later of the Damned) and Tony James (now in Generation X) had been sorting out their chops in a basement under the name of the London S.S. and the tutelage of future Clash manager Bernard Rhodes, a close pal of Sex Pistols' manager Malcolm McLaren. The London S.S., unable to locate a suitable drummer, never actually played a gig but, according to the few who've heard them, their tapes were very impressive.

When Brian James walked off/was pushed off to form the Damned, the rest of London S.S. faced up to facts, chucked in the towel and went their separate ways.

This is when Mick joined forces with Paul – who'd never even touched a bass before ("I used to be an art designer till I discovered the Clash") – and Keith Levine, who only stayed long enough to do a few early gigs and cop a co-credit for 'What's My Name' on the album. He was a great guitarist but. . . well, just check out 'Deny'.

Masterminded by their hustler-manager with tertiary verbal diarrhea, Bernard Rhodes, the three of them persuaded Strummer over a period of time that he was exactly the vocalist they needed. When Joe was finally convinced, the four of them moved into an enormous (but very cheap) rehearsal studio of their own and began to audition drummers. Getting the name was easy enough. After an initial flirtation with Weak Heart Drops (after a Big Youth song), they plumped for the challenge of the Clash. But getting a drummer wasn't so easy.

They searched with an unusual but un-derstandable and probably correct attitude toward drummers. To wit, drummers can't drum because they all suffer from a Billy Cobham complex and want to play as much as an egocentric lead guitarist. Therefore drummers have to be taught to drum. And drummers, being by and large nutters, don't take too kindly to such condescension. Also, at this time, while the rest of the band were outwardly convinced they'd be an unqualified success, under the surface they were stone scared that they couldn't live up to even their own belief in themselves. The tensions in the Clash camp

(late summer '76) were running so high that just sitting around the rehearsal studio could be an exceedingly uncomfortable experience.

But, after rejecting various drummers who were more in tune with the band's commitment but couldn't really hack out the relentless trip-trap bottom line, they settled on Terry Chimes, who didn't give a flying one about the politics (in the widest sense) of the Clash but made up for it by being one of the best drummers this side of Jerry Nolan.

Anyway, that's how they'd shaped up to the point of their early gigs, so that's enough of this hagiography. That's not nearly as important as why the Clash are the CLASH.

Scene One:

Bernie Rhodes holds Clash preview for the press in the studio, subtly paralleling Paris schmutter previews. Giovanni Dadomo of *Sounds* is suitably impressed and reports that the Clash are the first band to come along that look like they could really scare the Pistols.

Scene Two:

The reaction sets in. When the Clash support the Pistols at a London cinema gig, Charles Shaar Murray says that they're a garage band who ought to get back in the garage and leave the car motor running. (This prompts them to write 'Garageland').

Scene Three:

The sides settled, every Clash gig becomes an event. When Patti Smith comes over, she sees the Clash at the Institute of Contemporary Arts and is so knocked out with them that she jumps up and "jams". And some kid in the audience does a mock up of biting off someone's ear (with the aid of a tomato ketchup capsule) and the picture gets in the weekly music press. By the time they play the Royal College of Art (Arty lot, aren't they? Still, what do you expect? They all went to art college and wear some of the flashest clothes imaginable); emotions are running way too high. They play a set under the rubric "A Night Of Treason". (It was November 5th, the night that honours the burning of Guy Fawkes, the bloke who tried to blow up the

Houses of Parliament). Some of the audience, when not lobbing fireworks around, take an extreme dislike to the Clash and start binging bottles at the stage. The rest of the audience is split between Clash fans who already think their band can do no wrong and the uncommitted whose prevailing attitude is "Well, they are playing violent music and if you play violent, well you know what they say about what you sow..."

The band are certain how they feel about playing in a rain of bottles. Strummer lurches off stage and tries to sort out those responsible... personally.

The Clash style has been set. It's a straight case of being ruthlessly certain about how you feel and what you want to do and making sure that no one gets in your way. Like the man said, "We ain't looking for trouble but if someone starts it, it ain't gonna be us that's gonna be on the losing side."

Remember this is back in '76 when punk was still seen overwhelmingly as being POLITICAL. More than anyone else it was the Clash that everyone held responsible for putting down a party line. Now they're all pretty much retreated from that position (except the Clash, they just smile Highway 61 smiles) and say aw, we're really only into having fun, maaan. But then, you've no idea what a relief it was to have songs about something else than falling in love with some acne-infested adolescent or what a drag it is to be slogging our guts out "on the road" and staying in all these faceless hotels (when most kids in England have never even stayed in a hotel) or pathetic dirges about let's have a little more rock 'n' roll.

I know rock 'n' roll is *supposed* to be about the banalities of the pubescent dream but it had pretty much got to the stage where the average rock 'n' roll song was indistinguishable from moon/June bilge. If the Clash have done nothing else, they've given a big help to kicking out all that garbage (of course, many others have been working to the same end).

Strummer certainly didn't come from any poverty-stricken background (on the other hand, he never really pretended to) but his songs were like

a well-aimed boot plonked straight into the guts of an overfed and complacent music business.

And Mick Jones was no slouch either.

'Career Opportunities' for example:

*They offered me the office
They offered me the shop
They said I'd better take anything they'd got
Do you wanna make tea at the BBC
Do you, do you really wanna be a cop
Career opportunities
The ones that never knock
Every job they offer you's to keep you out the dock
Career opportunities
The ones that never knock.*

Okay, so it ain't gonna cop him a poetry prize (who wants 'em?) but it displays both a savage understanding of the demands for immediacy in a rock 'n' roll song and a large helping of witty comment on what it's like to be given the choice of one shitty job or another shitty job. Of course, the Clash never thought they could really change things. They're only (only!) a rock 'n' roll band, not a political party. But, if you're gonna sing about something, you might as well sing about something that doesn't usually make it onto pop singles. Unfortunately, while they handled it, lesser talents came along and decided that they'd have to write 'political' songs and, as a matter of course, mostly came up with insulting simplicities like Chelsea's 'Right To Work.'

And then, even more important, there was the music. Even early on (and especially after Small Faces addict Glen Matlock got the boot) the Pistols were very fond of heavy metal drones. I don't think The Clash even listened to HM. Joe only cared for '50s rockers (especially bluesman Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, believe it or not) and reggae. Jones was deeply into Mott, which shows in the Clash's attitude toward their fans both in their songs and their stage demeanour. And Paul Simonon was into football (listen to the chant on 'Janie Jones') and painting (look at the clothes, stage backdrops and all their visual presentation.)

By the time they'd done the Anarchy Tour with the Pistols, the Clash were in an unrivalled second position. They began to get the kind of press eulogies and fan worship that'd turn anybody's head. How could anybody fail to react to them?

Onstage, Strummer is so obviously a natural star, forcing his body and Telecaster to ever greater heights of pain/pleasure, grabbing the mike and screaming lines like he really does care.

Mick Jones bopping around like a younger Keef (yeah, that comparison again) doing a military two-step and sending out shards of steely guitar licks.

And Paul lumbering around looking looser and more relaxed but thumping his bass while indulging in perverse, arcane calisthenics.

And the clothes. Obviously paramilitary in origin – zips and slogans featured very heavily – but whoever heard of an army splashing paint all over their tunics?

All this combines to make sure the Clash, even at their worst, are never mere music. I am absolutely convinced that it's not only me that feels that they're the '70s answer to the Stones. If asked, Clash fans will say they love 'em so much because "They're good to dance to" or "I fancy Mick Jones" or "I just like 'em, that's all". If that is all, why do they shout out for 'White Riot' all the time at gigs? It's not one of the Clash's best songs, but it is the one that most represents where they're coming from, what they stand for and, by extension, what particular fantasy they're enacting for their audience. If the kids just wanted to dance or screw, they could go to a disco/home to bed. They want and get more but their lack of articulacy prevents them explaining what. Where success and even the music are subordinate to the stance – they're saying not we play rock 'n' roll but we are rock 'n' roll. If Chuck Berry represents for me an idealised adolescence I never had, and the Stones were an adolescence that I lived through once removed because, like so many kids, I was too busy studying, the Clash are as good an excuse as any for me to live out a perfect adolescence ten years late. Hell, why else be a rock 'n' roll writer – there's more to it than freebie albums, you know.

Which is also why – just like the Stones – while the Clash will fire imaginations, they'll never become a grandiosely success-ful band. Some reckon they won't make it in the States at all. I don't agree with that. Judging by the recent Rainbow shows, they've got enough classic big stage rock 'n' roll choreography worked out to handle any auditorium. And their newer songs, like 'City of the Dead' and the as yet unissued 'White Man In Hammersmith Palais' are played at a pace that even ears used to the Eagles can handle. Also, by slowing matters down a trifle, they seem to have upped the energy level – too much speed becomes nothing but a fast train blur. They learned their lesson on the first English tour. The set started out at 45 minutes. By the end of the tour it was down to 29 minutes and that included all the album plus '1977', 'Capital Radio' (only avail-able on a limited edition giveaway – which is a pity because it's one of their best songs), their truly awful version of Toots and the Maytals' sublime 'Pressure Drop' and 'London's Burning' twice. It gave their roadies something to boast about but if you wanted to keep up with it, you had to snort at least 2 grams of amphetamine.

This drop in speed/rise in intensity is obviously partly a result of their smoking a lot more dope and listening to a lot of very spliffed-out rasta roots reggae. They realised you ain't gotta run at full throttle to give out the necessary power.

Nonetheless, the Clash have come in for a lot of criticism. Ignoring the early jeers about unmusicality, the most hurtful has been that they're a kind of punk Bay City Rollers, programmed to do just what their manager tells them to do. Quite simply, that's like saying that the Stones were only Oldham's puppets. Of course, Bernie being some kind of weird conceptual artist lams in a fair share of the ideas but, at the last resort, it's Mick, Paul, Joe and Topper that cut the cake on stage and record.

Anyway, I reckon that carping like that is just more proof of the Clash's importance. Nobody gets into the same kind of polarisations about say Slaughter and the Dogs or 999. People only get into heavy-duty arguments about bands that really matter.

Look. If you already like the Clash, you'll like 'em even more live (if they play a good show – which admittedly, they don't do as often as

they should). If you hate the Clash, you'll either learn the error of your ways when you realize what great little pop songs they write or continue to hate 'em. The choice is yours.

All I can say is that any band that can bring a relatively cynical scribbler like myself to gush like a besotted fan, has got to be one of the most special things to have ever happened.

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Opening night of "Out on Parole" British Tour
THE CLASH
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No 000577

Record Mirror Interview

By Terry Lott, *Record Mirror*, June 1978

Joe, I want to ask you about your Rosso Brigado T-shirt. Why did you wear it to the Anti-Nazi League Carnival?

Joe: I wore it because I didn't think they were getting the press coverage they deserved. Personally I think what they're doing is good because although it's vicious and they're murdering people - you know, they go around killing businessman and the people they see as screwing Italy up - well, I think what they're doing is good because it's a brutal system anyway, and people get murdered by the system every day and no one complains about that. But when some fat businessman is shot down in the street, everyone is horrified, right.

After they shot Italy's answer to Winston Churchill, Aldo Moro, every day after that they shot down a new businessman. And it ended up on the back page of the Evening Standard, like who won the greyhounds and who got shot in Italy today. So I wanted to have my photo taken in it, and put it in the papers. Which of course it wasn't.

Why do you think no one mentioned it?

Joe: I don't think anyone could see it!

I didn't notice it until someone from Rock Against Racism told me about it.

Mick: They were saying: 'How dare you play the Anti-Nazi League gig in a stormtrooper's outfit!' I was wearing a BBC commissioner's hat which we nicked when we did the TV show, black shirt and black trousers. And all of a sudden I'm in a stormtrooper's outfit. And they're saying to me: 'You're disgusting.'

(Pause as Joe and Nicky kick each other under the table).

Joe: We're not finished, you know. You wait Till you hear this record. You'll Jump on the table.

Yeah, we have been waiting for the album. When's it coming out?

Joe: It's coming out in early September. The second week in September.

Mick: Or something. It's coming out soon.

Is it finished, then?

Joe: We've finished most of it. I've got two more to sing, he's got one more to sing. And there's a few guitars to do

Back to the T-shirt thing - you once said you don't want to be like politicians, but surely doing something like that is being political?

Joe: Oh yeah, it's being political, but I mean, the bad side of politicians is that they're all crooked and corrupt. They're all going about scratching each other's backs. It's just that we've got a tendency to write songs about the rest of the world, you know what I mean? If I write a song, I don't write about the lovely girl I saw, I write about other things. He (Mick) does a bit more than I do.

Mick: Yeah I do.

Did you read what Jimmy Pursey had to say about you a few weeks ago?

Mick: I read what you said about us.

Yes, I tended to agree with him

Joe: I think Jimmy's a bit of a rip off because what he does is, he has an argument with himself, a fake one. He says: 'Well, I was talking to a member of the Clash the other day, and I said this, and he said this' and he's just making it up. We never had that argument with him. He does it all the time. I mean, he's probably doing it sincerely but . .

Mick: I think they're a good group and they'll do really well. I think you probably set him up for some of that anyway, because you said (puts on a posh voice): 'I am really very much in agreement with him.'

What I was saying was this. Jimmy said he felt you were letting the kids down by not playing live gigs recently, and I agreed

Mick: We've played to the kids more than he has.

Joe: Sometimes you gotta play, sometimes you gotta sit down and work out what to play. There's no use going out and playing rubbish.

Mick: We haven't had a lay-off since Christmas, 1976.

Joe: We want to release an album that's 10 times better than the first one, and then one that's 10 times better than that Like the Jam and the Stranglers, they were rushed into theirs .

Bernie: You mentioned something...

Joe: Oh no, you shut up, you go on for 20 minutes. (The tape is switched off till Bernie shuts up).

Joe: We came out with this thing, we was helping groups. Normally in this business, people pay - if you want to support Black Sabbath, you've got to pay x thousand quid. We took groups on tour, and we were paying them, we were subsidising everything, just like the Pistols have done for us on the Anarchy tour, although we had to pay them back later.

Bernie: The Buzzcocks and all those bands, we paid everything for.

Joe: Jimmy comes on like this, and tom and sitting behind Tom is Pink Floyd's management, and behind Jimmy is Mungo Jerry's management. And sitting behind us we've got (points to Bernie) him! You know what I mean? It's supposed to be right on and different and new, but If you look behind, it's just the same c—— passing on the same money.

But you've got CBS behind you. What's the difference?

Joe: We nearly had to cancel our tour because they wouldn't lend us the money to pay for the PA. That happened yesterday. Me and him was

round there, and he was going: 'We'll have to cancel the tour then' and they said: 'Right, alright, we'll give you the two grand.'

Why aren't they behind you then?

Bernie: Because Bob Dylan's in. town.

Mick: Oi, hold it, that's enough of that. Show some respect.

Joe: what, about Bob Dylan? Oh yeah, he's the only one of the group going to see Dylan Next question.

*Let's pretend Bernie isn't present. How are relations with Bernie?
We've been hearing rumours . .*

Joe: Sometimes it's stormy, you know. The rumours are a load of bollocks. There's aH kinds of bastards trying to take us over, because they see they can make a few bucks out of us. They started these rumours they're trying to drive a wedge between us and Bernie.

Mick: We love Bernie really.

Joe: Yeah - even if he is short. We argue a lot, you know, because we're called the Clash and we have them. People say they ain't gonna last long like that, but we've been doing it for nearly a couple of years.

What do you argue about?

Joe: Everything. We argue about dates, tours, songs, shoes, socks, shirts, television programmes, telephone bills, everything.

Ah, talking of TV programmes, this is another thing Jimmy was talking about . .

Joe: what - 'Top Of The Pops'? Yeah, this is the real argument, right.

Mick: The real answer is that they only f--- asked us once, and the f--- record went down the next week! Anyway, we wouldn't be on that f--- programme, it's a load of f--- shit.

Joe: whats the point? You're just perpetrating it. I can see the point of going on 'Revolver', even though that thing with Mickie Most in your paper was really sickening. I can see the point of going on 'Revolver', because it's trying to start something new and it's a real gig. you know, it seems like the people are actually listening to the bands. But being on 'Top Of The Pops' and mimeing away is just perpetrating it, I would rather shoot our ammo into something new or not shoot it at all.

But his argument was that he could change things better from the inside.

Joe: That's a load of bollocks. Top Of The Pops' will still be there when Sham are down the drain.

Mick: that's what we thought when we signed to CBS. No, thats what the excuse given was. Oh, we can do much more work from the inside, when the point was, we also wanted to make records.

Joe: You can't go with a group unless you've got the dough to make a record and go on a tour, and the amount of dough for that, that comes to 50 grand. That's what we had, and that's where it went.

So what's your financial position?

Joe: Terrible.

Mick: Fair to middling.

Joe: Me and him (Mick) are better off than him and him (Nicky and Paul) , because we work harder.

Mick: We're not really very well off. What do you `mean, our PerSonal situation?

No, as a group.

Joe: Well, I'll tell you what our finances are, our finances are that we had to borrow two and a half grand to go on this tour next week. if we hadn't managed to borrow that, we wouldn't have managed to go on the tour.

Mick: Yeah, we're doing all right.

What about America? Presumably you'd have to borrow money to get to the States?

Joe: Sure we would. We had the chance of doing three dates In America in the middle of this month, but we had to knock it on the head because CBS just weren't interested in supporting us.

Why not?

Joe: Because they want us to go over later and do it properly. Which is what we're going to do.

So they were acting in your best interests?

Joe: I don't know, I don't think they know if they're coming or going. Every decision they've made seems to be the wrong one, ever since we've been working with them. They don't have anybody in the company who could make a decent decision.

Do you regret signing with them?

Joe: Nah, all companies are the same. They're as bad as each other. We've never been with another company, so I haven't got anything to compare it to. It's just, like they released rubbish, They picked the worst track off the album to release as a single. With us, they don't know who we are, or what we're about or how to deal with us, they still don't know. All companies are as bad - they're all after money. If you move records they're prepared to smile at you.

So haven't you sold enough records to earn a smile?

Mick: No, not actually.

Joe: No, not compared with Bob Dylan.

Mick: They bought David Essex a motorbike last year, and we got a set of building bricks. He was charging five quid a ticket for that poxy

pantomime he did, that's why he got a motorbike. I think they actually like to let people believe they're still happening till their money runs out. David Essex is probably going round in his Limo, still under the impression that he's like the most happening thing In the universe. And they let him believe it, you know, because it keeps him quiet, because the more of that kind of stuff you've got, the more the chances are that won't be thinking that you're going to be uncomfortable for a long time in the future.

But David Essex will always be comfortable.

Mick: No, no, I mean like it's your soul, I mean you'll always think, well blimey , if only I'd seen the error of my ways before . . . On the other hand, if they give me a motorbike, I won't refuse it. But I will flog It.

Another quote I saw somewhere was : 'We'll never get a Top 10 hit because they won't let us.'

Joe: What I meant by that was the radio playlists. Unless it's played on the radio you might as well forget it. And I can't see anybody ever playing Clash records on the radio.

Why?

Bernie: Because the music press hasn't backed us up, no one else has backed us up, we're just five people working very hard. And you can't have five people working against maybe, twenty thousand.

Don't you think that's a bit paranoid?

Joe: Better to be paranoid than pathetic.

Mick: The last time we phoned up Doreen Davies to say why aren't we on the playlist, she said: 'Well, it isn't exactly the sort of music you can work to.' And as an afterthought she added: 'Well, you lot don't work anyway, do they?' Well, why is that? Is our record too fast?

Bernie: It's not paranoid, it's realistic. The press at the moment are paranoid people, we ain't, we're dealing with it, right. we're getting on

with it.

Why do you think it is they still dislike you? Is it just a hangover from the punk thing, or are you still doing something to get at them?

Bernie: Of course we are. It's the naughty boy syndrome. If you're a good boy you get rewarded, if you're a naughty boy you get smacked. Art reflects society, and if Radio One reflects society, then you've got what you deserve.

Yes, but every group around hates Radio One, so what makes you any different?

Bernie: We're not trying to be better than any groups, we're just trying to do a job that other groups maybe find it hard to do.

What?

Bernie: Like - get on with it.

Joe: Like make real records. Records that deal with real things. We're trying to be the best group in the world. A punk rock group. A group that don't shirk out when it comes to it. Like telling the truth as we see it, and not being paid off. They offer you a bite of the big apple.

Mick: They've offered us every apple.

Joe: The say: 'If you change the words on this single, boys, you could have a hit.'

Mick: They say you could have the biggest nit in the universe if only you took the words piss and shit out of there.

Right, I know everyone's asked you this, but can you explain just why the album has taken so long to record?

Joe: Because records cost so much that we want to make damn sure that every groove on that record has something brilliant in it. If it takes us a year to do that, then let it.

Mick: As we said before, we ain't gonna be pushed Into bringing out dross.

Joe: It's so easy. That's another way the record company works for you, right - It pushes you into a situation where you maybe don't want to go. You've got to be strong to say: 'No, this isn't good enough.'

Mick: We did a John Peel session, right, and we worked all day and night on it, and in the end we had to stop it because it wasn't going right. And they said to us: 'There's only one group In a thousand that can't actually do It', and 'If you don't put it out, you may not get on it again' and we said: 'You should be supporting groups who won't put out rubbish, rather than saying that sort of thing, so you can take your 1930s microphones and stick 'em up your BBC arse!' I mean, the guy was OK about It, he put It down to drug- taking, but what we were complaining about was that . .

Joe: It sounded terrible.

Bernie: How many copies of Record Mirror do you sell?

Joe: Oh my God. Bernie, go out and get some sandwiches.

(This leads into a long, rambling tangent from Bernie).

Bernie, why do you always insist on interrupting? Why can't you let the group talk for themselves?

Joe: Because he loves talking. He can't resist It. He'd rather be here, butting in than sitting at home watching telly.

Bernie: Well, they're talking, aren't they.

Joe: Not when you're butting in.

Bernie: Sorry, you didn't send me the rules.

Anyway, what do CBS think about the delays with the album?

Mick: They think we're the laziest bastards in the world. We used to be

a group. Why am I even defending this rubbish? I tell you what, I'd like to see any of those people who do attack us, staying up as long as we fucking have to, day after day. Cos we love it, right. I'd like to see all those who say we're lazy do half as much. Even when you're not Involved with the actual mechanics of making something, you heads' full of It. A whirlpool of nonsense.

Have CBS done anything to speed you up?

Joe: No nothing, they're just getting worried, I think. They think we're going to have a big argument with them. They seem like misers, CBS.

How do you plan on attacking the American market?

Joe: We're going to get long wigs and satin loon pants, and we're learnIng Ted Nugent riffs. We're going to get a laser show.

Mick: We're going to go heavy metal and put make-up on.

I can't really see the Americans understanding you.

Joe: They're a bit slow you know, but they'll get there.

Mick: There's one or two quite bright ones.

One thing I wanted to ask you about was your song, 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home.'

Joe: 'again, Hurrah, Hurrah' (the English Civil War). It's an old American Civil war song. One day it just popped Into my head for no reason, and I just started rhyming it.

What do you mean by the English Civil War?

Joe: What I was trying to say is that the war's just around the corner - the English Civil War - so Johnny hasn't got far to march. That's why he's coming by bus or underground.

Which English Civil War?

Joe: Well, for example the one that happened the other week down at Tower Hamlets. All those people attacking them other people. Plenty of people think that sort of thing is a good idea. I was reading about that tennis player . .

Oh, Buster Mottram.

Joe: yeah. He was sitting there In a club full of people going: 'Right you tell 'em, good for you mate'. And there's the Monday Club. There are plenty of people who agree with rampaging down the street doing people In just 'cos they've got a different colour. Plenty of people. And like in 10 years' time, the country's going to be divided between those who think it's a good idea and those who think it's a bad idea. So it's a folk song, that's all.

What do you think about the people who say the power of the Front has been exaggerated?

Mick: in 1928, right, Adolf Hitler got 2.8 per cent of the votes. By 1939, right, there was no one voting for anyone else. That was only a matter of 10 years.

Joe: By 1933 he was Chancellor.

Mick: The National Front thing might have been slightly over-emphasised, but the whole thing is a much bigger ball game than just the Front. It's more than that.

Joe: The song also takes the piss out of the people who say : 'Oh yeah, it's gonna happen' . Cos It goes: 'Aha, haha, I told you so, hurrah tra la la', says everyone that we know.' And then it goes on to make the point, but who did anything about it?

We played a gig in Birmingham a week after the Anti-Nazi League rally, right, and it was on the front page of the Sun, right, some white guys in Wolverhampton opened a car window and fired a shotgun at a bunch of West Indians.

Mick: It happened the night we were playing there. We went out the next morning and read about it in the paper.

Joe: If people go firing shotguns at you , the first thing you `re gonna do is get your own shotgun. I mean, that's how it escalates. Think what the atmosphere must be like down Tower Hamlets - what are the Bengalis piling up to protect themselves with? It ain't gonna be bits of stick.

So you think it's still escalating?

Joe: Sure it is. Sure it is.

Mick: I was talking to some guys who were actually down there, and they were saying it was just a personal problem, but now the media's got hold of it, they were very well aware that the papers are gonna be down there and they can get their pictures in the Sun. The same thing happened down the Kings Road in the summer. It could be just that we're changing the area from Kings Road to Brick Lane. I don't think they care about politics, they just see it as toughies and weak people, right, and they don't see it in terms of any political thing. Whereas in Italy, they make their political allegiance at about 16.

What's your reaction to kids doing that?

Joe: what, bashing Pakis? I fuckin' tell `em to lay off.

Mick: I tell `em to lay off. I said to them, you're just doing it for the papers.

Joe: They should go down the House of Commons and bash up the people in there.

Bernie: Or Radio One.

Do you think you've changed any of their attitudes?

Joe: Well, it depends on whether they want to pick up on the words in our songs. But if they don't want to, they don't want to. You can't force them to listen. You can only do so much, you can only sing and play.

Bernie: You can take a horse to water . . .

Have you got any evidence that they've put your words into actions?

Your circulation has zoomed up since people got into that kind of comment instead of just singing about my girlfriend.

But you've still got kids beating up Pakistanis . . .

Bernie: There's a lot of Pakis who deserve it.

Mick: I don't think anybody deserves that.

Bernie: But people are getting bashed up everywhere. Cromwell started bashing people up. We're not talking about mushrooms . .

What ARE you going on about. Bernie?

Bernie: Rats in a hole. You take a drive round Ealing there's so much space you drive round the city and everything's so concentrated

Mick: You should move all the skinheads out to suburbia

Bernie: Give them all a nice house a lovely council house

Mick: You're going to do this I suppose.

So who's going to put up the money?

Bernie: I can't afford to put a PA together.

Mick: They give them nice houses out in Stevenage, new towns like that, and they become instant ghettos.

Anyway . . . after what you've said about the political situation, will you continue to support Rock Against Racism?

Mick: We were going before they were!

Joe: We are we. F--- Rock Against Racism.

Mick: We've never needed to affiliate ourselves with little

organisations. when they came out with RAR everyone was going yeah. Not at all! Not at all. They've got the Socialist Workers' Party pushing them. We've been doing it our own way. we don't need an organisation to back us up.

Joe: We just do it the way we live, you know what I mean. We started playing reggae when everyone was saying white men can't play reggae, just like they used to say white men can't play the blues. On our tours we took lots of heavy dub stuff the kids had never heard.

Mick: In Scotland they'd never heard it. They were pretty amazed. In a lot of those places, they don't even know there is a problem. In Scotland they say: 'Oh we don't have the National Front up here. What's that then?'

Joe: Let us ask you something. Let's ask you why you think we're finished, that you're so cosily in agreement with Jimmy.

I didn't. I said - oh hang on, let's see the quote.

Mick: what about what you said about 'White Riot'?

Joe: I think you were a bit hasty in saying we were finished just because of one naff gig. Every group does naff gigs.

Mick: I thought it was all right.

Joe: I thought it was naff.

What?

Joe: The Anti - Nazi League gig.

Right. I was disappointed with that gig. I didn't say you were finished, I just said I was disappointed with that gig.

Mick: You'd better blame the Rock Against Racism sound system, because we were f--- great.

Joe: They turned it up for Tom Robinson. Anyway, if you want to

know about all these groups and Rock Against Racism the truth is that we had the plugs pulled on us We've got it on film

Look I don't care what sort of interest group politics was going on backstage I watched you from out front and from there the Clash didn't sound too good

Bernie: Yeah but you re a cynical jaded journalist

I'm not a cynical jaded journalist, any more than you're a cynical jaded manager.

Mick: Or we're a cynical jaded group.

Joe: You are, because you get all your records free, and you get to meet all the stars.

So that's one of the perks of the job, like one of the perks of your job is getting to travel round the world.

Joe: Yeah yeah but if you had to part with your own money, it would be a different thing.

I agree, but what can you do about it? It's just as bad for you to prejudge us as it is it is for us to prejudge you

Bernie: So why don't you say what you mean?

What? We do.

Bernie: Do you know what you mean?

I don't know what you mean.

Mick: If you hate the group, say so.

I don't hate the group. I was disappointed in one gig, and since It ,was the only gig you'd done in six months, it was all I had to judge you by.

Bernie: We trusted people because they said they were from Rock

Against Racism.

Mick: And I don't think you should disclaim that, because it would make an admirable cause into a shambles. It was a very important thing from where we stood, but it was still an admirable try. And on the next tour, we'll put it right without another group pulling the plugs on us..

Joe: I think the reporting on the whole affair was really shallow because . .

Mick: No one mentioned that other groups hired lots more bodyguards than us. I think it's important considering we couldn't get a glass of water backstage, but the others could.

Yes but again that 5 back stage politics You can have it both ways on one hand you re saving the event was more important and on the other you re saying I should have gone Into all that sort of squabbling

Mick: We weren't particularly squabbling we were eating shit What I m saying is you should understand all the facts, right, but it doesn't bother me that we looked bad, or anything, because the event transcended all that stuff.

Agreed.

Joe: This is costing me £50 an hour. I have to go to the studio.

Joe leaves. The interview then disintegrated into a general confusion, with Bernie taking over answering the questions, making unfounded accusations, and generally making a complete prat of himself.

The Clash: The 'Serious In-Depth Interview' You've Been Waiting For!

By Peter Silverton, *Sounds*, June 17, 1978

"AAAWOOOEEEEUUUOOO, PETE... 'ear you bin to the States... how wazzit?"

THE DISEMBODIED VOICE in the recreation room at Island's Basing Street studio gradually reveals itself as emerging from a skinny and extremely stoned figure wearing a black leather jacket draped in a swirly-patterned, table-cloth sized scarf who's stretched out of sight across four seats so he can get himself comfortable enough to watch the TV. It's Mick Jones' way of relaxing and preparing himself for another twelve-hour day of laying down the backing tracks for the second Clash album.

"Oh, the States was fun. I had a great time there."

"Shit. I'm really jealous."

"Go there for your holidays. You went to Jamaica last year so you must be able to afford to go to the States this year."

"Nah. When I go to the States for the first time, I want to do it properly – I only want to go as a member of a group. That's the only way I wanna do it."

While he might have a very personal conception of how to get himself in the correct frame of mind for recording, Mick is as conscious as anybody of the current trend of opinion about the Clash. The nagging implications that they were 'last year's thing, maaan' and maybe 'they weren't so hot even then' and 'anyway punk's dead and these beat combos are much more fun so let's go and drink lemonade and tap our feet to that groovy new love song'.

THE CLASH were always more than some people could take and now, in a changed climate, knives are being sharpened that were kept well hidden while the Clash star was in the constant and meteoric ascendant. Some say the Clash have become – or always were – punk's answer to

the Bay City Rollers. Others have renounced them in favour of Tom Robinson's more easily digestible agit-prop or the crass and banal 'sincereness' and 'street credibility' of Jimmy Pursey and his British Movement followers.

And the wait for the second Clash album. The wait, my God, the wait. If the Messiah was gonna take this long, it'd halve the attendance at the synagogue overnight. Why so long? Reasons, reasons, all of them good ones. But people don't care about reasons; they care about records.

Mick understands that. He knows and is unsurprisingly worried about it. In fact, he was apprehensive about my doing this story as I'd already penned two long raves about the Clash – one when I reviewed the album last year, the other in a very long article for *Trouser Press* – and he reckoned that I was about ready to do a hatchet job on them. When I reminded him that I'd already given them a heavy slating for 'Clash City Rockers' (wrongly, I now think), he seemed relieved.

What I didn't need to remind him about was that, despite all that sufferation, there's still hordes of eager fans out there who must be just about at the stage of screaming to hear what the Clash are up to these days. After all, it's certainly been a long time since there's been a more than halfway decent article on them in a music paper. And, more than that, there hasn't been a serious in-depth interview with any of the band since the very early days. The last one in *Sounds* was a non-communicative shambles done with Giovanni just before the start of the Complete Control tour.

Arriving at Basing Street studios one hot afternoon, I was expecting to do both the interview and the pix within a matter of a couple of hours. Postponing the interview because Joe was late and had to get straight into recording, I ended up doing the first interview later that night – or rather the following morning – then going over to Paris with them for a one-off gig and finishing up with another interview again done as the sun was rising.

So keeping it all in that order for the sake of simplicity, we begin with...

THE STUDIO

WALKING DOWN the stairs for a short refreshment break after nine hours in the studio, assistant producer cum overseeing engineer, Corky Stasiak, turns to Sandy Pearlman, Blue Oyster Cult mentor and now Clash producer, and asks: "What did I do to deserve this?"

Pearlman has no doubts: "You worked with Kiss. That's what you did to deserve this."

After a while in the studio, I started to feel almost sorry for these two American innocents abroad. Both used to working with the most organised band in the world, they are in a continual state of disbelief when confronted with the most disorganised band in the world. While the Blue Oyster Cult drum roadie phones every day to confirm that everything's running smoothly and report any minor hitches, it's a very good day when the Clash roadies manage to get the band to the studio on time without forgetting to bring the guitars or something.

The Clash themselves seem to positively thrive on the spontaneity that this chaos enforces. They're past masters of the British production technique – "Bash it down and we'll tart it up a bit later". Naturally, this sometimes reduces the Americans to a state of utter dismay where all they can do is plead to the great god of the recording studios somewhere up there in the sky above New York's Record Plant.

And yet the Clash's attitude to working in the studio – once they're actually in there and playing anyway – is very disciplined, even militaristic. Strummer calls out "Hey, general" when he wants to speak to Pearlman and "Hey, captain" when he's after Stasiak's attention. And, when I arrived at the studio, they'd just finished showing some of the batch of war movies they'd got CBS to stump up for...after a little arm twisting – when CBS A&R chief, Muff Winwood (or Duff Windbag as the Clash call him) had refused to pay for any more films, they phoned up and informed him they knew where his car was parked; the films arrived the next day. Reinforcing this image of them as an army unit, Strummer was continually goading everyone into action like some kind of musical section leader.

(I asked him later about his almost quite dictatorial demeanour in the studio. "We arse around so much, you know what I mean. We relax and laugh and joke and if you don't get down to it sometime, you'll never do it.")

But, while quasi-militaristic it might be, the Clash attitude is not quite the same concept of sta-prest organisation that the Americans are used.

In the studio proper, the band grouped around putting down the basic backing track live. Topper Headon behind the screens with only his head showing as he bops up and down with the beat. Paul Simonon, legs akimbo and bass slung low on his right hip while he punctuates his attack with a few casual spits at the floor. Mick Jones lazes on a chair cuddled up round his Gibson Les Paul Special while Joe stands up, pumping his left leg as always and shouting out the changes to the rest of them. Just like he looks onstage, in fact, apart from one thing – his battered but trusty Telecaster is being mended and he's using a hired Gibson 345 instead, the big cherry red semi-acoustic that's best known in the hands of Chuck Berry. Joe completes the illusion with the occasional playful duck-walk.

Meanwhile, up in the control room, unable to see what's happening in the studio (or be seen), Sandy and Corky mix admirable professionalism with acapella choruses of the Olympics' 'Western Movies', discussions about how great it'd be out on the beach in Long Island in this weather and, now and then, a deprecating comment about what they've let themselves in for or, more often, what a lousy studio it is. Mostly though, the odd moment of depression is tempered by admiration for the spirit of the band.

Pearlman refers to Topper in almost awed tones as "the rhythm machine. What have we done? A hundred tracks? And he's only screwed up once." And, when they're not too busy eating one of the several ethnic meals they send out for each night, they clearly respect Joe's drive and spirited animation, even if they can often hardly make out one word of what he's singing. They can also get *very* frustrated by the band's more casual approach to the finer points of recording technology. In a break from blowing bubbles with his gum, Corky noticed a small mistake on Paul's bass track.

Paul couldn't hear it all. Joe could but still wondered: "Why can't we leave it as it is?"

Pearlman: "Because people will notice."

Joe: "Only ten million Hitlers will notice."

Pearlman half-smiles, re-adjusts his baseball cap and shrugs resignedly.

Joe: "Anyway, you won't even be able to hear it once I shout over it bit."

Mick: "And I'll be twanging over it."

The bass part is redone.

SUCH ARE THE pains of aiming for perfection and such are the lengths to which the band will go to ensure that this second album encompasses both what they and the record company (i.e. the American album-buying public) want and expect.

Considering that the first album has now sold somewhere in the region of a hundred thousand copies (and is still selling very strongly for a year-old album), this might seem an open and shut case of too much green leading to too much worry. But consider – ignoring the fact that all the band would love to be really famous rock and roll stars – that none of their singles has done as well as might be expected and that they're all still on a ridiculous twenty-five quid plus rent a week and matters move into a little more accurate perspective.

And Joe doesn't even have any rent to pay.

FIRST INTERVIEW

"YOU'RE GONNA write I where I live ain't you? I've had enough of this white mansion rubbish."

Joe's sitting on the other side of table surrounded by various kinds of debris including a half-empty can of paint. Given the time and circumstances, he's playing the perfect host, making me a cup of tea

and finding a tin lid for me to use as an ashtray. But it's still a long way from any white mansion. A squat he shares with Boogie, who used to manage him in the 101'ers and now works with Malcolm McLaren, it's about as glamorous as leprosy. I certainly wouldn't live there, even if it does have the advantage of an all-night cafe round the corner.

While we're settling down and I'm sorting out my tape machine, Joe shows me the Brigade Rosse t-shirt he made for the Anti-Nazi league gig. Clearly proud of it, he was surprised that no-one at the gig even so much as noticed what it had on it. He places the blame for that on the English daily papers.

When Moro was shot, it was like them killing Winston Churchill, the Italian equivalent of Winston Churchill or someone like that. The papers don't exactly give it as much coverage as Joyce McKinney, do they? They just keep out anything that's a bit dodgy."

Leaving aside the international politics for the moment, I asked about the internal politics of the album.

How did they come to be using Pearlman?

"Me and Mick met him and we went into the toilet and said "What do you reckon" and we said "Let's give it a whirl". Originally, someone introduced us. I think Bernie (Bernard Rhodes, Clash manager) did.

"One day I was in Bernie's car and he was playing Blue Oyster Cult and I said 'What are you playing this shit for?'...'cos he's usually got some doo-wop or some reggae of something and he goes 'Oh, it's well produced' and I said 'So what? It's a load of shit.' 'But I'm listening to the production' he said. He was checking it out..."

Wasn't using them as much what the record company wanted as what you wanted?

"They definitely thought it was a good idea that we had someone who could produce well."

I'd noticed in the studio that they were re-recording the next single, 'White Man In Hammersmith Palais' and wondered if they'd junked the original recording.

"No. It was just that Pearlman likes it so much that he begged us for a go on it. We've got a lot of stuff that hasn't come out. 'Pressure Drop'. We've done some Memphis stuff. We done another Clash song that never came out – 'Crush On You'. It's got some sax on it and piano."

I'd heard that they'd dropped 'Crush' because the press hated it.

"Nah, we dropped it 'cos there was no room for it. Like we dropped 'Shitting At The Party' and 'Flies' which was about all those flies in the basement of Orsett Terrace (where he lived in the 101'ers days).

"I lost all my stuff at the ice-cream factory, just underneath Mick's tower block where I lived. Some guy went and threw it on the skip. Everything...even my suit...still in its paper from the dry cleaners. I've got nothing left from the 101'ers, not a tape, a poster, even a photograph. Everyone got something out of that group except me. Snakes got a drumkit. Evil got an SG and Dan got a bass amp. I got nothing."

I'd seen Snakes, the drummer, recently and he'd mentioned that he had some tapes of the 101'ers and he planned to put them together as a proper album if he could get Joe's permission.

"He's a fool. If you do it as a proper album, you don't get any money out of it. If you do it as a bootleg, you're rolling in it. That's the truth."

Most bands see bootlegs as rip-offs.

"I dunno. That *White Riot* one in Manchester don't sound as bad as you could expect. You expect it to sound a lot worse than that...When Pearlman came to see us, he was appalled, horrified at the equipment and the result that we achieved."

OUR CHAT went on for another half hour or so. Unfortunately, the unthinkable happened. My batteries had gone flat and I didn't notice till the tape machine stopped running altogether.

Joe was pleased to be left alone so he could get some sleep but, as I was walking away, he couldn't resist leaning out of the window and asking for the name of the *Sounds* editor. Laughing with embarrassment, I told him.

"Right. Tomorrow I'll phone him up and tell him to sack you."

PARIS

THE BAND'S decision to play Paris was almost as sudden as mine to go. They'd cancelled out of the gig weeks before but the promoter had gone ahead regardless and spattered the city with posters announcing the appearance of le Clash. The replacement band, Subway Sect, also managed by Bernie Rhodes, understandably fearing a riot, refused to play it when they realised there'd be six thousand odd Parisians expecting the Clash.

So, with only twenty-four hours notice, the Clash organisation was at a higher pitch of streamlined efficiency than ever. When I arrived at the meeting point – somewhat delayed by the roadie being forty-five minutes late and Topper having to buy salt tablets, hair-spray and vitamin pills – Bernie had just done a runner on the band, taking with him not only the car but all their passports. Paul had irked him by painting his naked portrait on a blank white wall and then drenching him with a hose.

When he returned he explained he'd only gone to get some petrol anyway. Naturally the journey out to Heathrow in the Clash-mobile was rather tense, enlivened only by Paul's incessant practical jokes at Bernie's unwitting expense and Mick pointing out the famed Westway tower-block – "That's where some of our best songs were written" – and the rest of them joining in with gobbledegook choruses of 'London's Burning'.

RUNNING STRICTLY according to Clash schedules, they landed in Paris ten minutes before they were supposed to be onstage. Not that they knew that till after they left the stage. The promoter who met them was so out of it that it took him several attempts to find the car he came in.

"See, that's how you'll end up if you keep on smoking dope", announced Bernie to no-one in particular. The promoter, his eyes surrounded by heavy layers of silver glitter, grinned wildly and had another go at trying to find his car keys.

The gig was the showpiece of the last night of a festival celebrating the tenth anniversary of the French uprising in May 1968. Organised by the largest French Trotskyist organisation, the Ligue Communiste Revolutionaire, it was held in the Hippodrome which is normally used as a circus.

The Subway Sect really needn't have worried about a riot. They would've got it anyway.

Just before the band were about to go on, I wandered out to have a look at the crowd. I only had time to notice that rather a large number of people were wearing crash helmets before a Clash roadie pushed me back to the dressing room with a shout of "Ammonia".

As far as I can make out, there's a French political faction, les Autonomes, who consider all forms of political organisation to be intrinsically bourgeois. So they break up everyone else's meetings. However, as they were heavily outnumbered, they were soon forced out and the rest of the crowd broke into a couple of verses of the Internationale to clear the air and psyche themselves up for a touch of le vrai punk politique.

With the odd bottle still flying at the stage and the sound onstage being about as good as a ten quid tranny's, the show was the Clash at their most disorganised. The high point was Topper and Mick's duet version of 'White Riot' – Paul had dropped his bass and Joe had knocked over his mike and thrown down his guitar in disgust.

What they couldn't understand was why the crowd were threatening another riot if they didn't do an encore. Almost unable to speak for laughing, they told the promoter: "If you can't get 'em to leave, tell 'em we're coming back again."

Only later did they find out that the sound in the hall itself had been excellent and the French hadn't totally lost their senses when they

demanded more. Still, as one of them said: "The way we played tonight, Don Revie...he'd transfer us."

SECOND INTERVIEW

BACK IN THE studio a week later, they're at the stage of putting on the vocals, no-one would find the Parisian haphazardness even slightly amusing and Pearlman and Stasiak have got themselves a new name in tribute to their nightly pursuit of new culinary delicacies – the Glutton Twins.

Only Joe was really needed this night but Topper had dropped round sporting a large 'I'd rather be playing pool' badge and Mick hung around watching TV till he decided he might as well go home to bed. But mostly it was Joe stuck up there in the studio by himself, ploughing through endless takes of 'The English Civil War' ('When Johnny Comes Marching Home').

With a clean handkerchief stuck loosely in his breast pocket and his own little bar of honey-sweetened teas set up in front of him on an amp case, he looked a bit like a seedy and tee-total Bryan Ferry.

When, even with constant soothing with honey, his throat could no longer stand the strain, the session was halted and we started the second interview, again at his squat just off Marylebone Road but this time with a brand new set of batteries.

In the studio, I'd heard some mention of finishing the album in the States.

"That's just bollocks, pie in the sky. It's just that we were gonna go over and do three gigs and we got the cold shoulder. We were told it was a waste of time. We were gonna do the gigs and then mix the album at the place they (the Glutton Twins) know best. I just never even bothered to consider it. I'd like to go over there really strong with a thing like the Anarchy tour – load of groups, a whole evening, a whole spectrum of punk rock."

A way from the record for the moment, you don't play live very often now do you?

"No, we don't really, do we? Of course I was ill. I was only in hospital for a couple of weeks but it took me a long time to realise what was wrong with me. You don't think you've got hepatitis. You just think you feel ill.

"Rocco (who took the photo on the back of the album) said 'Ey, my friend, you looks a little yellow'. And he turned round with this floodlight and my eyeballs were bright yellow and my face was all yellow and I took off my shirt and my body was all yellow.

"I reckon there's an epidemic. Princess Margaret. I mean people like that – what have *they* been up to?

"We've been doing a gig every couple of weeks lately – the Nazi League, Birmingham, Paris. But playing London is a very difficult thing for us. We're trying to get a London date as hard as we can at the moment. It's only two weeks to go...It's just all their prejudices against punk rock.

"The Rainbow said they were going to use us as a dry run. If those three nights went alright, they were going to take out all the seats in January. They never did. I don't think they've even taken one out."

As Paris was the first gig I'd ever travelled to with them, I wondered if they were always so disastrously organised.

"We're always like that. It was so typical, I don't even notice any more. It starts with Bernie and it comes down to us. Bernie lives in another universe to most people. But it's not true we're gonna get rid of him. It's just we're always washing our dirty laundry in public. It's a natural gift that Mick Jones has got. He prefers to have a good fucking argument with an audience. He likes someone to play to...I can dig it."

How about the view of you as a punk Rollers?

"What? That's a new one on me...It's like the Lurkers talking about Strummer and those three other posers he hangs around with. The Lurkers just don't know us at all. But how can they know us? But they certainly have no idea of us if that's what they think. They think they're

doing something new, grovelling around in sweaty places but I've done my share of that and so has everybody.

"If you listen to everybody, you just end up as a fucked up cunt. You've gotta do what you think's right. 'Cos no-one's here when you're writing a song, there's no-one to help you".

Aren't those jibes because you somehow go beyond being a mere group, and for some people become some kind of moral paragons?

"Don't ask me mate. I'm in the group...Do you mean they think we're like the Pope?"

Yes.

"What a lousy job."

How do you feel about being treated as some kind of hero because in the beginning you were saying it was something you wanted to avoid and now you've found yourself trapped.

"The truth is it's very hard to believe it's happened."

Well, for example, Rotten's freaked by it, locks himself away in a house.

"Well, you can't really compare me and him because he went through the whole heavy thing. Suddenly everybody in the world descended on him. He went through something, a lot more pressure, a million tons more. You can't compare."

But do you ever feel that kind of pressure?

"No. I feel pretty good...I don't know anymore. You end up thinking you ain't got no fans really. You only think you've got no fans in between gigs. I've completely forgotten now what it's like to do a gig and I must have done a million. Then, when you see a good group on tele you can get a bit of a feeling. Like when I see Sham, I get a shot of adrenalin' cos I remember what it's like to be onstage just by watching them. But I don't get that off any other group on tele."

But you're certainly more relaxed about things these days, like you no longer lie about your age.

"I thought it was important. When you're about 23, I think you feel worse about it. When you're 25, you don't care. It's 'cos you've gotta say goodbye to being a teenager forever at 22/23. Whereas when you're twenty one, you can still kid yourself."

But changing it from 24 to 22 is such a small difference.

"Do you think I should have taken ten off then I would have been twelve. That's the silliness of it. When you're worried about it, it's a big difference. It's like women. They always used to say in the old days that you should never ask a woman her age...I had a lot to conquer, y'know. Like in the old days, this (plays slow riff on guitar) was banned and it was all this (fast riff) and we've got a bit of this (back to slow riff) on this record".

Another way in which you've changed is the change in emphasis over politics.

"It was like a defence thing. I'm prepared to talk about it more realistically now, I suppose, about us being a political group. It was like the Damned are a fun group (big smile) and the Clash are a political group (big frown). We certainly have a sense of humour, a really highly developed one, amongst ourselves. A lot of things that made us fall about laughing, people took very seriously. Some of the words on that first album...me and Mick laughed till we cried.

"I tell you what it was about the politics. We never thought of what we were doing as political. What all those politicians are up to is what we thought politics was. And when people said we were political, that was what we thought they meant. And we didn't want anything to do with those bastard boring c**nts. Who wants to be labeled with that lot of lying bastards. That's what freaked us out.

"We just thought politics was like the Socialist Workers Party and the Communist Party. And the people you meet from those organisations – I'm not knocking them, maybe they're doing good work – are just deadly boring, really just deadly f**king boring. And we didn't want

people to start thinking we were like *that*. 'Cos we thought they were just creeps."

Some people think Bernie used you as a political mouthpiece.

"That reminds me of once when I was talking to Viv of the Slits and it was the time that Malcolm was doing something with them and we were talking about being Malcolm's puppets. She just said, 'At Least it's better than being Rhodes' puppets'.

"Bernie never told us what to say. He just told us to stop singing songs like 'She's Sitting At The Party'. He said toss that fucking song out of the repertoire, write something else. It was great to meet him. Along comes this guy who says "Think about what you're doing, have something worth taking out there. Don't just shamle out there". And it was great...we don't really have a relationship like that with him anymore...still, everything changes."

But is there still a mutual trading of respect?

"Yeah, on good days. On bad days, there ain't much of anything."

How do you feel now about the treatment of you as a working-class hero? Do you think it was a fair representation?

"Yeah, I do."

Well, you certainly don't come from any poverty-stricken background.

"Yeah, but it's not where you come from. It's where you've been, what you've been through. If you just stood on your own two legs, do it that way, then it don't matter where you come from 'cos you learn all the lessons and you get wise, just 'cos you have to, to survive. Songs like 'White Riot' were written walking along the street in my head...endlessly."

And what about those photos of you in Belfast, posed like you were local guerilla fighters?

"It's funny being in a group. Whenever you go to a city, it's like in and out. It was like that in Belfast. Straight in, soundcheck, zoom round the streets, few shots. I didn't want to do it. It was disrespectful to the people who live there. If you wanna know the truth they say to you 'Well you won't get your picture on the front of *Melody Maker* if you don't do it. Don't you want to get ahead? Do you want to be a small group all your life?' Anybody'd go for that. It's just that your ego takes over."

Talking of ego, how about the name Joe Strummer?

"I thought it out in the Charlie Pig Dog days. That's more defensive paranoia. I could only play chords and at the first two gigs I ever did, there were like ten, twenty people in the room who could play better guitar than me. But I was the only one with a guitar. When you can only hold an A chord, you feel...I felt very inferior about it...playing music...I thought it was something difficult. That's what's so great about punk rock. Almost everybody I know knows how to play something now."

At the first encounter you mentioned that you were listening to a lot of country music. That could mean we'll now have a million country punk bands.

"I refuse to accept that. It's just crazy. I just flit about. I mean I was red hot on cajun for like a month and now my cajun discs are all dusty at Micky Foote's house. And now I just went mad on country music, Joe Ely, people like that. Next week I won't be playing it."

"I only like good music and the country that I listen to is f**king good. And if it's good it ain't gonna harm anyone if they listen to it."

How about the reggae you were into?

"I'm more strong on bluebeat now. There's a point where it stopped being R&B and suddenly became bluebeat and that's the fucking stuff I like. I heard some great stuff like Greek reggae...really, I've got it on tape. I think reggae was in a bit of a rut lately."

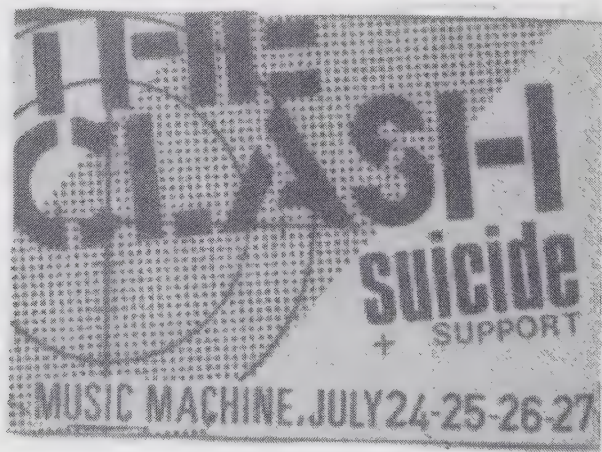
So does that mean the Clash will be doing bluebeat?

"I have written a couple of bluebeat numbers but we haven't had time to work them up yet. We do a great version of 'Israelites'. We do a load of covers for fun at sound-checks. We was thinking of making a record like our sort of *Pin-Ups*.

"We've come up with some great ideas. Like the thought of us doing this or that number is mindboggling. We do a stonking version of 'Train Kept A Rolling', like the Johnny Burnette Trio. We also do a great version of 'Your Rockin' Mamma' by Carl Mann. I saw him when he came over, really one of the best gigs I've ever seen. It starts off with a waltz but I'm sure that ain't right – I only heard him do it onstage."

AFTER HE'S had a piss out of the window, I said that made it sound like the Clash were a concept. Some people see them as the concept coming first and then everything being fitted into it. "No. First and foremost, it was always a group. Our main concept was that everyone should move. All action, no fucking lazing about. No-one riding on anyone's back. Everyone working full-tilt. It's much better to have a group working full-tilt. It's a real group."

Like the Clash.



The Clash: Clash On Tour

By Chris Salewicz, *NME*, July 15 1978

It's as if The Clash's 'Police And Thieves' stage backdrop has suddenly transmogrified into moving 3-D.

The scene: the cobbled street down the side of the Glasgow Apollo. Round about midnight.

The dramatis personae: The Clash, fifty to sixty Clash fans, Clash drivers and security guys, an indeterminate number of members of the Glasgow constabulary.

The sound:

C-R-U-N-C-H!!!

There it goes again: Paul Simonon, impeccably street-cool despite the Johnsons royal-blue shot-silk suit and Scotch House scarlet cashmere sweater, sinking down on his DMs onto the damp cobbles in a perfect staccato frozen-frame sequence as the back of his neck becomes the object of a manic, self-brutalising, truncheon-waving charge by an anorak-clad plainclothes Glasgow cop.

It's a disgusting incident. Highly emotive, riddled with flashes and waves of fear and terror and shock.

There's a whole pattern of ironies binding this little scenario together: the Apollo bouncers, the police, even some of the kids outside the back of the theatre, all hating The Clash because The Clash threaten the basic status quo on which their hatred has been erected. As the plainclothes cops suddenly emerge, chain-weighted truncheons in hand, from the shadows, they stir up eerie images of battles between the forces of good and evil.

BACKSTAGE BEFORE the Apollo gig, a Glaswegian punk is haranguing Simonon. "You still doin' all that politics stuff? That's not music."

"It's not politics," Simonon replies, taking a hit from a bottle of Smirnoff vodka. "It's just the difference between right and wrong."

"Yeah. But a lot of punks don't understand the politics. They're just here for the music."

"Well," Simonon shakes his head, "I don't understand it either. I just know what's right and wrong. Like closing this place – that's wrong."

There's something horribly appropriate in The Clash being the last rock band ever to play the Glasgow Apollo – always (in) famous for having some of the best rock audiences and the most psychotic bouncers in the UK – before it's turned into a bingo hall.

More than any other band, The Clash really do *care* – no, not care, *love* – their audiences. And, by extension, their fellow-men, though maybe that's another matter.

Anyway, the bouncers, apparently, have long been standing by for this night.

Tonight's the night, Jimmy, when they get their own back on the kids. "Here!" One of them proudly pulls up his vest to show the band's 'personal', Steve English. "This scar's from the David Bowie show. And this one's from The Faces. And this" (he shows a thick welt across his belly) "is from the last time The Clash played here."

The instant the band hit the stage it's like the Apocalypse is upon us and performing live in the stalls. Pogoing kids being dragged to the back of the hall and having the shit kicked out of them...Pogoing kids having the shit kicked out of them in front of the stage..."I'M SICK OF BLOOD. I'M SICK OF FUCKIN' BLOOD." Joe Strummer backs off from the mike and shakes his head to himself after pleading with the bouncers and kids to stop attempting to dismember each other.

They do stop. A little bit. But there are still obscene sights like a bouncer with shoulder-length hair diving head-first off the front of the orchestra pit onto the heads of the audience...

As he's coming off the stage, one of the bouncers is waiting in the wings for Joe. Whisky-breathed, he leers six inches away from Strummer's face: "Ah'm gonna have y-e-e-ew."

The word is that the bouncers are intending to come up to the dressing-room to tear the band apart limb from limb. They are detained, however, by a young lady whom the theatre management have thoughtfully hired to stand on the stage and remove here clothes and do clever tricks with bottles.

Meanwhile, the band, Strummer with a bottle of lemonade in his right hand, head for the car that's parked just a few yards away from the stage-door.

As soon as they're out the door Joe is screamed at by kids who's been kicked out of the theatre by bouncers. "Why'd you no' do anything to help us?" berates a guy who was beaten on and kicked out for pogoing during the first number. "Ye're jes' big egoed pop stars," snarls another.

Strummer, who'd been in tears after the gig over the way the fans had been treated, swears back and exasperatedly flings his bottle of lemonade onto the road. Instantly his arms are grabbed by two uniformed cops who've appeared from nowhere. As he's dragged out into the road, both uniformed and plainclothes cops appear to emerge from every crack in the pavement.

Simonon moves into attempt to drag Strummer free...which is where you came in.

Topper Headon is chased up the road and manages to slip away and get back up into the dressing-room where Bernie Rhodes, the band's manager, is entertaining an American promoter who maintains he's never seen *anything* like the scenes he's just witnessed inside the theatre.

Mick Jones is dragged away in a state of total shock by some fans, who smuggle him through the prowl-car filled streets and back to the band's hotel...

STRUMMER, ONE of his brothel creeper laces replaced with a guitar string, and Simonon spend the night in the cells. "The people inside," says Strummer later, "the people up for drinking and nicking, they really treated us great. Giving us dog-ends and stuff."

A certain new wave spirit is maintained by the arrested punk fans spending much of the night singing chorus after chorus of 'The Prisoner', the B-side of '(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais'.

Contrary to the fears of those waiting for the pair back at the hotel, neither Joe nor the bassist have too rough a time of it down the police station – although as Joe points out, "Just as we were leaving for the last time one of the cops on the door said to the one in charge of us, 'How come you didn't beat them up? Are you reformed or something?'"

"So I suppose they could've done that. But it never really seemed on the cards."

The magistrates court where the pair appear the next morning – both are on breach of the peace charges, with Simonon also charged with something like "attempting to free a prisoner" – reeks of austere, tiled Scottish Calvinism.

After a whole troop of casualties – crippled eighty-year-old drunks, 18-year-old hookers – have been led before the magistrate for him to sharpen his wit on, Strummer, appearing under his real name of Joseph Mellors, is called.

So authentic is Strummer's quite classic Brando slouch – head to one side, left lower lip hanging open, hands thrust deep in the pockets of his semi-drape jacket – that the real Gorbals heavies on the front bench of the visitors gallery turn round and nudge each other respectfully.

"Do you understand the charge against you?" demands the clerk of the court.

"Yeah," snarls Joe.

"Yeah what?" interrupts the magistrates.

"Yeah, sir," Joe snaps back sullenly.

"What is the name of your group?" enquires the magistrate.

"Vuh Clash," Joe enunciates proudly.

"How appropriate," titters the magistrate, just like he's seen them do it in court-room scenes at the movies, too.

Both Strummer and Simonon, whose appearance is something of a replay of Joe's, plead guilty. (Hey Joe, how come Paul pleaded guilty when he was quite obviously innocent? "Cos I told him to. So we could get on to Aberdeen".)

Joe is fined £25, whilst Paul, who must be especially punished for going to the assistance of a friend, has to cough up £45.

As each leaves the court to pay their fines, the hard man poses are dropped and first Joe, then Paul, beams the kind of broad smirk that the bad kids in class always used to have on tap for walking back to their desks after they'd just been slipped in front of the whole form.

In the street outside the court Strummer turns to Simonon and grins: "Maybe it was a mistake calling this tour 'Clash On Parole'."

ALTHOUGH HE BELIEVES himself to have "trouble with words" and had equal difficulty adding up, Clash bassist Paul Simonon is actually far more articulate than the average rock musician.

Like guitarist and group founder Mick Jones, Simonon spent the early years of his childhood in Brixton, South London. Also like Jones, the bassist is the product of a broken marriage – although both would appear to present strong arguments for the single parent family.

In fact, Simonon tells me, it was because his father was always looking for some place to dump him for a few days that Paul became interested in art.

Sent out to stay with a painter friend of his dad's in East Acton when he was about seven, Paul waited until the artist had gone out one day and

then sat down with a book of paintings by Matisse and copied them all out in pencil. "After a while," he tells me, "you find you can like draw a woman with just one flowing line."

Sitting in his Earls Court flat following a secret pre-tour warm-up gig in Fulham, Simonon recalls how he first came to join the band.

Mick Jones and Generation X bassist Tony James were attempting to get the London SS out of the rehearsal studio and onto some kind of stage, when Simonon turned up one day from the exclusive Byam Shaw art school in Holland Park, to which he had a scholarship, and, as a perfect David Bowie lookalike, auditioned for the role of lead singer by singing the words "I'm a roadrunner, I'm a roadrunner" over and over for ten minutes until he was requested to stop.

Later, Jones looked him up again and told him that if he wanted to be the bass player in a new group he was forming then he (Jones) would teach him.

Since taking up the bass and joining The Clash, Simonon feels his drawing and painting have suffered. "But then," he says, pouring me out a cup of tea, "I'm getting better on the bass all the time. I just want to transfer that simplicity from drawing and painting to bass-playing; to say an incredible amount with just one flowing line of notes just like Leonardo used to paint."

Leonardo Da Vinci, in fact, is one of Paul Simonon's major influences. All he wanted to do when he went to the Byam Shaw was to learn how to draw cars and tower-blocks "in the style of Leonardo". Going into the bed-room of his flat to get me a Clash tour poster, he shows me one of his paintings, a stark, sinister car dump with (almost a Clash cliché) the Westway as background.

Simonon learnt his bass technique by playing along with The Ramones, the Pistols and reggae records. Although a skinhead in his early teens, he claims he never actually got into their field sport of Pakki-bashing, though he didn't blanch at going thieving down Pakistani supermarkets.

West Indians, though, were viewed very differently. "When I was at school in South London I used to always want to be mates with the

hardest kids in school. So I could get to figure 'em out. And most of those guys tended to be black.

"Anyway, I used to hate all that Deep Purple and Hawkwind stuff and just listened to reggae 'cos I was a skinhead. Those reggae records really used to say a lot to me. Some of them really meant quite a lot."

As an English bassist who doesn't stick himself away back by the amps but chooses instead to move and dance about by the mike, Simonon is something of an iconoclast. And that's just for starters: "I want to be able to stick the bass behind my neck and play it like Jimi Hendrix played the guitar. Really elevate its status. Show people all the possibilities that it has in its simplicity."

He puts a Rothmans between his lips, flicks his Zippo lighter but holds it, flaming, in front of him without lighting the cigarette. "The last couple of years," he muses, "have been like being born again."

"Although I did always believe in doing the best in everything that I did...Even if it was only carrying carpets."

AH YES, THAT CLASH Pursuit Of Excellence that is the prime reason for my being at Simonon's...

Simonon, in fact, is about to play me the rough tapes of some of the new material The Clash have recorded for their next LP, the record for which the group have been in the studios laying down tracks since last summer.

After the slightly abortive alliance with Lee Perry – apparently whilst they wanted Scratch to give them a reggae production, the Upsetter himself was anxious to learn how to get a 'punk' sound – the band spent some months working on their own, though mainly only in the rehearsal studio, until the sudden appearance at the beginning of this year of one Sandy Pearlman, Witchfinder General for Blue Oyster Cult.

The introduction of the American Pearlman into the Clash camp can be seen as just one pointer to the fact that The Clash have now indubitably transcended 'punk' – in its musical rather than social definition – and become A Rock Band.

Not just any rock band, mind you. Indeed, it is probable that right now The Clash are the finest rock band in the world. The hassles of the past year – finding the right record producer, the constant frictions between the band and record company and, it appears, with their management too, plus Joe Strummer's hepatitis bout in the early months of this year and the band's regular run-ins with the law – all these troubles appear to have enriched the band with new inner strength and righteous power.

Whatever, it's fitting that the band should have cut a track entitled 'Last Gang In Town' – because that really does seem to be how The Clash see themselves. "We're the only one left," Mick Jones tells me, though he'll later qualify that by offering a fairly substantial list of other outfits who are trying to remain true to what he sees as the essential spirit of rock'n'roll.

Being on tour with The Clash, though, you do gradually begin to see the band as they seem to see themselves – or certainly as Jones and Strummer view it: like Peckinpah's vision of the Western outlaw in *The Wild Bunch*, the loners whose high moral sense is one of the last relics of another time.

Except that in The Clash's case they are not anachronisms but the forerunners of better times. The advance guards, the emissaries of the New Age when Babylon's flaky hold on rock music (and on life) will finally fall...

THE CLASH now appear to be approaching the future from firm foundations.

Although none of them has been as big a hit as it should have been, The Clash have put out a trio of classic singles in the subversive 'Complete Control', their very own group anthem in 'Clash City Rockers' and now the near epic 'ballad' '(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais', probably the best single of 1978 so far.

Of course, had 'Capital Radio' had an official release you could have chalked that up as *four* classic singles...but the band decided to give it away free instead. Still, Jah was probably quite happy about that.

Besides, 'Capital Radio', along with 'Complete Control', is being included on the U.S. release of the band's first LP. American CBS are finally beginning to wise up and, though it seems unlikely that anyone there fully understands what they're dealing with, they do at least see that The Clash are capable of earning them a large amount of money.

Listen, there is a lot of magic going on in the rough tapes Simonon plays me. All the indications are that when The Clash do finally release their second album it will be a rock music landmark.

Particularly notable are: 'Safe European Home'. Written after Strummer and Jones returned to England from their trip to Jamaica shortly before Christmas of last year. Originally the lyrics were some fifty lines long, now shortened to twenty. (Much of the material the band have recorded was written, Incidentally, whilst the pair were tucked away in their room at the Pegasus Hotel, Kingston, a matter to which we will return later. Topper Headon, incidentally, claims that they didn't just do a *bit* of writing whilst out in JA, but that the band's songwriting duo actually turned out some two and a half albums' worth of tunes.)

'Guns On The Roof'. The first Clash number to be co-authored by al the band. Details the Simonon/Headon pigeon-shooting incident, of which both Mick Jones and I heartily disapprove.

'Stay Free'. A Mott The Hoople-like anthem written and sung entirely by Jones, about the gang he was in at school. A great, stirring number that could be a Top Five single hit were it not for the number of four-letter words.

'Tommy Gun'. An uptempo rocker, as they were once described, that is fast becoming an onstage fave. None of the lyrics seem decipherable.

Other titles? 'Julie's In The Drug Squad', 'Groovy Times Are Here Again', 'Scrawl On The Bathroom', 'One Emotion' and the very excellent 'Cheapskates'.

It should not necessarily be assumed that any of these songs will be on the album, however.

JOURNEYING UP TO Glasgow from the Manchester gigs – in addition to the scheduled Sunday theatre date, The Clash also played a 'secret' gig at Rafters Club the following day – Mick Jones and I have the choice of either a very cramped car or the wonder of British Rail Intercity.

As Jah has specially delayed the Royal Scot by nearly two hours, we pick it up at Preston three minutes after disembarking from the commuter train that brought us from Manchester.

This ensures that we arrive at the hotel in Glasgow at *exactly* the same minute as the rest of the band, thereby dismissing manager Bernie Rhodes' taunt that Jones was only travelling this way to be 'flash', and that he would inevitably cause that evening's show to be delayed.

The group founder, Jones, like Simonon and Strummer, is a product of the English art school system.

While the rhythm section, and particularly the bassist, provide the truly primal punk aspects of The Clash, the central core of the group's being appears to emanate from Jones, with Strummer operating as an external expression of that soul. (It is interesting to note that although Strummer and Simonon are both fire signs – Leo and Sagittarius respectively – both Jones and Headon are Cancers, a water sign. Though logically one might expect the water to cancel out the fire, it seems reasonable to surmise that that indefinable warm tension within The Clash is a direct result of this astrological chemistry.)

Settling back in the empty dining-car which we've found, Jones crushes an empty Coke can in his right hand and soliloquises on his craft. "Rock'n'roll really is an art form – the most immediate there is, the most vital in terms of reaching out to the masses.

"But maybe one day if this all becomes dissatisfying I might go back to painting. Though it's one of the most introverted existences there is.

"Every morning when you get up and go and look at what you've done the previous day, in those moments you almost have to examine every aspect of your life. And if you're a painter – or an artist of any sort, come to that – then it's a full-time existence.

"I've no patience with people who claim to be artists and then just talk about it. Just get on with it: whatever you're doing."

Sandy Pearlman, Jones tells me, just appeared to "arrive" one day. "There's definitely some inner magic circle – whether conscious or otherwise – within rock'n'roll. We've encountered it enough times already to be certain of that. People seem to have been *sent* to see us, to tell us we're on the right path, to tell us to keep it up.

"I think Pearlman definitely saw in us all the possibilities of that *black* side of rock'n'roll. He immediately seemed to see in us another possibility for what he really wanted to do with the Blue Oyster Cult. He knows the Cult don't really do it. And he knows we know it, too."

Working with Pearlman began to appear something like the Grand Quest. Which it was/is as far as the U.S. division of CBS is concerned: The Quest For A Hit Album.

As the producer has laboured in Island's Basing Street studio until six every morning, making the band go through as many as twenty takes of each track, executives from CBS in New York have flown in to check out the progress. As the tapes have been played back to these upwardly mobile young men, it has sometimes been necessary for all four members of The Clash to be present in order to have enough people coughing and dropping books on the floor when particularly subversive or obscene lyrics came through the speakers.

Towards the end of the sessions, Pearlman became increasingly anxious over leaving what it seems he had begun to regard as Sandy's Perfect Studio Album in the hands of the band for the final mixing – particularly as they'd already been bitching about the cleanliness of the sound and expressing a desire to murk it up somewhat.

Matters reached something of a head shortly before Pearlman flew back to the States just prior to the tour. At a Blue Oyster Cult party thrown by CBS, Topper Headon placed a large cake on the head of the wife of Blue Oyster Cult's "gnome guitarist" Buck Dharma. Unfortunately the cake somehow slipped and splattered all over the good lady's head, with the result that several Cult roadies were on the brink of tearing Topper to pieces.

Not so Pearlman, however. *He* knew who was the *real* culprit. "He turned to me and said, 'You put the eye on him, didn't you? You made him do that, didn't you?'" grins a somewhat bemused Mick Jones.

THE ROCK AGAINST Racism festival in Hackney once again appeared to put The Clash in a position of conflict with other bands.

"We said we didn't *want* to top that bill." Jones shakes his head. "We just wanted to be part of it.

"And then backstage there were all these numbers going down with Tom Robinson's management – and someone turned the power down on us and made sure the PA wasn't working properly.

"But," he nods with a smile, "when we went onstage the sun started shining, so obviously the forces must have been with us.

"However, there are so many groups who do treat their fans as if they're complete rubbish. I can't think of many groups at all who really still care.

"Who is there? Well, we haven't given up. Neither have The Slits either. Nor Generation X. I certainly don't think John Rotten's given up...Nor Jimmy Pursey...Actually, I don't think Keith Richard ever gave up really. Mick Jagger certainly did, though."

We talk for a few minutes about the new material. Joe had told me that the anthem-like new number, 'Stay Free', was about a friend of Jones' whom I'd met on several occasions in his role as dilettante journalist.

"It's not just about him," the guitarist says. "It's about all my gang in Brixton. That guy's the lucky one – he's escaped.

"Two of the others both work in butchers' shops and are in the National Front. Twenty-three and they're in the Front.

"I don't not talk to them because of that, though. I go and see them. Show them what *I've* done. Show them the possibilities.

"You know," he free-associates, "it seems to me there are only three types of possible relationships: master-pupil, or pupil-master, or – and this is the really rare one that I've had about twice – a one-to-one relationship where you both help each other. That's the one to quest for, isn't it?"

"Actually, I've been reading a lot about orgone energy lately. I've suddenly started realising that all of these bands who're into pulling loads of girls backstage obviously can't be fulfilling their full potential when they're performing.

"Mind you," he admits, "all of this band are a right bunch of studs. I was the only one who slept on his own last night.

"But we *do* try and treat them with respect. In some ways we're probably the first group to ever do that. And it's quite difficult: making them realise that you really *are* a human being is something of a necessary strain in the job. It's quite understandable, though. When I first met musicians I never saw them as just people.

"But I think a lot of people are keeping their eyes on us. Waiting for it to crack. So it can't, of course.

"Listen, somewhere we played the other day there was some girl showing us the bruises this other band had given her.

"I mean, where's that at?"

ALMOST EXACTLY twelve hours later Mick and I are sitting in his room at the Albany Hotel in Glasgow, drinking whisky and smoking and recovering from the police aggro that's ensured neither Joe nor Paul will be using their rooms tonight.

Mick, who has been unfairly criticised for being a poseur by people who don't seem to understand that a certain dedication to looking sharp and stylish has always been an integral aspect of rock 'n' rolling, demonstrates a vision all too rare among rock 'n' rollers.

"You know when Joe was going over the top a bit in the dressing room tonight?" he asks through tight lips. "Well, the first reason that he could

offer for those kids getting hurt in the Apollo was that it was all because of his giant ego, all because of his obsessive need to appear onstage.

"Except that it's not that at all. Totally the reverse, in fact.

"I sometimes really do wonder if someone hasn't set out to get us.

"But then, everytime you start thinking that maybe the answer is not to play at all, I start noticing all these strange things which we can't put down to just coincidence. Like the train today, or talking about that guy from *Melody Maker* and then he walks through the door.

"Coincidence, maybe. But there's too many of them. It really does seem sometimes like there's someone out there caring for us.

"Joe understands all that, too. That's why it really is something of a strain sometimes. Like living out your destiny everyday."

IN EIGHT DAYS I see The Clash play six gigs – two of them, in Fulham and at Rafters in Manchester, totally unscheduled and slotted in the day before the gig because the band found they had the time and the facilities to play.

The Rafters gig is notable not only for not being sold out ("Not only is it a return to playing club dates, but a return to playing club dates that aren't even sold out – makes sure you keep your perspective," says Jones), but also for a certain drama involving Topper Headon and a girl – a situation that puts him in a position where he is forced to decide between his emotions and his loyalties to the group.

"He's beginning to understand the full extent of his responsibilities," says Mick Jones as, fortified by half a bottle of vodka, the drummer tapes up the hideous blisters on his hands that drumming on the tour has already caused him and drags himself out onto the stage.

Replacing Terry Chimes after the first L.P had been completed, Headon joined The Clash just in time for the White Riot tour in the spring of last year, A karate freak – in Manchester Strummer spends his last sixteen quid in the HMV shop on a Bruce Lee import that he knows

Topper ought to have – his musical pedigree includes having played with Pat Travers.

He now seems a totally integrated member of the band.

The vibe at the Clash theatre dates is akin to what it once seemed only The Faces were capable of attaining – a warm, positive empathy between performer and audience in which no one person's contribution is any more or any less vital than anyone else's. Except that The Faces only attained that level on about one in every ten gigs – and beneath that superficial empathy there always seemed to exist a subtly disguised contempt for their audience.

The Clash get up there every night.

Moreover, their sound, which in the past has frequently been *erratic* to say the very least, has now been sorted out to an extent where you know this is a big league rock band you're witnessing and not some mere experiment in anarchic creative situations.

The set is about 50/50 old and new material – which, considering the paradoxically reactionary nature already evident in certain of the hardcore punk fans, is brave indeed.

And almost always it works.

After the first number – which I *think* is generally 'Complete Control', although that might be complete mental aberration – you get (not necessarily in this order) 'Tommy Gun', 'Bang Bang' (featuring Mick Jones' Ron Wood-like runs across the stage), 'Capital Radio', the splendid 'Stay Free', a 'Police And Thieves' that frequently segues into a verse of 'Blitzkrieg Bop', plus the one that really seems to confuse them, 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home'. The Clash also play 'Cheapskates' and 'London's Burning' and 'White Riot' (generally as the encore) and 'Janie Jones' and 'Clash City Rockers' and, of course, the superb '(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais'. Plus several others that I've temporarily forgotten.

It's no wonder really that the kids at the front always seem into trashing the hall. The chemical fusion onstage is producing near-nuclear

possibilities. After all, all influences duly considered, The Clash really do produce the best, the warmest, the most involving, the most enjoyable rock'n'roll shows I've ever seen.

Indeed, there were even rash moments during the quite magnificent Aberdeen gig when I start hallucinating that The Clash really were the '70s Beatles.

ON THE WAY BACK to the Piccadilly Hotel in Manchester after Jones and Strummer had been out scoring some sounds – Jones had bought cassettes of Peter Tosh's *Legalise It*, Al Green's *Let's Stay Together*, Neil Young's *On The Beach* and Randy Newman's *Little Criminals* – we pass a piece of Manchester United graffiti which, via an intelligent usage of paint, has transmuted into MU...NF.

"About the best piece of art-work they'll ever manage," snarls Strummer sibilantly through the gap in his front teeth.

A couple of hours later Mick Jones, Mary (the fan-club secretary, who's distraught at having only been given £15 by the Clash's management to form the band's appreciation society), and I are sitting up in Joe's room watching a highly emotive *World In Action* expose on the puerile macho fantasies of the Front, when a slightly tense version of the Strummer hip rockabilly gunslinger strolls in.

He stands scowling at the programme for maybe two or three minutes.

"Did you talk to Bernie about all these problems with the fan-club?" enquires Jones, as Mary disappears into the bathroom.

In a sudden spasm of rage, Joe takes a penalty kick at the wastepaper basket, a cassette just misses my head, and the band's onstage frontman storms out, followed shortly after by Jones who cools him down and discovers that the reason Joe's uptight is because he's been told he's going to have problems getting kids in to the Rafters gig for nothing.

As a matter of fact, this Strummer incident is somewhat atypical – although, in typical Leonine manner, he goes over the top a couple of times more in the next few days. In the Glasgow Apollo dressing-room he grabs by the throat a fan who is berating him for not having done

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more to stop the bouncers (this is perhaps a salutary lesson for the fan: later it is he who leads Mick Jones through the streets away from the police). But the days when those close to the band would tell you that "the real problem in The Clash is Joe Strummer", the days when Joe would be found lying drunk in the gutter outside Dingwalls with rain-water washing into his mouth, now seem to be over.

The occasional losses of control on the road are purely due to The Pressure, mon.

In the past, though, as Joe himself admits, they were down to "the demon drink" – a problem which was solved when his bout of hepatitis earlier in the year obliged him to lay off the booze altogether for the next six months if he didn't want a permanently weakened liver.

"It doesn't half make you lose your friends, though, not going down the pub," he laughs. He also vigorously denies that the hepatitis was due to any ingestion of impure stimulating powders. Cocaine he considers to be "complete muck. If you snort coke you're in on your own. You don't *want* anybody and you don't *need* anybody. Which is a *horrible* place to be."

Joe has a very powerful aura about him

Onstage, he *never* smiles. This hard man stage persona, like the pre-hepatitis love of booze, may well be an extension of the belligerent Scotsman within him. His mother is Scottish and he claims that the sound of bagpipes renders him most emotional. (Jones, incidentally, is also a half-Celt – his mother is Welsh whilst his father is Jewish.)

He is also, as are all The Clash, a very sensitive and perceptive bloke, though not necessarily a near-intellectual in the same way that Jones certainly is.

When he was about 18 (he's 25 now) and just getting set to leave the minor public school in Epsom to which his parents had sent him (and where they told him he wasn't "university material", which is how he ended up going to Central Art School in London for a year before deciding it was a waste of time), Joe's brother committed suicide.

Although he comments no further than that "it happened at a pretty crucial time in my life," it seems certain that this event had a significant bearing in creating Joe Strummer, ally of the powers of positivism and light.

His brother, 18 months older than Joe, was a member of the National Front and was obsessed with the occult. In every way he seems to have been Joe's opposite. "He was such a nervous guy that he couldn't bring himself to talk at all. Couldn't speak to anyone.

"In fact, I think him committing suicide was a really brave thing to do. For him, certainly. Even though it was a total cop-out."

HE LEANS BACK on the bed-head in his Aberdeen hotel room. It's two in the morning and we're both pretty done in. All the time, he tells me, underlining what Mick had said earlier in the day, he keeps getting signs – whether in the form of actual emissaries or less tangible incidents – that he, and this band, are on the right path.

"I go in for that mumbo-jumbo a lot myself," he smiles. "Like, when me and Mick went to Jamaica I was quite convinced we were going to die. At Heathrow someone dropped this ketchup all over the floor in front of us – and then we get there and we're driving through Trenchtown and I glance up at this wall and just see this one word: BLOOD.

"Mind you, nothing happened at all like that, and when I got back I thought, 'What a lot of time I wasted worrying'."

Jamaica, mind you, was not a particularly pleasant experience for the pair, who went over to JA kitted out as hard-line punks. Instead of welcoming them, black Jamaicans were calling them "white pigs" in the street. Unable to find *anyone* connected with the music scene – they spent their last Jamaican dollars on an abortive cab ride looking for Lee Perry's place – they stuck themselves away in their hotel rooms with a load of ganja and got down to writing songs.

Didn't they think they might look somewhat provocative?

"Sure," Strummer smirks. "We fuckin' went out on the streets dressed

to the nines. We thought we'd show 'em where it was at." He laughs. "Cos they all like looking sharp, too.

"Boy, we got some funny looks. Sometimes when it got a bit heavy we'd pass ourselves off as merchant seamen."

Of course, one of the contradictions within The Clash is that all the warmth and positivism are hemmed in by overtly aggressive imagery – and here I'm thinking of the "White Man" gun logo, the militaristic stage backdrops, even the song titles: 'Tommy Gun', 'Guns On The Roof'...

"It keeps coming up, doesn't it?" Strummer nods. "I think it's just a reflection of what's out there. I really do think we *are* a good force, but we're dealing with the world and those images are just a reflection of what it is."

Strummer first recalls singing 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home' as a kid in singing lessons at school. Rather than being about the American Civil War, as is the original, The Clash's version is subtitled "The English Civil War".

"It's already started," says Joe matter-of-factly. "Sure it has. There's people attacking Bengalis with clubs and firing shotguns in Wolverhampton..."

"What really gets me is it's *so-o-o* respectable to be right-wing. All those big geezers in the Monday Club will probably switch over to the Front if they start making any headway. That's what happened in Germany – they turned round and said, 'Oh yeah, I've been a Nazi all along, mate.'

"It's a pity when the skins go out on the rampage, that they don't go down the House of Commons and smash *that* place up.

"Any time there's any urban disturbances they always occur on the poor areas of town. Why don't they happen in the rich areas? More things would get smashed up if they did.

"If it's in London it's always in either the East End or in Notting Hill. Or it's in Belfast or in Londonderry – they're like bomb-sites, the slums out there.

"You know, I was in Notting Hill the other day and I was walking along and I saw that all of Tavistock Crescent is gone. And they used to seem to really know how to build houses fit for human beings to live in in those days.

"I mean, round by Westbourne Park Road these real egg-boxes have suddenly sprung up from behind the corrugated iron. Which is just brutal. I'd like to blow the head off the guy who designed those – or, better still, force him to live in it."

DESPITE HIS serious intent, Strummer agrees that many Clash listeners seem to miss out on the humour in their lyrics. I tell him that there are certain tracks on the first album that make me burst out laughing everytime I hear them.

"Yeah," he smiles. "I think some of it's really hysterical stuff. *We all* used to burst out laughing too, when we first started playing them..."

Mick Jones has told me that he finds it a strain when people try to look on the band as evangelists...

"Yeah, that's a bore. Just a load of old crap. I think you've always just got to be grateful for what you've achieved and then just try and achieve some more."

But why do you think you've got to that position where people think The Clash have The Answer?

"We give 'em good stuff. That's all. There aren't that many other groups around doing it. Sham's doin' it. So's The Slits and Siouxsie."

So look: it's nearly two years on from when the band first started. How does it feel now?

"I could've told you the answer without hearing the question. *We're a good group*. That's the only answer.

"And when you're in a good group you feel good."

Clash: Manifesto of Punk

Robert Hilburn, *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1978

Rock bands like to talk about their independence and integrity, but most are as concerned with what'll sell as the people who put together TV sitcoms.

When the punk movement captured headlines last year in England, dozens of young hopefuls stopped trying to model themselves after old-liners Yes and Jethro Tull and leaped onto the new bandwagon.

The rush to punk, however, was derailed in January when U.S. audiences rejected Britain's Sex Pistols, the most colorful and best publicized punk outfit.

Record companies have continued to put out a few punk LPs, but their hearts haven't been in it. Promotion has been spotty and radio airplay even worse. The labels realized conservative U.S. audiences didn't want any part of the safety pin ethic.

Bands, too, have begun running for cover. Many of the aggressive, hard-core punk units have adopted new battle slogans - power pop or new wave - and softened their stance. Punk is now a commercial liability. No one wants to be associated with it. Except the Clash.

"We're a punk rock band," boasts the Clash's Mick Jones. "We're true to the spirit of '76 (in England). When other bands saw what was happening, they thought punk was going to be the next 'big thing.' So they wanted in.

"Most of them were crap. They were just trying to cash in on what a few good people had started. But then the Pistols came over here and kinda flunked, so the rush to punk has skidded to a stop. The bands are rushing off somewhere else. Good riddance. We'll carry on. In a year, those other bands will be crawling back."

Mick Jones has the sullen, mistrusting aura, on first meeting, that makes him ideal for a role in a film about punk rock. Sitting on the floor of a second-rate West Hollywood motel, he looks as if hasn't slept

in days. He's stringing his guitar and he's not sure initially whether to be outspoken or tongue-in-cheek in the interview.

Asked if he's pleased with the new album the band has been recording in San Francisco, he says:

"Yes, we're as happy as pigs in ..."

Gradually, Jones loosens up. True to the punk persona, he's got strong opinions. Like the Pistols' Johnny Rotten, he tends to exaggerate for effect, but over the course of an hour, his conversation becomes more natural, revealing him as a witty, provocative observer of the rock scene.

After the Pistols, the Clash is the most acclaimed of the British punk bands. Some critics there even place Jones and crew above the Pistols. But the foursome has received far less publicity in this country than Rotten's band. The Clash hasn't toured here and its first LP wasn't released in the United States.

CBS, which owns the rights to the album, hasn't explained officially why it hasn't released the album, but the company reportedly felt the sound quality and production of the LP were too primitive to make it competitive commercially.

Sandy Perlman, best known for his work with best-selling Blue Oyster Cult, is producing the Clash's second album in San Francisco. The speculation is that CBS insisted the band work with a name producer this time. Jones is vague on the matter, but he acknowledges the band was uncertain at first about the move.

"We had some reservations," Jones explains. "We didn't know if we wanted anyone else in the studio with us. A producer's just a translator. They're people with paid ears - wallet ears. They'll listen to what you have and they try to find a way to make sure it sells. But Perlman's cool. I can learn from him. But if CBS is hoping he's going to compromise our sound, they're going to be surprised."

Guitarist-singer Jones, 22, is joined in the Clash by singer-guitarist Joe Strummer, bassist Paul Simonon and drummer Nicky Headon. The

band (with different personnel) was formed in the summer of 1976, six months after the Pistols arrived on the London scene.

Of the foursome, only Strummer came from a group that was even remotely known around town. He was in the 101ers, which had recorded a fairly conventional rock ballad ("Heys to Your Heart") for Chiswick.

After seeing the Pistols live, Strummer wanted a change. He was attracted by that band's more urgent, aggressive, relevant style. "(The Pistols) just knocked my head off," he once said. "It was the music of now."

True to the punk guidelines, the Clash's first album contained short, high-speed songs and a belief that ideas in music are more important than technical proficiency. The themes struck out at oppressive social conditions and apathy.

The music isn't as commanding on record as the Pistols, but it has a broader melodic bass and more varied arrangements. Despite fiery titles like "White Riot," "Hate & War" and "I'm So Bored with the U.S.A.," the songs - Jones feels - are positive.

"That's the difference between us and the Pistols," he says. "I think we're more optimistic. The Pistols said there was no future and we say there is a future. But I've got great respect for the Pistols. They're my favorite group. People tried to make out there was a feud between us, but that's rubbish. The clever thing for me to do now would be to attack the Pistols. That would make us popular with some people over here, but the Pistols were great."

While not shying away from the punk tag, Jones does feel there has been too much emphasis in England on the Clash as a *political* band.

"I am interested in politics," he says. "I could reel off a lot of cliches about the political conditions in England, but we write about a lot of things. We're not just interested in one or two subjects. I write about anything that interests me."

"The thing that interests me most is the power and excitement of rock 'n' roll, what it can do to people. I saw Mott the Hoople years ago and I'll never forget the frenzy in the room. People were going crazy. I knew then I wanted to be a rocker.

"It showed me the impact the music can have on people. I thought about it for weeks afterward. It was a difficult time in my life. The music was one of the only things I had to hold onto. By the time I was old enough to be in a band, however, that frenzy and emotion was gone. People were listening to bands that my grandmother listens to. Then a bunch of bands came along and tries to revive that old energy. That's what the spirit of '76 was all about in England."

The United States gets its first sample of the Clash this fall. The band's new album is due in November and a brief tour is planned. CBS even is considering finally releasing the original Clash LP.

Given this country's conservative reaction to the Pistols, the Clash's commercial future here is highly questionable. The same arguments hurled at the exhilarating Pistols are likely to resurface against the Clash: the themes are too English, the music is too primitive, the stance is too crude.

Jones, who sampled U.S. rock tastes while recording the new album, doesn't underestimate the challenge ahead.

"I thought rock audiences in England were apathetic when we started, but I've never seen as unhealthy a place for rock 'n' roll as America. We might be too late. It may be impossible to wake them up at this point.

"What's worse than the rock audience are the rock bands here. If there were any way we could destroy them all at once, it'd be perfect. I think American rock bands - and the English ones, like Foreigner and Foghat, who pretend to be American - are a cancer. It's time for us to come here with a manifesto of change. All we can do is try. If people can't see what we are - *the* rock 'n' roll band of the '70s - that's their problem."

The Clash: Problems with The Roxy

Chris Salewicz, *NME*, October 7, 1978

I'D CALLED Mick Jones last Friday night The parsimonious Bernie Rhodes – who, though a replacement manager has yet to be found (and it is most likely neither Billy Gaff nor Brian Lane), appears to be regarded most firmly as the band's ex – wouldn't give me tickets for last Saturday's Clash Roxy date, said CBS.

Could Mick put me down on his own guest list?

"Sure thing," he replied. "Only I've just got in from playing in Dublin an hour go and I've just been told there's an advert on Capital Radio saying we're not playing.

"Whatever happens, though, I can tell you we're going to be turning up."

At seven last Saturday night the Clash turned up all right. To talk with and console fans unable to enjoy yet another Clash gig stymied by officialdom. See also Belfast and Birmingham, where the group made personal appearances outside the venue to explain their lack of appearance onstage.

"I can't think of any other group that turns up to a gig, spends a couple of hours talking to the fans in front of a fish and chip shop and then goes home," said Mick Jones in an Indian restaurant in Westbourne Grove about half an hour after the band had departed the North West London industrial wasteland in which the Harlesden Roxy is set.

This was the third time that efforts have been made to bring The Clash and the Roxy together.

Unbeknown to the Clash themselves, Bernie Rhodes had originally booked the band in to play the Roxy last September 9, to celebrate the return of Jones and Joe Strummer from their Stateside studio sojourn.

As the band knew nothing whatsoever about the gig, and as Mick and Joe were still in the States continuing their temperamental studio

relationship with producer Sandy Pearlman ("He's spent six months trying to turn us into Fleetwood Mac but he hasn't succeeded," says Jones), the gig was rescheduled for September 25.

The temperamental / tempestuous studio relationship continued. September 25 came and went. The gig was rescheduled for October 14 - last Saturday. Between September 25 and last Saturday, however, part of the downstairs section of the Roxy was turned into a dance floor. This entailed the removal of 500 seats. On the eve of the October 14 gig the Greater London Council, who appear to have been operating something close to psychological warfare with the Clash ever since fans trashed a sizeable number of seats at the Rainbow during the spring '77 White Riot Tour, checked out the Roxy and informed Terry Collins, the manager, that due to the new seating facilities only 900 of the 1,600 ticket holders could be allowed in to the theatre. At a meeting of the Roxy's Board of Directors, late last Friday afternoon, it was decided that chaos was likely to ensue if the first 900 fans who arrived were granted entry to the theatre and the remaining 700 were turned away. It was after this meeting that ads were placed on Capital Radio telling ticket-holders to stay at home. Even so, however, the band and the theatre management continued to attempt to find a solution that would permit them to play to all 1,600 ticket holders that day.

"Up until three o'clock this afternoon," grumbled Joe Strummer through a mouthful of vegetable biryani, "I thought we'd manage it. I thought we could play two sets, one for all the kids who turned up early and then another one for the rest.

"But the police objected to that. They said they didn't want that type of person wandering about Harlesden all evening.

"I wouldn't mind betting that Sid Vicious business hadn't got something to do with it." An ominous note for the future.

The Clash stuck around outside the Roxy until about nine o'clock. There were close to four hundred kids outside; the band figured they spoke to "most of them".

Most of them were very pissed off.

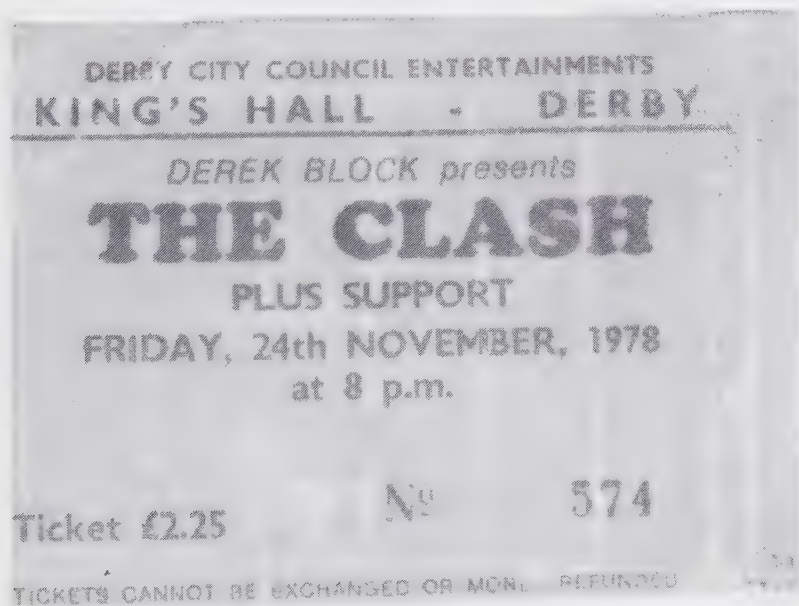
"Wouldn't you be?" demanded Joe wearily. "There were kids from all over the country: Cardiff, Liverpool. Belfast, Newcastle, Glasgow . . . What am I supposed to say when someone says to me that they've spent twenty quid to get to the Roxy and that they're broke now?"

"Ah, but listen, you know, I can understand it if they're pissed off with us but I wish they wouldn't be. Because if they are then they're just buying it. They're not seeing through it all and realising that they're being just as stitched up by the GLC as we are.

"Still, it's understandable. There was this guy there who's in some remand home in the North-East. I told him we were going to be playing two gigs – on October 25 and 26 – so everyone can get in to see, but he said 'I can only get out at weekends'".

So the Clash will return to the Roxy on Wednesday October 25 and Thursday, October 26. Ticket holders 1-900 will be let in on the first day, ticket holders 901 onwards on the 26th.

Jah willing, Harlesden should once again shake to and delight in the sound of the Clash City Rockers in a week's time.



A Clash Of Interests

Miles, *Time Out*, December 15, 1978

Will success spoil Mick Jones, Paul Simonon, Topper Headon and Joe Strummer? Miles chronicles the decline of a movement and the rise of a rock band.

IT'S BEEN a long time since anybody regarded The Who as a mod band, the Beatles as exponents of Merseybeat, or Bob Dylan as a folk-rocker. Musical movements enjoy even briefer life-spans than the careers of the musicians that emerge from them, and bands that start life in the turmoil of a new departure either vanish when times change or find a direction of their own. This has already happened to the British punk movement, and a magnificent crop of new groups are now developing in very different ways: The Jam, The Stranglers, XTC, The Buzzcocks, Siouxi and the Banshees, the Only Ones, Wire.

The Clash are the punk band who've stayed closest to their roots, and by being the most uncompromising, they have retained most of that original hard energy. Now they're poised at that difficult stage between local artistic success (which these days means Europe) and a place in the global rock industry. They have embraced the advanced technology of rock and risked the pressures of the market and yet managed to retain their integrity. With a second album produced by the heavily metallic Oyster Cultist Sandy Pearlman and recorded in London, New York and San Francisco, The Clash no longer can feel at home in the dole queue. But they're still broke. The new album, *Give Em Enough Rope*, entered the British charts at number 2, the four punks stared balefully from the covers and centrefolds of the four rock weeklies, and even in New York City *Soho Weekly News* headlined its front cover 'The Clash, Britain's Best New Band'. Yet as journalists rushed to deem them the Rolling Stones of the eighties, the band themselves closed ranks against a flurry of lawsuits from erstwhile manager Bernie Rhodes.

The day after the press reception for the new album, vocalist Joe Strummer and drummer Topper Headon were to be found selling clothes at a cold open air stall in Dingwalls Market in Camden Town. 'We're broke, man, so you just have to do what you can,' Strummer

shrugged. 'Bernie kicked us out of our rehearsal studio and changed the locks.' Not long ago The Clash filled the Rainbow Theatre three nights in a row and then had to take the bus home because they couldn't afford a cab.

Once upon a time punk really was the music of the unemployed school-leaver living at home with his parents in a high-rise council block, numbed by TV, harassed by the police and funded by the dole. The supergroup stars living in tax exile might just as easily have been living on the moon. Johnny Rotten: 'We have to fight the entire superband system. Groups like the Stones are revolting. They have nothing to offer the kids any more...'

Punk energy was negative energy, pure Nihilism. A response born of poverty instead of sixties affluence cancelled the kids' subscriptions to hippy hopes of a counter-culture and replaced them with...nothing. They suggested no alternative, they saw no future at all. Perhaps not surprisingly this turned out to be a more universal message than anyone suspected. In Jubilee Week The Sex Pistols' 'God Save The Queen' made number 1 on the charts despite having no airplay and being banned by most large chain stores. Public school boys scenting doom in the dialectic pointed out that 'No Future' could mean even more to them than to the unemployed.

Lead guitarist Mick Jones recalls the community feeling that existed when punk first started. 'In them days it was definitely more of a movement in term of people working together with one aim. It's only since the record companies came in that all the competition and bitchiness started. Before, it was like all other art movements, you know? Like art movements didn't mind having their photographs taken together and they all worked together like one group and it was the one group.

'All the people that used to be around were working for one aim. Some kind of change really, to do something more interesting and different from what we had at the time. Like, if you wanted to go out there was nothing for us to do...'

Joe Strummer used to go on stage with 'Hate & War' stencilled on his boiler suit. Not just because it was the opposite of the hippies' 'Love &

Peace' dictum but because it was an honest statement of what is happening today in Britain with our personal Vietnam in Northern Ireland and ever growing racialism at home. 'Things will get tough,' Strummer says, 'I mean a fascist government. But people won't notice like you won't notice your hair is longer on Monday than Sunday...What I'm aimed against is all that fascist, racist patriotism type of fanaticism...'

This he sees as the role of The Clash. 'There's so much corruption: councils, governments, industry, everywhere. It's got to be flushed out. Just because it's been going on for a long time doesn't mean that it shouldn't be stopped. It doesn't mean that it isn't time to change. This is what I'm about, and I'm in The Clash, so, of course, that's what The Clash is about.

'We ain't no urban guerrilla outfit. Our gunpower is strictly limited. All we want to achieve is an atmosphere where things can happen. We want to keep the spirit of the free world. We want to keep the spirit of the free world. We want to keep out that safe, soapy, slush that comes out of the radio. People have this picture of us marching down the street with machine guns. We're not interested in that, because we haven't got any. All we've got is a few guitars, amps and drums. That's our weaponry.

The band may not be packing any pieces, but they do have an armoury of ideas – and they weren't welcome on the airwaves:

*'All the power is in the hands
of people rich enough to buy it
While we walk the streets
too chicken to even try it.'*
(*'White Riot'*, their first single)

The Clash began in May 1976 as a drummerless group, rehearsing in a small squat near Shepherds Bush Green. In the grand British rock tradition as laid down by John Lennon, Keith Richard, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, Ray Davies, Pete Townshend, Eric Clapton and David Bowie, they were all art school dropouts.

When guitarist and lyricist Mick Jones formed the band he was still at Hammersmith Art School. He comes from Brixton. His father was a cab driver and Jones lived with his parents until they divorced when he was 8. His mother emigrated to America and his father moved out, leaving Jones to live with his grandmother. When he wrote 'London's Burning With Boredom' for The Clash he was still living at his grandmother's flat on the eighteenth floor of a tower block overlooking The Westway. 'I ain't never lived under five floors. I ain't never lived on the ground.'

Jones asked Paul Simonon to join his group. Simonon had been playing all of six weeks, just strumming at a guitar but now he 'found' a bass and began playing. Simonon was also born in Brixton. His parents had split up and he lived mostly with his father. 'I had a paper round at six in the morning. Then I'd come back and cook me dad his breakfast. Then I'd fuck off to school. Then I'd come back and cook me dad his dinner and do another paper round after school and then I'd cook me dad's tea...' He got a council scholarship to the Byam Shaw art school in Notting Hill. 'I used to draw blocks of flats and car dumps.' At the time of meeting Mick Jones the only live rock band he'd seen was The Sex Pistols.

Vocalist Joe Strummer was in an R&B pub band called The 101ers and had even made a single, 'Keys To Your Heart' (Chiswick Records), when he met Mick and Paul. The guitarist and bass player, together with Glen Matlock of the Sex Pistols, were just leaving the Ladbroke Grove social security office when Joe arrived on his bike. They had seen the 101ers play The Windsor Castle and recognised in Joe 'the right look'. 'I don't like your group,' said Mick, 'but we think you're great'.

'As soon as I saw these guys,' said Joe, 'I knew that that was what a group in my eyes was supposed to look like.' Almost immediately afterwards The Sex Pistols supported The 101ers at a gig and convinced Joe of what was happening. He broke up his group the next day. 'Yesterday I thought I was a crud, then I saw The Sex Pistols and I became a king and decided to move into the future. As soon as I saw them I knew that rhythm and blues was dead, that the future was here somehow. Every other group was riffing through the Black Sabbath

catalogue but hearing The Pistols I knew, I just knew!' Joe's art school was Central ('A lousy set-up').

The first thing the band did was refurbish an abandoned warehouse in Camden Town, then, with Terry Chimes (nicknamed Tory Crimes) sitting in on drums, they began rehearsals. They played their first gig in Sheffield in June 1976. Since places like the Marquee wouldn't book punk bands they often had to create venues such as cinemas or playing The ICA.

The Clash signed with CBS Records, controlled from New York by the mighty Columbia Records Corp. The deal, for something over £100,000, received a lot of press. But it wasn't, in fact, very good since it included no tour support and it is easy to lose £50,000 or £60,000 on a national tour promoting an album. The band remained on £25 a week, though times were better than in November '76, when they had returned to their cold warehouse after flyposting an ICA gig and desperately devoured what remained of the flour and water paste that they had used to put up the posters.

Then came the tour with The Pistols on their ill-fated 'Anarchy' dates and an album for CBS. They cut it in three weekends using their sound man as a producer. He'd never been in a studio before and the production was, not surprisingly, muddy. Despite this, the power of the music comes through and *The Clash* remains one of the best punk albums ever made. It entered the charts at number 12 and sold over 100,000 copies in the UK. But Columbia refused to release it in the States because they thought the sound quality would preclude airplay.

This was the period of punk violence. During one particularly unpleasant gig when the spit, bottles and cans were falling like rain, Terry Chimes watched as a wine bottle smashed into a million pieces on his hi-hat. He quit. Life on the road under such conditions took its toll on the others as well. Mick Jones remembers making the first album...

'Two years ago we did the band's first interview. On Janet Street Porter's *London Weekend Programme* it was, and me, being all young and naive, I blamed bands taking too many drugs for the great mid-70s

drought in rock. I recall saying it really well. And a year or so later, I found myself doing just as many drugs as them!

'Y'know, taking drugs as a way of life, to feel good in the morning, to get through the day. And it's still something I'm getting over right now. I was so into speed, I mean, I don't even recall making the first album.'

They auditioned 206 drummers and rejected them all. Number 207 was Nicky 'Topper' Headon, a friend who'd played briefly with them in the old days. Headon was born in Bromley. His father is a headmaster at a primary school and his mother is a teacher. 'I first played drums when I was 13. I was working at the butchers, cleaning up and I saved the money to buy a kit for £30.' After school he worked the Dover Ferries and then on the Channel Tunnel before moving to London.

With their lineup complete, The Clash began to tour Britain, always taking with them a number of other bands that they felt close to philosophically or musically: The Buzzcocks, Subway Sect, The Slits, Richard Hell & The Voidoids from NYC and The Lous, a French female punk band. The art-rock bands of the sixties took rock out of the dance hall and placed it, literally, in the concert hall. The Clash took it back to the dance hall again – partly by necessity since their audiences have been known to pogo as many as 200 seats per concert into oblivion. With replacement costs at £20 a chair, the band began to insist on seatless venues.

Nonetheless their concerts were banned by local watch committees, and the police continually busted the band for drugs and vandalism. They survived bomb threats in Sweden and found one of their most devoted audiences in Belfast, a town many English bands refuse to play. Everywhere they went dozens of fans were allowed backstage and their hotel rooms were always packed out with local punks crashing on the floor because they couldn't get home.

After a month-long tour of Europe the band returned to discover that their everyday movements had become prime fodder for the music press. Anything that could possibly be interpreted as 'selling out' was jumped upon. Since the punk stars had not been imposed on their audiences (in the way The Bay City Rollers were) but had risen from their ranks, to 'sell-out' was not a concern that the band would lose

artistic integrity and produce overtly commercial records, it was a concern that they would sacrifice community to commerce. And it was true, the band was feeling more and more distanced from its audiences. It was a subtle change: the scene's originally negative, yet communal, charge was unavoidably transformed into individual craft pride as the musicians became more professional. The very technology of rock, its expensive amplification equipment and studios, introduces the businessman into the musicians' lives. Playing becomes the band's work, performed while everyone else is at play. In *The Sociology Of Rock*, Simon Frith pin-pointed the problem perfectly:

'Their work is everyone else's leisure, their way of life is everyone else's relaxation, escape and indulgence. They work in places of entertainment. What for them is routine is for their fans a special event. Musicians themselves are symbols of leisure and escape, their glamour supports their use as sex objects, as fantasies and briefly held dreams.'

The Clash are now a long way from the squat in Shepherds Bush. They remain on a level of intimacy with many of their fans, perhaps a little too intimate at times. (A few months ago Joe Strummer got hepatitis from a well aimed gob of spit which caught him in the mouth.) But as their fame grows, particularly with the release of their new album in The States, the only way they will be able to express their original ideals will be through their music. That is now their job.

Joe Strummer: 'I think people ought to know that we're anti-fascist, we're anti-violence, we're anti-racist and we're pro-creative. We're against ignorance.' And their music is real fine as well.

The Clashmen Meet The Pearlman

Ira Robbins, *Trouser Press*, February 1979

"It wasn't the easiest thing I've ever I done, that's for sure." I had Sandy Pearlman, Record Producer, on the phone from some unnamed restaurant on Long Island discussing *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, the Clash album that took several months to record in three cities. "It was certainly worth the trouble — there's no doubt about that. I saw the Clash play in Manchester and thought that they were the best rock'n'roll band in the world."

Well, I haven't seen them live, but I agree with Sandy. No other band (with the possible exception of Elvis) delivers such strength on vinyl. With two albums and five singles to judge by, the Clash's manic intensity is their greatest asset, followed closely in importance by Joe Strummer's painfully true vocals and Mick Jones' classic English rock guitar wrenching.

The Clash at their best present an uncompromisingly honest outpouring of anger and aggression. On the first LP, most of the songs were directed against the social and political stupidity of the worse aspects of London life. 'Career Opportunities' railed against the job situation, 'Deny' against a friend turned junkie waste, 'London's Burning' was about the boredom of London and the intent of 'Police and Thieves' (written by reggae singer Junior Murvin) should be obvious. The lyrics are astounding and the performances match them shout for shout.

The singles that followed the first album continued the Clash's march toward immortality, with 'Complete Control' and 'Jail Guitar Doors' standing above the others in total 45 rpm greatness. Their last single before beginning work on *Give 'Em Enough Rope* was 'White Man (in Hammersmith Palais)', a complex, reggae-styled piece that doesn't do it to me as it has done unto others. After a series of great singles, the excitement and anticipation that awaited the second album could not have been higher.

Which brings us back to Sandy Pearlman, owner of a varied reputation as a producer/ manager (with partner Murray Krugman) of the Blue Oyster Cult and the Dictators and the object of much discussion in the

British press ever since the announcement that he would produce the Clash's second album. Since their first LP hadn't been released in the US for what their record company (Epic) felt were obvious technical reasons (it was produced in six days by their sound man) and since the Clash had long since established themselves in England and elsewhere as a very important and potentially money-making band, Epic *did* want to release *this* album and hoped that using a qualified producer capable of sticking to the project would make the difference. Despite spurious rumors that Pearlman was hired to make the Clash sound like the Blue Oyster Cult, the fact is that he was needed by both the band and their label to midwife a record that fully displayed the Clash.

"I announced very early in the project that I thought there was no way I was going to make any money," says Pearlman. "I could have done two other things in the same time but I did it for the art of it, to get this amazing revolutionary consciousness, which I really believe it has, onto vinyl and make it sound good enough that American radio wouldn't throw it in the toilet bowl, and that Americans would also listen to it. With a group like the Clash, I don't know what else you'd want to do except make them sound as powerful and aggressive as possible. To me, their first record was faultless material and great performances recorded as if it were a three-hour demo. The first object was to strip away all the technical problems, to remove all the veils and obstacles that were in their way."

One example of the obstacles Sandy perceived was their equipment. "The object was to make them sound as fiery and spirited as they do live, only better, in that in six or seven shows that I saw they played through a very poor system; they had bad equipment that was run down and poorly maintained. They just didn't sound that good. They couldn't make a good record with the equipment they were playing through."

Although as producer, the only obstacles Pearlman should have had to contend with were sonic, getting the LP recorded presented many problems not normally encountered under ordinary circumstances. But then the Clash are no ordinary band. "The problems were very rarely musical or technical. It was mostly stuff that I consider extraneous, like the band's problems with their manager, Bernard Rhodes (whom they recently fired and are currently engaged in legal battles with) that didn't speed the progress of the record any."

What should have taken several weeks ended up taking nearly six months from start to finish. Work on the album started last February in London when Pearlman "arrived to start rehearsals. Paul Simonon was in Moscow and it took two weeks to get him back. They actually worked for a week, learning the material which Paul hadn't been taught. Then Joe came down with hepatitis, which killed the rest of the month. Island studios (in London) sound good, though technically they were not up to snuff in terms of maintenance, but when the studio worked right it did sound great. I recorded part in San Francisco because it was very cheap and the Automatt is the best sounding studio that I knew of in the US. I felt it was the best studio to do the guitar overdubs. We mixed the record in New York at the Record Plant because at the time I believed it to be the best mixing studio I was familiar with. Also, at a certain point I wanted to get them out of England. I told them that if they didn't get out of England they would really have trouble finishing the record because of their constant fights with Bernard. It was down to where all sorts of silly stuff would happen. They would come in nine hours late because they'd gone to Paris to play and missed a plane or something. Or Bernard would come in and they'd argue for five hours and then no one would be able to play. They were literally unable to work. It was deemed a normal thing for them to have business meetings during recording sessions."

The problems with Bernard, Joe's illness and various other major and minor calamities are hardly new to the Clash. Or even particularly surprising. Joe reckons, "We've always had all kinds of hassles."

Ain't it the truth. Whether caused by the band's unwillingness to compromise either their integrity or their sense of what is and what ought to be, the saga of the Clash has always included fights, disagreements, troubles and bitterness. Ever since the group emerged on the London new wave circuit two-and-a-half years ago, playing support to the Pistols, they have been in constant battle with the forces with which they must contend. The mere fact of their continued existence comes as some sort of cosmic odds tampering.

The Clash have never had a smooth relationship with anyone. Their record company has been the object of bitter attacks by the band, starting in June 1977, when a single ('Remote Control') from their debut LP was released against their wishes, prompting their next single,

a new song called 'Complete Control' which was accompanied by the Clash's statement to the press that the song "tells a story of conflict between two opposing camps. One side sees change as an opportunity to channel the enthusiasm of a raw and dangerous culture in a direction where energy is made safe and predictable. The other is dealing with change as a freedom to be experienced so as to understand one's true capabilities, allowing a creative social situation to emerge." The single is all about the company.

In recent weeks, the band and record company have been fighting over the band's refusal to appear on the British TV rock shows that mean guaranteed sales for their new British single 'Tommy Gun'. When informed that a film clip of the song might be sold to the show without the band's permission, a full scale showdown erupted, the repercussions of which have not yet been fully tabulated.

Pearlman had the chance to observe some of their scrapes with the company and describes the basis of the band's refusal to comply. "It's rare that you meet people in the business who aren't working for the business. To a very good extent, the Clash don't give a damn about the business. It's not just bullshit. They're very honest — they told me they'll spend any amount of money put in their hands, but on the other hand they don't care about it. That dichotomy, although seemingly unlikely, is an accurate self-description of where they're at. To a very great extent, at this point in their career, they are not working for money; rather they're working for self-expression. Because of that, what they do is determined not so much by the question 'will this be a hit and will we move another 100,000 records?,' but rather, 'does this express our viewpoint in terms of passion, in terms of hatred, in terms of ideology?' "

That sense of honesty, of duty to their fans and themselves, has led the Clash into all sorts of problems that a less committed band would find easy to sidestep. When it was suggested to them that the removal of a few rude words in a couple of songs might allow them the luxury (and convenience) of mucho American radio play, they held fast, and refused to change anything for the sake of airtime. On the other hand, they have, in the past, offered some excessive criticism of some people who did and others who probably didn't deserve it. (Sandy: "I was not the object of their abuse. There were other people around for them to

abuse.") But while Strummer described Pearlman in the *Melody Maker* as "the only contender — we wanted someone who could put us on record, and he was the only one," Mick Jones told *Sounds* that making the album was "a fucking misery — 98 days in hell." For the record, Sandy sees it more Joe's way: 'The idea was to make an album that was viable commercially without destroying what they had, but maybe strengthening it. Not only do I believe that I succeeded in doing it, they believe it too. If they don't believe it, they'll say so — they're not loath to say anything about anybody, and they haven't said so, so I presume they are satisfied with what they got.'

And they're not the only ones. As I stated in my LP review last ish, *Give 'Em Enough Rope* "explodes with both fury and venom," and in weeks of listening since then I've really grown to like it. A lot of the album is self-descriptive (not self-important), describing the band's formation, recent incidents and a bitter stab at clearing the English air of unfounded criticisms.

From the top, 'Safe European Home' opens the LP in scorching fashion, chronicling the two weeks Jones and Strummer spent in Jamaica at the end of 1977 in order to see some of their favorite reggae bands and producers (like Lee 'Scratch' Perry who later co-produced the 'Complete Control' 45) and to write songs for this album. Although the political attacks against the repression there are clear, Strummer's feelings towards the trip are lost on me, as I can't figure out whether he's singing "wanna go back there again" or "*don't* wanna go back there again." Either way, it's a truly powerful song and perfect opener. Pearlman remarked that it was one of a few songs considered for release as a single in England, but the unlikely choice of 'Tommy Gun' prevailed. As 'Safe European Home' ends with some bizarre scat vocalizing by Joe and Mick, it gives way to 'English Civil War', with striking lyrics about the recent rise of several fascist organizations in England set to the melody of 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home'. The lyrics are ominous and scary, made only more so by the juxtaposition of international musical exchange.

'Tommy Gun' hardly sounds like an obvious single, but then the English do have a strange way of hearing things sometimes. As it happens, a friend in London told me the other day that a not-very-hip-but-very-important deejay there had picked 'Tommy Gun' as his

"single of the week" and is playing it regularly. Just shows to go you. The main focus of the song is Topper Headon's power drumming, playing percussion appropriate to the cadence of the song's title. Between the beat bursts, Mick Jones adds alternately melodic and jagged guitar figures, pushing the track into a high-energy level that seems to echo and linger a few seconds after the final coda. If anyone wants to believe that The Clash are a non-musical punk band with no sense of melody, harmony, or tempo, 'Tommy Gun' wipes all doubts away as to the depth of their abilities.

With 'Julie's Been Working For The Drug Squad' comes an abrupt change of tempo, slowing down the violent assault to a jovial ragtime affair, complete with anonymous piano that I gather was done by one of the Blue Oyster Cult. Although it initially seemed very awkward and out of place, 'Julie' grows into the album and the drug bust lyrics are much too clever to ignore: "Put her in a cell and they said you wait here/You got the time to count all of your hair." The side ends with 'Last Gang In Town', about the polarization and fragmentation of London youth into gangs. A sophisticated, tense arrangement of a rather plain song, it picks up steam in the middle but falls apart towards the end. Strummer, whose older brother committed suicide, offers a fraternal warning against misdirected malice — "It's all young blood flowing down the drain..."

I suppose lots of people will cite the 'Can't Explain' chords used in 'Guns On the Roof' to draw incorrect conclusions about the Clash's use of "riffs from our collective memory and the...Spirits of Rock Past" as one New York cognoscento put it in print recently. The interesting point worth noting is that while on the 'Clash City Rockers' single, they used a riff that could have been "Can't Explain" but wasn't, this time 'round they've gone perversely straight for the E-D-A jugular. The lyrics are superficially about the arrest of Paul Simonon and Nicky Headon for shooting at pigeons from the roof of the band's rehearsal studio, but the real message is much broader. Seething with disgust, Strummer lashes out at the judicial system and its hysterical response to non-conformity: "A system built by the sweat of the money/Creates assassins to kill off the few" carries none of the polemic hokiness that such political messages in song usually carry.

What I reckon is the only lame cut on the album, 'Drug Stabbing Time', comes up next. Although the uncredited saxophonist gets off some fiery salvos, the song flops in comparison to the other nine. Fortunately, the following track ranks at the other end of the quality spectrum and stands out as one of the most memorable rock performances (an instant classic) in ages. 'Stay Free', sung by Mick Jones in his thoroughly awful-yet-perfect voice (which, interestingly, sounds quite a bit like my all-time favorite non-singers: Pete Townshend, Keith Richards and Dave Davies) bears more than a passing resemblance to Mott the Hoople's 'Hymn for the Dudes' but avoids the fey posturing that Ian Hunter tended towards. With what sounds like honest emotion, Mick sings of a gang that he used to run with before the Clash. They ended up in prison, and he offers "When you lot get out/We're gonna raid the town/We'll burn it fucking down/To a cinder." The guitar solo is straight out of Mick Ralphs and the tune ends much too quickly. What a beautiful piece of from-the-gut music.

(Incidentally, while the Mott reference is fresh, kudos should be given to the world's greatest rock journalist, Nick Kent of the *NME*, who observed in a concert review dated March 19, 1977, that the "Clash take up exactly where Mott the Hoople left off." And they hadn't even made a record yet!)

Another amazing song, 'Cheapskates', maintains the emotional power of 'Stay Free' with lyrics about the way kids in England relate to the Clash. "Just because we're in a group you all think we're stinking rich/And we all got model girls shedding every stitch/And you think the cocaine's flowing like a river up our noses/And every sea will part for us like the Red one did for Moses." The chorus is catchy as hell, the drumming great, the guitars ideal and the Clash chalk up another near-perfect cut. With no break in intensity, yet with a turn back towards wistful memory, the thought continues through 'All the Young Punks', an avowedly anthemic update of an obscure (sic) Mott the Hoople song. Again taking on the mantle of wise uncle, Strummer offers some advice to kids following the Clash's footsteps amid a brief lyrical history of the band. "Face front you got the future shining like a piece of gold/But I swear as we get closer it looks more like a lump of coal." Another program note — the explanation offered last issue for the mistitling of this song on the US album sleeve was wrong. The real

story, according to Sandy Pearlman, is that "The Clash did all the credits that appear on the album. Remember, they didn't have a manager at the time — usually managers look after this stuff — and they submitted a list to the record company that had the wrong title of the song and a few other things left off, and they forgot to send a corrected list. Somebody noticed the error on a proof and the record company said they'd fix it, which they did in the UK but not in the US. They corrected the labels, but not the sleeve."

America is the final frontier for the Clash, but they have no intentions of bending over backwards to titillate the American market. (I read a Jones quote somewhere about America being "syphilitic.") However, initial reports on the first few weeks of the album here are promising — maybe there's hope after all. According to an Epic spokesman, the LP is doing better than expected and is getting heavy airplay in New York, San Francisco, Seattle, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, D.C., and Houston. A US tour is tentatively scheduled for late January, and the plans are for them to play headline dates at large clubs in cities where they can draw. Unless every person I know who's ever seen The Clash is wrong, this should be a major event in American rock culture and should vindicate, to those willing to find out, all my ravings.

A final word by Sandy Pearlman on the subject of the American public regarding the Clash: "I don't understand every lyric on the album, I doubt that Mick or Topper or Paul understands what every single word is. But if you fail to understand the import of what's going on in the lyrics, then you are a turnip. It would take a turnip personality to not understand what the Clash is all about. It's not like they're trying to hide it — they're not guilty of oversubtlety..."

The Clash In America

By Sylvie Simmons, *Sounds*, February 17, 1979

"SO YOU think we lost the battle — then go home and weep about it. Sometimes you've got to wake up in the morning and think, 'Fuck it you're going to win the battle.'" — Joe Strummer.

THERE WERE no riots, no outraged citizens, no glaring headlines when Pearl Harbour '79 came to an old elegant building in downtown Vancouver last week. The only report in the newspaper's music section was that the local symphony orchestra had gone on strike. The Clash's first American tour is being felt by the press as the stimulating aftershock of the Pistols US invasion a year ago or not at all.

The Pearl Harbour '79 tour posters depict the Statue of Liberty bundled up in rope. A more illuminating picture, I think, could have been taken outside the Berkeley Community Theatre in San Francisco a few days and a long bus ride later. An hour before the doors were due to open a line of people stretched quietly from the front steps in a perfect shape of a walking stick, where two young security guards shone torches on the few rebels who wanted to hang out rather than wait in the queue for their numbered seat. There was something numbing about that picture. US rock on Quaaludes.

Maybe, these were the Bo Diddley fans. The middle-aged usher who showed me to my seat felt the need to tell me who he was. He stood up there with his square guitar and growled "This feels like 1965 all over again," and almost everyone cheered and gave him standing ovations.

The difference between a living legend and a living band I thought to myself when Diddley left the stage, and the hired DJ brought over for the tour playing Buzzcocks and Sid's 'My Way' is between standing up and shouting because you feel you ought to — and standing up and shouting because you simply had to. There's simply nowhere else for all that passion to go. The best rock music someone once said is like a good whore, it's both aggressive and relieving. I didn't get any of that from Bo Diddley's macho strutting. The Clash supplied an overdose.

The audience was divided into factions: the delirious converts who made the most of The Clash's rule that the bouncers weren't to force people into their seats, flooded the front section and pogo'd madly.

Towards the back the typical US rock fans observed the action at a distance through binoculars (imagine the only place you'd ever seen your favourite band play is half a mile from the stage in a place like Earls Court — out here it's as inevitable in rock as death and taxes are in life) and an even more staid bunch sat in the balcony. I suspect they were the ones queuing quietly outside to guarantee a safe spot for their voyeurism.

There were a number of old style bondage and safety pin punks — remember nothing has happened on this scale since the Pistols' gig at Winterland at the end of '77. Now the Pistols are dead, Sid's dead, Winterland's dead and San Francisco is still the grateful Dead. The Clash have got a lot of reviving to do.

There were a lot more Ramones lookalikes, stormtroopers in sneakers with elaborate punk badges, a couple of miniature Sun front page headlines "I want justice for my Sid" and a large crowd of US music press analyzing the action like it was the interval of a Bernard Shaw play complaining that they couldn't make out the words when Joe Stummer called from the stage "If you can't understand the words, don't worry, you're not alone".

We were thanked for bothering to come tonight. Bothering? It was magnificent. Though I could see little more than the flag used a backdrop and Jones' and Simonon's electrocuted leaps about head level, all other rock and roll senses were gratified. Contact with hot pogoing bodies, smell of overheated energy (something you forget is sanitized for your protection in sports arena rock gigs) and the sound; a brain battering 'Tommy Gun', an exhilarating 'Stay Free', a scorching 'Gun On The Roof', 'I Fought The Law', 'Cell Block No.9' and the hardest, fastest, most powerful encore in rock with 'White Riot'.

As for the audience reaction, some seemed to feel uncomfortable but more felt salvation. I can't remember having seen a performance so shot with adrenalin, outdone though it would be by the next night's show.

BACKSTAGE there wasn't much talking. In the five days the band spent in San Francisco they must have talked to just about everyone who wanted to listen. A press conference on Monday with a barrage of dumb questions led the band to turn it into their own personal comedy show; record store appearances, radio interviews and private viewing with anything from *Time* magazine to *Cashbox*.

In the dressing room someone asked Mick if he liked the Jam (to a suitably non-committal answer) and someone else warily suggested that Clash had some sort of pact going with Elvis Costello (whose tour bus was parked in Japan town near the next night's gig) who was going to have old rocker Carl Perkins on his tour (Perkins in fact backed out a while ago), only to be told politely that if anyone was doing the copying it was Elvis, who doesn't seem that popular with Clash. Mick and I swapped notes on what a strange place this is.

Tomorrow night's gig hasn't exactly left their record company brimming with philanthropic joy. It's a benefit concert for New Youth, a fledgling organization aiming to keep ticket prices down, get larger percentages for the bands and a place for new wave acts to play.

Besides not being part of the official tour and bound to upset the promoters (the slyest get round any legal points by advertising 'White Riot in the Fillmore with the best band ever direct from England'. No names mentioned), the tickets are half the price of the Berkeley gig, the venue seatless and flooded with atmosphere. Of the eight dates on this mini-tour (the band intends to return in June and fill in the gaps) only one failed to sell out — the Berkeley one. A good sign considering the size of the venue (the only time the Pistols played to anything in the few-thousand seat mark over here was at Winterland).

The following afternoon I head for the Villa Roma bar to find Ace, the tour manager, locked in a verbal battle with the red-faced vein-popping motel manager. A misunderstanding over a phone bill that would have evoked polite discussion at the most with the average guest. "The man's an asshole," Mick told me by way of explanation. The manager had parked his little Pinto station wagon (one of the smallest American cars) in front of the tour bus to stop it leaving, and was threatening to call the police.

Ace was trying valiantly to keep his temper — not easy when a middle aged man screams "You bums are freaks" to your face. The band left and the manager swaggered over to the bar, loosened his collar and had the barmaid get him a double, boasting how he "wasn't going to be taken for a ride by the like of those freaks" and how "I blocked the bus with my little Pinto wagon — it couldn't move". A hero for a day.

The benefit concert was at a moth-eaten synagogue in San Francisco next door to Jim Jones' People's Temple, tacky but majestic, and a great venue. The punters were generally shit-stoned, dribbling in, falling over, dancing with strangers and having fun. There was a strong wired sexual sort of atmosphere here, an intangible kind of craziness. The thing that attracted you to rock and roll in the first place.

There was some trouble in the line, a few bottles broken, but that's all, mostly brought on by the slowness with which they were let in. This was New Youth's first gig and they hadn't quite got it together. They only opened one cash register until Clash's manager threatened to open the doors and let everyone in free and tills appeared like magic.

The Clash were electrifying. Like a bloody great headline, commanding attention and belief. They opened with 'I'm So Bored with the USA' and the punters went as wild as I've ever seen them go. No time to take notes — there were more important things to do. For the first time in the US I could see the relevance of pogoing. When there's no seats and everyone's crushing your ribs to powder down the front and you want to dance, there's nowhere to go but up. It's also a pretty efficient way of meeting people when you fall on top of them. One girl danced from someone's head onto the stage and dived off headfirst into the solid mass of people. That must be just about the ultimate rock fan experience.

America was getting off on The Clash and New Youth was getting a good down payment for their organization. Some hope yet. But the battle's not won. Johnnie Walker the DJ was there. He's just been fired by a San Francisco radio station for playing punk records.

ON THE BUS after the show, Jones, Strummer and Simonon are conducting a private post mortem on the tour in the back. Verdict: Vancouver pretty good, Berkeley OK, the benefit in 'Frisco, the best so

far. Topper and a friend and the rest of us are down the front watching *Heaven Can Wait* on the video machine while fans mill around outside.

Just before the gig started. Topper was sitting on the bus watching *Star Wars* when a guy came inside and struck up a conversation and took a lot of persuading to leave. He came back a few minutes later with a bottle of champagne, shook the drummer's hand and left. The champagne was consumed on the 400 mile trip to LA. Everyone is half-dead by the time the bus reaches Santa Monica.

While Ace is sorting out a beachfront hotel, an old man wanders up and asks if he can look around the bus. He thinks we're a troop of wandering Bohemians until the driver tells him it's a rock band that's playing the Civic tonight. Undeterred, the 70-year-old announces that he and his wife go disco dancing every fourth night. The bus breaks out in smiles. "All you've got to do is get in there and do your own thing, feel the beat," he tells this knackered-looking bunch of youngsters. No one offers him tickets for tonight's gig.

Los Angeles is less Bohemian than San Francisco. LA is big streets, big cars, big billboards and big money. In LA anything that doesn't make a big profit is considered neither art nor desirable. Little bands are pretty much banging heads against the brick wall. The so-called "new wave" scene is barely holding its own. That The Clash sold out the 3,000 capacity Santa Monica Civic is a good sign, even if the numbers were padded out by press and posers and probably members of every quasi-punk band in town.

It was a good show, but not a great one. Though that's not to say that this wasn't one of the best evenings I've spent in this venue. As always here the sound was flat, but the spirit and strength of the music and the wildly vibrating floor from the frantic pogoing as good as compensated. The crowd was pretty manic tonight.

Kamikaze punks made exultant swallow dives into the audience from the stage and the editor of *Slash* fanzine leapt up to join Stummer in an unofficial duet before being dragged off and according to him, roughed up by the bouncers who seemed for the most part very easy going for the States.

As Mick said: "We do as we can, we try to say to the guys, let them stand up, don't bash them, and if we're the headliners they've got to take some notice of us." So they've bought quite a big crew with them but they don't know all the security guards, Joe said, and was pretty pissed off when the guy from *Slash* kept on whining about his battle scars.

"We never said it was a utopia. Rock and roll is played on enemy ground. We never promised you when you were a baby that it was going to be roses all the way. But we stopped more than you can imagine. You can go on about getting the shit kicked out of you and you can go on about that guy being murdered by bouncers in London, you can go on as much as you like and I'll just sit here and listen and I'll be thinking of the times I've stopped the blood when I had the chance to."

There was a press conference at midnight after the show, rather a depressed concert as Mick described it. The band were in a lousy mood. No explanation. Mick told me it has just been a "strange day". They seemed pissed off with the way the record company was handling them, especially with the Statue of Liberty posters.

"If they're going to have ads and buy big space and show how flashy we are," said Joe. "We're going to pack information into it such as the lyrics." As in the epic "Don't know what to do with us, they're fucking us up". So what should they do? "Leave us alone for a start."

And they're understandably worn out after the 10 hour bus ride from San Francisco. In seven hours time they'll be back on the bus again heading for Cleveland, Ohio. Some people at the record company were privately expressing anxiety about letting the band drive halfway cross-country. They might decide not to arrive at the right place and the right time.

But they spent 20 minutes slouched over a table backstage (except when Topper got up to let in the members of the Germs, an LA band who were pummeling on the windows outside). Opposite 10 rows of assorted scribes giving half-hearted answers to questions; will they fill in the gap left by the Sex Pistols?

Joe: "I don't know. I haven't seen the gap yet." Will they ever release their first album here? (The record company thought the material and presentation too crude for US radio's present AM or FM programmes, and with no hope of a bit on their hands, didn't bother to put it out)

Joe: "We might release it sometime as a historical document, a greatest hits album".

Do they have problems being famous? Paul: "We can walk down the street in London, people recognize us and come up to us. It's like having loads of friends. That's the way we live, we don't even think about it."

We learn that they came here as soon as they could, that touring the odd places at home was getting tedious, that they found what they consider a healthy new wave scene everywhere they've been so far, that they intend to come back and finish off the job here in the summer, however much flogging it takes them to make it, and that their ambitions are to do away with Boston, Kansas, Foreigner and Kiss as quickly as possible and become "the best rock and roll band in the world".

If Pearl Harbour '79 continues its electrifying attack, they're going to succeed on both fronts. When it comes down to it, the battle is not trying the Statue of Liberty with rope, nor about the right to wear your safety pins, Fiorucci jeans and prawn silk shirts without protest from your Mum.

It's about defeating apathy in rock, changing its direction and taking over its future. And if that's too much to hope for, all who have seen this tour must agree that they're halting senility for a while.

The Best Gang in Town

By Jay Cocks, *Time*, March 5, 1979

The Clash offers visions of a rock-'n 'roll apocalypse

A word from a fan in Berkeley, Calif:

"I like the Clash because they're not disco. They're not fat, bald, aging hippies in hot tubs."

A reflection from the Clash singer Joe Strummer, backstage at Berkeley: "We shouldn't have played here. It's a university town. They're boring snobs."

Standoff. Stalemate.

It is a curious situation, not without a certain undercurrent of irony. The Clash, an English band of four tough-strutting musicians who together lay down the fiercest, most challenging sounds in contemporary rock, has just finished up an American mini-blitz on behalf of their new album *Give 'Em Enough Rope*: ten days, seven cities, stretching from Berkeley to New York, stirring up waters that flow far too free and easy. "American audiences like music to keep you happy," observes Drummer Nicky ("Topper") Headon. "It's music for you to drive home by." "It's the most dreadful thing," Lead Guitarist Mick Jones declares scornfully. "The Aerosmiths, the Foghats, the Bostons—they've kind of signed themselves out."

All around London, the Clash sings straight to—and, in a sense, even speaks for—a generation of working-class kids not only cut off from the social mainstream but disaffected from the smug, cushy sounds of most contemporary pop. Stateside, the audience is different: students, trendy punks, artists and camp followers who cruise the punk periphery like tourists looking to score a season box for the apocalypse. No wonder that, after only the first American date, Joe Strummer was already sounding a little homesick.

In England, the lashing, defiant sound of the Clash has scored well on the charts. Their songs drive hard and mean business. Just the titles

give a taste of the action: *Last Gang in Town*, *Guns on the Roof*, *Drug-Stabbing Time*. In the U.S., air play is scarce. Easy enough to figure that stations programmed for the lulling sounds of California rock or the dull throb of disco might not take to a Clash tune like *Tommy Gun*. There is even some civic concern about violence at the concerts, to which Strummer replies, "There's as much violence at our concerts as any bar" —or, he might have added, at your run-of-the-mill Aerosmith concert. Even with this uncertainty and resistance, the new album has sold upwards of 50,000 copies so far, indicating that there is still an audience for the kind of challenging, combustible music that has not been matched since the Stones or the Who.

Or, for that matter, the Sex Pistols, with whom the Clash is continually compared, although, as Headon says, "we're nothing like the Sex Pistols. We don't set out to shock people through being sick onstage or through self-mutilation." Jones elaborates: "I never was one for sticking a pin in me nose."

The Clash, though hardly elegant instrumentalists, makes far better crafted music than the Pistols ever did. The sheets of sound they let loose have the cumulative effect of a mugging, but the songs, full of threat and challenge, never mean to menace. They are, rather, about anger and desperation, about violence as a condition more than a prescription. *Last Gang in Town*, a fleet, bleak vision of the immediate future with London deeply riven by intramural combat between "rockabilly rebels," "skinhead gangs," "soul rebels" and "zydeco kids," is in part a smart parable about musical rivalries.

Even more to the point, it is a shrewd reflection on class and generational warfare, as Strummer sings, "The sport of today is exciting/ The In crowd are into infighting/ . . . It's brawn against brain or knife against chain/ But it's all young blood flowing down the drain."

Although the Clash assaults some familiar enemies (cops, narcs, soldiers and teachers), the group has no safe targets — not even themselves. *Cheapskate* is a bit of ironic bemusement about rock stardom, both its perks ("Just because we're in a group you think we're stinking rich/ 'N' we all got model girls shedding every stitch") and its permanence ("I'll get out my money and make a bet/ That I'll be seeing you down the launderette"). A fever-blister rocker called *Safe European*

Home concerns the lads' attempts to seek out some brothers in Jamaica, where "every white face is an invitation to robbery" and "Natty Dread drinks at the Sheraton Hotel."

Mick Jones, who writes most of the Clash repertoire with Strummer, hopes that their music can be "an illumination." Such an ambition might seem unsuitably lofty but for the fact that the group comes from a tradition that uses music not only as an outlet but as a force, an effective instrument of social change. "The record company's making out we're politicians, and that's a load of stuff," sneers Strummer, but Jones may cut a little closer when he recalls the title of his school song, *Servants of the State to Be*. "It was the high hope that you would become a civil servant," he says. "That was the best you could do. But rock 'n' roll changed the way I look at society."

Jones, Headon and Bass Player Paul Simonon are all 23; Strummer is the band's senior citizen at 25. Two come from broken homes (Jones: "I stayed with me gran and a lot of wicked aunts") and have logged long hours doing manual labor and running the streets. Even Headon, whose father was a headmaster and whose mother was a teacher, says, "I used to steal a lot and run with a gang," and figures he would be in stir today if he had not beat out 205 other drummers at a Clash audition.

Out of the pieces of a shared precarious existence, the Clash has fashioned music of restless anger and hangman's wit, rediscovered and redirected the danger at the heart of all great rock.

Clash City Talkers: New York Meets Jones And Co. **Ira Robbins, *Trouser Press*, June 1979**

There's nothing quite as frustrating to watch as the hypocrisy of press, radio, and record companies rushing to get behind some new band that has successfully survived their initial indifference and become some sort of hot property.

The Clash, who couldn't get a record released in America until nearly two years after their first LP was unanimously acclaimed by the English press, suddenly became the darlings of the season when they toured here in February. Epic Records, which had first cleverly chosen not to release the debut LP in 1977 and then later failed to commit itself to the Clash enough to see the release of a proposed amalgamation of that album and subsequent single sides, couldn't wait to take credit for the success of the tour and the critical reception of Give 'Em Enough Rope. The few people in the press who had been supporters of the band from the start were either exploited (for promo quotes) or ignored as the publicity machine proudly pointed to a story praising the Clash in Time Magazine, while those NYC fourth estaters newly converted to the band fell all over themselves to meet, greet, eat, and interview the Clash.

In New York, the next-to-last date of the seven-city tour, the Clash headlined (and sold out) the 3,000-seat Palladium, playing a very enjoyable set which included large portions of both albums as well as non-LP single tracks. On the whole it was a really good show, though not the cosmically transcendent experience some later claimed it to have been, just an impressive showing by a great band. The afternoon following the date, an industrial age mass interview situation was arranged in the Indian restaurant connected to the hotel in which the Clash were staying. The numerous invited scribes were presented with tables of interviewees — the band themselves, their manager Caroline Coon and roadies. Brief, round-robin interviews were conducted over buffet lunch as several nervous publicists hovered about, deciding who had talked with whom long enough and in what order people should line up for the chance to chat with their favorite Clashperson. Truly a new wrinkle on the press conference concept. As various over-enthusiastic writer-types attempted to fully express the cataclysmic life-

altering effect the previous eve's concert had had on them (where were they when only TP and the Village Voice's Robert Christgau had the courage to run rave stories in the US?), the tired-looking musicians ran through the repetitive interviews patiently, with much more apparent interest than I would have expected, judging by their published ability to destroy thick-headed writers with their cultivated British scorn. After some bartering with the powers that be, I managed to acquire the company, for 20 minutes each, of Paul Simonon and Mick Jones, in order to inquire about their impressions of the USA, now that they had experienced it from the stage-side. Jones seemed ebullient and much more willing to talk than on our first encounter, months earlier.

Is it easier to play when no one's spitting at you?

Yeah. It's easier when there's not spit on the guitar, cause you slip a lot worse if there's gob on the guitar. Not many people spit anymore — only up in the North of England — they're a bit behind. It's not happening because we just said we don't dig it, and people have got enough respect for us that they won't do it. I've lived through the spitting. I've had bricks thrown at me, and bottles thrown at me as well. We've had some very heavy times.

Are you over your Keith Richards fixation, Mick?

Without a doubt. I still love his playing, but sometimes I think he seems like an ass. Townshend's something more, 'cause he's still there and he's one of the few people in England speaking up for us. He's standing up saying that he thinks we're the strongest band. He's amazed me — that he can get through all these years, and a death in the band, and still have some kind of vision, Ian Hunter has that too — these are the guys I dig because they didn't feel that we were pushing them out of the way. The people who feel that are the Aerosmiths and the Bostons; the people who are scared and useless anyway, and they're gonna go because of it.

Do you see yourselves as Mott the Hoople 1979?

No, but Ian Hunter has definitely blessed our band. He was there for the making of the first album — when we did 'Police and Thieves'; he was in London for the making of the second album and we conferred. He's

always been there — one of my great spiritual guidances. I was very fond of Mott. No, we didn't name 'All the Young Punks' for him — that was something else. We didn't have a title for that one, though that was the obvious one because of the chorus. It was nothing to do with 'Dudes', and the whole 'New Boots' thing was a joke with Ian Dury — that was a mistake as well. You can call that number anything — it's kind of a statement, like 'Garageland' was on the first album. It's our message of what's happening with us.

That's sort of what all of Give 'Em Enough Rope is, though...

But it's important that people don't see it as a kind of corny bio pic. Some do — some see it as a system of living. That's not all it is — we're more than that. It's all for them as well as us; it's for their imaginations. We're raising consciousness. It's the only thing that young people can do for other young people that's worth doing.

Were you scared about coming here — scared of failure?

No, it would just have meant that we wouldn't come back.

The gig last night went well — you looked like you were having fun.

It was real nice. We had a big stage to fill and we wanted everyone to feel a part of it which is really difficult. You couldn't do it if the audience was any larger. That [3,000 seats] is the most you can do it to and still communicate effectively — I'm not keen on playing Wembley Stadium. The biggest we've played was outdoors in that Rock Against Racism thing to about 50,000. Indoors, the most we can manage is about the same as the Palladium. We've worked those bigger places, but bigger shows aren't communication shows. I can't see it working. The last time they asked us to headline the Reading Festival [England's yearly mini-Woodstock — Ed.] we told them to stick it, so they got Tom Robinson or somebody like that.

Do you like the Public Image album?

It must really be hard to be him [Lydon]. I think people are slagging him off because they're not going to let him do what he wants to do. I think it's a bit of a con for the kids, that's the trouble. I really like

'Fodderstompf', that makes a lot of sense to me, and the single is great. There's some good songs on that record, it's just a bit overindulgent. It's too long. The audience that bought it rushed out and got it 'cause he was a Pistol, and it wasn't. But I can see his point of view.

The song on your album that I really love is 'Stay Free'.

Yeah, even the skinheads cry over it. It really moves them. It's very difficult to do it every night; we certainly don't always do it. When we do it, it changes the whole tone of the set. It's like our ballad.

Talking to Paul Simonon proved somewhat less rewarding, although not uninteresting. The blond bassist, not usually a target for interviews, tends towards minimal answers, although he does seem as interested and aware of the affairs of the group as Mick and Joe Strummer (who spent part of the afternoon standing on a table, causing general consternation among the restaurant staff). After complaining about the raisins in the chicken tandoori, Simonon entertained a few questions. Well, sort of...

What do the Clash think of America?

It's been a pretty good tour, it's been alright, good reaction everywhere... It's just been a tour innit?

Is America what you expected?

Yes and no. It's just like every other place, really. It's nothing that important.

How has it been since you split with your manager, Bernard Rhodes?

It's been better — we now know what's going on. We tell Caroline what we want and it happens.

After the show last night a few people commented to me on the clothes you were wearing. [OK, so it's a dumb question — but the bright shirts and white jeans and boots worn by Jones and Simonon almost looked like a uniform...]

What clothes? [Fair enough — Ed.]

Give 'Em Enough Rope is a tremendous album.

I think it's pretty good.

A lot of people who like the second album don't like the first.

I think they're both good.

Do you think American kids understand the lyrics?

Just as much as English kids can. I think they can get the general gist of the songs.

How do you feel about Bo Diddley [who opened on the Clash tour]?

I think he's great. I had never seen him before, but I had heard his records and saw him on film and I thought he was great. When I got a chance to meet him, and travel on the coach with him, it was a real privilege.

Do you care about the English press?

I don't believe it much. I used to read it but I can't be bothered anymore.

What are the plans for the next album?

We haven't really got any plans yet, but we're working on it, slowly. We're putting out an EP of 'Capitol Radio', 'I Fought the Law' and two other songs that would have been on Give 'Em Enough Rope — 'Groovy Times Are Here Again' and 'Gates of the West'. CBS wants another single off the album, so they're putting out 'English Civil War' [#30 in NME, first week — Ed.] and another one of our old ones, 'Pressure Drop'. The EP will come out after that.

Parting comment to Mick Jones as I am cajoled out of my seat to make way for the next tape recorder:

I think, if nothing else, the importance of the Clash would be that you force people to think.

Mick: "I hope so. This whole thing has forced me to think."

A very interesting afternoon all round. The Clash got a lot of interviews packed away in short order without having to resort to the impersonal press conference format where everyone goes home with the same quotes. New York's press cadre got to meet and greet (not to mention eat) their newfound idols, without having to face the individual challenge of trying to query the Clash without first gaining their confidence. The Epic folks successfully whipped up a lot of excitement and temporary enthusiasm for their momentary charges. And one supposes the restaurant was well paid for its time, trouble, and curry powder.

The second US Clash tour is scheduled for June, by which time several other British groups, emboldened enough by the Clash's successful February venture to attempt headlining tours on the theatre circuit, will have been and gone. The Jam, whose American future had seemed a bit uncertain the past six months; Tom Robinson (whose first US tour was a low-key club affair); the Boomtown Rats, and a few others not yet announced are all playing the medium-sized venues where the Clash did so well. One hopes, for their sakes, that the same bandwagon jumping occurs for them, considering all three have been generally ignored (except for the Rats, whose second album was totally forgotten as an import — only its US release caused any significant radio/press interest). What all this sudden interest in good music will do for the Clash in the way of record sales here (pitifully low to date) remains to be seen. For the moment, their future in America seems possible, if not guaranteed. It just may take a while.

The Clash Turn Pro (Sort Of)

By Peter Silverton, *Sounds*, September 29, 1979

TUESDAY LUNCHTIME: Cleveland Airport. With a couple of hours to kill before my one-stop-only flight to Minneapolis and the first date on the Clash's second American tour (bewilderingly named 'The clash Take The Fifth'), I dragged out the Corona Calypso, balanced it sloppily on a tubular chrome ashtray (*everything's* bigger and shinier at Cleveland Airport) and started attacking the keys. Unfortunately, this attracted the attention of a perambulating mahogany tree.

"Hey, you man, whaddya doin', man? I was goin' buy myself a fuckin' Remington, man. That's the best fuckin' typewriter in the world, man. And it only a cost a hundred bucks."

The giant interloper paused to fiddle with his oversize shoulder bag before adding somewhat perplexingly: "But I never did get it 'cos my apartment got burgled...Hey man, what *are* you?"

"A journalist."

He wandered off to allow this piece of information time to find his brain and then eased his three hundred and fifty pounds on to the blue vinyl upholstery right slap next to my right ear.

"You're a German, huh?" I chose to ignore this Pinteresque reply.

"Which part of Germany?"

Remembering what my mother told me about talking to strange black men in airport lounges I kept my lips tightly clamped on my Kent.

'Hey man, you some kind of fuckin' communist?' This last word was spat from his gullet like he thought he was just about to choke on his gum. "I fuckin' hate communists, man". (This from a man who looks like he drew a five, a seven and a three in the Great American poker game.)

"I fuckin' wish I could fuckin' kill you, you motherfucker. If I had a gun on me right now, I'd blow your fuckin' head away, you goddam motherfucker." He drifted away.

America is a foreign country. They do things differently there.

TUESDAY TEATIME: A Minneapolis hotel room. Having just left Paul Simonon in the nineteenth floor bar with a brace of double Brandy Alexanders and his girlfriend Debbie who he introduced to me with the words "This is Debbie, she takes photographs", I'm sitting in Room 511.

Kosmo Vinyl and his yellow blond with black roots hair is sitting at the coffee table. I'm perched by the window. One of Ian Dury's managers, Andrew King, is lounging on a bed talking into the phone.

Both Kosmo and I remain conspicuously silent. Although we can only hear one end of the conversation, it's obviously one of those phone calls that are awarded the respect normally reserved for the dead. With half the information trapped in the confines of a long distance line, little of it makes much sense. I do, however, pick up on a couple of phrases — "Get out in the market place" and "shift some units".

The Clash turn pro in the depths of the American heartland, indeed.

Being a naturally inquisitive sort, I wonder exactly why Ian Dury's PR and manager are sitting in an American hotel room, dealing with Clash business. It's explained to me that this is one of those most modern of relationships, a trial marriage.

The Clash, although still connected to Bernard Rhodes by law and contract, are technically without management. At home in England, they'd taken turns — one week Mike would carry the attaché case, next week Joe would get in the honour. But, on the road in America, they desperately needed someone to take care of the business.

And, after all, Andrew King did have the necessary experience of American backwaters — he'd seen 'em all handling Ian Dury's failed attempt to interest the Yanks by supporting Lou Reed.

And so the Clash, Kosmo Vinyl, Andrew King and his partner, Peter Jenner, are all currently huddled together under the church porch trying to make up their minds and waiting for the priest to arrive.

By the time this is all clear, Kosmo is beginning to enjoy himself. So I asked him if he'd got a copy of the new album (the new album, for the purposes of this article, refers to *The Clash*, You Ess of Eh style) an' 'e said 'e' and'toooh, is there gonna be some fun at Epic tomorrow. I'll get right on the blower and they'll get a bloody vice president down there."

Relations with Epic, their American record label, are, I quickly discover, far from conjugal. (Not that the Clash ever bitched to me about Epic. They learned that lesson long ago. Blabbing off to the press about what is essentially a family affair can make you look like the silly, whining children of the relationship. They didn't even moan in public about CBS England insisting on a £1.49 cover price for the *Cost Of Living* EP when they wanted to keep it down to a quid.)

I don't know for certain why they're not exactly cuddling up under a nuptial blanket with Epic but I'd hazard a guess that it's not because Epic don't think they're worth it, can't see their effort being returned in hard currency but precisely because Epic figure (ha, ha) they stand a more than fair chance of using the Clash to buoy up their books as their profits slide nearer and nearer the red column and the total of Indians they've sacked starts pushing past treble figures.

Figure it this way. Having originally decided not to release the debut album, Epic were taken aback by the relative success of *Give 'Em Enough Rope* (which they did put out), the following tour of North America and, perhaps most tellingly, the overwhelming critical acclaim for the band, writ largest in *Rolling Stone* and the *Village Voice*, respectively the Bible and the Koran of the American music consumer press as it's viewed by the American record industry. (Being suggested as an escape valve for the fear and frustration engendered by China invading Vietnam might seem a touch hyperbolic to English ears; to an American record company it quite likely seems understand.)

So, after putting out the debut album (which has already set a record by selling 100,000 on import) to keep the band and the potential audience

sweet, Epic reckon that the third album (which only needs to be mixed at the end of this tour) could maybe "be the big one for these boys elephant dollar time". But, if that's to work out to Epic's advantage, they need a degree of control over the band they've so far been unable to gain ...even without management the Clash have retain their independence (of sorts — they still needed tour support for this swing through North America).

Accordingly, the label put the bite on the band, saying not to this, maybe (if you do this) to that and generally making life not easy for a band on the road. That way, if Epic play a careful game, by third album time, they hope the Clash'll be doing it their way.

Add Kosmo Vinyl and Andrew King to this mess of divergent ambitions and you have the perfect recipe for tension between a band and their record company.

This, you understand, is all supposition, but I *was* told by one of the Clash's two American tour managers, that if Billy Gaff (Rod Stewart's manager who was once rumoured to be talking over the Clash) was in charge, he would be getting *everything* they wanted out of Epic *with ease*.

Also, I couldn't help but overhear someone saying that, if they didn't get the extra money out of Epic, the tour wouldn't even get as far as New York on September 19/20. Maybe I heard the figure of twenty thousand dollars mentioned. Maybe I didn't it.

TUESDAY EVENING: St Paul Civic Centre. We'd been told to be ready to leave for the rehearsal around six thirty — the following day's show was to be first gig of the tour proper; the only previous date had been an open-air show in Monterey — we finally left around ten.

The journey from the safe Minneapolis home of the Sheraton hotel along a dark and drizzly freeway and across the fledgling Mississippi took a good half hour. As we arrived, we were greeted by an illuminated sign outside the St. Paul Civic Centre promising the Clash tomorrow and Abba next week and the four Clashers bouncing around the stage in mufti.

Paul as always in a peaked cap and black, swinging his bass like he was building a railroad. Mick in trilby, white vest and black pegged pants — Bruce Springsteen's obviously big in the Jones book this year. Topper's behind his kit and Joe's in a green shirt and shouting down at me "Ow long you been 'ere?"

"Since last Friday."

"Oh, I thought you'd been here for ages. You've got fat."

Retreating in shame to the back of the hall that Peter Frampton couldn't fill the week before, I joined Andrew King, who was dancing along to Paul Simonon's first song, 'Guns Of Brixton', which was him and Joe switching instruments — Paul on the 240 Volts Killer Telecaster and Joe on the Pressure bass. It's a moody dub-like nonentity, which doesn't improve with subsequent listenings.

Really, it's like a sideshow to the main action which is Mick running the show from the centre of the stage. It's him who's arguing with the roadies, chivvyng the sound guys and deciding which song they're gonna run through next.

Now they've got someone running the road show, Mick's free to concentrate on the music while Joe messes around with the presentation, getting Johnny Green, the band's "personal", to shine a torch up into his face as a dramatic addition to their new reggae cover version, 'Armagedon Time'.

A few more runs through new songs like '(The Police Walked In On) Jimmy Jazz', an R&B number with a heavy debt to 'Stagger Lee' and 'London's Calling', which is a bridging link between the histrionics of the past and more measured paces of the present.

On past midnight when the union crew for the whole hall switches on to treble time and I fall asleep and get woken by a bottle of beer over my head courtesy of Topper.

The band return to the hotel and their girlfriends — only Mick didn't bring his beloved; she's on tour with the Slits.

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON: Dressing Room. "So what I did was put the jacket carefully in the case so when I took it out there wee no creases in it". Topper's girlfriend, Dee, in multi-coloured spotty suit, is explaining to Gabby, Joe's blond-haired girlfriend who's in a more functional olive drab boiler suit and white boots.

"My mum ironed all my shirts before I left," replies Gabby.

Back in the hall the American sound mixer, Shorty, who's identifying the band by means of the cartoons from the *Sounds* Christmas Clash game taped to the desk, announces: "The hall union has requested we break for fifteen minutes so they can fly the curtain."

Still puzzled by the rigidity of American unions, the band wander off the stage and watch the union crew go for their tea break. I overhear one of the union men telling another: "Christ, didja ever see such a bunch of pricks?"

WEDNESDAY EVENING: The Clash onstage (finally). And tactfully opening with 'I'm So Bored With The USA' as the Stars and Stripes beams benignly down on them from the centre of the backdrop butted right up against the red, white and green of Italy.

All in black apart from Topper's white shirt and Joe's red shirt with the collar points aiming for the sky and running around the stage Clash-wise as Mick "testifies about Brixton" on 'Stay Free' and starts to take chances with his solo on 'Complete Control' — longer, freer, less structured and, for once, not an almost carbon copy of the recorded version.

Joe reaches for the mike and starts blurting: "I come over here and I switch on the radio and all I hear is the Eagles and Steely Dan ...so I turn it to a country and western station."

The crowd boo. Country and western is not the coolest thing in the world to a Clash fan who doesn't know that in Monterey they brought Joe Ely on for the encore to do his 'I Keep My Fingernails Long so they Click When I Play The Piano' and 'White Riot'. Later in the tour, they plan to play a roadhouse with Joe Ely in his hometown of Lubbock, Texas.

The gig starts to disintegrate as Joe's guitar refuses to work, leaving him skanking guitarless in front of the mike, sticking alternate hands in his pockets and wailing through 'The Prisoner'. As the crowd wildly applaud 'White Man', Joe tells them: "It's no good. It's a pile of shit." And later: "You gotta say 'Fuck off, you limeys. Give it some stick, you cunts'."

The crowd is perplexed and next day the *Minneapolis Star* interprets this as "punk rock's offensiveness" instead of an honest admission to being at less than peak form.

Mind you, the monitor mixer didn't help. Deaf in one ear, he was reading a book throughout the set. (He wasn't there the next show.) Surmounting such odds, they played a solid rearguard action, making it on guts, charisma and the strength of new songs — 'Waiting For The Clampdown' about the Three Mile Island near meltdown and 'Koke Adds Life' which they segue into 'I Fought The Law'.

The crowd didn't care that it was "hardly transcendental" (*Minneapolis Star* headline); they wanted their encore. Paul and Topper came on first, then Paul and by the time they were locked into the thudding rhythm of 'Armagideon Time', Joe strolled on in the total dark carrying a candelabra, its candles the only light on the stage.

(The candelabra later disappeared which cost the band two hundred and fifty very useful dollars.) The sweet and sour tones of Strummer's "A lot of people won't get no supper tonight" wound into the first-album-greatest-hits-sprint-to-the-end-and-off.

Andrew King's mellow voice told me "I don't think I'll go backstage for a few moments. I'll let them kill the road crew first."

When all's cooled out, Mick sits in the dressing room, drawing on some herb and chatting to his mum and step-dad. Renee Jones(as was) lives in Armwood, Michigan with her copper-mine engineer husband, George. They'd driven down specially for the show and both had obviously got themselves dressed up for the night out. He's in a neat, well-cut suit and tie. She's got a mass of black curly hair topping a copper necklace and a black, translucent shirt covered with what look like white apples.

Both of them are obviously very proud of Mick. George has never been to a rock show before. He keeps mumbling: "My God. It was amazing. I've never seen anything like it before." When Mick wanders over to the other side of the room, Renee keeps stealing glances at him just like any proud mum.

In the other corner sit the road managers discussing the equipment failures. "Those mikes just aren't built for Strummer," says Andrew King, "they're for folk-singers like Roy Harper. What we need is some hydraulic ones. Two of those should last us the whole tour."

THURSDAY: Seven hours on an Arpeggio tour bus. As body after body is squeezed on the tour bus, the size of the entourage becomes inescapable. The band, three girlfriends, the personal roadie, Rory, a mate of Mick's and one of the America tour managers and great fund of stories about Mick at art school and in the Delinquents, two journalists, two photographers and an artist. Throw in a juggler and they could open a circus.

Minneapolis to Chicago. Seven hours on a bus with one short stop. The tinted windows make it almost impossible to see but the comforts of the bus make it seem more like a vibrating hotel room than a means of transportation.

By squeezing against a window and squinting, you can see out.

'Holidrome Holiday Inn 41 Miles. Exit 53 North.'

'County Line 62 Miles.'

'Howard Johnson's Travel Lodge Exit 3 South 26 Miles.'

We pull up by the Chicago Downtown Holiday Inn three hours later than originally scheduled — on this tour, *everything* except the and going onstage seems to happen three hours late. I'm last off the bus and as I'm about to wander into the hotel, Johnny Green rushes out and grabs me.

"Have you got your credit card? They insist on either full payment in advance or a credit card and we haven't got either. Just stroll in there

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looking like you're the manager — I'll take that bottle of Jack Daniels off you — and give 'em the card."

(I oblige. Putting 30 people up at a hotel for three nights is just the kind of thing my bank manager loves me doing. I finally have to drag the other American tour manager, Mark Wissing, out of bed fifteen minutes before I leave for the airport to settle the bill.)

FRIDAY NIGHT: Aragon Ballroom. On this summer's tour of the States, Rod Stewart played the Uptown Theatre in Chicago. It holds four thousand. The Clash played the Aragon which holds six thousand and drew maybe four thousand to their first gig in the city.

The Aragon looks like the architect couldn't make up his mind on which style to copy ... so he used them all. It's got a little bit of Mexican, a touch of Inca, some Spanish and an entrance hall that looks like a catacomb.

An old ballroom that once played host to the likes of Glenn Miller and Count Basie, it's got history, the Lawrence 4800N 1200W E1 running right up its side, level with the stage, a warm feeling and lousy acoustics. Topper sounds like he's the Scots Guards. And the Coldstream Guards.

Supporting them this night (as well as the Undertones who are on all of the first half of the tour and got two encores in Chicago) was the mighty lumberjack himself. Uncle Bo Diddley, in his element and his hometown. With his computer assisted guitar and primal rhythms, he's the point where the jungle and the research lab walk and talk it hand in hand and he plays the drone guitar to beat all drone guitars.

Holding 'USA' back for the second number, the Clash opened with that R&B song 'Jimmy Jazz'. Most of the audience stared hard at the stage trying to work out if they'd turned up on the right night but by the end of 'USA' you could tell Mick was enjoying it — he did a giant leap in the air for the final chord.

Already by this second date the band are beginning to work out a new choreography — Joe advancing to the front of the stage during the subdued section of 'Complete Control' and all of them retreating to the

back of the stage in 'I Fought The Law' which the audience interpret as drama and I reckon is maybe "We can't hear the drums".

Joe: "This is an American song. I want you to put your hand son your heart like this and ..."

Mick straps on a blond Ovation acoustic guitar.

'When Johnny comes marching home again Hurrah Tra la He's coming by bus or underground...'

The acoustic has everyone confused but the crowd still applaud convincingly. Having survived this test and wading through Paul's song, they push on through to the end of the set on at least five out of the six cylinders. The shouting, screaming, dancing, cheering and lighted matches (lighted matches? Who do they think this is, Bob Dylan?) make it clear that if the Clash want to take America, it's theirs to take.

Amidst the Epic execs and fans in the dressing room are two bovine women looking very out of place in halter tops, fishnet tights, hot pants, garters, gloves and very heavy eyeshadow. They look like ten-bucks-for-a-blowjob hookers and the least likely people you can imagine in a Clash dressing room. Later I'm told that they were brought by a local dee-jay — a little (refused) present for the band. I realise America is obviously ready to shower its fruits on the Clash.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON: Air Canada 727 smoking section window seat. I leaf through a copy of *People* Magazine, the one with the 'Music Biz Blues' cover story. A flighty, unthought-out and soft piece on the recession in the American record business, one line caught my eye. "Most of the major record companies have fired at least fifty employees. At CBS Records, where the body count was 172, victims took to wearing t-shirts reading THE CRASH OF '79."

How long before Epic alter that R to an L?

Clash in NYC – Waiting for Ivan

Mary Harron, *Melody Maker*, October 6, 1979

According to reports, it was a hot, dead, airless summer in New York City. With nothing much happening on the local music scene, excitement centred on the English visitors. The Gang of Four were ecstatically received, scoring over the Buzzcocks, while Eddie and the Hot Rods found a kinder welcome than they do at home. And when the Clash arrived in town last week they were heralded in the *Village Voice* as "the most intense rock and roll band in the world".

Supported by the Undertones and Sam and Dave, the Clash sold out the Palladium, as they had several months before. The Palladium is an old converted theatre; in commercial terms it stands half-way between the Mudd Club and Madison Square Garden. It's as ornate as London's Lyceum, but even sleazier. Every Saturday night the 14th Street pushers move from their usual pitch in front of the Disco Donut shop to outside the theatre doors, waiting to sell downers and questionable marijuana to the teenagers who flock in from the suburbs.

New York audience are notoriously reserved, with the result that the Undertones almost stole the show on Thursday night and didn't realise it. Reported to be depressed by their performance on Friday they shouted from the stage "What is this, a funeral or something?" and didn't come back for the encore they certainly deserved. Sam and Dave, who danced, sweated and crooned in a splendidly over-the-top performance, near-missed on the first night but hit on the second, with the audience dancing on the stage.

But it was the Clash's event, and even if they suffered from nerves or tiredness on Thursday, they had the singular achievement of keeping a Palladium audience on their feet throughout the show. Friday night was stunning for its concentration, energy and high-spirited attack. Whatever they were in the beginning, they now embody a modern version of Fifties rock 'n' roll glamour. For many of the audience, they are simply a new kind of rock star.

Backstage the security force were guarding the door as if they were Kiss – no reflection on the group, just house policy. "Youse can't come

in here, understand – SO GET DOWN THOSE FUCKING STAIRS!" one of them shouted at Johnny Ramone, who curled up shyly in the doorway, like a fern. In the dressing room the Clash signed autographs, submitted patiently to questions from people they didn't know and were filmed for television. Finally Mick Jones refused to do any more interviews: "I can't talk now, I'm going through a transcendental phase."

In a corner Joe Strummer was losing his voice. He said he felt happier with this tour than the last. "I think we're playing a lot better – more people are coming, which makes you feel like giving more. You feel less irrelevant." He admitted to being depressed by the behaviour of the bouncers on this tour; in Boston a girl was beaten up and pushed down the stairs. "During the Boston show they were punching people all over the hall. We stopped the show and said where's the promoter? And he weren't there, he'd run off like they all do. That's one area we just haven't got control over yet."

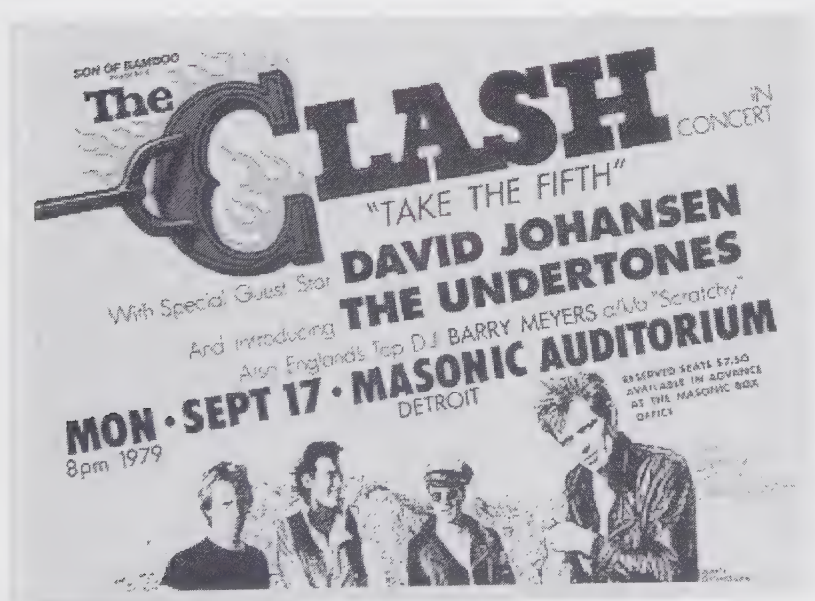
Strummer insists the tour isn't making them money so far. "We had to borrow \$20,000 from Epic records to fund the tour, and it was hard enough getting that out of them. They come and shake out hands and smile and say 'Great show, boys!' but they should make with the cheques. They should give us a hand – it's a costly business this. We're staying at the Empire, which is the worst hotel in New York. You go in the shower and the wall falls on your back."

What about American audience?

"I always get tongue-tied once people ask me that. Because once I'm on stage and the lighting guy hits me with a hundred white lights, I don't know what country I'm in. As for seeing the cities – we've been three days now and played two shows and my taste of New York is 25 minutes standing on a corner in the rain eating a pizza, with a take-out coffee. Watching people go by, you know? I was standing by a phone booth and it started to ring. I walk over and pick up the phone and this guy asks to speak to Ivan. So I'm standing on the corner shouting 'Ivan! Ivan!' at the top of my voice – ruining it for the show – and no Ivan comes. So I say 'There ain't no Ivan', and he says 'Thanks a lot'. And that's my experience of New York."

With what could have been wishful thinking, Strummer said he thought the American audiences appreciate the political content of the Clash's songs. "Even though America has cooled down lot since all that turmoil in the Sixties, I think there are a lot of people who are willing to get on the street and fight for what they want. Even more so than in Britain. This is backstage at the Palladium but tomorrow we'll be rolling down the turnpike through all the burnt out areas of Philadelphia. We think of America as this middle class place with everybody stuffing themselves, but a quarter of the population live in places that are just like the Gorbals."

He fell silent and looked like someone who had had to answer too many questions. "I'm not into lying on a bed with a mirror and a razorblade. I'm not into it. I just want to have a cup of coffee and a pizza on the corner while I think about things. And that's how I'm looking after that show, you know?"



Clash USA '79

By Paul Morley, *NME*, October 13, 1979

Details: The Scene

The Clash on tour of America. There's a glamorous image, with a confident, crusading edge to it.

The Clash: a lot of hope and responsibility there.

America: it still means a lot.

THE CLASH'S CURRENT six week coast to coast tip to toe tour of the United States Of America is their first major assault upon the stupefied standards of the land. It follows a few months after their exploratory dip into the stagnant, dense culture waters of America – a six date trip definitively chronicled by Joe Strummer's own frantic pen in the *NME* of March 3rd, 1979.

The tour – titled 'Take The Fifth' – possesses a resistance and direction that sets it well apart from the soft centered, soft hearted British invasion of Sniff N' The Tears, The Records, Ian Gomm, Bram Tchaikovsky, et al. The Clash are in America following destiny. The tour has taken on the spirit of a quest. The Quest: abstract words with a definition much the same as 'punk'. New change and choice...

In America this is about working towards less Kansas, Styx, Foreigner and Boston and more reggae and Clash on the radio; towards replacing the glazed look in the eyes of American youth with a glint of purpose and passion, towards staying alive, towards saying 'look out'. The Quest is a battle requiring non stop concentration, humour, flexibility and understanding. Blind faith, even.

Joe Strummer will refer to the unknown American audience as the great grey people, maybe something ultimately unreachable. "You know how we can get through here," Strummer will reflect, "I want to get through to the person in high school; you know, all the people that we've got to in the cities, they're sussed, right, it's the kid in the high school who doesn't know anything about it even yet. I hope ultimately we get

through to him. Because he's the one at home in his bedroom, he's got Kansas albums and racks of Kiss and all that, and I feel like he should have a dose of us."

But perhaps, paradoxically, it's a victory that The Clash must never complete: "To sell something like Rod Stewart here, that's going to mean that we reach all the nerds, they're gonna have to go out and buy a copy, right, and they ain't even gonna do that because they never heard of us...but maybe that's why we are never going to get there; because once you get there, you're fucked. You know what I mean? Maybe we'll never get there."

It's an end – commercial success – that The Clash shove in a corner. "If we were just going to be another Stones or another Who," Strummer told a Detroit newspaper, "it would be a bit of a bore. That's why we're going to try and turn left where we should've turned right, y'know."

The Clash try to live from day to day. The Clash are in America for better or worse; it's a shot-gun wedding of sorts. They are committed to convincing America that there is something wrong. There is no easy way.

I spent nine days with the group, the first part of their stint, about a fifth of the total. I glimpsed the pain and pressure, a little bit of the pleasure, shared a lot of the monotony and frustration. There was some jealousy, but ultimately a gladness that I wasn't in what they were in. Mixed up with love, admiration, confusion; that's this writer's cocktail.

The Clash have surrounded themselves on the tour with a lot of people. Girlfriends Gabrielle (Strummer), Dee (Headon), Debbie (Simonon); publicist, clown and one of the most important people in rock'n'roll, Godfather of the Quest Kozmo Vinyl; photographer Pennie Smith; cartoonist Ray Lowry; DJ Barry Myers; personal roadie Johnnie Green. Already this circus of creativity has been reported as unnecessarily unwieldy – the way music papers transmit fragmented fractions of truths that negatively pad out the glamour image is one of the things that frustrated me about the tour. These fellow travellers were all invited on to the tour, were not a buffer, and did not cramp The Clash. If energies were split and diverted that's the only way it could be. At least the energy was there.

The Clash love to be with people, and shared their touring coach to bursting point with no complaints. They feed off others' energies. This is one reason so many on the road adventures of The Clash turn up in the pop press. My own presence, if unwelcome, would have been quickly discarded. The Clash are hardly tolerant or submissive.

Reports have indicated that such an unwieldy entourage suggests confusion. Of course The Clash are confused. In such unnatural circumstances who wouldn't be? This confusion is more positive than harmful. There is nothing slick or pre-planned about The Clash, who were literally living, financially, from day to day on the tour, not able to be certain that hotels two days ahead were booked. Reports that the group were smothered in money from Epic are silly and laughable; at one point the group was forced to seriously discuss coming home.

There is still confusion over Clash management. On the tour, at certain points, up to four people would be telling the individual members of the band what the next move was. This caused misunderstanding, a lot of waiting, a lot of muttering under the breath. It emphasised that The Clash are not a business; they are still an amateur organisation, and whilst this can be frustrating it's positive in that the essence of Clash is not set, sealed and unchanging. There is nothing certain about The Clash. Nothing comfortable. No chance to sit back.

Joe Strummer, Topper Headon, Paul Simonon and Mick Jones live The Clash. Touring America is a long hard job with no distinction between work and play, where things constantly shove into the mainline preoccupations of travelling, soundchecking, sleeping and performing. Distractions like round the clock newspaper / radio / tv interviews. Distractions like attempting to package, title, and even mix their third LP, knowing at the back of their minds that decisions often made snappily or jokingly will stick around them for a long time to come.

Distractions like fighting to insist that the record will be a double for the price of a single, knowing that if their demands get ignored by faraway CBS they will be the ones to face the cynical derision.

The third LP is going to contain 18 songs. Songs they took to writing as part of the recovery from the spiritual low they experienced at the

beginning of the year. "Black music, black vinyl, black and white cover."

But there's nothing about The Clash that is straightforward. They concentrate on bringing these long, tall and wide new songs into the set, thinking about the forthcoming release, and meanwhile their American label Epic have finally released the first LP, with the addition of a few recent songs to contrive a 'greatest hits' package. The Clash find themselves unwittingly and unwillingly having to promote relics from the past – that was that and now it's now – songs that have a part in their set but little relevance in their new way of thinking.

Not only that, but whilst The Clash are away, CBS will play. CBS thought it would be a good idea to release the USA package in Britain. Full price and all that. The Clash are forced to fight this nonsense.

"What a threat," snaps Strummer, "just to pay for this jaunt!"

"Typical of them to try and trick us when we are away," snarls Jones. "They always do that. They thought that they could make it look like the British fans would want the record and then it would pay for us to come over here. We're not going to do that! How would that look? To the kids at home, some kid in Bolton: 'Oh yeah, I'm paying for them to ponce about in America'...so we've successfully put the block on that.

"We just said we would come back home if they did that," expands Strummer. "We were willing to go home straight away. Fuck it, we'd go home, bollocks to the rest of it."

On it goes. A ball of confusion bouncing wayward but forward. Vague ideas about visiting Mexico and Cuba are brought into play, introducing more problems. The curiosity of The Clash will never be curbed. Their ills of desire will never be cured. The reputation thickens, for better or worse.

This yet-another-lengthy *NME* support of The Clash is subjective details of the extent of their commitment, a commitment that is often nothing more than a commitment to merely continuing. It is a report on the new responses; The Clash truly never look back.

It is a glance at four totally different characters who came together, became the strongest survivors of the punk purge because of spite, the ability to expand, the odd accident, a lot of stubbornness and fear. They have had to struggle constantly with compromises, their naivety, their impatience, the scorn of those who are convinced that they've failed in their 'task', the sycophantic glee of those who observe in the group's desperation and dilettantism and arrogance the saviours of something or other.

Details from little bits of a story. The Clash story, like all the very best stories, doesn't start once upon a time, but is about limitation and potential, a search, and will not have a happy ending. It's thick with plot, the characters are complex and wonderful, and it's impossible to ignore.

It started something like this:

Details: The History

"Twenty one was when I first got sensible, when I learnt to play the guitar. Before that I was just poncing about," Joe Strummer tells me.

"From school I went straight into art college, and after a year I just went off and did absolutely nothing. For at least two years I was just bumming around. Everyone's gotta bum around. I worked on a farm but stayed round London most of the time, and then when I was 21 I thought right I'll get really serious now and I'll learn to play the guitar.

"When I was sixteen like everyone I had a Spanish flamenco guitar and I learnt to play some blues toons on it, then I thought well I can't handle any more of that so I never bothered. When I was 20 I felt sick that I'd never bothered. I thought 'Shit, I could be better than Eric Clapton, so now I'm 21 I'm really gonna do it. If I don't do it next year I'm going to be even more pissed off'.

"So I just started, and having to earn my living with it helped. I ended up bottling for this busker, and it was like, I found out later on, the apprenticeship of a blues musician. I got a real kick out of that. All the great blues players started out collecting the money for some master, to learn the licks. The guy I bottled for would play the violin and

eventually whenever there was a guitar lying around from another busker I would borrow it and he would teach me how to accompany. Just simple country and western and Chuck Berry.

"One day he said he was going off to do the pitch at Oxford Circus and he left me at Green Park and said 'Now you do this pitch.' I had a ukelele. He just walked off and left me alone. It was rush hour and the train emptied at one end of the corridor. One second the corridor was like empty, the next minute it was packed with people streaming through. It was like now or never, playing to this full house. That was the first time I remember performing on my own.

"I got good money but I had to give it up. I was walking along a curved passage at Oxford Circus and I happened to glance up at the ceiling at these speakers and I couldn't work out what they were, and I started playing and a voice said, from the box, speaking to me all on my own in this corridor, one flight under the city, this box was saying 'Right you clear off we're sending the railway police'. I realised these speakers were linked to the cop shop upstairs, where I was used to being dragged, but usually you had a chance to run off. But this was like – what can you do? This is 1984. This guy walked past and I screamed at him 'Can you hear that? This is 1984!' and he gave me a funny look and rushed off. I thought 'Aah fuck it' and packed it in.

"Then I was hanging around the Elgin Avenue, the Elephant And Castle pub there, and I was watching this Irish trio hacking out this stuff and I thought, 'Hey this is how to get over the summer', y'know, when my form of income was like curtailed because of the speaker system, I thought this is how to do it. All these people were hanging round my squat just doing nothing and I thought I'll whip up a few of these guys and we'll play in some Irish pubs. I can do that. And that's how the 101'ers started, just to get over the summer. I never thought we'd end up playing in the Windsor Castle, which seemed to me to be the be all and end all, never mind Madison Square Garden, that's what it seemed like to me.

"After busking for a while doing Chuck Berry and blues tunes you start to switch around the chords when no one's looking. You start making up things in those endless hours when no one's around. That's how I guess I started. I didn't really want to write songs cos I figured that I

couldn't...I'd never been musical, I didn't know what I was getting into. I'd always been into the music ever since 'Not Fade Away', I'd always been a total number one fan, but I never thought that I could do it, especially as I'd always been more into painting. I just ended up writing after trying everything else, by default.

"The 101'ers' gigs were really chaotic, like hiring a room above a pub, tenpence to get in – independent promotion I just realised that was. This girl said rent the room for a quid – A QUID – and we can put on a club, and we can print circulars, and we were lying around going 'Leave it out, we'll never do that, no one'll ever turn up'. She pushed us into it and we had a thriving club going before we knew where we were. Every Wednesday night, packed with lunatics.

"It just seemed by default again, doing 'Boney Maroney' to a load of lunatics, and we only had six numbers so to fill it out I figured I was going to have to write something. I think the first thing I wrote was 'Keys To Your Heart'.

"It took a long time for me to meet up with Mick. I mean, from that time to the time I met Mick is almost the longest period of my life. It was six gigs a week for maybe eighteen months. Getting work was all by default as well. We got on to the pub circuit and we started getting one line mentions in the papers. After that started it was just a slog. It just seemed after doing eighteen months of that we were just invisible. I started to lose my mind, I would go around the squat saying, 'We're invisible, we should change our name to The Invisibles'. Cos I felt like we'd been doing great shows for three hundred people in Norwich or Thetford and it would just be invisible. You'd get back to London about 5 in the morning, unload the gear in the back room, put on a kettle and go 'What the fuck's all that about?' And in the paper it'd be like Queen and all that. We were just shambling from one gig to the next banging our heads against the wall.

"As soon as Johnny Rotten hit the stand, right, the writing was on the wall. As far as I was concerned. I was in that state of mind that I was just slogging around getting nowhere. I sacked yet another guitarist because although he was a brilliant technician he didn't understand what I wanted. I got Martin Stone in to play some shows and that was fun but it just seemed that whole thing was over.

"Bernie Rhodes turned up at the Golden Lion with Keith Levine and I went outside and stood at the bustop with them and he sort of said, 'What you gonna do?' And I said, 'I dunno,' and he said, 'Well come down to this squat in Sheperds Bush and meet these guys,' and Keith was sat there nodding saying, 'You'd better'.

"I met Mick the next day. I didn't even have no choice. The 101'ers were strictly a well known west London R&B band.

"When I met Mick and Keith at the squat we went in and sat on the bed and looked at each other and like Bernie said, 'This is the guy you gotta write songs with,' and Mick sort of scowled and I thought, 'Well I haven't got any choice. This is what I've got to do'.

"Finally we got playing and we'd play anything until we could think of something to write. Me and Mick were just sitting upstairs and I had a big notebook and I would just write the words out with a big crayon and he would bang out a simple tune. I don't know how it happened. I got no memory, really, no recall at all. I can remember writing 'White Riot' and '1977' but the rest I can't remember.

"The whole thing was really great from the beginning of 1976 when my group crumbled and I met this lot and we took off, all the way through that. My dreams were like carnivals, my mind would churn over and over in my sleep and I'd wake up and I'd been speeding naturally cos of the decisions, throwing in one thing and doing another, everything was being tried and experimented, it was just great.

"It can't seem to be like that all the time but it's great when it is.

"We knew it was going to be good. You know that certainty when you don't even bother to think, that certainty was with us and I'm glad of it. We knew that this was it. I don't know how or why.

"I loved the exposure that I got. Finally. I thought 'We'll show those bastards'. They'd been ignoring us, and when we got big reviews I just thought it was really something. It seemed like we deserved it.

"To be honest I'm a total idiot in the business affairs, more so then, I'm really dumb and naive now, and I'd freely admit that I didn't know what

the fuck was going on, I hadn't got a fucking clue. Maybe it was because we were being so totally creative, like business decisions seemed totally irrelevant. It's like jazz musicians saying 'Let me play the horn, don't bother me with details'. I was only happy that we were going to be able to put our stuff on record. When Bernie said we were going to sign to Polydor I just left it all to him and I just thought 'Fucking great, we can put out a record'.

"Signing for CBS was a good idea for us at the time because it was really a danger of it being us and The Pistols, we signed to major labels, The Damned went to Stiff, and then like we went in the Rainbow as well as that and the Pistols went off on the Anarchy tour with us bottom of the bill and like that was a conscious attempt on the part of McLaren and Rhodes to burst out of the confined thing. They'd been to New York and what they hated was that the punk thing was like CBGB's on the Bowery was how it stayed for five years. It never came out of there.

"And McLaren and Rhodes were right; our stuff and the Pistols' stuff was great. I don't want to brag, but it was great, and it didn't deserve to stay in a hole in Covent Garden for five years. Can you imagine us playing The Roxy Covent Garden for four years? I'm glad that McLaren and Rhodes had the suss to suss that, and that was like part of breaking out. We burst out when it needed to be taken seriously, y'know what I mean.

"Now people go 'Of course it was taken seriously', but in those days it was a novelty: 'Ha ha ha look at those idiots, pass me the Little Feat album'. And at least we fucking burst out. We had to."

Details: The TV Show

Two and a half years after bursting out, gaunt, twitchy Joe Strummer is sitting in a row with his equally restless comrades, blinking in front of the unblinking glare of a white heat television light.

Perhaps that early Joe Strummer was looking for a reward. So is this it? It's part of it. Sitting in a room the size of a bathroom tucked away in the corner of the New York Palladium, squashed between Mick Jones

and Topper Headon, preparing to play spokesman for a movement to the film camera of a well known American documentary programme, *20/20* which wants to know what this noise is all about. Thirty minutes after concluding a performance that cracked his voice, blistered his hands and blurred his eyes, Strummer is expected to explain. And perhaps he'd better get it right. Millions will look on. Joe can't see it like that. He needs a drink.

Two and a half years, two albums of songs, a handful of singles, lots of questions and lots of answers, and Joe Strummer and The Clash's reward is to have people continually poking away.

What's going on?

What's this?...and that?

Why do you look like that?

Where's the change?

Whatever it is, revolution or idle chit chat, it has to be televised. And because of the defaults and the anger it had to be The Clash. It was inevitable looking back. The Clash have become known. Unique. Important. And still a novelty. They don't flinch. They get on with it.

That a programme like *20/20* comes to The Clash for comment – and hopefully a small helping of controversy – is both a sign of success, and also, because of the nature of the programme, a sign of failure. Clash are viewed as little more than hopeless eccentrics. To burst out in America isn't easy. The Clash don't shy away; they get on with it.

Kozmo Vinyl manages to get the group in one place at the same time and squeeze them into the room. The tv people smile genially and hopefully. The room has been set up so that the final on screen viewing will be the typical stark, crude punk setting. Clash fidget and sigh as the technicians fix microphones and camera. They're to play sensible spokesmen for British punk rock but they're tired, they want to go home. Duty, the vague sense that this is the reward, keeps them in place.

Quiet Paul Simonon, with the awkward frame and beautiful face, contributes a couple of words to the conversation, fights to keep a playful smirk off his hard features, and then walks out, letting the smirk break up his face. That'll look good on tv.

Topper Headon, sneaky and cheeky, small and tough, absent mindedly lets Strummer draw a moustache on his slight face and then he departs too.

Grinning condemning Mick Jones and a tetchy Strummer do the talking, warming just a little to their subject: How could they not? Off camera, the careful female voice prods, nudges and doesn't help the discontented duo into action.

...20/20 take six...I have to ask you some pretty dumb and stupid and obvious questions because a lot of people don't know anything about you or punk.

Micky plays the good boy, teeth break through his lips. "Well, we are The Clash," he explains as if to a little child, "and we are a British punk band from London."

"Australia," grunts Strummer, looking away.

What is punk anyway?

"It's a music innit?" charms Jones.

Is there such a thing as American punk music?

"Not really," decides Jones, taking the question at safety pin literal.

"What about the Dead Kennedy's?" asks Joe.

"Mmm. But really it started in London in the mid '70s and we are the only survivors!" Jones eyes sparkle.

What do the people who play punk have in common?

Simonon says his two words worth. "Short hair."

"Yeah," agrees Jones "and no flairs."

Everyone says you're angry. What are you angry about?

"Fucking everything," spits Jones convincingly.

"The hotels ain't good enough," croaks Strummer.

"Well we're quite happy actually," claims Headon.

Are you a political band?

Headon, Strummer and Jones break into a silly sing song. "We're A Political Band. La La La La." Jones decided they should write that one down.

The careful female voice continues, unmoved: What's the difference between your music and American?

"Well this is English music. What happened to American music is completely opposite to what happened to English music. The English music is really exciting, it's in the spirit of rock'n'roll; that's what we're doing, we're trying to remind people of that..." Jones pauses. Strummer screams and clears his throat: "IT AIN'T ABOUT PLAYING THE RIGHT FUCKING CHORD FOR A START!"

What is it about?

"I can't quite put my finger on it," Strummer sneers.

How do you feel about people buying your album? The commercial success?

Strummer: "Well, there's about three people who've bought our album so far."

Jones: "I'd rather they bought ours than somebody else's."

Strummer: "We've sold three records and after this tour we'll sell another three."

What are you trying to do? You're on a tour of America and lots of people are seeing you, far more than three.

Strummer: "If we come to an American city there are approximately 2,400 people who come to see us, who know about us. On the other hand there are ten million zillion people who've never even heard of us in the city, especially those people who go to high school or low school or any other kind of school. I've been in their bedrooms in Virginia or Texas and I've seen their albums stacked up by the bed, and there's Kansas, Boston, Foreigner and I try to say to them, 'These records ain't no good, doncha know about The Yardbirds?' And they say 'Who?' And I say 'Doncha know about The Clash?' And they say 'Who?' And that's it. How are we going to get through to these people? They ain't rushing over to the radio station saying 'Put on a Clash record PUT ON A CLASH RECORD!' They ain't doing that."

Jones: "A lot of the radio stations in America aren't even playing black music..."

Strummer: "Which is even worse! Never mind The Clash, what about where the music came from!"

Jones: "You're sitting in Minneapolis and you don't even know what reggae music is!"

Strummer: "For every satin-suited platform-soled macho-strutting guitarist, for everyone of those up there in the lights sniffing coke, right, there's like 50 or 60 black men starving in the same town who invented the music with their own sweat, and this guy is ripping it off and posing away. It's shit!"

Jones and Strummer had by now successfully succeeded in pulling the conversation away from the confines it looked like it was keeping to. The conversation jumps through discos and theatres and things, Strummer and Jones really wanting to go but keep getting worked up by the questions. They have to answer. Who else will point these things out? Eventually the careful female voice asks for some final words of wisdom.

Jones: "Keep on complaining." Strummer scrawls TRUE on the wall behind Jones' head as he speaks. "If you want to give us a hand you've really got to do it...if you want to hear things on the radio you got to ring up the radio station..."

Strummer: "In Detroit they've got a free radio organisation...free radio for the '80s, they ain't being passive...I'd just like to say don't be passive..."

Jones: "Don't be apathetic."

Strummer: "And we highly recommend that you go to a show and if you don't like the show you've got to bottle them off stage, you gotta make your feelings felt. That way everybody knows what you want. If you don't tell anybody how they gonna know?"

OK. One more question can I ask: You're signed to CBS, and Columbia and all that stuff, are they trying to put any pressure on you?

Jones: "They try."

Strummer: "We've been on Epic, we've been an artiste on Epic Records for two and a half years and for the first two and a half years they didn't even know we were on the label, and then they found out and they come and shake our hands but they never make with the chequebook baby. We want some cheques, otherwise how we gonna get petrol in the bus to get down to Kansas?"

Jones: "So come on. Hey this is on ABC not CBS!"

Strummer: "CBS never come crawling..."

Details: The Fans

*Don't ask me to be your hero
I will only let you down
Don't ever sleep with your hero
Things will never be the same
All the heros, like they say
They're all dead out of the way*

*If you see me on the street
Don't attempt to speak to me, cos
If you see me on the street
I won't want to know you*
– Patrik Fitzgerald. Copyright Control

Mick Jones likes the Patrik Fitzgerald song 'Your Hero'. He says that Fitzgerald has got it exactly right, which is odd because Fitzgerald must never have experienced, perhaps only anticipated, what Jones has to go through...as a new hero.

Even in America, walking down the street, visiting clubs, in the dressing room, teenagers and people in their twenties clamour around Jones, clutch his hand, offer bits of paper for autographs, attempt conversation...Jones always seems a little unsure...

"I find the laying of hands a very strange thing. No one's come along and wanted to shake my hand in order to heal me, but they often look to be healed..."

"Yeah, I know what you mean," agrees Strummer, "they want to shake your hand, but they want to take something, I don't know what..."

"They never offer anything, or very few do," continues Jones. Even so, Jones often looks for something.

After 20/20 have used The Clash, Jones and Strummer move back to the nearby dressing room, overflowing with New Yorkers. The previous night's New York performance had seen a post gig dressing room filled with slick liggers and empty smilers. For the second night, Jones wanted the fans to be let in.

The fans are let in. Stern but not impassive schoolteacher Kozmo Vinyl organises them in batches. Jones never really knows how to handle them, but he wants the experience.

Jones back in the dressing room, fans move in for the kill. Jones, is, unusually, frowning. He's not pleased with the tv performance. He's not as comfortable as the others with Clash's tendency to lark about. "I think we were a bit like Morecambe and Wise," he mutters, "it's like a

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comedy. It wasn't right, what we're talking about isn't comedy, it's tragedy, the story is a tragedy. Still by the time they've fucking finished with it..."

All the time Jones is talking to me in the crush of the dressing room he's obliged to sign autographs and put on a brave face through his fretting. "I can refuse, but I feel that I need to explain why I am refusing. In the streets I refuse; it feels like a mutually humiliating experience. This is why now I'm talking to you I'm signing, it takes time to explain to everybody that it's not worth it. In a situation like this it's better to keep signing. I just hope it doesn't do too much harm."

Doesn't he see it as a sign he's achieving something I ask, as another autograph has to be signed?

"Not at all. If all we've achieved is someone wanting my autograph then I think we've gone wrong."

Jones seems in an emotional mood, a little pensive, so it is a good time to ask him what he wants to achieve. He looks into the distance, oblivious for the moment to the congratulatory huddle and cry of New York's finest all round him and the people close to looking for a look. The grin has gone.

"What do I want to achieve...I want things to be different here...I want things to be different in England...I want stupid things like people happy...and real music...and an end to all the shit...I just feel to be able to contribute, that's an achievement in itself. Change? Little things do change but it takes a bloody lot longer than people think. In a way that's what I mean when I say there's too many smiles, because although I enjoy the playing I don't want people to think I'm all 'Ha ha ha how you doing let's boogie!' y'know, cos that's no challenge for the audience, that's exactly what they're expecting, and then they get what they expect. Well I hope that we're gonna be something that they don't expect."

He emphasises the don't. People around are beginning to listen. I ask him about The Clash clowing.

"I think there's too much. I do want people to have a great time and enjoy themselves, and I think that's what it's all about really, as far as the concert is concerned right, but somehow I don't feel good unless I feel that they've gone away and thought about it or something...the after effect, the after taste is what I'm really after."

A small bearded person nearby has been listening. He speaks: "I think everybody buys your record after the show and they get the text."

Jones isn't satisfied. "I don't want everybody to buy the record just because that's what you do after you've seen a group, although I do want people to have the records, but that like ain't the be all and end all of it, it's like only the start when you've got the records. That's where it starts. You've got to hear it and really listen and then maybe there'll be a change. Maybe that's just my imagination..." Jones is often very self deprecating about his passion.

"Maybe there won't be a change. How does it affect you?" he asks the small bearded person.

The small bearded person comes on like a university lecturer. "I can say that in Belgium there's a lot of people listening to these records and discussing about it, they're saying this, they're saying that, anti-capitalistic things, discussing starts it and then it goes further and further and it starts to change your life, things other than things like money are important, saying everything's beautiful and I love you...things to change."

Jones pulls a face: "Sounds like George Harrison to me."

"No," retorts the small bearded person, "I'm not an optimist."

"No, I agree with most of the things you say," says Jones, "We're living in the material world! Good old George! I'm going to join a monastery, Paul."

He's alright, I say. He has financed *Life Of Brian*.

Jones' grin twitches. "George Harrison is a good bloke after all! Hey look!" he lunges away and grabs a boy a couple of yards that he'd been

talking to before. "Tell this guy what you were saying before about 'Bored With The USA' and New York"

The boy drawls at me, with as much a garble as possible with such a slow accent. "They were bored with the USA until they came over here and realised that the fans loved them, realised that The Clash are the ones so we figured that you weren't bored with us no more and you wanted to come here, and then you play the song and show that you still are. You've got to keep coming!"

Jones is pleased that he is having a conversation with a fan that seems quite constructive. He's getting information. He continues reliving the previous conversation they'd had. "What about if we started to sound a bit strange to you, playing all acoustic numbers or something, what would you think of that?"

"That's ok."

"What about jazz?"

"Hang on, you said two things, before you just said acoustic...acoustic work I like – 'Groovy Times', that is really special maaano..."

"If we played jazz..."

"Naaah...I think we'd fade away a little."

"But they love us now," Jones smiles. The future takes care of itself.

"Aaaw I really love you now," the fan is a fan again. "It's not like The Ramones, they keep playing the same sound!"

"And we are always different!" triumphs Jones. The grin returns. For now at least.

Rash Clash Mash In Motor City Bash

Dave DiMartino, *Creem*, December 1979

JOE STRUMMER and I are sitting in a bar, talking about his band. I ask him about 'I Fought the Law' and its relatively unexpected success on American radio. Doesn't he think it odd that the one song promising to break the Clash in America is a tune he didn't even write?

Joe shakes his head in disgust, something he's been doing quite a bit of. "It just goes to show ya, ya know?" he says.

"I'd just like to say this: America, how is it we make *twenty-nine* brilliant records and you won't give us a drop of airplay – and we make one *shitty* one and you lap it up. How is it? Tell me..."

Howard Johnson has a lot more going for him than HoJo cola. His hotels, for instance. Right in the middle of beautiful downtown Detroit sits a real *beauty* of a scrap-heap, the kind of mammoth, overgrown monstrosity that only the Motor City or any other dying metropolis can provide. Vertical, not horizontal, it shoots upward and leaves little room for people to walk about comfortably. The ceiling of each floor's hallway hangs down ominously, threatening the safe passage of anybody over six feet tall and adding even more to the already pervasive, claustrophobic atmosphere. The view outside – cars and busses streaming in every direction, city construction men attempting to beautify what can't be beautiful with their jackhammers and sledges – it all says more about Detroit than any chamber of commerce ever could. [*Ah, go back to Miami, wetback. – Ed.*]

In the lobby, we sit waiting for the Clash's bus to take us to an afternoon soundcheck at the nearby Masonic Temple, tonight's venue. A well-dressed, fifty-ish man sticks some change into a lobby vending machine as we wait and pulls out a fresh new copy of the latest *Penthouse* magazine. Outside, a weary-looking black man, old and hunched over, sticks his arm deep into a city garbage can and pulls out a prize – an empty Stroh's bottle that some unknowing tourist didn't realize was worth five cents. He sticks it into his half-full burlap sack, throws the sack over his shoulder, and walks on, halfway to his own

bottle or halfway to his own copy of *Penthouse*. Who cares? Welcome to Detroit.

We climb on the bus.

Mick, had you any preconceptions about what America would be like before you come here?

Mick Jones: Yeah, plenty

And?

Mick Jones: Most of my preconceptions were absolutely true.

Like?

Mick Jones: Everything's bigger here. And the food tastes twice as bland. Like the tomatoes, for instance – they're so big, but they don't taste like anything. Everything's been given a shot of something. It doesn't seem quite *real*.

How about you, Paul? Any preconceptions about your Detroit audience?

Paul Simonon: I dunno. Only that they must all have *cars* or something.

Detroit is the Clash's fourth stop on this, their second American tour. They began at Monterey – an ex-hippie's failed attempt at recreating the 60's festival and a total financial washout – and reportedly went down a storm, pulling in encore after encore. They've hit Minneapolis, Chicago a night ago, and tomorrow they're on their way to Boston. They have a way to go yet, and they want to make sure everything will be running smoothly for tonight's Detroit show.

At the Masonic Temple, the equipment is already set up. The band goes through several numbers, extending them, obviously less concerned with tightness and more concerned with sound quality. *Everything* sounds good – the system, the players, the monitor system they weren't quite sure about – and another part of the band, the less disciplined, more adventurous part, surfaces. They have no one to impress but

themselves, and they sound terrific. They ought to do more things like this. In public.

Clash bassist Paul Simonon is upstairs relaxing in a Masonic Temple dressing room. The soundcheck is over, and Simonon sits talking to the most spectacularly *beautiful* girl I've ever seen.

Some questions about the band's new album. The one you just recorded, OK? What were you looking for when you asked Guy Stevens to produce it?

"Madness," Simonon says. "And we found it."

How so?

"Well – he's just *loony*." Simonon points down at the tape recorder. "Like he'd pick this up and just throw it somewhere, ya know? He wouldn't care." A smile creeps up on his face. "Like we had this big piano in the studio, right? He poured beer all over it. Once everybody was getting ready to watch Marilyn Monroe films on the telly, right? He started crying. He walked over to the telly, hugged it and then poured beer all over it. And then it blew up. So we didn't do much telly watching while we were recording."

Simonon is extremely happy with the new album, as is the rest of the band. Sandy Pearlman's production efforts on *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, its predecessor, seem to have left no small impression.

"I'm not as pleased with the second album as I'd like to be," Simonon says. "I dunno...it's just like..." He pauses. "It doesn't seem *loose* enough, that's all. Seems a bit uptight."

Mick Jones, who's just walked into the room, is even harsher. The new album, recorded within two months, slam-bang, in and out of the studio, seems the total antithesis of the carefully measured, laboriously drawn-out Pearlman affair.

"I didn't realize the significance of how quickly it was done until people kept bringing it up," says Jones of the new LP. "That's only because all the records over *here* take nine years to do. And believe me

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– the big production, the last one – we've done it, we've done it the American way, and it *don't* work, and it's a load a shit. So we've done it the English way now and we've got *two* albums instead of one. And it's all much better. Guy Stevens is probably the best English producer of the last two decades."

"Definitely," says Simenon.

In the Howard Johnson's bar, Joe Strummer is methodically removing ice cubes from the mixture of orange juice, grenadine and tequila that makes up his Tequila Sunrise. He's putting them in the ashtray that sits on the table between us, talking about America to yet another anonymous American. He's also talking about business.

"Clash will one day sell *millions* of records in America," he says. "But in the 1990's."

You plan to stay together that long?

"No," he grins. "It'll be like on TV, ya know? *Thirty Hits from the Temptations*, *Twenty-two Highballin' Truckers' Hits*. It'll be one of those. *Thirty-nine Greats from Old England* or *Remember the Seventies*. Yeah, they'll buy all *that* shit – and now, when we need the dough, need it to keep going, we're gonna get the two fingers. But that's how you *like* it over here, don't you? Repackaged nostalgia."

Again, Strummer looks disgusted.

"I saw a fuckin' Jackie Wilson record on sale on the telly, right? And Jackie Wilson's lyin' *sick 'n half dead* in a New York hospital, but they're still floggin' it. I bet Jackie Wilson don't see none of the \$9.99 that goes for *that*."

So what do you think of American audiences so far?

Mick Jones: "Well, they're pretty receptive, at least on some levels. They seem to listen, they seem to be aware. I mean – it's not like it's made out, it's not like they're all dummies or something. No, the people that come to our concerts seem to be pretty *alive*."

What exactly are you talking about?

"The *mass* American audience that goes to see all the heavy metal groups and drop quaaludes and throw firecrackers? Man, if *that's* representative of America then you know you're in shit as well as I do..."

Joe Strummer is still back at the bar, talking about business, while a nearby cocktail pianist plays Barry Manilow's 'Daybreak'. It's an interesting scene.

It's also been fascinating watching Strummer speak. At first, he makes absolutely no eye contact with me – making it painfully obvious that a) he's only speaking with me because he feels he *should*, and b) personally, he doesn't like me in the least. But as he warms up to the subject – record company screw-ups, *American* screw-ups – he looks me straight in the eye. He's talking advice now, advice to newer bands who've seen the Clash grow and become what they now are. He's talking about traps on the wayside for new, younger bands, unavoidable corporate politics that might be avoided. *Maybe*.

"I'd say that there are several smart things you can do," says Joe. "Number one – set up your own business operation before you start, so that – Number two – you can peg your own prices. And I'd say, speaking personally, that it's a bit of a wind-up to get with a major label. You never make a *penny* out of it, as far as I can see."

How would you have done things differently?

"I would have set up my own operation, for a start. You know, my own company, my own publishing, I'd set it up all our own. Maybe we couldn't in those days, maybe if we did we wouldn't still be here. I dunno – but if I had a chance to go back and do it again, that's one thing I'd change, I think. 'Cause the understanding is virtually nil, and you always are pulling in the opposite direction. Ya know, we pull pretty *hard*, but we face a battery of 60 lawyers. When we try to get the price down on one of our things we face a battery of 60 lawyers all pullin' the other way. I just see it as a waste of spirit and effort and time. I think maybe if we got free we'd try to do something like *that*."

Can you get free? What're the terms of your contract?

"It's a 99-year deal with 18 tracks a year. Same sorta contracts like the ones they give at Sing-Sing."

The bill tonight features not only the Clash but the Undertones, a very young, very talented outfit from Ireland whose debut LP should be out here soon on Sire Records. More than likely, few in the Detroit audience will have ever seen or heard the band before.

Not so with David Johansen. Johansen is to follow the Undertones, and Detroit is very much a New York Dolls stronghold. Johnny Thunders' recent local gigs with former MC5 guitarist Wayne Kramer seem to have rekindled interest in what the Dolls have wrought. Detroit is *very* anxious to see David Johansen.

Have the things the band sung about on the first LP changed much since the record was made?

Paul Simonon: "No, I think those songs still ring pretty true. Probably more so, now. Like 'Career Opportunities' – we wrote it a couple of years ago, but the situation about getting jobs is worse, and it's *getting* worse. Since Margaret Thatcher's come in it, I dunno, things aren't as easy for poor people. Or young people."

Back in the bar again. Joe's half-finished his drink and I'm on maybe the sixth or seventh beer of what's become a very *long* day, asking If Joe thinks his experiences will ultimately be of any value to anyone but himself.

"At least some buncha jerks will read this article," he scowls, "if you're ever gonna *write* it, that is, and, I dunno, may be it'll help 'em a little, maybe it won't.

"Actually, I'd *like* to think that I've done all that for a good purpose. So you can pass on a message, so all that bollockin' around wouldn't have been in vain. But secretly I have to believe that you cannot tell one person *anything* – I can't tell you anything, can't give you no advice, 'cause you won't believe me until it happens to you. Not you personally, but to everybody.

"I mean it's vice-versa, too, 'cause I heard things like 'don't sign anything.' Keith Richards, for instance, he did an interview five years ago. 'Don't sign anything, kids,' he said. I read that, ya know, thousands of others like me read it – but I *signed* the fuckin' thing. So I'm not sure. Only *now* I know, 'cause I *been* ripped, *now* I know 'don't sign anything,' but I had to be ripped to get here. Even though I read that before. So I'm not sure that what we're sayin' can really help anybody. Not until you've really been in it yourself – done in, done over.

"That's why I don't mind bein' done over – 'cause I know that I'm learning something. Slowly."

Do you think you might be able to remove yourself from the situation? "Lissen," says Joe, "I'm in a situation where I couldn't even go into a drugstore and get myself a hamburger. So I'm not in any situation I can get myself out of."

I manage to make it to the Masonic Temple shortly after the Undertones' set, which apparently met mixed reactions. Barry Meyer, also with the Clash on their debut U.S. tour, is back again between sets spinning 45's and having a great time. The Detroit audience seems especially feisty, here to witness a headlining band they've heard on record, read a lot about, but never actually *seen* in person. When David Johansen emerges onstage, cheers are heard – but there's a tacit understanding between the performer and the audience. He's not the headliner, it's not really his show, and what happens next is essentially Johansen's own making.

In short: Johansen is superb. Three encores, Mitch Ryder and Four Tops tunes, even 'Personality Crisis'. The audience loves it, totally behind Johansen, totally behind his surprisingly magnetic stage appeal. Fists raised in the air after his third encore, he shouts "DETROIT!!!" into the microphone and the audience shouts just as loudly.

And the Clash are next.

A final trip back to the bar. Joe Strummer is getting ready to leave, I've got yet another beer and the day's third pack of Merit Menthols, a new record. I want to talk about Joe's record company problems.

Joe, you've been saying that you've been done in and screwed over and taken advantage of. What exactly is the deal? What do you have to do that's so terrible? What exactly is the obligation to CBS that's so unfair you can't even get a hamburger at a drugstore?

"How do ya mean 'obligation'?"

I mean what do you have to give 'em before you're a free man?

"Preferably they don't want us to *die*..."

Yeah, right, but you said it's a long-term contract. How long?

"Ninety-nine years. It's a new kind of contract they've come out with to make sure you don't get away..."

Yeah, right. Ha ha.

"Look," says Joe, glaring at me one final time. "All I'm trying to tell you is *why the fuck should I tell you about my personal business deals?* You asked me about my contract and I tell you it's 99 years, right? If you had any fuckin' *tact* you'd fuckin' say it was a long one and leave it at that, right? But *no*, you gotta come back and drivel on about it, 'how many albums is it' and all that. These personal business deals are *my* business and *not yours*, and not all your readers, right? I said we got a long contract and we gotta come out with a load of stuff every year, and if you wanna get the fuckin' *precise details*, take a lawyer, go up to West 52nd Street, go up to the 21st floor and start *there*! And by the time you get to the 99th floor you'll find out!!"

Uhh...sorry, Joe. You're just making it sound like you don't have any kind of control at all. I mean, you must have some kind of artistic control, right?

"No! We're gonna give *that* up as well! We decided it's better – not only is CBS gonna *sell* the records, we decided it's better if they *make* 'em, too!! You know, it's better if we just stay in *Hawaii* or somewhere like that. Maybe we could do one or two photo sessions and let CBS handle the whole thing!!"

Right, Joe. Yeah. Sorry if I offended you and all that –

Look," he says, getting up out of his chair, "I gotta do a show in a minute and you're *smokin' cigarettes and blowin' the smoke in my face an' askin' me questions an' CLICK!!!*"

At this point the tape recorder shuts off. Mainly because Joe pounds on it with his fists.

Life is great.

The Clash open their set with a new tune, a reggae-based thing few people seem familiar with. But as soon as Mick Jones breaks into 'I'm So Bored With The U.S.A.', the stage is rushed and the audience is screaming. Things are working as planned: Detroit *loves* the Clash, the band is tight, and everything each audience member has read and heard about the band is confirmed. And more so.

Until: Joe Strummer starts having problems with his guitar and kicks over his amplifier. Then the band plays 'English Civil War' with Mick Jones bringing out an acoustic guitar and strumming while Simenon and drummer Topper Headon play on obliviously. And whatever momentum the Clash has achieved at this point halts altogether. A few unavoidable Detroit "BOOO"s are heard and things are never the same again.

Strummer grabs a microphone and yells, "In England when they don't like us they throw *bottles* at us!" Then Paul Simenon sings his new number – another reggae-based thing, already recorded for the new LP – and at the song's conclusion, a bottle is hurled onstage, followed by a few paper airplanes and a persistent, unrelenting chorus of booing, mixed with applause, that seems to set the band's nerve on edge.

No matter. Mick Jones' guitar playing isn't affected in the least. He easily stands out, at least on this night, as the band's most capable musician. Topper Headon and Paul Simenon have few problems, and Joe Strummer's voice, despite the cigarette smoke, holds out just fine – but it's plainly Mick Jones' night. Even if no one in the audience seems to realize it.

The band returns for an encore, halfheartedly, and as they finish 'Career Opportunities' Strummer grabs the microphone and screams "WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO PLAY NEXT?" Of course, they don't return.

As the audience files out of the hall, one angry Clash fan – now, apparently, an ex-fan – screams "The Clash is Dead!!" And maybe a few people believe him, maybe a few people don't.

This time I don't get back on the bus.

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THE BOSTON PHOENIX, SEPTEMBER 18, 1979

The Clash: One Step Beyond

Chris Bohn, *Melody Maker*, December 29, 1979

Inside the Clash's new rehearsal studio, under a railway bridge somewhere in South London, Joe Strummer is singing a slow country blues about rolling boxcars, twisting his head way down under to reach a low mike, perched next to an electric piano.

To his right, Mick Jones, dressed in black shirt, vest and trousers, looking like a maverick from a Western B-movie, messes around with a bottleneck; while to his left Simonon slouches on a barstool, as if posing for the silhouette logo on *Top Of The Pops*. Behind them, Topper Headon drops an occasional beat to throw drumsticks for his dog.

This is the new Clash, relaxed and unfettered by the chains – or "bullshit", as Joe would have it – with which some would bind them to their past. They will later worry about the lack of work they're getting done, but undoubtedly the music will be as tough and as tight as it ever was by the time they reach the stage in January.

By then, their attack will be strengthened by an influx of new songs from their third album, *London Calling*, which showcases an ardent, much younger-sounding band, for the first time allowing itself the expression of a full range of emotions, rather than just those sentiments we all wanted to hear. The sound is exhilarating, jumping from the loping, lightweight 'Jimmy Jazz' to the swinging political punch of 'Clampdown', to the "white trash" reggae of 'Lover's Rock' and the upstart rocking 'I'm Not Down' or 'Hateful'.

The songs' source-material is rock'n'roll, old movies, Raymond Chandler, anything – not just personal experiences or responses, which limited the scope of *The Clash* and *Give 'Em Enough Rope*.

Those albums were necessarily narrow, pushing forward the punk message. But life goes on, things change, people grow, and in doing so the Clash have broken out gloriously from their own confines. They've learnt from their mistakes, which were many, and today they're far more cautious in what they say off the record, friendly and helpful,

without volunteering the "good copy" they used to deliver, and which they've been forced to live down ever since.

"THE trouble is the newspaper men have forgotten why humans like music," says Strummer. "It's like the fairy-tale, when people forget the basic thing because they're too involved with the bullshit. And that's the moral of this fairy-tale – they can't see the wood for the trees any more.

"We're just a group and we release records, and that's the face of the situation, I'd say, but people think they've got to swallow all the bullshit with it. That's why I thought Blind Date, which you used to have in your paper" (MM used to carry single reviews by a guest musician who wasn't allowed to see the label or the artist's name before passing comment) "was so good, because the reviewer had to judge it on the tune and the beat – what it should be judged on, you know, not what kind of trousers he's got on. Aw, I dunno."

Easy to say that now, but the Clash – with or without Bernie Rhodes, whom they've previously acknowledged as being important in establishing the political character of the band at the beginning – formed the blueprint for the whole movement of socio-political punk bands, and thrived on confrontation at all levels: with authority, with their record company (CBS), and with their public – the last category perhaps still to come.

The Clash coming clean will shock those harbouring illusions about them being front-line troops, though the band began the whole mobile-guerilla-unit thing themselves. Even on the new album, on 'Spanish Bombs', Strummer glamourises the "artists at war" image.

"I got that from reading – Orwell and people like that," he says. "It's been pretty well covered. But me, I've gone through my Starsky and Hutch stage. If there was another one, I don't think I'd rush out there and get in the front line. Who lives by the gun dies by the gun – never was a truer word said."

The emphasis has shifted. The Clash still shoulder responsibilities, like making sure the songs are right and the band are fit to play them and to give their all onstage.

"It ain't like sitting on a stool, it's about 300 times more physical than that. I'm now 27 and it's something you gotta learn by the time that you're 25, that before then your body doesn't keep a record of what you do to it. After that you get real sick, sort of burning the candle at both ends – especially doing the stuff that we do. All this junkie he's-so-out-of-it rock 'n' roll stuff doesn't appeal to me at all. That's the easy way out, you know?"

He adds: "I wrote 'Rudie Can't Fail' about some mates who were drinking brew for breakfast. They think nothing of it. Me, I'm past the stage where I can. I can drink brew for breakfast, but not every day, and that's what made me notice them. I thought it was a hell of a way to start a day."

Their commitment comes in the positive exuberance of the songs, concentration on getting the basics right and helping people in the most direct way they know – cutting the price of the album to the minimum. Eighteen tracks for £5, as the ad goes. Most of them worth having, too.

Ironically, bearing in mind the music's healthy vitality, the Clash were at their lowest when they began planning London Calling. Reeling from expensive court hearings, extricating themselves from former manager Bernie Rhodes, then leaving his successor, Caroline Coon, the Clash were going through a radical reappraisal of their whole approach.

First, they took control of their management, only recently relinquishing it to Blackhill Enterprises when they had the album in the can, because "we didn't wanna spend all day on the 'phone".

But they were at rock-bottom, and desperately needed to find a way out. Says Strummer: "Economically, we were really tight at the time. This album woulda been our last shot, never mind if we didn't have the spirit for it, which we did. I don't know why, but the problem seemed to relax us, the feeling that nothing really mattered anymore, that it was make or break time.

"Desperation. I'd recommend it."

He continues: "We thought of this idea to create the £2 wall of sound, by recording it on two Teac recorders to keep the costs low, so we

could release it cheap. Then the music would have to be fucking good to cover this fucking insanity. We just said to ourselves that we'd never put out a Clash album for six quid.

"But to do that, we knew we'd have to pay for the recording costs ourselves, otherwise CBS woulda told us to fuck off and sent us another list of debts when we asked them to put it out cheap."

They got CBS to agree to the lowest price category, which would also cover a free 12-inch single; they played a festival in Finland – "it was good dough and would pay for the recording costs at Wessex studios," says Strummer – and recorded between May and August.

"We gave CBS 20 tracks and told them to put eight on the 12-inch single. They freaked out, so we said, 'Look, make it a fiver', and against my expectations they agreed to put it out as a double-album.

"I'd say it was our first real victory over CBS."

More important, the double-album format allowed them to keep lighter, nonsensical tracks, like the free-ranging 'Jimmy Jazz' or the misunderstood 'Lovers Rock', alongside more conventional Clash songs like 'Clampdown', 'Hateful' and 'Death Or Glory'.

'Jimmy Jazz' is the Clash at their most relaxed, working out on a bluesy tune, with Strummer scatting along, taking more care with his voice than the words:

"What started me thinking, is that it's not only the message, but the way it's said. So a piece of nonsense can have a powerful meaning to me. Like, you know, 'Well, they all call me Speedo/But my real name is Mr Earl.' But in this post-Dylan age, if you unleashed that on the political critics, they'd go 'tedious nonsense', whereas in fact it's the greatest thing that ever walked the earth along with all the other things."

Mick Jones begins miming Gene Vincent doing "Be bop a lula" and Strummer continues:

"Like, I saw that TV programme when they were taking the piss on a panel show, by reading out the lyrics of 'Be bop a lula, she's my baby /

Be bop a lula, I don't mean maybe.' They didn't understand that it's Gene Vincent and that's it – the meaning of life is revealed immediately (laughs).

"But," he says, "I put a lot of thought into the whole process of writing lyrics. Some days, I just can't see the point, and then I get worried because it's the only thing I've been solely preoccupied with for I-don't-know-how-many years."

Strummer's at his most passionate these days talking about method rather than content, except in a rather extraordinary defence of 'Lovers Rock'. It's a song I'd considered lightweight before he volunteered, out of the blue, his reasons for writing it, opening up a whole new area previously left uncovered by the Clash.

He says that the song's based on 'The Tao Of Love And Sex', which is about "The Chinese way of fucking. A lot of people in the Western Hemisphere have problems. No-one really wants to talk about this kind of thing, but it's very common, especially with boys turning into men – you get some great bird and fuck it up, right?

"This song mainly tries to tell you how to do it properly. It goes: 'You Western man, you're free with your seed / When you make lovers rock / But whoops there goes the strength you need – to make real cool lovers rock.'

"Another thing" he adds. "It's about how you can have a good time without her either having to take the pill or have a baby. The pill leads to dreadful depressions with some girls. Taking the pill every day, sometimes getting fat and they don't know why, and that makes them feel worse.

"I mean, I was a dwarf when I was younger, grew to my normal size later on, but before then I had to fight my way through school.

"Anyway, that's why I wrote the song, even though it's a bit of a touchy subject. I don't agree with the pill at all. Then you got the Pope saying Catholics can't take it..."

Strange: the Clash, musically closer than ever to the rock 'n' roll mainstream, moving further away in their concerns. Strummer does deflate his explanation somewhat, though, saying: "The song is, kind of, having a laugh, too."

In retrospect, *Give 'Em Enough Rope* was more of a mistake of execution, Sandy Pearlman succeeding only in diminishing the Clash's passion, without playing up their force. It just doesn't compare with Guy Steven's more sympathetic, less obtrusive job on *London's Calling*.

Strummer remarks on the difference: "Guy is that private thing called an X-factor. He comes in and grabs me by the throat and says, 'I deal with emotions', and that's it. He doesn't deal with knobs or whatever else producers deal with.

"He's very off the wall, and he understands the spontaneity of the moment – priceless. If you can get that moment when you play a song just so in front of a tape machine, you got a million dollars. He understands that.

"Sandy's just a knob-twiddler. Well, not even that – he oversees others twiddling knobs. But Guy Stevens no longer knows what a machine is, only that it's a means to an end, while Pearlman halfknows that, but he's not sure. He's too obsessed with the machinery of it. He's kinda forgotten that it's only there to give us some soul."

The myth-making of 'Guns On The Roof', 'All The Young Punks' and 'Last Gang In Town' indicated that the band were taking themselves and their history a bit too seriously in those days. Strummer counters:

"Yeah, that was another stream of bat-piss, you know? But I think sometimes you need to do that. We like to gee ourselves up a bit, but it's not strictly serious, like 'Last Gang' wasn't anything to do with us at all. I never for one minute imagined that we were the last gang in town, but the fact it was one of our song-titles became a handy headline for newspaper editors.

"In fact, I was taking the piss out of violence by inventing a mythical gang. Every day I was hearing about a new gang, first the teds, then the

punks – then they were fighting – then the rockabilly teds and the zydeco kids, who were rumoured to wear straw cowboy hats and Doc Martens covered in cement.

"All this was at the height of the violence, an' I came across it lots of times. I just wanted to take the piss, you know? So we invented this mythical gang, like 'Boy, you better come running, because here's the last gang in town.'"

Less interesting were the continually publicized clashes with CBS, the remote-control /complete-control games that still go on, but now they don't talk about them so much.

"Hmm. I must agree it's not the point at all, fighting record companies. It's a waste of time, but with 'Complete Control' I thought strongly about it, and the phrase kept cropping up everywhere after we seized on it, so I think, looking back, it was wroth latching on to."

Strummer today is more pragmatic, less prone to lash out at easy targets. Mick Jones is the same. In casual conversation, he's friendly and open. When he drifts in on the interview, he contents himself with a few quips or corrections. He'd rather continue the rehearsal that the meeting has interrupted.

With both, some subjects are taboo. The Clash film for instance, which they're adamant won't be released. No further comment. On the band's past political involvement, Strummer tends to sidestep questions by talking about the medium rather than the message.

He says: "I personally like a pokey lyric, because unless there's something really good about it, it bores me to hear about jealousy and straight heterosexual complaining songs. Unless, say, Chrissie Hynde – I wouldn't care what she's singing. Her voice is the sweetening to the pill. But unless it's someone like that, I prefer a pokey lyric – by which I mean a lyric covered in barbed wire.

"Look, we're just trying to do the best we know how. Our ability has widened slightly. Ya gotta learn, ain't ya? You wake up the next day and know there's more to be done, and carry on hoping that you won't make the same mistakes. You gotta keep your eyes open."

"Another thing I'm fed up with," Strummer adds, getting more animated, "if you don't mind me saying so, and that's calling the kettle black – (singing low, deadpan): 'It's a shitty situation/A lot of mess today / It's a shitty situation.' What I'm trying to say is one step beyond. I hope we've gone through that stage.

"Listening to all this cold, grey brave-new-world music – with a K – you know, I wouldn't play it to a cage of hamsters. It wouldn't do them any good. It doesn't do me any good. What we're trying to do is make some music. It's just, you know, the sound of finger-clicking. You know what I mean? This is out of place in the modern world.

"It's bullshit, the new kind of bullshit, and it's just as well to spot it when you can, otherwise you follow it like sheep.

"Like, there we were in '71 following Emerson, Lake & Palmer to the brink of disaster, but luckily everybody snapped out of it. I don't like this neu pop musik, because it just ain't got swing, or soul.

"Dogma?" he continues. "We kind of need that stuff, but we ain't gonna set it to lifeless, cold, grey music, because we realize there's no point in trying to get a message across unless it's somehow sweet – so that your unconscious will reach out to it.

"Anyway, we always tried to play just as good as we could. What we play now is what we can do. It wouldn't be fair to do ranting music, because we've mastered a time-change. We can play in another rhythm. So there's just no point. We do a bit of ranting, just to keep it up, but we don't do it all the time. We do something now which we couldn't do before."

The Clash Play Revolution Rock

By Chris Salewicz, *Trouser Press*, March 1980

It's four days before Christmas. A dark, early evening damp with snow and rain. Immediately south of the Thames, in the inappropriately genteel Victorian suburb of Putney, the Clash is stashed away in a rehearsal studio. They are readying their set of reggaebilly rockers for a 40-date British tour set to start on the fifth day of the New Year. As elevated tube trains rumble past a few yards away from the building, the Clash – vibed in on several hours of playing and spliffing – are into serious work, running repeatedly through the backing track for 'Rudie Can't Fail'.

Drummer Topper Headon retains a spiky haircut (albeit growing out), but the three front-line Clashers now bear little sign of the band's punk origins. In keeping with their fascination with and love for their musical roots, they all resemble variants on late-'50s rockers. Lead guitarist Mick Jones sports a black slim-lapelled, drainpipe-trousered suit and pomaded black hair; all he lacks is a pencil-thin moustache to seem at home cleaning his nails with the end of a metal comb in a backstreet Italian bar. Bassist Paul Simonon wears a brown chalk-striped variant on the same cut of suit as Jones; his blonde locks are plastered back too, in homage to James Dean. (Simonon is due in Hollywood this March to act in a feature film.) Lead singer/rhythm guitarist Joe Strummer's dark blue woolen shortie overcoat proclaims hitman cool, though this image is softened by faded tight jeans and battered shoes.

Strummer's seated at the organ in the middle of the rehearsal room, and pouring out his soul on 'The Bankrobbing Song', an unrecorded slow blues featuring Jones on bottleneck. As he sprawls over the notes and squeezes his mournful words into the mike, Strummer invokes memories of countless anonymous bar-room bluesers, their voices husky from too many nights of booze and cigarette smoke – though Joe hardly drinks at all these days. (Live, the Clash's keyboards are handled by Blockhead Mickey Gallagher, who in another incarnation co-wrote Peter Frampton's fab smasheroo, 'Show Me the Way'.

'The Bankrobbing Song' completed, the Clash replenish the energies of several hours' playing with Chinese and Indian foods brought in during the last song by personal assistant Johnny Green. Jones and Strummer check carefully to ensure no animal flesh comes their way (Jones: "Chrissie Hynde once told me that if you eat meat you inherit the fear of the animal as it was killed"); the assorted dishes are shared around until a no-waste situation is achieved.

London Calling, the new Clash double LP, has been in the shops for about 10 days, and entered the British charts at number nine. With legendary, supposed loony, producer Guy Stevens at the controls, the album – cut in three and a half weeks prior to the band's summer '79 US tour – transcends the introversion (not to mention the Blue Oyster Cult sound) of the Sandy Pearlman-produced *Give 'Em Enough Rope*.

Dealing with emotions, decrying self-defeatism, *London Calling* is direct spiritual heir to *The Clash*. Just as that LP was probably the best debut album ever made by any group, so *London Calling*, appearing at the tail end of 1979 is possibly the definitive '70s rock 'n' roll record, an ironic antidote to Me Generation selfishness and self-defeatism.

"It's our *20 Greatest Hits* currently," Mick Jones comments after dinner. (Only 19 titles are listed on the cover; the closing 'Train In Vain' was a last minute inclusion after a plan to give it away free with *New Musical Express* hit insurmountable technical problems.) "We knew it was coming out at Christmastime so we thought it would go up well against all the other *20 Greatest*. We think ours stands up quite well against Lena Martell."

"Tell you something," the lead guitarist turns to Strummer, clambering back to the organ like a kid returning to a school desk. "We're going to have to do something to make the album come out as cheap as possible in America. That's quite important. How much is *Tusk*?" Jones turns to me.

About \$15, I hazard.

Strummer: "But that's made of ivory, isn't it?"

Simonon: "Must be."

Jones: "Well, I reckon we must definitely go for about ten bucks. And we'll have to stand by it, 'cos, you know, once you've said it – "

Strummer "Stand by your price."

Doubters have suggested that the Clash's open derision towards their record company is little more than a chic urban pose; this is hardly a worthy estimation of the intensity of passion within the band. The Clash just despairs at the generally ham-fisted lack of humanity displayed by the soulless super-corporation, and their company's depressingly low level of understanding of what rock music is all about. Consider Strummer's appalled reaction to the news that, prior to the band's spring Los Angeles show, Epic Records execs had gorged down nine-course meals. "What sort of person goes out and eats a nine-course meal and then goes to see some rock 'n' roll?" he demanded incredulously.

Despite constant public confrontation between the band and their Babylonian Paymaster General, genuine Clashfans apparently exist at boardroom level. There seems to be little question of the band's being dropped by Epic should *London Calling* fail to shift the required number of units. Headon hands me a highly laudatory, slightly unctuous cable from an Epic bigwig comparing the Clash to such mighties as John Lennon. It says he will love them always and that they are jolly smashing.

"There you go then," Jones says with a decisive nod of his head. "That's what they think of us...Though they probably will turn against us if [the new album] doesn't happen.

"It's not as though they almost haven't anyway. Perhaps they haven't in America, but here it's different. They've always got so many problems with us; we're the problem cases.

"You see, they're not very musical people at CBS. They're not really interested in *music*. The ones in charge don't know anything about music." He turns to the bassist who is sitting on my left. "What do *you* think of CBS, Paul?"

"I don't really know." Simonon shrugs his shoulders. "I don't really deal with them."

"Yeah," Jones adds reflectively, turning to me. "We don't really. We've stopped."

Simonon: "But before it was always a pain. I can't bear to go up there."

Headon: "We never ever speak to them."

Jones: "See, they're the sort of company – their latest Christmas card, right, is a classic. It's in full color: a picture of the managing director holding his dog's paw..."

Simonon: "...which is holding a pen..."

Jones: "...which is signing a contract..."

Headon: "...in front of all these gold albums."

Simonon: "That must be what they think of us."

Jones: "People on our label are the same as dogs. Anytime it looks like you're going to get out of it they find loads of different ways for you to owe them money."

Simonon: "They sort of say, 'Well, here's some money to help you out'; but it doesn't help at all. It just appears on a bit of paper later. You think, 'Oh, great. We've got out of the mess we're in.' And there it comes again."

Jones: "We did think that we could just do a load of records, right – like just quick, jazz albums – hand them all in at once and it'd be over with. But this is a contract we signed when we were naive youngsters. It says the records have to be made over a certain period of time. So it's just a case of us doing our time, really."

Besides guerrilla warfare with their record company, until recently the Clash was involved in a similar situation with former manager Bernie Rhodes (who signed the band to British CBS the same day the group

thought they were signing with Polydor). The diminutive Rhodes, former second-in-command to one Malcolm McLaren, appeared to thrive on tensions and disharmony at direct odds with the growth of the group's collective strength. Having settled out of court with Rhodes, the Clash is now managed by Blackhill, one of the world's more trustworthy management operations. The original managers of Pink Floyd currently care for the career of Ian Dury, as well as Roy Harper and Philip Rambow.

"You've got to get ripped off," Strummer concludes, "to know what it's all about."

London Calling is littered with allusions to and pastiches of rockabilly, R&B and especially reggae, not forgetting rock steady and ska. These are sources, though, not Bowie-type steals. There's nothing self-conscious or sneaky about them; it's all out in the open. The Clash wit, and the fiery positivism it hangs out with, sees to that.

Of all the sources, reggae is certainly dominant. It pervades *London Calling*, sometimes unobtrusively, sometimes not. The Clash listens to a lot of reggae; on-the-road traveling music is invariably chosen from the Paul Simonon cassette collection. 'Rudie Can't Fail', 'Wrong 'Em Boyo' (originally cut by the Groovers in '64), 'Lover's Rock' and 'Revolution Rock' are obviously under the influence, but it's all over the place: 'Hateful', 'Jimmy Jazz', 'Death or Glory', 'Clampdown' and others.

For the B-side of the 'London Calling' 45 the Clash cut their version of Willie Williams' summer reggae single, 'Armagedeon Time'. The original was released on Coxson Dodd's Studio One label, a company renowned for some of the best sounds that come out of Jamaica (and also for the philosophical manner in which its artists seem to accept not being paid).

'Armagedeon Time' used one of the most popular rhythms of the year, Sound Dimension's 'Real Rock'. The Clash had hoped to go to Jamaica after their US tour to use the same rhythm track. Studio One expressed no interest whatsoever. "They didn't want to know," Jones says sadly, "though they don't mind selling us the publishing! I was bitterly disappointed that I had to come back to England instead.

"There were all these plans: we were going to have gone to Cuba. And to Mexico. And Japan. We were going *everywhere*. And instead we came back here as soon as it was all over." The Cuban tour idea fell through during the mini-crisis about Russian troops on the island.

The last US tour seemed almost pre-destined to end in chaos. The organization completely fell apart at the last date in Los Angeles.

"Me 'n' Joe were stuck at the airport," Headon recalls. "We didn't even have the money to fly the luggage out. As soon as the last gig was over everyone did a runner. We woke up in the hotel the morning after the last gig and there was just the four of us left."

"We were in charge that night," Jones continues. "Kosmo [Vinyl, member of the Blackhill team and legendary rock 'n' roll visionary] had lost his passport and had to go up to Vancouver to fetch it. Then the geezers in the road crew wouldn't start the show unless they'd been paid. And there was this massive audience going bonkers. All bribes and things to get them to turn the power on. After that even the tour manager skipped."

How about the famous Clash vs. America stand-off?

"America hasn't really woken up to us on any massive scale. The concerts are good. I think we have a bit of a rep as a live band.

"I imagine" – Jones's lips curl contemptuously – "the Police – someone like *that* – must have sold quite a lot of records there. Like the Knack have."

And radio airplay?

"Some...It's like – [to the others] I mean, are we underrating it or what?"

Strummer: "Underrating what?"

Jones: "Do we [^]get played on the radio a lot or not?"

Strummer: "Definitely *not*!"

Headon: "On John Peel-type shows."

Strummer: "What's that station in Boston?"

Jones: "Can't remember. We had a good time in Boston. Took over a radio station."

Headon: "Oedipus."

Jones: "That's the name of the DJ."

Headon: "We smashed all his records up."

Jones: "Yeah, we were taking his Boston and Foreigner albums out of their sleeves and scratching them. His most popular records totally fucked. The program director was talking to us as he stood on this pile of hundreds of records that had just been chucked down on the floor."

What sort of radio programs did the Clash find themselves stuck on?

Strummer: "'Look at the latest drivel that's come into town'."

Headon: "'Latest gimmick'."

Jones: "'Four novelties from England'."

Headon: "We'd play up to it 'n' all."

Christmas Eve. The Clash is rehearsing in Acklam Hall off Notting Hill's Portobello Road, directly beneath the Westway flyover that is such a vital symbol in the group's mythology. On Christmas Day and Boxing Day (the 26th) the Clash is playing two "secret" gigs at the hall (tickets \$1) as an antidote to the holidays and as warm-up dates (with Mickey Gallagher) for their British tour.

Afterwards, Simonon, Strummer, Headon and myself walk to Simonon's basement flat a couple of blocks away. It's a modest two-room place, decorated and carpeted in various shades of red that are totally appropriate for a fire-sign person. The other two Clashers call for cabs to take them home. Simonon and I sit down in the kitchen with

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some rum and my tape recorder. His American woman friend and her friend watch a Gene Kelly film on one of the two TVs that are switched on in the front room.

Like Strummer and Jones, Simonon is a former art student. The offspring of a broken marriage (as are Joe and Mick), he used the first money he earned with the Clash as a deposit on the flat. He badly needed a place of his own after years of sharing bedrooms with his brother and living in squats. He bought this flat very cheaply indeed. "It's great in this neighborhood," he says. "There's this black family next door and really early in the morning they play all this dub. I don't even need to put anything on to listen to when I'm getting up."

We return to the subject of America. The country does seem to be accepting more new wave.

"Yeah, slowly. Something seems to be stirring over there. I think all those other groups like the Police – and whether I like them or not is another thing – you do hear them a lot on the radio, so it does help us in some ways. Makes them a bit more open to our music.

"New York's really great for us. It's probably about the only place in America I really enjoy. Then again it's got all its bullshit attached to it.

"I think someone from England coming up against all that stuff can easily be taken in and sink with it. Everytime I go over there I'm aware of that. Funny thing is, after a while it gets boring."

Recording also tires Simonon, although that wasn't the case with *London Calling*.

"Usually I get really bored because the producers and people aren't interesting. But Guy Stevens is really different from the others. He's much more than a producer, really."

Mick Jones had said that Stevens absorbed all the nuttiness and tensions within the band.

"Yeah. You could just pour it all out. Great!

"Making the last one was terrible. CBS or Bernie or whoever it was kept us separated from each other. Blackhill, our new management people, seem okay so far, but we've got our eyes open more than before. We no longer sign things when we don't know what they're for. I suppose that showed stupidity – though it's good in a way that happened to us because we'll actually tell people about it."

After two superb Acklam Hall shows the Clash climaxes its holiday gigs December 27th at the Hammersmith Odeon as the "Mystery Act" on an Ian Dury-topping benefit for Cambodian refugees.

Twenty minutes or so before the Clash is due on I meet Guy Stevens at the backstage bar. In addition to his incredible production work, Stevens was responsible for the release of about half the classic R&B and soul Britain heard in the mid-'60s. Music is precious stuff to him, and he deplores its bastardization by large record conglomerates for the sake of mere profit. The Clash, he knows, is true to the cause. The Clash is part of the Quest.

"Listen," he shouts in my ear, spraying the entire right side of my face with spittle. "Did you see Joe Strummer in the dressing-room just now? Down on the floor, ironing his stage-clothes on a towel? Gene Vincent would've done that! Eddie Cochran would've done that! Jerry Lee Lewis would've done that!" He has a firm hold on my arm, and a fan's passion in his voice. He loosens my arm and slumps down on a seat, as though in a trance, to contemplate this perfect rock 'n' roll image.

Midway through the Clash's set I look up from my seat and see a squirming Guy Stevens carried up the center aisle by four security men. Fearful he may be kicked out of the theater or even beaten up, I go in search of him at the rear of the auditorium.

He's okay. One of the guards has recognized him and is mildly scolding him for causing them any bother. Carried away by the Clash's music, Guy had been dancing in front of one of the cameras filming the event. He is very drunk.

We are negotiating a swaying journey down the side of the auditorium to the backstage door when someone suddenly rushes up behind us and throws his arms about Guy. It is what seems to be an equally pissed

Pete Townshend! Leaving Stevens in good hands, I wend my way back to my seat.

Eight days later I'm seated between Jones and Strummer on the mini-bus the Clash has rented for their British tour. It's about midnight. We're traveling up the M1 to Birmingham where the band will appear next morning (Saturday) in a children's TV show, *Tiswas*. Hard Jamaican sounds pour out of the Simonon portable cassette player, filling the rather too warm vehicle.

The intention is to discuss specific details of *London Calling* with the self-contained and highly romantic (a compliment, of course) Strummer. We start off with 'Lover's Rock'. The title refers to a reggae sub-division popular in England over the past couple of years and featuring what sounds like twee 14-year-old girls and electronic drums. The Clash song discusses just how lovers should rock, invoking Taoism through quotes from *The Tao of Love* ("You can make a lover in a thousand goes") and decrying the Pill's subtle Babylonian oppression.

"It's been misunderstood, that song, you know," Strummer half-grins, wryly self-mocking. "You have to be a bit gone in the head to try to get that over."

'The Right Profile' is about Montgomery Clift. I recall Guy Stevens saying he lent Strummer a paperback on Clift.

"I read two of them," he nods. "It's quite interesting to read two books about the same person because they both give you a completely different picture. You read one and you think, 'Oh, that's how the guy really was!' If you read another you get a totally different angle, and you think, 'Was he like this, or like that?' And you realize he was probably like neither."

Through Strummer's recent reading, the conversation turns to the *Odyssey*, Greek and Roman mythology, the Basques and Atlantis, Karl Jung, Edgar Cayce and Rasta passivity. The last topic reminds me that *London Calling* advocates just the opposite: people should step forward, get on with it and blow out their apathy.

"Yeah, but – It's very hard to deal with apathy. Making like you've got the answers to everybody's problems – it's impossible, of course. Everybody must sort out their own problems; that's the key to everything. You sort one problem out and get the will to go on and sort another one out. You can't expect any help, I don't think.

"Mainly, though, we were thinking about people accepting shit as gold. Just a little while ago we heard a record on the radio which was pure shit, and this guy goes, 'Mmmm...that's good.' It's just the Emperor's new clothes again and again. *Of course, it ain't good.* It's just a load of fuckin' shit, y'know."

The Clash questions everything, which is why they're so positive. They don't believe in hopelessness; they believe we have nothing *but* hope.

"Only the lazy ones look to us for a solution," Strummer says. "We just made our feelings clear; other people happened to feel that way too, so they got behind it. But making your feelings clear is a long way from solving everything.

"That 'Bored with the USA' song has always been misconstrued. We say, 'We're so bored with the USA' having to sit at home and have it pumped into us. The second you turn on the TV you know it's in America somewhere, and there's this bird who's probably a detective, and then a car's gonna roll over a cliff – you know all the plots by heart. 'I'm So Bored with the USA' was about the importing of culture.

"A quick spree 'round the States taking in all the sights and buying all the crap you can lay your hands on – that's what we call fun. So long as we don't have to live there."

The next afternoon, arriving at the gates of the Aylesbury Civic Hall for the first date of the tour, Joe Strummer gazes out of the mini-bus window at the street filled with punks and punkettes.

"See," he turns to Paul. "We've sold out again. And we said we'd never sell out."

The Clash: Joe Strummer Answers The Call-Up **Paolo Hewitt, *Melody Maker*, December 13, 1980**

Working on the theory that if you give him enough rope he'll either hang or save himself, the following pages are left basically for the words of Joe Strummer.

The reason for this is simple. Since that violent eruption of upturn, promises and rebellion in 1977, no band has received more flak and criticism for the directions their career has taken than the Clash.

The Pistols blew themselves up; the Damned became an even bigger joke; and the Jam grew from strength to strength. The Clash, meanwhile, came under constant fire for their determined pursuit of success in America, superficial politics, chic guerilla poses, and worst of all, their forsaking of furious music, for safe, formulated rock 'n' roll.

From the band who once sneered so viciously with boredom at the U.S.A., whose leader used to wear "Rock 'N' Roll Is Dead" T-shirts, we had cover versions of oldies like 'Brand New Cadillac', time spent in American studios, and worse still, promises, however rash and heady, ignored and rarely fulfilled.

After all the fuss, may be that's all they were and ever could be...the new Rolling Stones.

Now, the Clash have recorded a new triple album, *Sandinista* (whose main highlights are explained and discussed overleaf), became a lot bigger in the U.S.A., and became frustrated by the sycophancy with which they have often been treated by well-meaning, but misguided, critics.

This interview offered a chance for Joe Strummer to answer criticisms.

It took place at CBS's London headquarters and a nearby pub, and is the result of a five-hour talk re-arranged accordingly to allow Joe to fill in all sides of the story.

Make of it what you will, but I must say Joe Strummer couldn't have been nicer, or more honest.

How are relations between the Clash and CBS right now?

We're tied here for a ten-album deal. Did you know that?"

I thought it was five.

That's what we thought. But we were had and I don't mind admitting it. Sick of pussyfooting around. We've been trying to get out of that for ages, and there's no way we can do it. The only way is to sue Bernie (Rhodes, the group's original manager who signed them to CBS) and his lawyer, but I don't want to sue Bernie...I think Bernie's great.

Like *London Calling* is counted as one album not as two. This counts as one (pointing to *Sandinista* cover) not three, because we say, "We want it cheap" and they say, "Well if you want it cheap, we're not going to accept it as more than one".

We can't have our cake and eat it. So we choose, but we have to because we want to get the record out now we've made it. If we went to court it would be a three-year case and we'd lose. We haven't got the money to pay. The legal situation is really appalling and there's nothing else we can do. *This* is what we can do (grabbing the *Sandinista* cover). You can get this for £4.29 in Virgin in a couple of weeks. This is our answer to the jam we're in. but I will say we're in a jam just maybe to prevent other people following us. Obviously we went through every alternative, but I've come to accept it, especially now we've got a record out.

PROFITS

Why not break up and come back together again under a different name?

I don't like negative solutions to anything and breaking up is negative. Also we're individually signed.

They're keeping their profits intact, it's not as if they're taking a cut in it.

We're taking a cut. In order to keep the price down we had to make concessions and those included not paying us any royalties until certain vast amounts have been sold. But that's just for Britain. I've heard they want to pay us half royalties round the rest of the world, to put it out at the price we've demanded. That's what we're having to accept and as I said before there's not a lot we can do except give value for money.

It's seemed recently that you've become preoccupied with America.

Yeah, but that's what I call the Woking philosophy...(laughs). Yeah the Woking philosophy, because that's one of Paul Weller's things. Like on our last album I wrote a song about Montgomery Clift which went (sings), "New York, New York, 42nd Street..." and he says "you're not allowed to do that, right?"

Well I thought what's Paul going to do when he goes to Yankee land or Australia or Japan? What's he going to do? Is he going to look at a picture of Woking and concentrate on that in the bus or train? Or is he going to look at what's going on outside the window? I'm English and I live here, but I'm still aware there's the rest of the world out there.

Can English kids relate to that though?

Yeah, but what about the Americans listening to it? We don't sell records here. The situation has kind of changed very subtly, but we don't sell records here. We can get an album near the top of the charts but it goes (indicates with his hands a quick descent) and if you compare it with other albums that stay in the top of the charts, it really means a lot.

I know it's the usual view to say America is the land of the fat slobs with small brains, but that's just not true.

There are young people in America who are destroyed by what their government's been doing since the beginning of the century.

The imperialistic attitudes, the supporting of Right Wing juntas around the world and there are people who are well pissed off with it. And they're human beings too. I mean if you're an English band and they're not going to buy your records, then you've got to face up to it.

Perhaps it's because you've lost credibility.

Well I'm not going to sway to them. I haven't got any kind of wish to dance to another person's tune, because the one I hear is too strong. I hear what they're saying, I read everything they say and I shut myself off from them all.

ALIVE

A lot of people have accused you of failing to live up to the group's original radical image.

I see what you're saying, but I would say to them they must think what they want. It certainly looks like that, but on the inside it's a different story. We're still alive, the Clash, a real ongoing situation, a real bunch of people that are still talking to each other, and we don't intend to stop. We intend to go on and on and we'll see in the end what we do with it. Our thing is that we were too childish to know just what we were walking into. Yet we've matured enough to not let the full impact of that...it hasn't broken us up. Like a lot of people don't know how the thing is set up. I didn't know until I was tricked all over the place. I'm talking about the actual business of making records and selling them...I had no idea!

So you've been manipulated?

Only by our own stupidity in a way. I'm talking about getting a big advance. A lot of groups are smart enough those days not to, but certainly in those days we had no idea what an advance was. It was just like a big laugh, a big laugh, and once we'd blown the advance on a few tours and making a record, we realised. Like people were saying to us, "Now you going to be rich and famous, what are you going to do with it?" and we had loads of ideas. Like radio stations, like put a co-operative venue together owned by musicians because they know what's wanted, and a decent bar with no hassle and all ideas like this.

We came flooding out with these ideas and everybody wrote them down and said, "Well, this is all really good stuff, right on." Then we walked into the door and we realised we weren't getting any money, that they'd been geeing us up going now you're going to be rich and famous...

It's a myth! I mean they all expect you believe that, that pop stars are rich and famous. It says it in the papers, so it must be true. I certainly thought it was true, but when we walked into that and realised what a massive debt we were into, it meant that any incoming money was sucked in by these people here (sweeps arm around him to indicate CBS), to pay them back for what they'd given us.

ATTENTION

We took a hundred grand and that brought the Clash to the attention of the people, we invested it in that.

Yet it wasn't our hundred grand, we had to pay them back and that meant we were fucked and we're only just getting out of it now. I mean splitting up with our manager didn't help it because he wanted a lot of dough and he, I'm not knocking Bernie because I think he's the best, but that was his idea that we lost that money in order to flog these tours and records. And so he didn't mind that we were thousands and thousands of quid in debt because he anticipated that in the first place.

But not us, in our stupidity, with all these people telling us how rich and famous we were going to be next week! – really thought that was going to happen.

It began to sink in after a couple of years of slogging round the Top Ranks and beging gobbed on, it finally began to sink in we weren't getting anywhere.

I mean every time we went to see the accountant it was like, I mean I couldn't get a member of the Clash into that office if I offered them a lift down in a mini cab.

They just wouldn't get in the mini cab.

ANGRY

It was that kind of depressing story, and it took a couple of years for that to sink in, whilst in the meantime all these other people were saying (adopts angry tone), "Where's all these radio stations? Where's all these wonderful things?" And of course when that begun to sink in...phew dear!

And it's taken us the following two years, after we began to feel that affect to dig our way out, and try and get on an even keel.

But I haven't dropped any project at all.

In fact I spend my time dreaming more up and we're starting small. We've got a four track cassette machine, right, on its own without a room to put it in and that's where we're starting from.

We're trying to keep it together and not let our egos get out of hand, and we're going to slog on from here.

But I don't think people are interested in this. They don't want to hear about this because this is the reality of life and they don't want to hear about all this, what I'm saying, but it's still reality to me and the rest of the Clash and they've still got to deal with that.

How do you feel when people cynically describe the Clash as the new Rolling Stones.

To be just like the Rolling Stones? I mean, a thousand groups would give their right arms to be called that, although I don't particularly find it wonderful.

But if we were, wouldn't we have a 24-track studio? For a start we haven't got our own houses. I'm talking about the old rock 'n' roll thing.

You get a big house, you build your own 24-track in the basement and when it's all done you can't think of a damn thing to record on it, right?

I mean, all those groups scrabbling round for studio time and there's all these jerks sitting in there and they can't think of anything to tape.

I mean those people would condemn us because they read it somewhere, but I'm not saying I don't have no fuck-up in my life.

I know where every penny is going, I know exactly how much we owe to who, how fast we're paying them off and how we're going to pay the rent to get an office of some kind, or basement to put this tape recorder in, and I know we're starting from the ground like that and I'm not interested in what people think, I'm only interested in the realities of my life. Which are very far removed from what anybody would think. You know, if you're a pop star you're rich and famous and that's all they want to know. They want to hear about Adam Ant's trousers or whether Malcolm McLaren likes geese or something like that. They're not interested in all I've been talking about, like the grim realities of life. Being conned by giant corporations when you're too stupid to know what's been pulled.

I don't regret it because you're not supposed to regret anything, so I don't regret it because I think that's a good attitude. But I'm only interested in...we're digging our way out and we're going to do it and people can go fuck themselves.

What did you think of Pennie Smith's book, *Before And After: A Book Of Clash Poses*? Did you think it had any validity? Any real point other than to glamorise you?

It's a book of photos and at least the chapter is called "Posing". But what are photographs for? Photographs are for other photographers. I'm talking about books like that for people who are into it. I think your argument would have some grounds if we forced every Clash fan into buying a copy. If we could think of some way to do that then your argument would have some grounds, but it's freedom of choice and for £4.99 you can either get that or Paula Yates's book of knickers, right?

SCENE

Paul Weller used his position and influence to finance a book of poems written by kids – not just his own fans.

Yeah, but Pennie wanted to put that book out. There's not a lot we had to do with it. Eel Pie published it. Townshend's company, and it was

Pennie's scene you know. Pennie wanted to put that book out, Eel Pie asked her and they came to us to see if we'd say okay.

Doesn't it perpetuate a rock star mythology though?

Well maybe, but that's all part of it. That's part of the lure of hoisting yourself out of some duff environment. You can't take the glamour out of this scene, not matter how hard you try.

Would you like to?

No. I don't see a necessity for it. In fact, it's impossible even if you wanted to. I mean we're real people and they're real places in that book and each of those moments was sweated to, through and beyond, right, and that's just a record of what happened, That's her record.

She's an artist, herself, and that's one of her testaments.

She might bring out a book on flora and fauna of the British Isles next. It's her business.

We were pleased that they wanted to bring out a book on us. Who wouldn't be flattered by that? I can see your point, but otherwise it's "Let's all go down and lay in a black hole somewhere and die". Hell.

Do you feel self-conscious when you're described as a rock star? Surely you don't want to end up like Mick Jagger – a caricature?

When I say a rock star shouldn't be a rock star, I'm not apologising for existing, you realise that. I'm very serious about it, I'm not apologising for existing. I'm just saying that the arrogance and unfeeling and inhumanity that these people have, they didn't grow up like that, they became like that because of the treatment that was handed out to them, people licking their arseholes from morning to night and they become like that. Arrogant and insincere...like Mick Jagger. But when we started out, say they were the big heroes of the day or whatever, we didn't see that you had to end up like that. We knew we were good, we knew that we could write songs that could thrash everybody else's just as well, but that doesn't mean to say we were going to crawl off in a

corner and die. Yet there was no need to end up as an arrogant jerk, and that's what I mean by a rock star as defined...an arrogant jerk.

YOBBO

Does criticism from the press cut very deep?

I'm not sure if you people realise how sensitive these so-called tough-skinned, yobbo groups can be. I know I get very sensitive in the wrong frame of mind. In a certain frame of mind, a good slagging can just about be the last straw on the camel's back.

But no-one would ever admit that, not really, not in a group, to a journalist like I'm admitting to you. But it is true.

How has your relationship with your fans developed – has there been any deterioration? You always used to pride yourself on how close the group was to its audience.

Well I'm always willing to talk, but I'm not so good at writing back, I must admit that. But I do read and again they never have anything constructive to say. It's facile, easy, the usual stuff, "Oh you've sold out". But take them beyond that and they're lost. People are desperate to be trendy, the only thing they've got is to be trendy, so they must follow that. But I'll argue with somebody if they've got a real argument and they really want to know. But mostly I find when I'm in that situation, I take them past their obvious declaration and they don't know what they're talking about. They end up (adopts monotone voice), "He says so or "I read it" or "It's true", they say.

And there's nothing really beyond it, they're not interested in what's real or not.

RADICAL

What about the people who continually dismiss the Clash's political songs as 'radical chic'?

I just don't think a song needs a licence or a passport and these people do. It's just too bad. I know people would like to censor my dreams, but they can't.

There's too many rules because rule one is, there is no rule and that was the first rule of punk and the last. That kind of attitude, we can do what we want to do.

How would you define your own political stance?

I'm Socialist, but by persuasion, from my own experiences. I believe you can't give orders. People have got to want to do it, and to want to do it you've got to be educated enough to think about it. I'm talking about any kind of socialist society.

Paul Simonon went to Moscow a couple of years ago and he said there were shops where tourists and party members could go, but not your average Russian. People walked round with their heads down and he said the whole thing seemed as unequal as anywhere else.

It's obviously not the solution and the Khmer Rouge, they forced that down the throats of a nation and butchered a whole nation. But you've got to realise you can't do it like that. It's the will of the people that must be followed.

Do you have any religious beliefs at all?

I'm one of those people that believes in an after life or a soul lives eternally. I don't believe that surrendering yourself to Jesus is a solution to anything at all, but I believe He existed, but not in the form that, you know, the Bible is as much a political document as it is a spiritual one. I'm sure it's been well censored by the Romans. We've got it today, but it must have passed through many hands...

Have you been involved much with drugs?

I've been a little acid freak in my time, though it never caused me to freak out. But there's a part of your brain where you leap in there when you take acid, where not only is there a good energy there, but something that's a malevolent one as well, and that's where a bad trip

comes out of. Though I never tripped one myself, I was with plenty of people who did and that's why I gave it up.

I took it about 35 times over a period of a couple of years ('70 and '71).

What do you feel about your contemporaries: Let's start with Rotten?

I like to think that I'm celebrating being alive. We can only open our mouths and sing a tune and when he says he wants to destroy rock 'n' roll, well I've heard that often enough. I'd like him to stop there, go back a bit and define what he's saying so I can understand it. What does he mean by rock 'n' roll? And what does he see to take its place? They never say that. They just go (adopts Rotten voice), "It must be killed". It's like dogmatic, but I'm quite interested to know what they mean. If they mean the rock 'n' roll attitude, well...

MESSAGE

...I agree, destroy it.

But if he thinks the mode of the music must change, I kind of agree with that as well, but I think if a message of soul is to be delivered, it can only be delivered if the listener is with you.

The way they subscribe to, is to make it sound horrible so that the listener will know how horrible they feel, which I find a bit strange. It's something a bit alien to me. I mean I'm just an r'n'b fanatic.

What's your opinion of the Jam?

The Jam are really opposite to the Clash in that I see them as an organisation. We call it Tory Rock, like tightly organised shit and I don't think you can knock that at all. Paul Weller furthermore is 22, and I got to give him respect, a hell of a lot of respect. But personally, and I'm no expert, it's too organised and dull for me.

MATURE

And the Damned?

The Damned I think are great fun but I don't listen to their music. Musically they mean nothing.

Anything to say about 2-Tone

I'm just glad 2-Tone is more mature than punk ever was.

Any last words on the Pistols?

The Pistols were locked up by McLaren, they weren't allowed to play and they took that out on the Clash. It was that kind of heady daze, it was very aggressive.

They gave it to us and we gave it right back and like we were all giving it to the Damned, so it was just like a load of petty backstabbing from childish, petulant arseholes, but the Pistols, I hated them because they slagged us off without intelligence. They took a word like conscription out of a song like 'Career Opportunities' which is worth more now than any of their songs are, except maybe 'Anarchy' and that one about "eat your heart out on a plastic tray", they took a word like that and in the *MM*, to an adoring, gushing Allan Jones, who had been slagging them off a couple of weeks before, and gave him what he wanted to hear. "Conscription" they said and they tore it apart right out of context...

PRESENT

Let's talk about the Blockhead connection.

I've just fucked it up. You know that interview you done with the Blockheads, well there I am sitting waiting to be interviewed on Radio One, with a microphone right next to me, and the guy goes, "I've just read what Mickey Gallagher says here, that you've got one good album, and two thrown in as a Christmas present. What do you say about that?" And I kind of went, on the air, "Well the guy's jealous. Just because he's taken a year to put together one measly record, of course he's going to slag us for having the audacity to come out with three." And like Mickey Gallagher's my best mate.

What's going to happen now, though?

But I'm glad you pointed that out because that scene's been great and it is unusual for us to be mates with a group. I hope it continues although it gets sour. Like what we just said, God knows what Mickey is going to say now.

VIOLENCE

You seem more mellow than I expected. Do you think violence is ever justified – in any kind of circumstance?

I'm in Ghandi's army and Luther King's army. I tried fighting violence with violence. I tried it in Hamburg and I nearly murdered some guy, because I was out of order. They were out of order, but that's no excuse for me to get out of order, and I only just got out of jail alive. So from that day on, life was teaching me something and Luther King and Ghandi were right, you can't fight violence with violence. I don't know, that's my new way of thinking, maybe I'll change my mind if Thatcher books herself in for a 20-year slot...

Do you think you were fairly portrayed by *Rude Boy*?

We were most unhappy about what they were doing with the blacks you know. They'd be the first to admit it, Dave Mingay and Jack Hazan who made it, they're middle class twats.

POCKETS

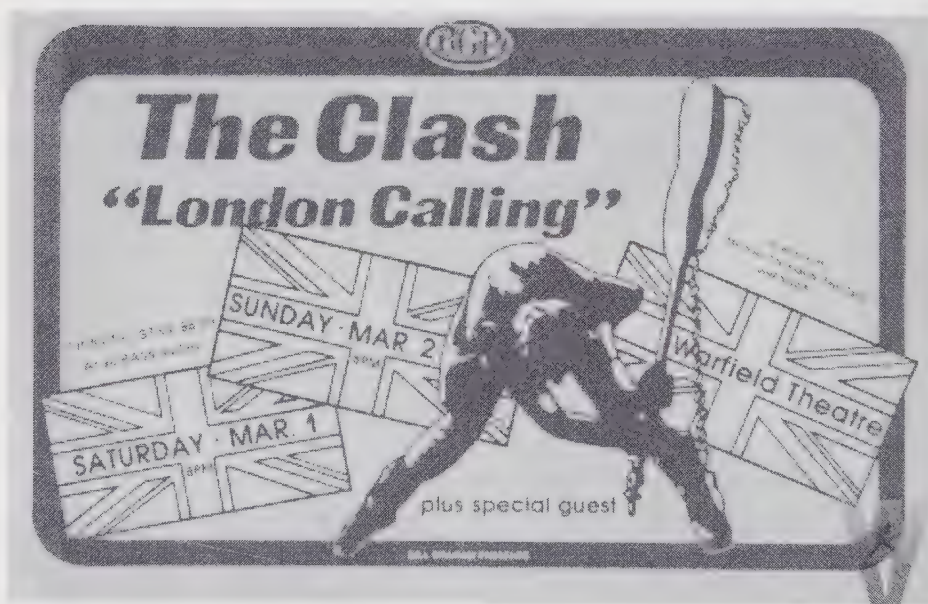
I mean I'm a middle class twat, but so are they and we didn't like what they were doing with the black people, because they were showing them dipping into pockets and then they were shown being done for something and that was their only role in the film. And that's a one way view. I think the contribution the black people made to this scene, that's one of the negative contributions...the music, the...(angry) who wants to propagate that. That's what the right wing use, all blacks are muggers which is a load of rubbish. After that rough showing I've never seen it since and nor have any of the Clash. We've never spoken them, never seen any dough...

Can you briefly sum up the past, present and future of the Clash?

We were too naive and we said too many things, although I will say we meant them and we still do. But we said too many things and that means that the people aren't prepared to give the music a fair hearing obviously. They listen to it with a sneer and I do myself with other artists I hate. I won't give their music a fair hearing and sometimes I have to grudgingly accept that the people I've been slagging off for years have genuine talent. Like Elvis Costello. So I can well understand people listening to it with sneers, but I've learnt to cool down on what I expect.

A final word, then...

I'm sure there are answers. The answer is organisation and education.



The Clash: Home On The Range

By Chris Salewicz, *The Face*, February 1981

PAUL SIMONON lives in a modest two-room Notting Hill basement flat just north of Ladbroke Grove tube station.

On one wall of the red-painted neat front room that serves as his lounge and casual rehearsal room hangs a stark, strident painting of a gloomy car-dump set in the proverbial shadow of The Westway which was such a vital symbol in early Clash mythology. The painting is part of the heritage of the bass-player's years in nearby Holland Park's exclusive Byam Shaw Art College which he attended on a scholarship.

"It was really good there," the dry, slyly mischievous Simonon once told me. "All the other kids had really rich parents, so you could just nick their canvas and paints and they'd get their fathers to buy them replacements."

The offspring of a broken marriage, as are also Joe Strummer and Mick Jones, Simonon used the first real money he earned with The Clash as a deposit on the flat – he picked it up very cheaply just before the beginning of the recent property boom. "It's great in this neighbourhood," he enthuses. "There's this black family next door and really early in the morning they're playing all this dub. I don't even need to put on anything myself to listen to when I'm getting up."

Paul badly needed a place of his own after years of sharing bedrooms with his younger brother – Nick Simonon, now the drummer with Pearl Harbour and at one time seriously mooted as a replacement for first Clash drummer Terry Chimes – and living in squats.

One of the houses he squatted in was with Joe, in Paddington: "Squatting's a good idea. But you can't really enjoy living in squats. It's just a place to put your head down."

Arriving at his home early one damp, dank winter afternoon I find the Clash bass-player listening to a tape of recent reggae, to which he sways back and forth like a Jamaican toaster in the wide-brimmed hat that these days has become an almost growth-like part of his skull, and

out of the sides of which peek the thin sideburns that provide the only visible signs of hair.

Paul's girlfriend Debbie is out, pursuing her career as a model. "She's keeping me at the moment," he laughs, with no visible signs of guilt at this role-reversal. "I ran out of money after I had to pay a £1,000 phone bill. I've had it cut off now – that seems safer."

Leaving the Simonon residence we walk through the scruffy streets to a caff off the Portobello Road where we sit down with a cup of tea each.

PAUL SIMONON was recruited by Mick Jones into the embryonic Clash when the bassist, then a Ziggy-era Bowie clone art student, turned up to a rehearsal at which for ten minutes he sang the chorus-line of Jonathan Richman's 'Roadrunner'.

To the visually aware Jones the tall, gangling youth who walked with the sway of an autistic child was perfect material for the group the guitarist was forming. He set about teaching him the bass, and on the first Clash gigs Simonon still had inked in the appropriate notes on his fret-board.

Since then, though, he's always been spoken of as the weakest member musically in the group, an unwelcome reputation offset to some degree by his 'Guns Of Brixton' composition he sang on the *London Calling* LP, and now further demolished by 'The Crooked Beat' which he sings on *Sandinista*. Moreover, Jamaican DJ Mikey Dread of late has spoken of Simonon as having a perfect understanding of reggae-style bass-playing. Indeed the toaster, who adds a Disco-45-like finish to 'The Crooked Beat', and the bassist were due to have travelled to Jamaica before Christmas to cut an album together for the Dread At The Controls label, a studio expedition which now has been re-scheduled for later in the winter.

"I think," admits Paul, sipping his tea, "that it was probably true that I wasn't a very good musician at first. But I also think that situation's changed a lot now. I've been working very hard at it for some time. Playing along to reggae records has been one of the ways that I've bettered my playing."

Neither is he unduly concerned about the barrage of unfavourable criticism that has greeted the sprawling, sound system-like extravaganza that is *Sandinista*, a hostility probably inspired as much as anything by the daunting amount of material required for reviewers of the triple-album set to absorb:

"Well, at least getting numbered means that people are still paying attention to us, so I don't mind that at all. Really, though, I think we were just expected to come up with another *London Calling*, but the thing about the material on *Sandinista* is that it's so varied that now we're free to do anything whatsoever that we want. No-one has any idea what we'll come up with next."

SIMONON DENIES rumours of friction within the group at the time the record was being made: "Well, for a start it was made at loads of different times. A lot of it we did in Electric Ladyland in New York during the American tour in the spring. Then after that tour we went straight to Jamaica and did a couple more songs at Channel One. That was fantastic, though a lot of the black musicians there seemed to think we were really rich, when in fact we were completely broke all the time we were down there. CBS were supposed to be sending some money down to us but it never arrived. And the rest of the record we did at Wessex in London during the summer.

"Actually, Mick and Joe did have a fight at one of the English gigs, but I think that was just because they were done in from touring – there were bottles and things flying around the dressing-room. It was over whether we should play that song, 'White Riot'.

"In fact, that song's always causing problems. When we got to Hamburg on the European bit of the tour we heard that there were all these hard-line political punks who were likely to cause trouble. Before the gig some of them came backstage and told us there wouldn't be any problems so long as we didn't play 'White Riot'. So naturally we *did* play it, and there was this bloke up at the front who kept gobbing at Joe, so he hit him over the head with his guitar, and then this fight broke out"...a satisfied sparkle enters the bassist's eyes..."with me 'n' Joe down in the audience slugging it out with them.

"The police came backstage afterwards and tried to arrest Joe. We had to leave Hamburg a bit quick."

Also, during another break in the American tour Paul Simonon, with his high cheek-bones and supreme posing ability the natural matinee idol in The Clash, participated in his first feature film role. Flying to Vancouver he appeared alongside Steve Jones and Paul Cook in the Lou Adler-directed *All Washed Up*.

"It was really good experience – and quite good money, too. Acting's definitely something I'd like to get into. I know everyone says that, but in fact if you're in a group you do get loads of opportunities to appear in films. I really enjoyed doing it, and I hope I get some more parts. I don't know how the film'll turn out though – it's all down to how it's edited.

"The story-line is pretty good: it's about this English group that gets stranded in America without any money, and they team up with an American all-girl group. Barry Forde, who used to be in Merger, is in it, too. He plays the driver of the coach who's doing the job to raise bail for a mate of his.

"It was really funny: me 'n' Steve 'n' Paul were staying in the same hotel in Vancouver – they made it in Canada because it's cheaper than doing it in Hollywood – as the rest of the people working on the film. We were supposed to pay for our keep out of our fees, but instead we charged *everything* we ever had there to the film company – we'd sign for things with names like Danny Blanchflower. We must have had thousands of dollars worth of stuff and I don't think they every found out who was doing it.

"Vancouver's a bit boring, though. On the days we had off I started noticing that Steve would disappear off up this mountain that was nearby. I thought that was a bit odd, so I asked Paul Cook about it. 'Oh, Steve's found a bar up there.' he told me."

LEAVING THE caff, Paul and I head through the cold twilight towards Holland Park, for a session with photographer Chalkie Davies. Afterwards we walk back through some of the plusher streets of

Notting Hill to the Simonon gaff. On the way Paul takes care to point out some of the local landmarks.

"See that really big house over there?" he asks as we draw close to Ladbroke Grove. "When I was at school I came past it with one of my mates and there were all these really rich people in there having afternoon tea with all these servants waiting on them. So me 'n' my friend picked up these rocks and threw them through the open window at them."

After his parents split up whilst he was very young, Paul lived at first in Brixton and then moved with his father and brother up to Notting Hill where he went to various secondary schools. He used to work on a stall in Portobello Road on Saturdays – "It used to get so cold in winter you had to stand with your feet in cardboard boxes."

He got two 'O' levels, in English and Art, notwithstanding the efforts of one of his teachers to ensure the whole class did even better: "He was really good, this one bloke, he told us all the answers during the exam. Most still failed though."

We get back to Paul's place, via a stop at the Dub Vendor reggae shop, and after a few minutes Mikey Dread arrives. For the next 90 minutes or so Paul and Mikey run through the vocals of a rhythm track that the toaster's brought with him and which is played on Paul's cassette deck. They're intending to go into a studio in London that weekend to record the single for release as a Disco-45.

When Mikey leaves to drive back to the place he's staying at in Battersea, he drops Paul and myself off in Westbourne Grove where we adjourn to an Indian restaurant.

He's reading the Michael Thelwell novel of *The Harder They Come* – he already has a video of the film. He tells me he's also after a cassette of the Richard Attenborough movie *Brighton Rock*, and talks knowledgeably about writer Graham Greene whom he first studied at school for 'O' level: the dark figure of gang-leader Pinkie, the central character of *Brighton Rock*, seems to hold a special fascination for Simonon who, as exemplified in the incident in which he used a racing

pigeon as target practice, has a weird interest in guns – in one corner of his flat the bassist keeps a replica model of a German machine pistol.

"It really seems like it's meant to be held. I just look on it as a work of art," he says, attempting to justify his obsession.

OVER A prawn curry and a pint of lager he tells of how The Clash is yet again in the midst of wrangling with CBS, their record company. Despite being a triple-record set, the low price-tag demanded by the group for *Sandinista* has resulted in the record company insisting that it be counted only as *one* of the five LPs required under the Clash contract, the same terms under which they released *London Calling* at a budget price.

"It's a bit much," moans Paul. "It means they've had seven actual records, but CBS are claiming they count only as four albums."

Recently, the group also decided to split with Blackhill, the management company who stepped in to take over the band's affairs following the interim arrangement with Caroline Coon, Paul's former girlfriend, after the divorce from Malcolm McLaren cohort Bernie Rhodes. Now The Clash are managing themselves, with creative assistance from Kosmo Vinyl, ardent pursuer of The Rock'n'Roll Quest.

"Blackhill were alright really," explains Paul. "We needed them for a while – there were loads of things that had to be sorted out. But now they've done that, it seems we may as well look after ourselves. We know what we want, anyway.

"It means, of course, that now we've to shell out money to them as well as to Bernie – we're still paying him off, though I think that ends soon.

"I always really overdid things with Bernie." Paul laughs with affection at the memory of Rhodes. "There was one time we were all waiting to go off to Paris to play a concert. Bernie's sitting there in the garden in his deck-chair, reading the Sunday papers in the sun.

"And I'm pissing about in his house whilst Mick and Joe are moaning and wandering about. So I went out and got this hose and they both said, 'No, don't do that!' But I turned the hose on Bernie and sprayed

him all over. And he *hates* getting his hair wet – if it rains he runs down the road with his leather jacket over his head.

"So he just ran off, leaving the Sunday papers all crumpled up in the mud.

We finish our meal and wander off up Westbourne Grove. Simonon watches a prowling police car. "Corr," he semi-shivers, "I do seem to have to spend a lot of time avoiding the police these days. I got done the other day for driving without 'L' plates. Joe's dope case comes up soon too, but I don't think that should be much of a problem.

"It's funny though, everyone seems to be out to get us these days: we're definitely the most fashionable group to have a go at...but that doesn't matter. We're going to play some dates in a few weeks time, but it won't be a long tour – we're never going to do that again. We'll be playing places no-one would expect that we'd play.

"And we've got a lot more surprises up our sleeves, too. We're going to keep a lot of people on their toes."



The Clash

By Paolo Hewitt, *Melody Maker*, June 6, 1981

STANDING BY the toilet door, the kid recognised him instantly. The hair piled up in a scrappy mess. The white leather jacket. The beautiful punkette slouched next to him as he pulled on his cigarette, coolly eyeing the Patti Smith audience at the Rainbow that night. It had to be! Mick Jones. Of the Clash.

Nervously, the kid approached him and stood patiently next to him. He'd seen him on television just the night before and wanted to ask him some questions about a chat show the Clash had been on.

It had turned out disastrously. There they were, the Clash, one of the best bands *ever*, face to face with a Labour politician who was ripping them, and their arguments about the indignity of work and the uselessness of education, completely to shreds.

The kid had watched it despairingly as his heroes resorted to cheap shock tactics to save face against this calm, experienced voice of Establishment reason. Only the band appearing live saved the show. And now he was standing next to one of them.

The guitarist turned to him. "When's your next album going to come out?," the kid blurted. The guitarist raised his eyes to indicate how many times he'd heard that one.

"What about that show you were on last night?"

"What about it?"

"Well, that stuff about politics and factories?"

"Look, mate, I only played the guitar on the show, right?"

"Yeah but you..."

"If you want to know about that, ask Joe. Otherwise just leave me alone. Alright?"

"Yeah, but you said a few things."

"I said fuck all. I don't even know where I was. I was out of it. Now why don't you fuck off. Eh?"

From that day onwards I swore never to speak to Mick Jones again. Ever again. Until last week when I ended up in the Clash's Milan dressing room. And interviewed the bugger.

Jesus, I'm getting soft.

LIKE A FIELD of poppies blown upwards by a vicious wind, 15,000 Italians rise to greet the Clash in a Milan cycling stadium. Outside the gig the hedonistic game of "Don't Pay To Get In" is in full motion as a large segment of the Milan population give their interpretation of the storming of the Bastille. Inside the Clash have just broken into 'London Calling' as the blood splashes on the pavement outside.

Harsher, and with a lot more passion than on the record, the Clash attack the song with fire and venom, putting their money where their guitars are. Right upfront. With no quibbles.

PAUL SIMONON believes that if he was a kid he would have no hesitation in following the Clash.

"Pretty positive, I would," he confirms. "As long as it's got something to say that wasn't a bit duff".

Physically intimidating, once Simonon gets chatting he's definitely an OK Bloke. He laughs at his own reputation of being "the quiet one", but is well aware of the aura he creates. So are others. He's just made his first real feature film.

"The script was really good", he enthuses. "It was written by Nancy Downes. She wrote *Coming Home*, but the thing was, she was pissed off with it because they changed it from ordinary soldiers to officers. So they fucked it up."

This film is about a female group, "somewhat similar to the Slits," meaning it concerns itself with the adventures of this female rock and roll group and all they have to deal with.

Interspersed in the main storyline are "lots of different things, like an English group being stranded in America."

"I've got an easy part to play," Simonon says self-deprecatingly. "I just play one of the members of the group, which is good because if I had a leading role, if it was a shitty film then all the shit hits me."

"I learnt a lot from it. Just like the whole technique of filming and projecting yourself."

"I don't know, it sounds wanky really," he says a bit irritably, "because you hear about pop stars going into films and all that stuff which make me sick. Like Roger Daltrey, and they all do their rock 'n' roll bit and then they think right we're going to go into films. I know it's a road well trodden. But I thought it was worth it."

Another project Simonon is involved in is with Mikey Dread, the toaster the Clash gave a support slot to on their last British tour along with Joe Ely. Since then their relationship has blossomed, with Simonon utilising his love and feel for the music of reggae to help out. To him it's part of the process of growing up, something that the Clash have done most vividly in public.

"It's like the older you get, you become wiser. You must feel it in yourself that as you're growing up you see things that you did in the past, they might have been mistakes, or they might have been good, but it don't matter. You learn from them."

"Something that somebody told me once," he continues, "I can't remember who it was, probably Caroline Coon or somebody, she said 'You're as old as you feel'."

"I thought about that and it seemed to ring pretty true. You could be like my dad for instance walking along Ramsgate pier with his Robert De Niro suit on. He goes and has a laugh."

"A lot of people, they've lost their life. They get married – getting married is like going to prison I think. It's true. I don't want to deal with that. Ever."

LAST TIME I saw the Clash with guitars in their hands was well over a year ago. The Electric Ballroom, I think. Since then, with the release of *Sandinista*, they're clearly marked out their position. They are now international. Clash music *now* incorporates all kinds of styles for all kinds of people. It is as far removed from *that* debut album as anything is likely to be.

They've claimed their territory and are sticking to it, come what may. But that resilience, their backbone, was so nearly broken after the release of *Sandinista*. It's no big secret that they came near to splitting up.

They try to play it down, but without a guiding influence the criticisms and abuse they received for *Sandinista*, (all the normal everyday Clash complaints of selling out, latching onto chic causes, and playing at rock stars; something they ostensibly set out to destroy) plus the sheer physical strain of making a triple album, looked like being enough to crush them.

Two months ago they brought back Bernie Rhodes as their manager. Bernie was their original manager, but that relationship ended up in messy court battles. Now the Clash have never seemed more buoyant. Both on and off-stage. We'll be going off stage in a minute, but here *on* stage, the Clash are heading into 'Safe European Home', one of their best ever songs.

An adrenalin pumper of epic proportions, they raise the temperature even more by slamming into 'White Man'. Jones and Strummer hit those opening chords in unison and immediately I fly back to summer '78 and the Music Machine, being drunk, and walking the streets of London at two in the morning but not caring one bit.

Because I'd just seen the Clash.

PAUL SIMONON believes that as a member of the Clash they do not glorify or degrade heavy political situations. Nor are they all obsessed with rock star cool and drugs.

"I'll give you a good example, right," he says in a more than forthright manner, "photographs taken in Northern Ireland right? We went there and we were having our photo taken in Shankill Road and I was shitting myself.

"We all were because right opposite were gunmen. But it's like a photo-documentary. It's like the Clash. Northern Ireland. It's music going into a situation where it's pretty heavy. It's like a documentation type thing in the way that it represents that the Clash were playing music in Belfast.

"It says – maybe not so explicitly – that more groups should go there. And more groups *do* go there. People say we were poncing around, but if someone points a camera at you you could be a bit drunk and stick your tongue out, mess around right?

"But to make a good picture you've got to be serious. Especially," he sums up, "something as serious as Northern Ireland. Right?"

And the drugs?

"True. But I bet the people who say that must go down the pub some nights and get pissed out of their heads. For me drugs are no big deal. And I say that seriously. They're no big deal because I like to be in control of my situation. If there's no grass around who cares?" He smiles. "Too much of a good thing is bad."

THROUGHOUT the Clash's hour and a half set, which was delivered with a lot of verve, energy and spirit, images and snapshots kept appearing on a screen behind the band. So as the Clash gained momentum with 'Train in Vain', the disco style 'Lightening Strikes', the breather of 'Junco Partner' which recalled Strummer and the 101'ers and 'Guns Of Brixton' which has suddenly become Very True And Relevant, people stranded at the back could at least get some sort of impression about the Clash.

They were even treated to one new number called 'Radio Clash', though I doubt if they understood a word. What they did understand was that the Clash are about spirit and defiance. It was a visible thing as anybody who has seen the Clash onstage can tell you.

What I think is that somewhere along the line the Clash put their music first and their attitude second. They've forgotten that the Clash, initially, were more than just a band. But it was great seeing them live for the first time in years.

AFTER the Clash are dead and buried, CBS ought to give Mick Jones a job as one of their press officers. When I enter the dressing room...my God, he's politeness itself.

"Have a drink! Have a chair! Have some food and have an interview."

Oh. Thanks.

"For us in England," says Mick Jones, "I've found out something that was quite important. It seemed that when they were turning against us, it's because they're annoyed with us. And the reason they're annoyed with us is because we can't make it.

"And if *we* can't make it it means *they* can't make it. I think that if you're stuck in Sunderland or Newcastle and you've been following the Clash for a few years and you see the Clash bashing their heads against this brick wall..."

Jones defines the brick wall as to do with "people's closed minds" referring to "*Sandinista*, and the record company."

Of course. What Clash feature would be complete without a CBS slugging? As for their loss of stature in England and their popularity abroad Jones is philosophical. And typically defiant.

"It disappoints me," he says about their failure to match their international success in England, "but I'm not completely prepared to admit that it's not totally happening. As far as I see it we've got a lot of detractors but we've also got a lot of supporters. So I don't really think

you should say 'Come on admit you're not happening in England any more'.

"Because it's not really true. It's just that the more superficial things are floating to the top. We're still active...ists." he sneaks in quickly.

"Maybe," he continues, "there's a sort of attitude that says you have to be down there with us. I feel that sometimes. They want to drag me back down and when I go to London and I've been there long enough I really feel that. A depression comes over.

"This thing is quite claustrophobic and oppressive and it's increasingly difficult the longer I spend there to get out the door, let alone...it's to do with...I think people who make cultural contributions should be supported or at least allowed to exist." he finally says decisively.

"Along with people making superficial contributions for financial gain. You know when I go back I feel good, then, after a few months there's a load of weights around me. That's what I feel about England.

"I feel it's become acutely worse in the last few years due to the general Tory-like vibe. I really see that.

"I had a relative in hospital and I went to the to the hospital and I saw these people and they're fucking working their guts out. Like my gran's heating bill went up 16 per cent and it's just gone up again, (Mick was raised by his grandmother), and then she got a bill for the fucking electricity.

"It's like the poor people and the old people are getting hit worse. Along with the violent Face Of Great Britain, 1981."

Sure, I reply but isn't it up to the Clash to try and help out. Make a little cultural contribution.?

"Yeah, to a certain extent," he replies "We do have a responsibility and no doubt we are going to be playing. We haven't said 'Hey we're not coming back to England anymore.'

"I live there, but no use asking me when. And if the people are a bit more open minded in terms of receiving us then it's better.

"Because that's when the exchange comes," Mick stresses.

"The exchange of ideas and communication where we can actually capture people and perhaps make people understand. We play much better if people are digging it than if they're fighting us. There's no sense in that. It's stupid".

DRAPED IN an Italian flag, Joe Strummer bids Milan goodbye. It's been a great show culminating in a vicious 'White Riot' and 'London's Burning'. On the soundcheck rostrum where I was standing they had to tell me to stop leaping about or the thing would topple.

Only 'Bankrobber', 'Brand New Cadillac' and 'Jimmy Jazz' had grated. But, shit, what's that in an hour and a half show? It's very unfashionable at the moment to say this, but the Clash were great live and I enjoyed nearly every damn minute. To say otherwise would be lying. I can't do that.

"THERE'S A picture on our first album cover," Mick Jones says referring to the snap of the police at the Notting Hill Carnival, "and it's just after the steel bands. Steel bands are here now," he says pointing to a poster of *Sandinista* on the wall, thinking about the song 'Washington Bullets' where the Clash use them.

"Bernie is here," continues Mick going back to '77. "Now Bernie's here. It does connect. It all fits. it takes some looking at, this punk group in 1981."

It sure does, but have the Clash become everything they wanted to be? Or more to the point have they become everything they didn't want to be?

"It's like a big train. It's like saying 'Have we arrived at the wrong station?

"No! Because we're still on that train.

"Say you're painting a picture and you imagine the picture to be something and when it's painted it isn't what you imagined it to be. It never is! But it's generally better.

"I used to paint so that's why I use painting. But I think the same goes for us. And I would never ever say I was disappointed. Because I'm not".

FIVE YEARS after Mick Jones told me to fuck off we've all changed a hell of a lot. Mick Jones might think that the Clash are a punk band in 1981, but they're not. That's all over with now.

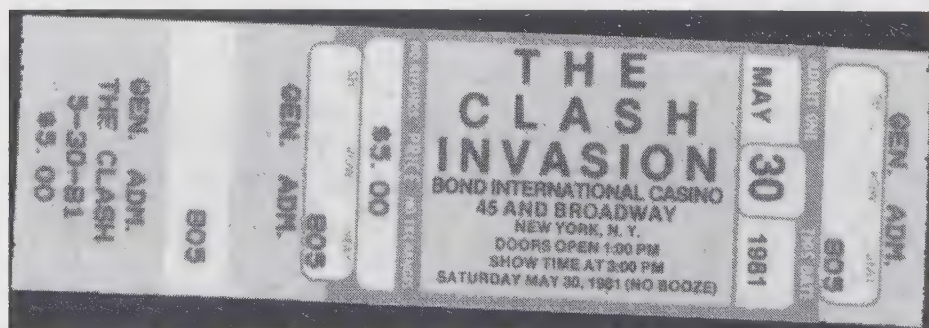
Finished.

Gone for good and left for bands such as Discharge and UK Decay to carry the banner. And good luck to them. But sod the categories. It's either good, (Kid Creole, Parker, Uhuru) or bad (). You fill that one in.

Either way, there's only one way for the Clash to be treated now. Not as failed punks. Or saviours. But are they a good band? For me it's 70/30 in favour. And these days that's a good ratio.

"And tell them I'm not arrogant," shouted Mick Jones when I left. "I do worry about it. I'm quite nice really."

And then he smiled. "Cuddly even".



How The Clash Fed The Wonderbread Generation, Made The Mountain Come to Mohammed, And Other Miracles By Mick Farren, *NME*, June 20, 1981

The winner of NME's Flatter The Clash competition checks out the ramifications when an English band's world is at Bonds.

KOSMO VINYL shoots both fists heavenward, for all the world like a man who had just scored for West Ham at Wembley.

"I got the news on every channel! I got the news on every channel! I conned them all. I told them all that they were going to get an exclusive and then I stitched them all up!"

Bernie Rhodes may be back as The Clash's manager, but Kosmo is their conscience and one of their greatest psychic protectors. Right at this particular moment Kosmo is ecstatic over the fact that each of New York's seven major TV channels has run a substantial Clash item on their early evening news shows. The fact that, at the moment in question, The Clash may not be able to play in New York at all doesn't cause him a second's pause. There's nothing Kosmo likes better than the reckless danger of being a rock and roll Indian on the cowboys' own turf. Jerking the electronic media seems a fine prank.

In fact, The Clash are jerking around the whole of New York. They have arrived in the middle of a mini-British invasion. PiL, The Jam, U2, Teardrop Explodes and The Fall have all been through town in roughly the same timespace, but nobody has made anything like the same impact. The others are just rock and roll bands. The Clash, by a sweet combination of ignorance, arrogance, deviousness and plain blind luck, have become, if not a cause, at least a major talking point.

For a while, it seemed as though no British band was going to be able to top the PiL outrage of being bottled off the stage of the Ritz and then asked to play a return engagement. Then the Clash turned up in town, created two mini riots on Times Square, got themselves four solid days of saturation media coverage and, by the time the band has finished its New York stint, they will have played to some 30,000 punters.

The original idea was for The Clash to play an extended US tour. The usual gruelling round of 32 cities in 34 days or what have you. Unfortunately Epic, the band's massively corporate US label, refused for their own reasons – reasons they don't want to reveal – to underwrite the tour financially.

The only other alternative was to play an extended season in a city like New York. Instead of taking the show to the fans, it was decided to bring the fans to the show. As Joe Strummer put it at the very first press conference before all the trouble started, " It's like the fans are going on tour instead of us, the mountains coming to Mohammed."

The venue chosen for this Clash spectacular was a place called Bonds International Casino. Up until a few months ago Bonds had been a predominantly gay disco with lavish lighting effects, dancing fountains and a Flash Gordon staircase that bombards anyone walking up or down it with a frenzy of lights and tweeting sub- Eno electronics.

The main problem about Bonds is that the place is situated slap in the middle of Times Square, which is pretty much America's epicentre of vice, vulture shock, sleaze and dark doorway vampirism.

Bonds' initial intention was to add a couple of thousand star spangled funksters to the midnight mess. Unfortunately, it didn't quite work out that way. When disco failed, Bonds tried to stay in business by turning to live rock and roll. They ripped out the more lavish effects. The dancing fountains went and a stage was erected in their place. the first attempts were fairly modest, Burning Spear and The Dead Kennedys' New York debuts. Crowds increased when they presented The Ramones and later The Plasmatics with their exploding car. Booking The Clash for eight days straight looked, on the surface, like a move that would not only fit exactly with the band's need but also put Bonds firmly on the map as one of the pre-eminent rock joints in the city.

What the Clash didn't know was that New York was in the midst of a rock club war. Over the past 18 months, far too many people had the bright idea that the way to make a million dollars was by opening a rock nightspot. Everyone except those involved knew the tide had to turn.

Since the start of the year, attrition has set in. The cavernous Heat, the chic and trendy Rock Lounge and the Anglophile and long-established Hurrah have all closed. Others will undoubtedly follow. None of the other owners and promoters wanted to see Bonds pulling huge crowds right in the middle of town.

The real physical capacity of the ex-disco is around 4,000. That's the number that can be crammed in without their either being crushed, suffocated or driven axe-berserk crazy. The legal limit is 1,750. That's the number of people who can get out of the place in the event of fire.

Like most other New York clubs, Bonds sold tickets for The Clash up to and probably beyond the real physical capacity. Unlike other clubs, though, Bonds got caught. During the opening show the Fire Department received an anonymous tip. The firemen arrived just before the end of The Clash's set. The fire chief wanted pull the plugs on the band but relented when Kosmo pointed out that if he did, the crowd were likely to rip the place to bits.

The Clash were allowed one encore, then the lights came on and the nightclub was cleared. The following day Bonds was informed that if they exceeded the legal limit on one more occasion they'd be closed. On the day after that the Building Commissioner also got in on the act and for 24 hours Bonds was actually shut down. Then, in the full glare of the local medial, a compromise was reached. The shows could go on but not to more than 1750 punters.

Unfortunately, something in the region of 4,000 tickets had been sold for each of The Clash's eight shows. The band, finding themselves caught in the middle of all this nonsense, decided that there was a only one ethical course. They would add enough dates so everyone who has a ticket will get a chance to see a show. This means they will play total of 16 days at Bonds.

It's rugged stint, particularly for Joe Strummer's voice, following on a European tour. Doubling their expenses also means they take a financial loss. In order to reschedule the extra dates, Bonds are forced to blow out a date by The Stranglers and Gary Glitter's US opening.

IT SEEMS like everyone and their uncle now comes on stage to the strains of some stirring prerecorded tape. For The Clash in New York it's Hugo Montenegro's title theme from *For A Few Dollars More*. This spaghetti western opus is not only ironic, but for me it has the right touch of melodramatic, trashy bravado.

I figure if they had motorcycle gangs in the Soviet Union, The Clash are pretty much what they would look like. Jones is spiderlike in black, Strummer in a red, sawn-down Levi jacket, Simonon stone-faced in leather pants and a T-shirt, Topper stripped to the waist.

The particular show I'm talking about is the fourth into their NY stint. The opening night had been hot, crowded and, despite the fact that the audience had gone quite bananas, the band had been inclined to ernie about. At the end of normally taut, tight tunes they seemed unable to resist the temptation to fall into lengthy dub grooves, some of which were interesting, others just plain dull. Someone behind me whispered, "Jesus, they want to be The Grateful Dead when they grow up.

Four days in, though, The Clash are firmly on their feet. It's been a while since I've seen them, and the thing that's most noticeable is the stature they've gained. They have matured and they've acquired a definite authority. Where once they were enthusiastic but ragged and all over the place, they are now tight, tough and confident.

While Joe Strummer will never be a bel canto singer, he's learned to work extraordinarily well within his limitations and, when there's danger of his faltering, he gets more than adequate vocal support from the other three.

Jones has become a passingly nifty guitar player with a pleasingly eclectic style that spans influences from JA to rockabilly as well as straight-ahead post-Chuck Berry knocking it out. In addition, he has gained a number of electronic toys including a pair of heavily gizmoed rototoms to keep us amused during the dub sequences. While Jones, with a mile-long guitar lead, leaps and bounces over the whole stage, Simonon, impassive as ever, sticks to his slot at stage right except when he fronts the band for the now topically prophetic (if slightly overstaged) 'Guns of Brixton'.

The real surprise, though, is Topper Headon. Rock steady is a grossly overused cliché, but it fits so well. He lays down the foundation rhythm for The Clash with a dependability that can't be beat.

High points in the show include 'Ivan Meets GI Joe', the vintage 'Career Opportunities', the Vince Taylor classic 'Brand New Cadillac', Strummer's traditional 'Junco Partner' and the newie 'This Is Radio Clash'. It's a long show, just short of two hours, and after all the grief of standing in line, switching dates and exchanging tickets, the audience isn't stinted.

There's more, however, than just the sum total of songs. I used the word authority earlier and figure it's still about the most descriptive. There's an air about the band, an aura if you like. The only bands that have it are the ones who, barring accidents and lame-brain screw ups, are destined to be very, very big.

CERTAINLY THE Yanks seem to feel this is true. They want the Clash in the worst possible way. It's mid-afternoon on the sidewalk outside Bonds and a young woman is complaining into a TV camera. She has come down from Boston only to find that her ticket is now good for a show some eight days later.

"I mean, I can't come back next week. I already spent over two hundred dollars so far, what with the drugs and everything."

A woman with matted frizzy hair, the kind of skimpy outfit that Rolling Stones tour groupies wore in 1975, is offering to strip in order to raise the money for a ticket off a tout. She's clearly on the verge of hysteria. There was a time when loud, demented, star-fucker obsessive were simply a part of the rock and roll tapestry, but since Hinckley and Chapman they are treated with a little more care.

Nonetheless, the combination of boobs and high emotion attracts both the cops and the TV crews who have been camped on the block ever since Bonds' troubles started. It is, after all, New York's biggest punk rock fiasco since Sid stuck the knife into Nancy. The woman shrieks into a proffered microphone: "I should have backstage passes for every show!".

Even inside the club there are elements of the kind of hysteria that used to be the preserve of The Rolling Stones. In the space of one session of hanging out after the show, I encounter a woman handing around a nifty little nitrous oxide inhaler; Pearl Harbour, who's been hired by The Clash to DJ their shows' is spiked with acid and has to be taken to Bellevue Hospital; I also have my tape machine stolen.

Part of the problem is that America seems to need a big, bold, badass rock and roll band. For some reason they're unable to produce one for themselves.

Basically, The Rolling Stones' old slot is going begging after they lost it by being too old, too tired and too disco dreary. The contenders are not impressive. Jim Carroll doesn't have what it takes; The Dictators never made it and were ugly to boot; Johnny Thunders was too low-rent and The Dead Boys couldn't hold it together. Not even in America are Ted Nugent's carnivore capers seen as anything but strictly for laffs. The slot is definitely open and, if not the whole of America, at least New York seems anxious to shoehorn The Clash into it.

Mick Jones is not altogether happy with the situation.

"A couple of years ago it was never even on the cards for us to come here."

The Clash are clearly not convinced about this eager US audience. The American kids seem into icons where the band is into iconoclasm. The American kids are, apart from a few sore-thumb loonies, docile and pre-programmed. From where The Clash are standing it's not only the band who has to prove itself. The crowd has to do it too.

So far the crowd has not done too good a job. By far the largest majority have come to see a hard rock show but they don't give a tinker's cuss about The Clash's leftist principles or third world connections. They have come for their money's worth and nothing more.

When pro-El Salvador leaflets cascade from the roof, the audience grabs for them eagerly only to discard them when they find out that they are not free gifts. As Strummer puts it, "We play music that,

hopefully, not only gets people dancing but makes them think while they are dancing."

Unfortunately, America is not thinking. Already there have been displays of the Bonds audience's thick-ear conservatism. They've been given the support acts, mainly chosen by The Clash themselves, as hard a hard time as any opener at a brute ignorant HM fest. First and worst victims were Grandmaster Flash And The Furious Five, one of the city's hottest rap acts. Their talkover funk interplay was clearly too much for three quarters of the crowd; white, Wonderbread-fed, post-Travolta kids from the suburbs. To them, rap is the anthem of the ghettos, the music of the kids with whom they fight in high school. The Furious Five flee the stage after a scant 15 minutes in a hail of garbage and Dixie cups. (Fortunately Bonds doesn't serve its over-priced beer in bottles.)

They have one final shot: "We've played a lot of places to a lot of faces, but we've never seen shit like this."

It was a similar incident to the one on the previous tour when toaster Mikey Dread was booed off the stage at the Palladium. Other support bands haven't fared much better. ESG, a multi-ethnic band from the South Bronx got the hook from the hooligans when they opened the Friday show, and even The Slits found themselves experiencing something of a negative response.

Funkapolitan, on the other hand, despite doing rap material, were almost acclaimed. The final irony was that the most popular support with the mob turned out to be Siren, an all-female hard rock band not a million miles from heavy metal.

"It's disgusting, it's so fucking narrow-minded. I mean, it's an insult to us when you look at it. We picked the bands that opened for us, so, supposedly we liked them and we wanted to turn the crowd onto something. They're too narrow-minded to open up to something new."

It seems that there is a hard core at the show who simply see The Clash as just another macho rock band and, if they are even aware of it, look on the band's political stance as just another gimmick – like the Stones'

drug taking, Alice Cooper's monsters or Nugent's big game hunting. Mick Jones has a fix on this breed of Yank.

"They're like little kids with roller skates and Walkmans on their heads. I don't think our influence gets through to them at all. It's really cushioned here. It's the mass hypnotism."

He flips a hand toward the TV. A sickeningly cute child is telling us that he's going to be a top class basketball player by the time he's 18 because his mom feeds him on Wonderbread.

The cushioning of America is probably one of the most scary symptoms of the current malady. America (and that goes for a good deal of kids as well as the middle-aged) is still on its honeymoon with greed and Reagan. The cuts in welfare, aid to the old and education have yet to be felt. The serious unemployment has yet to come. Alexander Haig has not yet been allowed to start his escalating brush-fire war. The draft hasn't happened and neither has the polarisation of the racism that lurks just below the surface of the Clash audience. Overt fascism will only emerge from the swamp when America starts to hurt. Right now it hasn't even begun to care.

"On one level we're the same as them. We're just as irresponsible. On the other level, our stage performances, the records we make, the statements we make – we try and be responsible. May be not objective, but responsible and I don't see anything wrong with that, if you have information, to offer it as advice."

He looks for an example.

"Say you have got to register for the draft, don't register and see what happens."

He suddenly grins.

"In fact your high school turns you in. That's what happens."

The flip side of The Clash's coin is, of course, the situation in England. The US fan may want The Clash but not understand them, but if a mix of rumour and media are anything to be believed, there is at least one

part of the English audience that seems to understand The Clash and not want them any more. I put this to Mick Jones who seems concerned but not overly worried.

"We haven't played in England for a long time. I think when we do, everyone will see that there are plenty of people who still want to see us."

You don't think there are a lot of people with the attitude of fuck you, you abandoned your roots?

"I think there are some writers saying 'Fuck you, you abandoned your roots'."

You don't think that the very fact that you're making it tends to alienate some sections of the original fans?

"I don't worry about making it, I worry about not making it. If I don't make it then all the kids who are watching can say to themselves well shit, they didn't make it, they didn't get out, what hope is there for us to make it? If we make it, then those kids know that they got a chance too."

I enquire if he could see The Clash taking over the old Rolling Stones slot of global bad boys into which the Americans seem so anxious to slide them.

"We really don't want it."

IT WOULD seem fairly certain that, barring accident, The Clash are on the verge of some sort of major breakthrough in the USA and, even in these depleted times, it is still the land of the big money and big exposure. They are a direct, almost traditionalist, four piece rock and roll band and, in that, they are eminently acceptable in all areas of the country. It's their political attitude, their ethics and principles and their single-minded determination to use rock and roll as a mass medium, a means to hand out their very personal view of the conflicts in the real world, that sets them apart.

Not only are they on the verge of a breakthrough, they are, by very definition, on the verge of a whole set of problems. The role of a political band is about as relaxing as a brisk saunter through a minefield.

For The Clash it will be made doubly difficult because whatever breakthrough they make will coincide with the building of resistance to Reagan's right wing policies. They could even find themselves figureheads and anthem writers for a particularly bitter conflict.

They will find themselves not only a target for flak from the bad guys but also from some who are supposed to be allies. There is always the sniping of the ideologically pure and the inverted elitist who thinks that you can't have a valid idea unless you're in penury and rags.

They will have to avoid the traps that eventually brought down The Doors and The MC5. They will find themselves at war with their record company (although this is nothing new for the clash - all through the stretch at Bonds nobody from Epic seems to have shown their face) and at odds with a major section of the rock media who will never be satisfied with their efforts. They will also have the problem of simply maintaining their real world perspective while being seduced and massaged by the trappings of stardom.

I doubt if I'd bother with The Clash except I still hold with the innocent belief that rock and roll music is a means of mass communication not yet totally in the hands of bankers and corporations, and that it still has the power to influence society as a whole - may be not to the degree that I fondly imagined in the '60s, but that it can exert an influence.

I also believe that, of all contemporary rock and roll bands, The Clash have gone further in using this medium on a mass, politically-based level. As I'm writing this, the TV is telling me that Israeli strike planes have levelled an Iraqi nuclear plant which may or may not have been manufacturing atomic weapons.

I figure I'm going to need all the help I can get to survive this bloody decade.

The Clash: The Return of Native Paranoia

By Chris Salewicz, *The Face*, August 1981

IN HOT humid New York City, the eight Clash dates at Bonds discotheque had their number doubled following a first night raid by the Fire Dept that revealed the Times Square joint contained more than twice the legal 1,750 audience limit – such overcrowding being standard practice in Manhattan clubs.

Though Mick Jones was moved at one early point in the proceedings to murmur mournfully, "It looks as though the bad guys have won again", the blanket media clamour that subsequently surrounded the on/off nature of the shows was so intense that it left no doubt whatsoever as to the considerable popularity of The Clash on the US East Coast.

The seasoned Clash-watcher could make out at the centre of all this brouhaha the diminutive figure of a character restored once again to a central position in The Clash story. Bernie Rhodes, the band's first manager who assisted Mick Jones in 1976 in the band's formation only to be dismissed by the outfit in the early autumn of 1978 in a flurry of acrimony, is now once again loosely holding the reins of this most passionately human of rock 'n' roll bands.

The creatively paranoid Rhodes, a sometime cohort of Malcolm McLaren, has no doubt that there were dark forces at work behind the Fire Dept raid. "It was definitely a set-up job," he claims. "I've done a bit of research and I know who tipped off the Fire Dept to visit the show. It was definitely down to club wars. People didn't want a specific club to have The Clash for a week and tie up the scene in this city.

"But so many of the clubs in New York are run by gangsters and the city's run by conservatives, and we've just been trying to operate in the middle area between the two."

The Bonds dates were, in fact, all that remained of a 60 show US tour that had been scheduled to open on April 28. Following a refusal by Epic Records, the group's US label, to underwrite the tour, a European set of shows was slotted in and the New York dates were regarded very much as the final leg of that tour.

The Epic decision was an odd one: a series of 60 gigs would have cemented the already colossal Stateside Clash popularity once and for all; the audience they've picked up is very similar to that from which Bruce Springsteen draws his US devotees.

It's open to conjecture as to how much of this greater friction between the group and their American record company – with whom they've apparently enjoyed a better relationship than with English CBS – is due to the return of Rhodes. Bernie claims, though, that there were record company machinations behind the group's dispensing with his services in '78: it was during the making of the second Clash LP, the Sandy Pearlman-produced *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, that Rhodes' relationship with the group fell apart.

"CBS wanted Pearlman in to do it," he explains, "because they said they thought he'd get them an American hit album. But I'm certain they wanted him to manage them as well – that's the way Pearlman works anyway: he both produces and manages Blue Oyster Cult, for example.

"CBS couldn't understand the way I work. See, I like the idea of performance art, of seeing how far you can push something. It's like blowing up a photograph and finding out how long people see it as an image before they start seeing it as dots.

"Every situation needs a scapegoat and I became it. But I was totally prepared to be the scapegoat. I cared for the group. And I knew being a scapegoat wasn't going to be a fulltime career.

"Actually, I'm thinking of setting up Scapegoat Productions – you could take responsibility for goof-ups and send invoices in for payment. So people could keep their careers clean."

Bernie claims that the reason The Clash have experienced continual contractual difficulties with CBS (not until he was out of the way did the four members appreciate that their five-album deal also gave the company five *further* options on LPs) is because he wasn't around to continually nurture the situation he himself had created.

"I wasn't allowed to finish a job I'd started," he complains, and compares the £4,000 production costs of *The Clash* with the £150,000

to which *Rope* tabbed up. Bernie stepped aside, however, and cared, for varying lengths of time, for the careers of The Specials, Dexys Midnight Runners, Vic Godard, and Johnny Britton.

Clash affairs in the interim were looked after first by Caroline Coon, then by Blackhill, and from early summer of last year by Kosmo Vinyl, the group's inspirational PR, whose current function seems to be to act as Bernie Rhodes' conscience. With the four members of the group, Kosmo became part of a creative cooperative effort to further The Clash Quest.

"It was too much to take on," Kosmo now claims. "For example, as well as looking after their own business affairs, Joe and Mick have to write songs, rehearse, tour and talk to the press. It's not necessarily an enjoyable experience for a musician. They're not businessmen, and neither am I. In the end, my time as manager turned out to be just a matter of keeping the whole thing going."

By the beginning of this year, group morale had sagged to an all-time low, largely caused by the critical pounding handed out to *Sandinista!* Joe Strummer apparently threatened to quit unless Rhodes returned to take control of the group's direction. It was up to Mick Jones, at one time the greatest opponent of Rhodes' policies, to personally visit the group's first manager and ask him back.

Bernie, though, doesn't necessarily see his future as being inextricably linked with that of The Clash. "I want to get the group back on their feet," he says, "so that they're thoroughly established and totally immovable from that position."

"But I certainly don't see it as a permanent position. In fact," he threatens, "Malcolm McLaren and I have plans for something quite big that we'll probably get underway in about a year or so."

Clash Credibility Rule!

By Paul Rambali, *NME*, October 10, 1981

"I don't wanna know about what the rich are doing/I don't wanna go to where the rich are going..."

— 'Garageland', 1977

TONIGHT, like most nights, the rich are going to Privilege, the choicest of chic Paris nightclubs. In the alleyway opposite, there are three tramps, and in the cafe next to the alleyway, there is Joe Strummer, nursing a cold beer, an aching throat, a sore conscience and a wounded pride.

"You saw those blokes lying out there in the gutter, " he says hoarsely. " A lot of your readers ain't so far away from that young bloke in the middle ...

"When I read the *NME* now, this is what I think, and this really heavy ... If they're teaching the readers to hate us, then I'd like to ask the *NME* who they're teaching the readers to trust? Which groups? Which ideas? I'm looking hard, and I can't see anybody."

Whoa! I don't believe it! I thought the *NME* was supposed to dote on The Clash ...

"You must have a fucking long memory. *You* don't notice every little pin-prick — obviously not. I mean I don't care — my skin is thick enough by now, otherwise I wouldn't be able to get on stage, I'd be hiding in a cupboard somewhere. And I can deal with hard criticism. It's something I'd *like* to deal with, because if I'm no good I wanna know it ...

"But how come the managing director of Warner Brothers isn't being whipped with the same stick? How come *TV Eye* sent him on a one-way trip to palookaville (*World In Action* in fact-Ed.) and not the fantastic combined intellectual power of the *NME*? Is it because of IPC? "

I tell him it isn't (though I may be wrong).

"Well that's even worse then, isn't it?"

THOUGH BOTH would probably like to deny it, The Clash and *NME* had a symbolic relationship over the years, mutually furthering each other's separate causes: *NME*'s sales, The Clash's exposure.

However there is, or there was, or there should be, a cause in common: the hippie activist ideal of rock as a protest, a provocative current carrying ideas and nourishment to the counter-culture. Of course there is no counter-culture any more, only subcultures. But this ideal is the reason why *NME* has done so much to shape, define, fuel and sustain something called the Clash Myth. In words, in pictures, and in cosy idolatrous cahoots!

"It's the positive things most of all, " complains Strummer.

"Quite often, I tell you more often than not, I've felt ... *Leave it out!* I've felt almost sick! So I can't win. If it's good I feel sick because it doesn't do me any good to read that shit, and if it's a slagging off I feel sick because I feel I'm hard done by ...

"They have a cupboard with a ruler in it which is called Clash standard of honesty, truth and what the fuck is this world doing with ... rich creates poor, and they take it out and they measure it with us and then they go off on a fucking 19-day whisky and cocaine binge! ... Don't look so funny, because most of the music business is only interested in cocaine and alcohol in as much quantity as possible and at all times of the day and night and if you don't know that you must be living in Epping!"

Those pin-pricks must have found their mark. What that was, I don't know. Somebody said the Myth is dead. Somebody else said no it isn't. Somebody else asked where are The Clash now that the white riots have begun? I ask Strummer about the Clash book of Rebel Poses.

"You either attract people or you repel them," he replies, smiling. "And if you repel them, then you're wasting your time and theirs. That's what I say about the Clash book of Rebel Poses. Look, we could do it two ways. We could write the same songs, perform the same way on stage, but we could all wear C&A outfits.

"Either you go up there for people to look at you or you stay at fucking home! When I see people going on stage in any old shit, I think: you mugs! Do you think people *enjoy* standing down there? They want to see something. It's such a hideous thing anyway. You might as well make the effort."

Whatever happened to breaking down the barrier between the audience and the group, I ask, on behalf of our older readers.

"Tell ya, the audience can get through to any group if they give them encouragement. You don't know what it's like. It's ten times better than amphetamine. Same the other way around, mind you."

So you don't feel you've started something you can't live up to with the Clash book of Rebel Poses?

"No man. I'm *improving* on them! I don't see the shame, if you're hinting that there is ... "

It depends on how sincere they are. (Can a pose be sincere?)

"*Sincere!*" he laughs. "Tell you this ... Principle one of acting: a physical action denotes an emotion. It's the first rule, and it's true. Once you realise this, everything becomes clear."

Are you saying that wearing those poses brings out something in you?

No, no, no. I mean yeah, obviously *yeah*, but ... Drama is very powerful. Supposing we had the best script, and we were bad actors. Could we get it over? I don't think so. It'd be really hard."

Joe Strummer was born in Ankara, Turkey, 29 years ago to a father in the diplomatic service. He lived in Cyprus, Mexico City and Bonn before being sent at the age of nine to a boarding school called City of London Freeman's, "a kind of private comprehensive. If you got three 'O' levels you were top of the list. I got three. History, English and Art."

He went to the Central School of Art, which was as much of a failure in his eyes as he was in theirs. He says he became politicised through "experience, plus Bernie Rhodes".

"See those guys out there, down the alley? See the angle they see all this from?" He waves his hand to indicate Privilege across the street. "I saw it from that angle. I was 18, or 19, and I couldn't be fucked to ... to play the game. I saw it from their angle, literally. In this city too. And that's what politicised me more than anything.

"Bernie Rhodes made me realise it could be sung about. Which is something I was kind of groping towards; singing about VD and squatting.

"Ever heard of Jack London?" he asks. "He was a writer from California who came to London for the Coronation in 1905 — a bit like that wedding we just had. Instead of getting a seat in the stands in the Mall, he went down the East End.

"All these people were just sitting around on benches, really the *poorest* people. 'What do you think of the Coronation?' he said. And they said, 'It gives us a chance for once to be able to sit down all day without being moved on'. And that's all they said ... "

I am honestly touched by the anger and compassion in Strummer's voice, just as I have been inspired in the past by these qualities in his music. It's easy to see why some people at *NME* lionise him as they do (despite his protests); easy to see how one French critic could romanticise thus: "They got Lennon and Baader. Are we going to let them get Strummer too?" Hard to imagine how anyone could live up to being Joe Strummer — heir apparent to rock's rebel crown.

THE CLASH are in Paris for seven shows before coming to England to play there for the first time in 17 months. Their repertoire now is virtually all highlights, with a handful of new songs. Their stage set looks like a border checkpoint, and they come on stage to the sound of wailing sirens. Their backdrop is painted by the New York subway artist Futura 2000, who works with his spray-cans and a ladder while the group are on stage.

Seventeen months is not such a long time but rock has a short memory, as The Clash seem acutely aware. In 17 months they have hooked again with their former mentor, toured Europe and played New York, and seen the clashes they foretold come true on the streets of England.

"A prophet is never welcome in his own land," says Strummer, licking a wound that seems to be causing a disproportionate amount of pain. "Where were we during the riots? ... Where was Karl Marx in 1917? We were playing a residency at Bon's in New York."

You and me and Joe Strummer and even William Whitelaw know that it wouldn't have made a brick through a window's worth of difference if The Clash were in Toxteth or Timbucktu at the time. And *that's* why the wound hurts!

Whenever that kind of activity has happened in the past, rock music has been there to inspire it, catalyse it, crystallise it, or at least provide some kind of soundtrack for it. But not this time — or at least, not The Clash ... And that's a bitter pill to swallow for anyone who still believes, as The Clash and Bernard Rhodes believe, that rock music can perform the same function for alienated white youth as reggae performs for alienated black youth.

"We were sitting there in New York saying, it's ridiculous us being here and this going on," says Bernard Rhodes." But I don't know whether the riots were that major in terms of people being clear about what was going on. It was just a fracas.

"The Clash are interested in politics rather than revolution. Revolution sets a country back a hundred years. Revolution is very, very dangerous. I don't think we ever were revolutionary. I think we were always interested in the politics of the situation. And I think we still are. But I think that England's less interested.

"Politics could be, well, Healey got in just above Benn or Thatcher can't keep interest rates too low because America is doing the opposite and their system seems to be working ... But that isn't it. It's about youth and where they get their information from, and how they deal with that information. And I think that's what we're about. Information comes to youth through the mass organisations like record companies and TV and that. In order to create an ethnic scene that these kids feel part of, they have to have their own sources of information.

"If The Clash are less relevant, or their profile in England lower ... I think it's only because there's a right wing mood in England, and

everything turns to suit the mood of the government in power. Usually you find that when it starts to turn the other way, the people responsible for turning it are the people who were considered the outgoing party at the time.

"Providing we can deliver to the best of our abilities, and providing we're critical enough internally, I think it'll be good. But it's still very difficult because of what the music scene is, with all its deficiencies, and you are prey to those just by being involved in it."

Bernard Rhodes seems unusually calm and optimistic, almost happy. Pennie Smith says the group have more arguments since his return, which I gather is one of the reasons why he's back. She says one of Rhodes' first moves was to rule no more hats!

Pennie also says The Clash are a very tactile group. "Most groups will stand the regulation English foot apart if you pose them against the wall, but The Clash touch each other all the time." She says their relationship is unusually close. "They quarrel a lot, but it's like lovers' quarrels, they're over as soon as they start. Most of the quarrels can be traced back to their laundry anyway!"

And what of The Clash's music? The Clash's music has lost a lot of its abrasive power over the years — the short, sharp, volatile statement has been replaced by the long, meandering and convoluted. The impact in a song like 'Washington Bullets', for instance, is diluted to a trickle by the music, which is too insipid to match the sentiment, and doesn't work too well as a piece of Brechtian discord either. I should have been shocked by 'Washington Bullets', shaken into the rage that I have to assume compelled them to write it, I want to be able to *feel* compelled them to write it.

The Clash shouldn't be afraid to do what they do best, orthodox as it may be. Their progress has been in terms of variety and experiment, straying across idioms in what seems at times like a vain search for another way of saying what can only be said as loudly and directly as possible. The Clash's progress as musicians has been at odds with their progress as politicians.

It's as politicians rather than musicians that they hold out the highest hope. But that's the Myth again. And the Myth is dead. Anybody know any better ones?

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICK JONES

Why are you such a superstar?

People usually say rock star. But that still hurts. I feel it. I don't want to be just that. But, yes, there are some traditional elements to my work. A good guitar solo in the right place, a little bit o' tension added to the show. There's nothing wrong with having respect for the stage, because you're also out there entertaining.

There was a time when behaving like that was —

I couldn't give a shit! I do what I do and if you think I'm a big arrogant superstar then you're entitled to your opinion. I think I'm more than that. If I felt any moments of inflated ego, if I felt I was rushing to the stage just to please the audience ...

You say I write soppy songs and I think I am better than I am. Since the time you wrote that I am better than I was, I've been practising and playing. I ain't Liberace, man! I do me best. And I'm going to do better. If I'm rejected I'll work twice as hard! Slag me off, I want it! because I'll be *better* then.

Were you disappointed with the response to the Ellen Foley album you produced?

Yes. I was disappointed. (Angered) I thought it was a *great* record. I'd like to do the next one and make it even better and fix all our mistakes and *do it* this time. If she stands by her guns, I'll stand by her.

Will you get a chance?

I might. I might not ... Not really. I'm not well liked in industry circles because I have way out ideas. You might think they're not. You might think they're really fucking straight! But I ain't a fucking straight. I ain't no sell-out either! You said Bernie's right, and we should have faced a

trial for betraying our fans. So how come he's back with us if he thinks that?

Because he's got an awful lot of faith in you. But you obviously don't think you've betrayed your fans ...

No. I don't. I think I done what's right.

Do you feel you owe them anything?

Yeah, and that's why we're going to play. We feel we have to play there. But it mustn't be like it's just gonna drag us down and we're going to split up! We want it to be great, not some *downer*.

Is that what it was getting like?

Sure it was getting like that! I felt *dragged* down, because you have to be on *their* level ... I don't know, that's how it seemed. Now we seem to have our senses about us and we're ready.

A lot of people asked where you were this summer.

What am I supposed to say to that?

Implying that you had some sort of obligation to be there because of what was going on.

I don't think I'd make such a great rioter ... I don't even know if I agree with them. Destroying your own places. Especially if the government ain't going to give you another one — it seems really *double* dumb. I do my thing and it's a creative thing — that's how I feel I contribute to that. And if my absence is conspicuous on these occasions then I say don't look to me in the first place. I'm not the street fighting man. I still got a belief in the power of reason. That's how I feel.

You understand why people asked where are The Clash, don't you?

Yeah, I do. But I think I'd be really *stupid* to think I could go out and lead the people. I can help, maybe pass something on as I'm going along. Maybe if they were kicking my door down ...

I don't think people expected you to be manning the barricades ...

They *do* expect us to! But I don't feel that to participate I have to be in the riot. I think they should have a little more patience, these people.

I think they shouldn't look to you in the first place.

Yeah, *sure*. I think that too. Really, I honestly think that. Because it's a *lumber*. It's a big lumber! I can't do my thing so good if I'm distracted by nonsense! And I'm not saying the riots were nonsense ... But a lot of it is just *horseshit*, right? *Horseshit!* What we have to put up with ... especially at home. The *jeering* ...

Do you like the Clash Myth — the image that has been built up around you, as much by others as by yourselves, although you've gone along with it ... The Clash book of Rebel Poses and so forth.

Some of it's nonsense. But it has its aspects ... It's the best way to travel, without a doubt. We have our arguments, because we wanna try and do it right. We're having a go ... It's a very English thing, isn't it, having a go? But it's a drag because it's an oppressive thing. It's an oppressive thing that happens to me and that's what we're coming back to do, to try and make it a more positive situation, and we don't know, we'll see what dent we make. I mean it's just a sniff in the arse to the New Romantic, it's just another perfume, ain't it?

But I'm looking forward to it, I consider it a challenge. I don't consider it a comeback, because I don't consider that I've gone anywhere. We've got to get better at it. We've got to make ourselves *understood*.

The Clash and the critics — how much do you think they've defined The Clash?

They *have*. Too much. To their own ends.

A lot of them think The Clash are, or were, on some kind of pedestal...

It feels more like a coconut shy!

... holding the rock and roll grail. How does it feel to be a screen for all these fantasies to be projected on?

It can be uncomfortable at times. And it can be exhilarating at other times ... At least I don't have to wait until I'm dead to be recognised. Like Edvard Munch. I like the odd slide. It's like a memento, you know, looking back ... But it's usually projected onto an entity called The Clash, not us as individuals.

Why you? Why not, let's say, Generation X? Or The Police?

Because we always had our foot in the door. We were always going: Hey! What about us?

You reckon?

No ... There's something about the four of us that makes it different, I suppose. I don't know. You're trying to say: do they project their fantasies on us? Yeah, and they obviously do. Right from the start. That piece by Tony Parsons. The light shone down from your guitars. And it's gone on ever since, and of course you've failed to live up to these wild expectations, and you've had to live with it. Yeah, and live with it, and live with it and live with it! And I know it's not me a lot of the time, but I still sort of ... give that, because I think The Clash is probably more important, I mean the myth ...

There is something to be said for that. That what people project on The Clash, the myth, is as important as what The Clash actually are.

What do you think about it? We've been called a Russian bike gang, or the Westway Wonders. What do you think, because you're going to do it, in some way?

I think you contain so many of the key images anyway, images from the rock tradition — Joe's Chuck Berry, your Keith Richards, the rebel stances, the quotes in your music — that people sought to complete or embellish the picture.

There's nothing wrong with people having imagination.

You were complaining just now about what it was putting you through.

Puts me through a lot, but there's nothing wrong with them doing it. I can't stop them. I *can't*. I wouldn't know how to. Sure these things are projected on us. I think it's cool.

So do I. But it leads to great disappointments.

Yeah, disillusionment. That's the trouble with imagination, ain't it? It never turns out how you think it's going to. Doing a painting or something; some of the songs ... You imagine it and... . like meeting famous people is a bit of a disappointment, generally. That's to do with myth again. You want to get to the bottom of the myth, but I can't help you.

Have you met any famous people that have lived up to your expectations?

I haven't met that many, but I'd have to say ... Martin Scorsese, Robert De Niro and, um, Patti Smith.

It's often said that Bernard Rhodes is the group's mentor. Is that a fair description of his role?

He's part of the chemistry.

How did you meet him?

I met him at the Nashville one night (laughs). Deaf School were playing. They'd just won the *Melody Maker* competition. I thought he was a piano player. He seemed like a really bright geezer. We got on like a house on fire.

Does he give you a hard time?

Yeah.

Yeah. He gave me a hard time when I interviewed him once. But I liked him for it.

I imagine it's different on a daily basis. I see him more often than you do.

What did you think when he suggested you wear those clothes, the Seditonaries zips?

I don't remember him actually suggesting it. We probably thought the paint was pretty good at the time. I don't know if we were ready for the zips, but we were into them, no problem.

Were you already together as a group?

Some of us, not Joe. Me, Paul and Terry Chimes off and on. But we needed someone like Joe. I mean we had Bernie, and he was sort of putting it together. Eventually we decided it was gonna be Joe so we went about getting him. Good job too.

Did you go to art school?

Yeah, I went to Hammersmith, which became Chelsea halfway through my stay. I did a year of 'A' levels, then I worked during the second year and I went to night school, because I thought if I get a folder together I'll get four years of grants.

I got accepted for a foundation course, which wasn't really that hard. It's what happens afterwards. In my case, nothing much. One day they said you haven't done any paintings this term, and I said, Hey! Look at this (his shirt). Loads of people were really getting into it. Painting shirts. Before like Johnson's and that all caught on and started selling it.

We used to do it over everything. Over guitars, over the amps, all over the place. But they could never relate to that at school. They weren't the happening geezers. They always had chips on their shoulders. They wouldn't allow anyone to be happening. You had to be traditional. I spent a whole year just doing life drawing before I could do my own painting, which was all razor blades and Marilyn Monroe and limousines and so on.

Pop iconography! Yeah, I can imagine. It's what you do now with The Clash!

(Mick Jones laughs heartily at this and makes no attempt to deny it) ...
Art school was just a fill in, though. I knew exactly what I was going to do. I had hoped to meet other musicians ... I met some great people there though, and I wonder what happened to them now.

They're in advertising, if they're lucky. Otherwise they're in sanatoriums.

Yeah, the good ones, not the ones who could explain themselves well and bluff their way through exams, the ones who did good work, coming in and painting all day and working at home at nights ... at the end of it, these people never got any jobs, nothing. The best ones never got any jobs, but the arseholes and the bullshitters did. I suppose it's the same in the music business...

Doesn't say much for you!

Well, there's always an exception.

And yet crass things seem to be the ones that succeed.

Oh yeah, sure. It's the lowest common denominator. But what we gotta do is find a place where the reality, and the art, and the entertainment can all meet. When we can bring that together, I think that's when we'll be really successful, because it won't be a crass thing.

That's what I hate about the music business. It *is* always the lowest common denominator. *Rubbish* always makes it.

Everybody likes muck!

The Clash: Up The Hill Backwards

By Charles Shaar Murray, *NME*, May 29, 1982

HALF PAST ONE on Portobello Road. Past the chippy, opposite the bookshop, within earshot of a man with an amplified mouth-harp honking and scything through Little Walter's greatest hits.

The sun comes down hard on the cast of the street parade, on the bikes and push-chairs and the stalls, a crowded pavement where money changes hands, time is passed and everybody seems to be waiting for something different to happen.

And it does: one by one, The Clash appear. First Paul Simonon, dressed in his usual black, then Mick Jones in khaki pants, bleached denim jacket and huge Rasta cap, then Joe Strummer, greasy, stubbled and buttoned into his trench-coat.

OKAY! HERE WE GO!

JOE'S BACK AND TOPPER'S GONE

WHAT ELSE DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?

That's approximately what Kosmo Vinyl had said a couple of hours earlier on the phone, so we deal with that.

This is Saturday, while the F.A. Cup Final is going on, and the previous Thursday, The Clash reunited in Amsterdam to play the last ever gig with Topper Headon. Strummer had returned after weeks of rumours – working as a navvy in Marseilles, fished up out of the river in Glasgow, what did *you* hear? Did you believe it? – from a sojourn in Paris, during which time two career politicians in dead schtuck with their punters while their countries were falling to pieces embarked on a joint military adventure to distract attention from the home front and wave a few flags around, an entire British Clash tour was cancelled and rearranged, and *Combat Rock* had reached number two in the album charts.

Obviously, there are a few things to discuss.

First Topper. Why'd he go?

"It was his decision," Strummer replies. We're squeezed into a booth in

the corner caff: Strummer hunched in the corner, Simonon and Jones opposite, Kosmo Vinyl at an adjoining table and Bernard Rhodes leaning over Strummer's shoulder anxious to answer the questions first.

"I think he felt...it's not too easy to be in The Clash. It's not as simple as being in a comfortable, we're-just-entertainers group, and he just wanted to do that, just play music. He's a brilliant multi-instrumentalist – what used to be called that – and it's a bit weird to be in The Clash at the moment. Well, it *was*. He has to sort of strike out in another direction, because I don't think he wants to come along with us. There are things that we all want to do..."

"We all feel the same," Jones chips in, "and he don't, really."

"We're going to continue as a trio," resumes Strummer.

"I'm going to play the drums," announces Simonon brightly.

"We're gonna get some guest drummers in, and they're gonna play with us whenever we want to make a record or play some shows."

OKAY. Why'd you vanish? "Me? (*Who'd you think, Lord Lucan?* – *Ed*). It's a long story." Gonna tell it?

Strummer sighs. "Well...it was something I wanted to prove to myself: that I was alive. It's very much like being a robot, being in a group. You keep coming along and keep delivering and keep being an entertainer and keep showing up and keep the whole thing going. Rather than go barmy and go mad, I think it's better to do what I did, even for a month.

"I just got *up* and I went to Paris...without even thinking about it. I might have gone a bit barmy, you know? But anyway, I went to Paris, and I knew that there'd be a lot of people.. the fans were disappointed, the road crew had sold their motors to pay the rent fucking around with this lot. I knew a lot of people were going to be disappointed, but I had to go and I went and I'd recommend anybody else to do that if they have to.

"And once I got there...I only intended to stay for a few days, but the more days I stayed, the harder it was to come back because of the more aggro I was causing that I'd have to face there."

What about the agreements that you'd broken by going? Were you thinking of them?

"Yeah! We'd *never* blown out other gigs except for the time that Topper got stabbed in the hand with a pair of scissors. Even when the gear doesn't arrive and we're in a foreign city and the trucks are held up at the border, we'll still play the show by borrowing stuff off the support band or whoever we can get it from. We've got some *pride* in that direction – the show must go on blah blah – than to cut out *permanently*, you know?"

So what would have happened if you *hadn't* gone?

"I think I would have started drinking a lot on the tour, maybe. Started becoming petulant with the audience, which *isn't* the sort of thing that you should do...but it's very different now that Topper's left. It's back to the old trio now," he concludes with what can only be described as anticipatory glee.

So what did Simonon and Jones feel about the wandering Joe's pilgrimage?

"Well, I felt that anything he does is all right," replies Jones, staring out from under his cap. "Obviously we were disappointed that we weren't going off on tour and everything, and we were disappointed that some of our fans would be disappointed, but – I said this before while Joe was away – I felt sure that whatever he had was a good reason. And he's such an extraordinary person that it was fine: we could handle it. Hold the fort was what we did."

Were you in contact while Joey was away?

"No," volunteers Simonon. "We knew he was all right because he phoned his mum. He'd told her to keep schtum but I think Kosmo wore her down."

While you were away, did you consider not coming back at all, doing the full vanish?

"I don't think I had the...it's pretty hard to do that, to disappear for ever."

"Bernie was saying," says Jones, indicating in the general direction of Rhodes' manic grin and impenetrable shades, "'Now this is like Brian Jones or Syd Barratt or something, now you're one of *these* group' so it *is* possible to vanish forever. Okay! We're The Pink Floyd now! And," he continues, warming to his theme, "Joe was Syd Barratt."

Yeah, but he didn't vanish *physically*.

Jones considers this. "Ah no, that was Vince Taylor, wasn't it."

Was Joe thinking while he was away about what was going to have to be different when he got back?

"No, not really, I was just pleased to have an...escape. It's great bunking off work, really great – as you well know – and it was a bit of that. I was just enjoying being alive. *I just wanted to prove to myself that I was alive...* that I existed, that it wasn't over. It was okay. We're doing this firstly for ourselves..."

"And it helps clear the air, anyway" – Simonon – "The fact that he went just cleared the air and made you realise more of where you stood individually as well as to two other people, three other people, or whatever. I knew he was coming back."

Strummer picks up the thread again. "I was saying that we're supposed to be doing this for ourselves, and when you lose sight of that, you're in trouble, because you start to think, 'Those people out there don't really *care*' – that's the people who come and see you and buy your records. It's been a bit of a desert for us lately, but we're Number Two this week with the album – which is a real shock, I can tell you..."

OBVIOUSLY! While the sheer fact of a record's presence in the charts is not necessarily a relevant signifier, *Combat Rock* is the most extreme and direct Clash album since the first, and its ready acceptance and acknowledgement by the purchasing public indicates that there's far more support than is often supposed both for The Clash themselves and for the militancy that they once again represent.

See, The Clash had become first accepted, then absorbed, then declared quaint, obsolete, null and void. As soon as it became 'safe' to like them and they started touring the States, it then became 'safer' not to. It was a

short step from American pundits hailing them as the new greatest rock band in the world – the new Stones! The new Who! – to British True Punks and post-rock hipsters alike to regard them as just another Anglo-American success story, like Costello before he withdrew, or The Pretenders. Not hard enough for the Oi Polloi, too rockist for the dancetariat.

And I mean they really show their roots: there's good old Greasy Joe with his rockabilly fetish, and Ranking Paul skanking with the system, and Mick's *such* a poser, always playing too loud...

Plus all this romantic rebel guerilla chic, all the ethnic snippets...hopeless, boys. *Hopeless*.

The trouble is that – in the wake of *Combat Rock* – none of that washes any more. X. Moore did the album all due honour a couple of weeks ago, so it only remains to state that it's a very *clear* album: the work of people who know exactly what they want to say and exactly how they want to sound. There is virtually no 'hard rock': none of the bull-dozing rabble-rousing power-chord anthems left over from *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, none of the easy warmth of parts of *London Calling*, none of the musical tourism and lucky-dip oddments of *Sandinista*. They haven't united their sound and their vision more perfectly since their first LP, though both have broadened almost beyond recognition in the intervening period.

Listen to the way Strummer sings 'Straight To Hell' or 'Ghetto Defendant'. What you're hearing is not a presumptuous or impertinent attempt to associate with the alleged glamour of revolutionary war or urban repression, but genuine compassion for the victims of organised human stupidity and greed; an expression of a desire to draw attention to intolerable circumstances and to mobilise public opinion towards eradicating them. I don't know about you, but I respect that compassion.

Combat Rock says that playtime is over. Strummer says that it's very hard being in The Clash, and if they are taking what they're doing as seriously as the album would suggest, then it sounds like he's right. It's also very hard being *around* them: not in the sense that they're unpleasant or antagonistic, but they carry an atmosphere of tension with

them, just as they did when they were starting out. A very strong sense of *purpose*.

Combat Rock was – as is obvious to anyone with any knowledge of the logistics of record-making – written, recorded and designed and packaged long before the Falkland Islands represented anything to anybody who didn't have relatives there, but synchronicity is *not* a myth and this album isn't just selling because it's good product from a popular band. I think it's selling because a large and significant number of people want to hear what it says. There's an *edge* on the album and there's an edge on The Clash again.

Once again, they are a profoundly *unreasonable* band. There is a lot of excellent entertainment about, and it is by no means all reactionary, but it *is* reasonable. The Clash aren't.

"AND we're going to go over to New Jersey and start a four-and-a-half week American tour, and then we're going to come back here and do the British tour that we should have done before – that's if we can find a drummer. After that we don't have any plans."

Mick Jones: "After that, we *all* disappear."

So what do The Clash *want* to do?

"We want to consolidate something – like *us*," replies Jones. "Coming together and then exploding out. Out of captivity, the captivity of people's expectations of us...and of being contained by the music industry, that situation of not being able to get out."

So how do you get what you want out of them without them getting what they want out of you?

"Simple!" snorts Strummer. "Make sure that you're in a position to be able to *say* what you want, make sure that you're ahead. But as soon as you're not in a position to do that, if you're not independent enough to do that, if we couldn't keep this thing going to the right pitch, then we'd be...CBS were coming around to us saying, 'Right, we've got these suits here and we've got a nice little number written by Andrew Lloyd Webber...'"

"And a nice idea for a new haircut," interrupts Jones.

"...and that would become what we were putting out. It wouldn't be anything to do with us. You have to be independent enough to remember what you were there to do in the first place, or you're fucked. They've all got their lawyers and their legal scene well worked out before we were even born. It's very hard to go in there and not go under. I mean, the whole game is to get you so that you owe them so much money so that you can't say, 'No, I don't wanna do that' without them saying, 'So how are you gonna pay this?'"

Bernard Rhodes at this point launches a high-velocity dissertation on the subject of Control In The Media and the fact that The Clash don't seem to reap the benefits of the airplay shop-window. (This is, after all, only right and proper. I, for one, don't want a load of depressing rubbish about knowing your rights and not heeding the call-up on *my* shiny yellow airwaves).

"...in fact," Jones sums up. "We've written a song about it. It's called 'Complete Control' and we hope to have it out for the summer."

Well, you can by-pass the radio if people will buy your singles whether they get airplay or not.

"We can do that because we've always put singles out whether they got played or not. People have said that we should just do albums, but we like singles too! But since 'Capital Radio' we haven't been played on Capital Radio." Mick doesn't sound too surprised about that, as it happens.

"I never thought we'd be Number Two in Britain. I really didn't," Strummer muses. Rhodes quietly tips a slug of brandy into Joe's cup of black coffee. "There really seems to be something against us here...over the last few years, since we started going round the world."

"People don't *understand*," Simonon interposes fiercely, "what 'Bored With The USA' was about. They haven't got a fucking *clue*. If people say 'Oh, The Clash did 'Bored With The USA' and they're always going over there'...they don't understand the bloody song in the first place!"

"I think that Britain is really insular" – Strummer – "They don't realise that there is a world out there. People who spend any amount of time in

London can't believe that anything outside *London* exists. I like to travel..."

This would appear to be the case.

Another new factor in the existence of The Clash is the removal of one of the all-time great millstones: their financial debt to CBS Records. This liberation is due to the much-abused and admittedly unwieldy *Sandanista!*, which has quietly and unsensationally contrived to be purchased by approximately 197,000 people in this country alone. They are now out of hock for the first time, a state of affairs which they find highly satisfactory. It is, after all, at least as valuable in terms of independence as cash.

Kosmo Vinyl recounts that nearly every American college the band had visited last time round had featured a bulletin-board offer to tape anybody's choice of an hour's worth of *Sandanista!* for around \$3. American release of *Combat Rock* has been delayed so that the sleeve can be reprinted without the 'Home Taping Is Killing Music' health warning. "We don't care *how* many people tape our records," he declares proudly.

What The Clash are in the process of becoming is – in spite of CBS Records – a genuinely Underground band (I am choosing, thoroughly arbitrarily, to define an 'underground band' as one which is denied access to radio and TV exposure for reasons other than unpopularity). This means that their music actually has to be *sought out*. To see The Clash you have to go to their gigs (whenever they happen to be), and to hear The Clash you have to buy their record (or tape it off someone else who's bought it). Embarking on this course means an awful lot of hard work: it means that the band have to stay in touch with their audiences and keep their interest – and in the case of The Clash, that also means retaining their trust – in order to make sure that their work continues to be sought out. Especially in the current climate, one is unlikely to hear 'Know Your Rights' or any of the vital album tracks on daytime radio or down the pub.

Current pop wisdom sayeth as follows: in order to create a popular success, something shiny must be dangled in front of people's eyes via electronic media. The only other way is via discos and the club scene,

and The Clash are no more welcome there (apart from isolated breakouts like 'Magnificent Seven' and *maybe* 'Overpowered By Funk' from *Combat*) than they'd be on a Capital playlist.

Doing it The Clash's way on a worldwide basis therefore demands an insane amount of gigging, and as a famous '60s smart-ass who got very little airplay himself once remarked "Touring can make you crazy". The danger of thereby developing intermittent strangeness of the mental process would seem to be substantially increased by this policy, which would also deliver them right back into the got-to-tour-to-sell-the-records/got-to-sell-the-records-to-finance-the-tour noose that they've just got themselves *out* of.

The Clash are almost messianic in their intensity when it comes to 'providing an alternative' on the US live circuit. "Maybe they'll just think we're Van Halen with short hair," Strummer will surmise grimly. "Maybe they'll just be grunging out on the bass and drums and guitar."

"Maybe we could put on false beards and stovepipe hats and stick pillows up our T-shirts," suggest Mick Jones helpfully, "and put out a nice country and western song to get on the radio there...then we could do some dance stuff for the hipper areas..."

Three the hard way. I mean, up the hill backwards isn't half of it. In terms of conventional careerism, The Clash are nuts. They are a gang of loonies. They are out of their fucking minds.

They have created an objective which – virtually by definition – debars them from utilising crucial means necessary to achieve it. If they doubt their ability to get successful without getting sucked in, then they'll set it up so that they won't succeed. In other words, not getting sucked in is more important than succeeding on any but the most stringently proscribed terms.

To reiterate: the Clash are totally unreasonable. They work on the principal that the distinction between method and objective is artificial and spurious, and that therefore compromise must be kept to a minimum (noises off: rising murmur of 'CBS! CBS! Train In Vain!' etc). The thing is that the amount of compromise necessary to get a

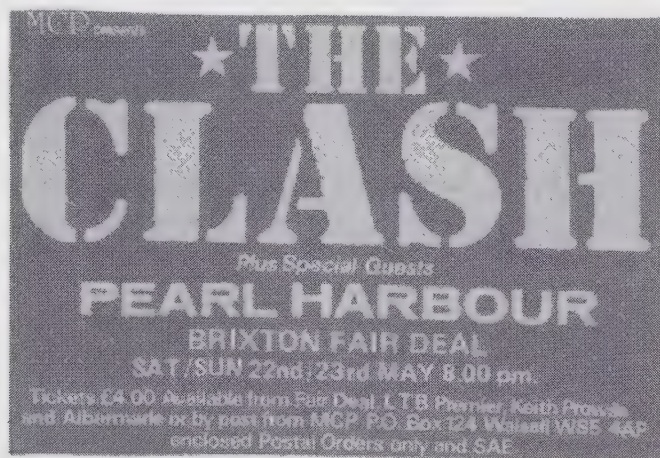
single as hard as 'Ghost Town' or 'Going Underground' on the air does not appear to have been crippling.

However, I admire the Clash's intransigence, and the best of *Combat Rock* is as powerful as anything anybody's done for a while. Long may they continue to piss everybody off.

JUST NOW there was almost a minute of uninterrupted gunfire on the radio, and the sound was almost too neatly set off by a police siren outside. Right now everybody's supposed to be jacked up to the back teeth with war fever, but just the same there's that dippy song about peace from the Eurovision Song Contest as Number One single last week and *Combat Rock* mashing up the album chart.

There was a song I wanted to hear just then, but it wasn't on the radio. It went:

*"It could be anywhere
Any frontier
Any hemisphere
No man's land
There ain't no asylum here
Go straight to hell, boys."*



The Clash: Revolution Rock

Michael Goldberg, *Downbeat*, December 1982

IT'S AN UGLY voice. Gruff, guttural, uncouth, barbaric at times. Joe Strummer can't sing, not like an Al Jarreau or a Joni Mitchell, anyway. Lyrics are shouted out in a harsh nearly unintelligible cockney snarl. At times this voice rips at the ears like an exploding letter-bomb. It cries out for justice in an unjust world. It nags at the soul like the memory of those nuns killed in El Salvador, like the memory of Allison Krause gunned down at Kent State by the National Guard. Joe Strummer's voice demands to be heard. Surprisingly, it is.

Strummer is the singer, songwriter, and rhythm guitarist for the Clash, the most popular punk rock band in the world. You've probably heard of the Clash. You've probably read that some rock critics think they're "the greatest rock & roll band in the world," as *Village Voice* critic Robert Christgau announced a few years back. Or maybe you noticed that their LP *London Calling* captured the Rock/Blues Album of the Year in the '80 *Down Beat* Readers Poll.

But if you've only heard of the Clash, and haven't actually *heard* their music – listened to the five albums and the EP that they've released in the US – you may still be wondering what all the fuss is about. You may still be dismissing the Clash as one of those foul-mouthed punk rock bands that made a lot of media noise – and not much else – in the late 70s.

Dismiss them no longer. If you listen to one rock & roll band during the next year make it the Clash. You will discover music and lyrics as rich as anything that Bob Dylan or the Rolling Stones created 'n the '60s, back when rock & roll mattered, back when rock was more than the uptempo elevator music one mostly hears by bands like Journey on the radio today.

At the beginning of their most recent album, *Combat Rock*, Joe Strummer spouts out: "This is a public service announcement... with guitars!" That single line does a good job of summing up the Clash. This is a band that makes rock & roll with a message. For the Clash, the message is as important as the rock & roll and vice versa.

"We're dealing with the power of music here" says lead guitarist/songwriter and occasional vocalist Mick Jones, who is thin and gaunt and wears his black hair short and greased back. Jones looks like a cross between a 50s rockabilly singer and a '50s hood – and that seems to be his intent. "Music can sooth furrowed brows and all that stuff," he continues "and it works and it's true and it really can make you feel better when you have the blues. I have a lot of faith in it. The music, as a really good force."

Those are calm and reasoned words from a member of a band that has a punk reputation for being taciturn, moody, rude, even hostile. Jones, as well as his mates – Strummer, bassist Paul Simonon, and drummer Terry Chimes (the original Clash drummer, who played on their first album, was replaced for four years by Topper Headon, but began performing again with the Clash following Headon's heroin bust earlier this year) – can certainly adopt a tough pose. Yet beneath the surface bravado and "punk" attitude that they often present to the public and the media, these are dedicated, courageous musicians. Unlike a large number of other punk bands, the Clash have never trafficked in nihilism, never jabbed a safety pin through their ears, either literally or metaphorically. The Clash have always had more in common politically and idealistically with politically aware hippie rockers and folk singers of the '60s like Country Joe McDonald, Joan Baez, and the young Bob Dylan, than with the other angry young men of punk.

The bottom line for the Clash is a belief in the human spirit, in the ability of men and women to do good. And in all their music, in the 100-plus songs that the Clash have recorded in a five-year period, this positive spirit is clearly felt. The Clash may agree with another punk band that sings "the world's a mess," but despite the darkness, they continue to have hope.

The Clash's songs are infused with a sense of social responsibility. "Hate and war – the only things there are today/And if you close your eyes/They will not go away," sings Strummer. "You have to deal with it/It is the currency." Such a refusal to close their eyes to the atrocities played out day by day around the world, and an insistence on writing about those atrocities in their songs, helps to make the Clash one of the few contemporary rock bands that truly matter.

Often, the Clash use sarcasm to make their point. In 'Know Your Rights', on their recent LP, Strummer sings, "Know your rights, all three of them." He goes on to detail those "rights." "Number one: You have the right not to be killed/Murder is a crime/Unless it was done by a policeman or an aristocrat.../Number two: You have the right to food, money/ Providing of course you don't mind a little humiliation, investigation and (if you cross your fingers) rehabilitation/Number three: You have the right to free speech/As long as you're not dumb enough to actually try it."

Since 1978, when Jones and Strummer came to San Francisco to record vocals for their second album, *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, I've spoken with them on several occasions. One overcast afternoon, I met them for the first time. They were wary, antagonistic, and mostly impenetrable. Strummer, a short, stocky man with a rotting, chipped front tooth that added menace to his sneer, slouched in the corner of the small lounge where the interview was to take place. He wore dark glasses and a black motorcycle jacket and had short, oily brown hair.

"So how much ya gonna make on this story anyway," badgered his buddy, Mick Jones who was pumping away on a pinball machine. He looked over at Strummer and they both laughed.

"I don't think we should do this interview," continued the guitarist.

"I don't either," muttered Strummer, turning away.

But they did continue the interview. I discovered later that this was just the Clash's nature. In America for the first time, they were particularly suspicious of Americans, who they thought were not to be trusted. In the Clash's camp, one was always suspect until proven innocent.

During that first interview, asked about the problems occurring in England, Jones snapped, "Not as bad as it is here! That's definite. You've got your Hershey bars and your Dr. Peppers. There's a lot more f**king work to be done here than England. Everyone watching TV. It reminds me of the Roman Empire. And every American I meet is a bullshitter. This place tends to look not very real."

Those impressions of America as a land where the reality of the problems faced by the rest of the world do not often penetrate, came out in the Clash's song 'Guns On The Roof (Of The World)', in which Strummer sings sarcastically, "And I like to be in the USA/ Pretending that the wars are done."

When I spoke to Strummer and Jones more recently, they were no more enchanted with the U S. and the complacency of Americans. The group's personal manager, a young man who calls himself Cosmo Vinyl said, "Nobody in America wants anything to question or upset what they might personally be. Ted Nugent never gives anyone a hard time. He's just like his fans, He never causes them to think things should be different, that things aren't right."

"I agree with him, really," said Mick Jones. "I get depressed at the thought of 50 million people worshipping Ted Nugent." Then Jones cracked a smile and said in an exaggeratedly proper English accent "We're only doing what we can to impress upon them that there is something better going on. By being here, it can only help."

I've been talking a lot about the politics of the Clash, and politics isn't what *Down Beat* is usually about; *Down Beat* is about contemporary music. But with the Clash, one can't avoid talking about politics. The Clash don't see music as something isolated from the rest of life; they see music as a part of life. For anyone who recently lost his job – or knows someone who lost their job – and happened to hear Gary US Bonds' recent hit, 'Out Of Work', the ability of music to tie into the rest of one's life should be obvious. Don't think, however, that the Clash's music is inconsequential, just because, as is often the case, interviewers and reviewers spend more time considering why the band called an album *Sandinista!* or what they think of Margaret Thatcher, than discussing the Clash's music.

The Clash make magnificent rock & roll. In concert their music roars along like a train whose brakes have worn out, Huge, raw chunks of guitar noise tumble out of Jones' amplifier, Strummer barks out the lyrics, all the while bashing at his own guitar, as if the fierceness of his strum alone determines its volume On a good night the Clash are like a team of rock & roll guerrillas. With guitars for weapons, they seem

determined to show the world that nothing will stop them, that they will win the good fight and keep the fires of truth burning.

It was in 1976 that the Clash formed, inspired by that other famous punk band, the (now defunct) Sex Pistols. Joe Strummer's previous experience as a musician included "playing to earn a living in subways... I had low overhead. No rent and stuff like that. Squatting in empty buildings. Busking. You play and you have a hat and they like what you play and throw money into the hat." When he got busted by the police, Strummer formed a band, the 101'ers. His band became popular on the London pub circuit. Guitarist Mick Jones and bassist Paul Simonon were impressed by Strummer and eventually talked him into joining the new band they were starting, which Simonon wanted to call the Clash.

With the Pistols and the Clash at the forefront, a British punk movement sprang up as a gut response to both ever-worsening conditions in England and to a rock music scene populated by elitist and wealthy superstars who had become complacent and, as Strummer railed in one song, "fat and old." Punk was firmly anti-star. "They [the audience] could be up there as easy as me," says Strummer. "In a way, we were just there. And that was it. You feel lucky. Why you? Instead of him. Why you? Don't know why. Don't ask me the f**king meaning of life 'cause I don't know it."

Yet the Clash now find themselves caught in a bind, treated like stars when they tour America despite everything they can do to prevent it. "I find it humiliating," says Jones. "I try not to be anything other than just a human being. But you can't just say I don't want to sign autographs if there's a hundred people there."

"We feel a bond with our audience, but we hate them too," says Strummer candidly. "Best way to explain it is imagine if you were standing on the dock of the bay and lots of fish come. 10,000 fish and they all came to look at you and opened their mouths. You know what I mean?"

The Clash recorded their first album, *The Clash*, in 1977. Because the Clash emerged as part of England's punk movement, their rock & roll sophistication was initially overlooked. The rudeness of punk was

mistaken for musical inability and ignorance. In the U.S. the Clash's label initially refused to release their first album because of what one Epic Records executive called "the tin-can sound."

But in fact, when one listens a few times to *The Clash*, one discovers much more than the sound of buzzsaw guitars and sour voices. One finds brilliant vocal arrangements that contrast Strummer's ultra-real, man-of-the-street voice against the chanted background vocals of the rest of the band. One finds inventive, concise revisions of the classic Chuck Berry guitar style, savage, but well placed, rhythm guitar work and, overall, a dramatic return to the high energy style of early rockers like the Who and the Kinks. Only this time, instead of singing about how 'You Really Got Me', the songs are about unemployment and injustice, war and racial tension.

Right from the start the Clash demonstrated a tremendous knowledge of rock music, and an uncanny ability to remake the music into an intense, highly original sound. In a song like 'White Riot', which is basically about the need for middle class whites to rebel against the unchallenging lifestyle that the government endorses, Strummer turns in one of his most embittered vocals as he sings, "All the power is in the hands/Of people rich enough to buy it/While we walk the street/Too chicken to even try it." The rest of the band counters with background voices singing "White riot, riot of my own," that are obviously derived from the purposely "off" horn sections on Jamaican reggae and ska recordings.

In a rock & roll context, this juxtaposition works perfectly, both in terms of the sound, and as far as getting the message across.

Since making that first album (which some critics have flatly stated is the best rock & roll album – period), the Clash have certainly become better musicians, yet they refuse to let technique replace emotion. With honest, uncompromising lyrics they continue to render the ravaged and decaying modern world like punk Picassos detailing their own version of *Guernica*.

The Clash's music often sounds like a violent revolution. At times it is a thunderous roar that filters bits of the Rolling Stones, reggae, the Who, Chuck Berry, rockabilly, marching soldiers, gunfire, and a brawl at

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some London pub into a crashing wall-of-sound But there's a mellower side of the Clash too. 'Jimmy Jazz', from *London Calling*, is reminiscent of Tom Waits, or even Mose Allison. (The Clash included a version of Allison's 'Look Here' on *Sandinista!*) And over the course of their five albums, they have recorded a lot of reggae, from the gutsy 'Police And Thieves', to more subtle pieces like 'One More Time, One More Dub'. The Clash have also fit straightforward rockabilly, gospel, blues, and both classic and modern soul music – funk and rap – into their bag of tricks. 'The Magnificent Seven', the group's first rap number, was played by some of the more adventurous black stations in the U.S.; this greatly pleased the band, who felt that they were connecting directly with an audience that could appreciate their songs about oppression.

"We're not minimalists." says Mick Jones. "Where they [most punk bands] tend to keep themselves in one line, we tend to go out in every line possible – all sorts of sub-tracks." In fact, the Clash's embracing of numerous kinds of international music, and their commitment to keep that music alive in the minds of their fans, is a very important part of what they have accomplished. Particularly now, when American radio is more specialized than ever, when jazz, soul, country & western, reggae, and rock are each isolated and never heard on the same radio show, the Clash continue to demonstrate on each album (since *London Calling*) that music, like people, should not be segregated.

Of course the fact that politics are such a part of what the Clash do begs the question: Can political rock & roll actually accomplish anything? The Clash try to be realistic, if not optimistic. "Maybe it won't change anything," says Mick Jones, "but I still believe in it, as something worth doing. Perhaps we're too ambitious a band. I would say rock & roll *can* contribute toward some minor change." Then he adds stubbornly, "But it ain't gonna tell the politicians what to do. It ain't gonna save people from wars."

Adds Strummer with finality, "But we'll have a go at it."

The Mouth That Roared: The Return of The Clash

By John Mendelsohn, *The Record*, June 1984

Joe Strummer announces the Clash's comeback in no uncertain terms.

CONVERSATION WITH THE CLASH'S Joe Strummer elicits the simplest, most blindingly self-evident solutions to agonizingly difficult political problems since the non-release of *Billy Jack Goes To Washington*.

On the subject of terrorism, for instance, the artist concedes, "It's dump moves blowing innocent people up – it doesn't get them anywhere. But I try to understand the feeling behind it. Terrorism only occurs when the people holding power won't negotiate. After World War II, the super powers divided up the world at the Yalta Conference and thought they'd solved things, but all they did was create long-running problems. What did they think people were going to do? Suppose we were Palestinian – what would we do? I'll tell you what *I'd* do – exactly what they're doing. They can't get anybody to even sit down at the table, so what else are they going to do, piss off?"

"If you had an orange you wanted to sell me, I'm sure we could arrive at a price even if you were a stubborn bastard and we had to sit here all night. But the Western governments just bring in these laws, like you can't have a lawyer for 92 hours, and never say, 'Right, let's sort this one out.' It's always, 'Let's get more security. Let's do this and that,' when all they really have to do is sort it out somehow.

"I think it's great," he says of Nicaragua's immensely impeachable Sandinista regime, "but I'm worried that you lot are going to invade it." When the long-ago campus radical who's serving as his conversational foil objects to being lumped in with "you lot," the artist sneers, "Every American is responsible for what their government does – if it ain't being done in your name, then whose name is it being done in? I read all about the Committee on the Present Danger, and I know that they're the ones calling the shots. Why doesn't every *American* know that? Why is everybody on drugs and goofing off?"

Alternately perceived as The Only Rock and Roll Band That Matters and as the most shrilly self-righteous boors in pop history (see above), the Clash visit California as January becomes February to battletest their new Mick Jones-less line-up in Los Angeles, San Diego and a handful of small towns where rock traditionally disdains to tread.

"After the US Festival last summer, we promised we'd come back to California," explains Kosmo Vinyl, the group's aide-de-camp/designated talker, whose speaking voice sound like Tony Bennett's. "And as Joe says, rock'n'roll is best when it's fought on enemy territory – in the halls that were meant to be cinemas, in basketball pitches, in sports arenas. So we'll go out this year and play all these little towns – Stockton, Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara – instead of sticking to the usual English group thing of just playing the major cities. It isn't compensation, though, because we don't have any doubts at all that we did at the US Festival was right."

What they did – besides change their minds (most clamorously) approximately every 45 minutes about whether they would or would not actually perform, besides trying to shame their fellow performers into donating parts of their fees to local charities – was demand that festival bankroller Steve Wozniak donate \$100,000 to a Southern California summer camp for disadvantaged youth. Off the top of his head, Vinyl can't tell you much about the camp, or even its name. "We thought, 'Why *shouldn't* those kids go on holiday? Wozniak's rich.' I don't know how much the guy's got, but I think it's in the region of \$284 million, and all the hack-type industry people he had working for him were already shaking him like a money tree. In the end he agreed to \$32,000. But then he announced that he would have given the money anyway, which was a damned lie. Our lawyer had stood there arguing with him for seven hours!"

After the group's second performance at Santa Barbara's cozy Arlington Theatre, Strummer explains why, when the group was apparently so intent on sending disadvantaged young Californians to summer camp, they didn't simply hand over a hunk of their own \$500,000 paycheck. "We needed it for London. We don't have people in London who what to throw Woodstocks as a tax writeoff. If Wozniak wants to be a sucker and give us half a million dollars, we'll take it. If we can get it out of Mick Jones' lawyer's hands, we can set

up a scene in London with it – a club, a bar, an atmosphere, somewhere to hang out. We don't have that anywhere. It's all like Studio 54."

What made them so obstreperous at US, they tell you, was Wozniak's Utopian pretensions. "If he'd just said he was putting on a show to make money," Vinyl claims "we would have gone, 'All right, Jack.' But that whole Unuson-us-togetherness community thing! There *weren't* no community! It was rubbish."

Strummer's contribution to the festival's Woodstockian vibe was to snarl, "Here we are in the capital of the decadent U.S.A." at the tens of thousands who'd waited patiently in the mud for two hours before the group finally took the stage. "I wanted to wind them up," he reveals. "There was too much self-congratulation in the air. I wanted to get a reaction, and I felt that we'd never reach them – it was too vast. When you're on stage, you forget about those giant TV screens even being there." He's big enough man to concede that this tactic failed.

When asked why his group agreed to perform for Wozniak in the first place, he zealously asserts, "We had to go there. Otherwise we'd have been condemning rebel rock to the basement. I wasn't having all that other nonsense up there without some rebel rocks as well – I don't care if it's us or somebody else. That was the rock'n'roll event in America that weekend, and I was going to be damned if I'd crawl off to show how pure I am."

"We want to be in the Top 10," Vinyl adds earnestly, "so that young groups will think they have to speak the truth to make it big instead of go to Egypt to make a video."

Between the US debacle and their California trip, of course, the group expelled guitarist Mick Jones, who ego, to hear Vinyl and Strummer tell it, had run amok. "We'd get some dates together for a tour, right?" asserts Vinyl. "We'd talk to Paul and he'd go, 'Yeah!' We'd talk to Paul and he'd go, 'Yeah!' We'd talk to Mick and he'd just shrug."

"Or," snarls Strummer, "say he'd have to talk it over with his lawyer."

"He said if we didn't produce *Combat Rock* in New York, he wouldn't be at the sessions," Vinyl charges, by way of illuminating the departed

guitarist's accelerating insufferability. "So we cart everything to New York and make the record there. One day there's an argument and that gets brought up and Mick goes, 'Oh, I didn't mean it.' You don't pull that sort of thing on your friends. Surely you don't!"

"I could take the moaning and the not wanting to work and the lack of enthusiasm," Strummer claims. "And did until I had all that up to the neck. But what *really* got me was when he started saying he'd have to check things with his lawyer first. I thought, 'Since when was lawyers involved in this team?' We never had a lawyer to begin with. We would have run a mile before we'd have had one in the room with us! What's a lawyer anyway – an overpaid geezer who's out of touch with reality, who charges you fifty quid to say good morning and make a telephone call." (Or a guy who badgers someone like Steve Wozniak on your behalf?) "And all that language – that legal mumbo-jumbo. They *could* make it plains as day. Don't tell me they couldn't. They've translated the Bible into Scottish, into Greek, into plain English. But no, they won't allow that because then we'll do 'em out of a job, right?"

"Another big problem," Vinyl recalls, "was that he thought he should produce, but the rest of us didn't think he was ready. Maybe you've heard rumors about Mick being opposed to the commerciality of *Combat Rock*. Well, in fact, all that Mick was opposed to was Glyn Johns doing the final mix. Mick liked his *own* mix, and when everybody else didn't, he took it really bad. But it's kind of like if your friend don't brush his teeth and the girls all go, 'His breath smells.' If you're his friend you've got to tell him.

"He felt after *Combat Rock* that we'd arrived, and started all this my-room's-too-cold/I-don't-want-to-ride-in-this-bus stuff – this rock star behavior! But to me and Joe and Paul and Bernie (Rhodes, the group's manager) *Combat Rock* was just a foot in the door. What's the point of getting that enthusiastic about selling a million records when Michael Jackson's sold 30 million while we talk?"

Strummer chimes in. "I finally said, 'Go and write songs with your lawyer, and piss off!'"

Replacing the banished Jones, whose lawyer has since had the group's US Festival paycheck and *Combat Rock* royalties impounded, required

Vinyl and Rhodes to spend three weeks listening to 350 respondents to their anonymous advertisements in the British pop weeklies for a "wild" guitarist. "I wanted someone," says Strummer, "who knew that the guitar is for accompaniment and not for ego-tripping. The ones we chose (Vince White and Nick Sheppard) changed their playing for each of three backing tracks they had to play along with for their final audition. And they were punks – they'd been in the punk rebellion in '76, been excited by it, swept up in it. So they don't moan."

The group hired both new boys so that Strummer could concentrate exclusively on singing, but only a few numbers into the new lineup's first show he discovered that "I missed thrashing myself into a frenzy." One of the least rhythmic rhythm guitarists in pop history – one who rarely strums less than 25 percent faster than anyone else in the band is playing – Strummer gives the impression of having changed his mind primarily so that he can make a big production of angrily yanking his black Telecaster off and flinging it a roadie in the wings every couple of numbers.

"I'm looking for the ultimate wipe-out," Strummer confides, by way of elucidating why he always appears in a rage on stage, "for the ultimate feeling out of every song. It isn't something you can just do – you have to work yourself up to some elusive pitch. It I look angry, it's because I'm trying to reach that pitch, to be took away and out of mind." He's nearly sheepish when he concedes that "sometimes I do turn 'round and smile at the drummer."

"People think we're these studios, deadly serious people who slave over big thick books in their rooms in the middle of the night and never have fun," says an obviously concerned Vinyl. "We *are* serious, but that doesn't mean we don't like fun, or have a sense of humour. I think we're really funny. We spend a lot of time laughing. And we appreciate style. We like to see the kids in our audiences dressed great and having a great time. We want to make it so a feller could go, 'I was checking out Jean-Luc Godard the other night,' or, 'I've just been reading some Sartre,' and all the girls would go, 'Oh, *really*'."

And just when you think you've heard it all, you find out that Joe Strummer refuses to be spat on. Indeed, he urged those members of his Santa Barbara audience who "really support the Clash" to wallop

unceremoniously in the kisser anyone they see "gobbing" on him. "you'll be playing down this end of the neck," he explains, "and somebody'll gob a great yellow-green goolie that'll just lie across the fretboard up there, getting cold. The next time you move your hand up there, it winds up in the middle of this freezing cold diseased mess. I went through it in England for years. It wasn't just a gob here and gob there – it was like a rainstorm that never ended. I ain't going through it again. If that's what they want to do, they can find themselves another dummy."

Exhibiting that zany Clash sense of humor, Vinyl cheerfully notes that Strummer "once caught hepatitis when somebody in front of the stage gobbled at him while he was singing and he swallowed it."

It's the perpetrators of the diseased green goolies, one supposes, who make up most of what Strummer calls "the meathead section" of his group's audience, and who often make life very miserable for the group's hand-picked opening acts. "You know what they shouted at me in Long Beach?" Strummer queries, clearly marveling at the fact he's about to reveal.

"'You nigger music lover!' But three years after they shouted the same sort of redneck stuff at Grandmaster Flash and threw rubbish at him when he opened for us at Bond's Casino in New York. I'll bet they were all rocking out to 'The Message' at their discos in Queens and Brooklyn. They help us face reality."

The subject of facing reality gives Strummer second wind. He's entering the stretch run at full forth. "People in England are asleep," he charges. "They don't realize what a fascist, racist press and police and government we've got. And here too, where MTV won't play black music because they think their ideal customer is a white middle-class Midwestern racist. They had to be forced to play *Michael Jackson*. Not that I consider Michael Jackson a black artist. If he is, why did he get a nose job? And why doesn't he give half the black leadership he should as the biggest superstar in the whole bloody world?"

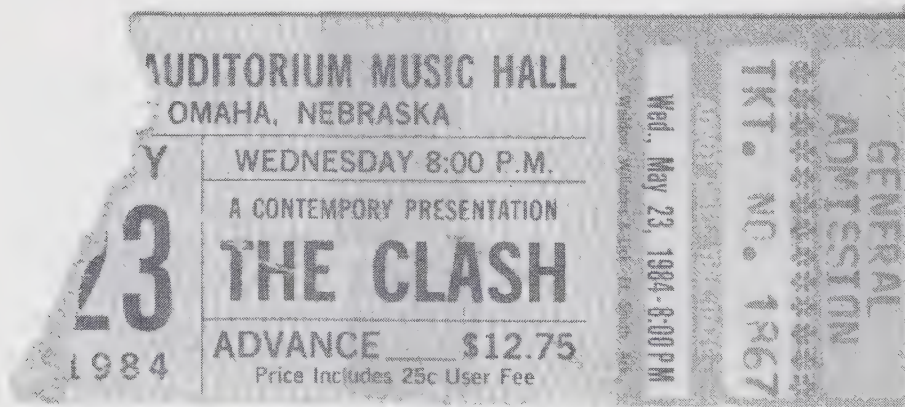
As suddenly as he'd exploded in vitriol, Strummer turns somber. Leadership, it seems is another sticky subject, especially as it applies to the Clash. "When we said, 'Let's have a punk rebellion,'" he explains,

"we didn't mean for everyone to become copies of the clash. For awhile, being a punk group was a good way to get signed and make a few bob. But you don't discover and participate in the creation of a culture every week. When you abandon your culture, you don't know what you've lost 'til it's gone. After a few years, we could see that we'd *had* a culture, and that we'd abandoned it.

"We thought we could make pop real again," Strummer says, apparently resigned to the Clash's melancholy lot in life. "We were going to destroy British pop television and rebuild it into something vital. We were going to do all those things. We didn't realize what a lonely road it was going to be. We didn't know the punk movement was going to fall apart, that Siouxsie and the Banshees would become like Led Zeppelin, that the Pistols would fall apart so fast, that Rotten would get a Holiday Inn band and the Damned would become comedians. We didn't have a clue about all pitfalls we were going to stumble on.

"We've been through everything in the book. We've been through drugs. We've been through pretension. We've been through studio bullshit. You name it – I bet we've been through it.

"But," Strummer announces as he boards the bus heading for the next whistle stop, "I'm still walking around the stage without a crutch."



The Clash Want To Spoil The Party So They'll Stay

By Bill Holdship, *Creem*, October 1984

CREEM contributor Mark Norton and I were talking several days before the Clash "invaded" Detroit, and we began discussing the concept of "armchair activism" and how the Clash probably fit into that category.

Mark pointed out that there's currently a voguish literary movement of poets and writers speaking out against the turmoil in Central America, and (using Joan Didion's recent book on Salvador – which he says is "terrible" – as an example) he added that, for the most part, it's a pretty limp-wristed political mechanism. "War is bad," they say, "but evil dictatorships should be stopped." To which the only sane reply might be: "How perceptive!" (Or an alternative reply, courtesy of Lenny Bruce, might be: "What 'should be' is a lie.")

It seems if these artists were *really* serious, they'd follow the lead of Ernest Hemingway and other writers during the Spanish Civil War, and put some action where their words are. These earlier writers not only spoke out in favor of the anti-Fascist Spanish loyalists, but they raised money and actually went to the center of the conflict to help out. Artists literally became soldiers, donning military fatigues for more than fashion's sake; and while they lost their cause, no one could ever accuse them of being limp-wristed.

On the other hand, as I grow older, I'm beginning to believe that there simply are no political solutions. It's just a fact of life. Sure, "war is bad," but we've always had it, always will. No one can possibly agree on everything (or sometimes it seems like *anything*), and the '60s "do your own thing" message proved to be bullshit because I'm sure Charlie Manson would argue that's exactly what he was doing. For socialism to come to America, nearly everyone would have to suffer first – and almost no one is willing to do that. (Former SDS president on why the activism ended: "Paranoia – and we liked air-conditioning too much.") America should have learned a lesson from Nixon, but it still elected Reagan, who actually makes (the) Dick look better in retrospect. Or going back to the Spanish Civil War for another example, Hemingway warned both America and Europe if they failed to support the fight

against Franco's Fascists, Hitler and Mussolini would overrun Europe, creating the second world war. No one listened to him. Things rarely change. Everything remains the same. Fatalistic? Perhaps. Realistic? Definitely.

Which is why something like the Who's 'Won't Get Fooled Again' or Elvis Costello's brilliant 'Peace In Our Time' makes more "political" sense to me than most of the Clash's combined output. Don't get me wrong. I thought the band's debut LP was great, while *Give 'Em Enough Rope* had some great moments, particularly 'Safe European Home'. But even back then, it was the energy and humanistic attitude that impressed me as opposed to what often sounded like empty political rhetoric. On top of that, I was still an idealistic college kid who believed that rock 'n' roll could "save" the world, and that everyone who listened to (and grew up with) a certain kind of music had to share a similar world view. (What a chump, eh?)

London Calling was the Clash's masterpiece – but what made it great was (once again) the attitude and the traditional "roots rock" position, right down to its Elvis Presley cover art. (Who could resist Joe's growl right before Mick's solo on 'Brand New Cadillac', one of the great vocal moments in rock, right up there with Otis's whistle on 'Dock Of The Bay' and Elvis's "Yeah!" on 'I Need Your Love Tonight'?) But the bubble burst with *Sandinista!* (or *Give 'Em Enough Vinyl*), an overblown, pretentious affair, while *Combat Rock* was the absolute pits. What were the Clash trying to say? Nothing, unless you wanna count doubletalk, and it seemed that the band was finally being consumed by its empty political stance. And, of course, there was the million dollar question: what does an orange Mohawk have to do with changing the political structure in the 1980s?

It was about this time that the Clash's offstage actions started to reveal a bit of hypocrisy and inconsistency as well. Topper Headon's heroin addiction and Mick Jones's "rock star" posturings seemed to represent the very image the band had once denounced. Joe Strummer's rhetoric made him an almost comical character (an image *CREEM* has manipulated to the hilt). There were the hit singles, MTV videos ("rebel" rock or big business?), and, especially, the US Festival fiasco, where at least a few Clash fans sat in the dirt and heat while the band decided whether they'd take the stage or not. Even recently, Dave

Marsh's *Rock & Roll Confidential* accused the "new" Clash of crossing a picket line of striking house technicians at a concert in Long Beach, CA.

For me, the final blow came when I heard Lisa Robinson interview Mick Jones on her radio show shortly after the release of *Combat Rock*. She said 'Should I Stay Or Should I Go?' reminded her of classic Yardbirds and Who (!? – as Rick Johnson pointed out, the song sounded better when Mitch Ryder recorded it as 'Little Latin Lupe Lu'), and she asked if the Clash compared itself to these great '60s bands. Jones's reply? "We feel there has never been another band in the history of rock as great as the Clash!" To which my reply (as Lennon, Holly, Moon and assorted others probably rolled in their graves) was "You pompous ass!"

So this probably would have been an even more negative story if the Clash had refused to talk to us again, as they had the last three years in a row. The band was reportedly unhappy with the negative review R. Meltzer gave *Combat Rock* in *CREEM*, as well as the fact that we wouldn't guarantee them a cover story, which sounded like a "rock star" attitude to me. One of our correspondents at the World Music Festival in Jamaica two years ago reported that the Clash absolutely refused to talk to anyone from *CREEM*. I finally confronted Kosmo Vinyl, the band's press liaison ("whose speaking voice," John Mendelssohn wrote in another publication, "makes Joe Strummer's singing voice sound like Tony Bennett's") on this issue.

"I didn't want to talk to you because you wouldn't put us on the cover. I'll admit it. I don't mind. And if people say that's wrong, I'll say I don't go on about publisher's meetings and all the things that get spoked. I know about publisher's meetings! I understand the game, and I play it quite openly. I know for a fact that certain magazines don't get interviews with certain people unless they guarantee a cover. Your magazine chose not to put us on the cover. I chose not to do an interview. It's only mutual."

But isn't that a pop star attitude, the same thing Mick Jones got canned from the Clash for?

"No, that wasn't a pop star attitude. That's a hustler's attitude! I know that even *Time* Magazine guarantees covers to the right people."

Weren't you angry about the negative review of *Combat Rock* in *CREEM*?

"Nah! Not too much. I thought it was quite interesting. The worst review you gave us turned out to be our biggest selling record!"

Fair enough, I suppose.

I finally get to talk to Joe Strummer two days after the Clash's Detroit gig with new guitarists Vince White and Nick Sheppard. Admittedly, the "new" band sounds tighter and better than the old line-up (Joe attributes it to better amplification – "Before, we had a very loud stage sound, and Mick had the attitude of 'Stuff it, I'm having my guitar as loud as I want it.' So we lost control of the P.A. sound, and it was a mess"), although the new songs, possibly excepting 'Are You Ready For War?', leave a lot to be desired.

Joe seems to have mellowed with age, although part of his new calm may have something to do with his recent repudiation of drugs.

"We're not born again or anything like that. All we want to do is think clearly, and you can't think clearly on any drug. And I've found that my life is much better. Too much marijuana is a bad thing. You can deal and cope with life. I don't think people on marijuana realize how much it affects them. It's like taking their legs away or something. It's such an insidious drug because it claims to be harmless, doesn't it? But it's a bad drug."

Whatever the case, he doesn't spout off in his previous "violent" manner. When he wants to make a crucial point, he relies on eye contact, and he'll touch your arm for emphasis. He seems much friendlier than he was in previous days (cf. Dave DiMartino's Clash story in *CREEM*, Dec. '79). He compliments me on my "Elvis/Sun Studios, Memphis" T-shirt (I mean, how can I dislike this guy?). He worries there's too much noise in the bar for my recorder to tape our conversation. (In seven years of interviews, I've never had a subject in the least concerned about that.) And wonder of wonders, when some

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spittle escapes Joe's mouth and lands on my recorder, he graciously wipes it off.

He talks about everything from Jesse Jackson being the best candidate ("the only *real* opposite to Reagan") to the Russians ("They can't even build a color TV that doesn't break down. How are they going to conquer the Western World?"). Granted, the leader of the "anti-violent" Clash still often contradicts himself ("I've seen people come to blows over the Clash, and that made me feel great. What else can we really argue about that would inflame our passions to the point of physical violence? And more power to it!"), while a lot of what he says still sounds banal. Cases in point:

ON WHY THE "NEW" CLASH ARE TOURING WITHOUT A RECORD: "In my mind, I liken us to a new platoon, and we're going to go out and crawl right in front of the enemy lines, get fired upon, and then look at each other to see how we're bearing up. Can I rely on this guy when my gun jams? We're under fire, and we're sharing that experience. And that's what is going to make our record great." Huh?

ON WHY THE "ANTI-WAR" CLASH WEAR MILITARY FATIGUES ONSTAGE: "What is the opposite of a highly trained Green Beret? I'd say it was a shambling, wino-junkie hippie. So that's not good enough. We wear those clothes in a spirit of self-defense. The more organized they are, the more organized we will be. And that's the way it'll be in the future." Hmmmm.

ON THE CLASH'S 1984 "POLITICAL PLATFORM": "Get up off your chair, turn off the TV, go outside and deal with real life. What I'm talking about in 1984 is the 'on' and 'off' switch on all appliances, and I would urge all Americans to put it in the 'off' position for a change. I turn off everything when I come here – TV, air-conditioning. Dammit. I don't want that Top 40 radio, MTV in my mind. Turn off everything. Exercise your right upon the switch. That's our message in '84." Which does make sense, but if everyone turns everything off, how will they hear the Clash's messages?

But fair's fair, and I gotta admit that I kind of liked Joe Strummer. The man is definitely concerned and sincere, if a bit politically naive. I asked him what I considered some tough questions, and he answered

them, without anger, the best he could. What follows are some excerpts from that conversation.

The Clash have always had a lot of political rhetoric, but I'm beginning to believe that there are no political solutions. Don't you ever feel it's a lost cause?

Yeah, but I don't think we can know what will happen. The reason the political thing isn't going to be a solution is that we don't know what the truth is. Just suppose the right people, who aren't puppets, started running for office and were elected. The climate would change. And within that climate, you might even get truth in the papers, on TV and on radio. And when the new generation is subjected to a bit of truth, who knows what might happen? Compare the Black Panthers to Martin Luther King – who achieved more? It was really King's message in the long run. And a thing like that should be studied.

Sure, King achieved more, and he got shot. Most of the Panthers later embraced the establishment. The '60s taught a lot of lessons, and we still have Ronald Reagan as President.

Yeah, but Ronald Reagan is a product of the drug culture. The two are synonymous in my mind. Reagan is there because we didn't care. We kept goofing up, we copped out, and we let Reagan in. The same with Thatcher in England. Maybe we have to be burned to learn. Hopefully, people are going to be less apathetic about it now, or nothing will be left.

I mentioned the poet-soldiers in the Spanish Civil War. Don't you think real activists should go to Nicaragua and help the people out?

Yeah, I think it would do some good, really. But even so, I don't think anything can stop the U.S. Army from killing every man, woman and child in Nicaragua. And that's what they have to do because that's the only way the U.S. is going to stop them. America is following the wrong policy because Nicaragua would be friends with the U.S. It's the same as Southeast Asia. When you realize that Ho Chi Minh was in touch with the U.S. in 1949, you begin to see things differently. They drove Cuba into the arms of the Kremlin. It's all paranoia. I'm sure that Americans could get on well with Nicaragua and Cuba – even if they

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are socialist, Marxist states. So what? They want to trade. Why is it the Western policy to uphold the worst dictators – anything but letting socialism come into it? It's madness.

But don't you think that activism goes beyond your song lyrics?

Well, yeah, but it's first things first. We're musicians. I started by playing 'Bony Maronie', and that was enough for me when I was learning it. We're musicians, but we know there is going to be a struggle between one economic order and another – the have and have-nots will come to a conflict, and the music is going to play a part in creating an atmosphere for that struggle. But first you have to have that cultural input. First, you have to have the spirit raised before any activism can begin. I mean, the Vietnam War was a target that everyone concentrated on, and I really believe the anti-war movement stopped the war. But that was because there was one clear issue to think upon. Without that clear issue, the left is in complete disarray. But again, I think the issues will eventually become clearer, and I believe that our music will play a part in that struggle. When you're talking about activism, I'm not pretending to be an activist. That's going to be another thing completely.

I heard Mick's out of the band because he developed a "pop star" attitude.

I don't think he could help it. He was a bedroom kid one of those kids in the bedroom dreaming that someday he'd be as big as the guys on the posters, learning his chops in the bedroom. That's something I never went through at all, but he did, and he just doesn't realize that the '80s are different. He still thinks the world's the same as it was when he was in his bedroom. He still believes in the hierarchy of rock 'n' roll. What it came down to was, in the end, we were going "Look, these heavy metal bands are turning people into oafs and idiots. We've got to get out there, and stick in another oar. We've got to work." And he'd say. "I think we should take six months off." And I couldn't convince Mick that it wasn't the '60s out there anymore.

And then there's the fact that I don't believe anyone is that great that they don't write crap sometimes. Mick wouldn't have that. In his mind, he was a great artist, and great artists don't write crap. It was dangerous.

I think Mick's got a tendency to bring "yes" men close to him, and shut out people who will tell him the damn truth. Remember, I'm supposedly his buddy and partner, and I said to him, "Mick, I don't think you can produce." What I meant was that you just can't sit in the chair, move some faders, and claim to be a producer. And it was "You bastard! I thought you were my friend." I worry about him because I don't think he has anyone around him telling him the truth.

There was a piece in Rolling Stone where Mick's lawyer said in time Clash fans will discover that they haven't been told the truth.

Ah, fuck that Rubbish. He ought to get something going. I mean, it's been six months. What's he doing? All I've heard is that he's fallen out with Topper. He's auditioning drummers, and they're calling it T.R.A.C. – Top Risk Action Company.

Since the Clash promote harmony to a degree, isn't it a paradox when the band itself can't get along?

Yeah, it does seem like a paradox. I just feel that's real life. The only way it went wrong was because we couldn't tell each other the truth. When any relationship gets to that point, you might as well forget it. We argue constantly here, but nobody takes it personally. Everyone realizes that we're trying to get the best out of it. That's why I think this is going to work.

I liked everything up to London Calling, but thought Sandinista! and Combat Rock were terrible. What happened?

What's wrong with *Sandinista!* was that there was too much to give every track a good mix. It was brave to try, but unsatisfying in the end. To understand *Combat Rock*, you have to realize it was a salvage operation. It was a home movie mix – which led me to tell Mick he couldn't produce – and I finally had to take it to Glyn Johns, an outsider, to save it. Mick's attitude was that I ruined his music. Fifty percent of *Combat Rock* was great rock, but the other fifty was what Phil Spector would call "wiggy."

From what I see, hasn't punk – especially hardcore – evolved into just another cliché? It's like heavy metal with a different uniform.

Well, I think we're too successful for a lot of those kids. They don't follow us anymore because they've forgotten that punk is an attitude – and not a uniform or even a form or style of music. Punk was never those things. They were by-products. But the hardcore scene ain't exactly a hotbed of creativity – the things I always check for. I'm only reading it from a distance, but I think they've forgotten that it ain't studs, it's the thoughts.

You were criticized after the US Festival. On one hand, it was admirable that money be donated to charity. On the other, a lot of people were there to see the Clash, and you made them wait hours in the heat.

Yeah. That was a screw-up. We knew that we had a two-fold purpose there. We're not a band that protects our ideals at home. We have to deal with the music industry, and that weekend, the whole industry was looking at the festival as the state of rock 'n' roll. So we had to go in there and show them that we wouldn't be pushed under the carpet. Our second purpose was to spoil the bloody party, because I'm not going to have some millionaire restaging Woodstock for his ego-gratification and tax loss in his backyard and get away with it. If Wozniak had said "I'm having a beer fair, a T-shirt fair and a computer merchandizing fair, and we're going to have some music on the side to draw crowds," that would've been honest. Instead, he said "Unison, Unity – US." Our first reaction was to go right in there and ask, "Does anyone know what we're unifying around?"

Does anyone know what the definition of US is?" Dead silence. People forgot to check that out, and rushed to get walkie-talkies. As we rode out of there, Kosmo was singing to the tune of 'T For Texas': "It's Vietnam mixed up with Woodstock." Don't tell me that you can recreate Woodstock in the Me Generation of cocaine California in 1983. We had to go in there and spoil the party because nobody else was. Everyone else was sitting around going "Hey, man. It's cool, man." And on the Van Halen day, someone got clubbed to death over a drug deal. Anybody could've seen that was going to happen.

But there were[^] fans there specifically to see the Clash...

Yeah, but you see we got caught. We were juggling with too many balls. We were having it out with the press before we went on, and I don't think we should have done that.

The press did criticize your attitude.

Yeah. Well, I'm glad. Let's stand up and be counted. But what I thought as we left was how none of the other bands on the "new music" day stepped forward and said, "Hey, I think this is lot of jive, and I want to say something, too." In fact, the only guy with any guts the entire weekend was Eddie Van Halen. Because with all that stuff going down, he walked alone, unasked, right into the middle of our trailer, and stood there grinning, with his hands spread wide. And I thought – well, I drank to him over that.

I take It you won't do another US Festival?

Well, I don't think an Invitation will be offered. But, you know. I like a good argument, especially with Californians.

You were criticized in Dave Marsh's Rock & Roll Confidential for crossing a picket line of striking house technicians in Long Beach.

Well, if there was a picket line, it must have been manned by ants or something. (Reads RRC) Yeah! This is what we want. More of this kind of stuff...I didn't see any picket line. I mean, I've usually got an eye for those picket billboards

Would you have crossed it if you'd have seen it?

No, I wouldn't have. Definitely not. But usually when we go into a town, I can spot a picket line 200 yards up the road. Even when it's only manned by two or three people, I can spot it. I think I'm going to investigate this a bit. We drove around the building several times. There wasn't a soul. Hell, it's not above their ability to come and talk to us, is it? Still, I guess if it's true, we have to take it on the chin.

You once sang "No Elvis, Beatles or Rolling Stones in 1977." The Clash have existed as a successful band almost eight years now, and by this time, in chronological terms, the Beatles had split. Elvis was in the

army and the Stones were in decline. Aren't you afraid in 1984 the Clash may be peddling their own form of punk nostalgia and "phony Beatlemania"?

Not really, because those scenes were founded on the aura of mystique. "See the star, worship the star, don't touch the star." One of the facts that we've tried to bring out is anybody can do it. We've always tried to talk to anybody after a show who wants to talk to us because we're intent on showing them that we're just another bunch of idiots like anybody else. And the fact is we play three or four chords. On a good day, we might hit five. But dammit to hell, I challenge anyone not to be able to learn five chords in three weeks. God, I could get a penguin to do that. Or Flipper. Flipper on the fretboard. Twenty years ago, people swallowed the "star" thing, and you'd think we'd have progressed. But, oh, no. 1984. Duran Duran. Boy George. Still swallowing it. Phony Beatlemania definitely ain't bitten the dust, but I'll be damned if I'll support it. You know, I like to tell people to hate us. Get out from under our shadow, be your own person. I'm proud to inspire people, and from then on, they should take it from there.

Why call this band the Clash? It's weird. The Pretenders are continuing with brand new people. Johnny Lydon has a bunch of faceless sidemen doing 'Anarchy In The U.K.', and they call themselves PiL. Wouldn't it be more honest to call this Joe Strummer's new band?

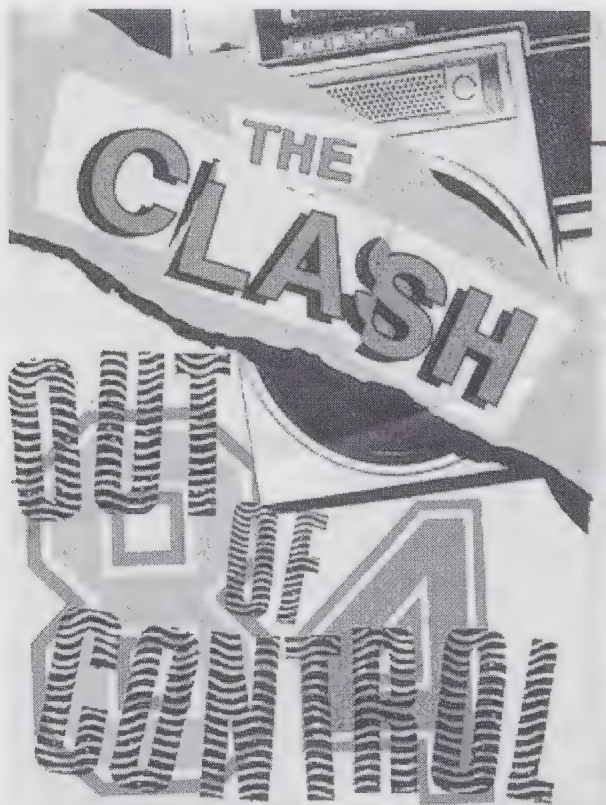
No. We are the Clash. I say in all my arrogance that we need the Clash, and we're it. Even if Vince and Nick weren't In the Clash before, they were buying the records and standing in the front row. The fact that they learned to play is great because we can use them now. But we are the Clash because it certainly ain't U2, and it certainly ain't the Alarm, and it certainly ain't the make-up brigade, and it certainly ain't the heavy metal thing, and it certainly ain't Mick Jones. *We are the Clash* and I'd hope that if I started to act funny that I would be fired, and the Clash would continue to roll on without me.

So there you have it – Joe Strummer in 1984. Still as arrogant as ever (he told me Mick Jones was right in calling the Clash the greatest band ever "because you got to believe that, whether it's true or not"), he remains steadfast in his beliefs, and you have to at least respect him for that. On one hand, the Clash haven't produced a really good record in

nearly five years, and I'm afraid their time may have passed them by. On the other hand, I'd rather hear Joe Strummer telling a crowd of Detroit teenagers that 'Sex Mad War' is dedicated to "a time when a woman can walk alone in the park at midnight without being afraid – which is her divine right" anytime over Motley Crue's "We love fucking the girls in Detroit because their pussies taste so good!" (Can someone get these morons to crawl back under their rock? Please?)

After I left the interview and was digesting some of the things Strummer had said, I drove past the American Legion hall in Royal Oak. I swear that two Army sergeants were out front leading a group of pre-teen kids in army uniforms through complete military drills. I couldn't help thinking of Hitler Youth (Reagan Youth?), and wondering if maybe Joe Strummer was right. Maybe we do need the Clash. After all, a little optimism ain't a bad thing.

But then, I guess that I just don't know.



Strummer on Man, God, Law – and the Clash

Richard Cromelin, *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1988

HAS JOE STRUMMER lost his ambition and Drive? It was strange last month to see one of rock's all-time most involving performers serving simply as a sideman for another band, even one as colorful as the Irish folk-punkers the Pogues. The former Clash Leader's more familiar position is at the eye of the rock 'n' roll hurricane.

It's also odd that Strummer, who filled in on rhythm guitar on the Pogues recent U.S. tour, dismisses his recent activity doing music for the films *Sid and Nancy* and *Walker*, a bit of acting, the Pogues gig – as "holiday."

"I just want to go back to rockin'," Strummer said, "but I'm uncertain as to what to actually do... The truth is, I never stopped thinking about rock 'n' roll for a second that I'm on holiday."

The ragged-voiced Strummer led the Clash through a stormy 10-year career that began in 1976 when the London band emerged as *the* English punk group. Unlike many of their cohorts, Strummer, guitarist Mick Jones, bassist Paul Simonon and drummer Topper Headon survived that intense, brief period, first broadening their music and finding a larger audience with 1979's *London Calling*, and hitting the Top 10 in 1982 with the single 'Rock the Casbah', from the million selling LP *Combat Rock*.

But things were coming apart. Headon had been fired because of his drug use, and Jones was given the boot in '83. There was one more album with a revamped lineup, 1985's *Cut the Crap*, but Strummer regrets that move, even referring to that band by a different name: "the Clash Mark Two."

Since then, one of rock's most colorful, impetuous and provocative figures has kept a low profile. Though he claims his creativity is undiminished, he's found that age and fatherhood have changed his priorities, and he's not ready to commit himself to anything like a Joe Strummer rock album right now.

Sitting down for an interview in the small bar of the West Hollywood hotel, Strummer, 35, was sharp, loquacious and given to a salty vocabulary that would make Tom Lasorda blush. But into his second Margarita his mood darkened slightly as he considered more cosmic issues.

Carefully balancing a small acoustic guitar on the floor behind his bar stool, he started off, in his thick Cockney accent, talking about music today.

Joe Strummer: What's holding me up is I'm confused about the nature of the music. Because the modern music doesn't reach me. I mean to say the sound of the modern electric production. A lot of sequencers... synths. That's what people are buying. Because that doesn't reach me, it throws me back to like 1948, but I don't want to be there. Back there, I'm talking about blues records... The roots of rock 'n' roll is rhythm and blues and that's like really where I'm at, where I was always at.

I want to go back to '48 because something there that isn't now. But then I don't want to re-create '48, OK, that would be a jive. So, therefore, I'm kind of just basically juggling with that.

Also I don't like the idea that people who aren't adolescents make records. Adolescents make the best records. Except for Paul Simon. Except for *Graceland*. He's hit a new plateau there, but he's writing to his own age group. *Graceland* is something new. That song to his son is just as good as 'Blue Suede Shoes': "Before you were born dude when life was great." That's just as good as 'Blue Suede Shoes', and that is a new dimension.

What are your feelings looking back at "Clash Mark Two"? Was it a mistake?

Yeah. If you're allowed to make your mistakes, I think you should. But people don't really like hearing you admit them. Although I'd never wanted to dump on the musicians that were involved in that... Because it was not their fault.

The problem was really that we shouldn't have done it. I felt they were haplessly involved in something that they shouldn't have been involved

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in, and I always felt bad that when I eventually decided it was forget-its-ville, that it might have reflected on them. 'Cause it shouldn't have.

Why did you do it? Were you trying to prove something?

Yeah. I was trying to prove that I was the Clash and it wasn't Mick (Jones). I learned that that was kind of dumb. I learned that it wasn't anybody, except maybe a great chemistry between us four, and I really learned it was over the day we sacked Topper, and not the day we sacked Mick. There was quite some time between them. We played a whole tour between those times. But it was the day we sacked Tops.

Because it's between humans. (Clash managers) Bernie Rhodes and Cosmo Vinyl I think perhaps didn't understand that. You couldn't just jigsaw-puzzle it, take out a piece and put in another piece. That it was something weird between four humans that when they played it sounded OK, you know. And that's fairly rare, that's all.

And when we knocked out Topper for excessive drug abuse, I don't think, honest to God, we ever played a good gig after that. Except for one night in New Jersey we played a good one, but I reckon that was just by the law of averages. Out of a 30 gig tour, one night, you've got to say it's a fluke.

Could Topper have continued to function?

Yeah, considering what happened straight after that when everybody I bloody knew in London was on smack. I mean it wasn't rare, it was like ho hum, who isn't? I think we could have. But then we were ignorant. It was like hoo hoo hoo, the big heroin, horse. I didn't know anything about it. It was only after we fired Topper and my friends began to go down like flies. Now most of my friends in London are in Narcotics Anonymous. They can't even have a glass of wine. Just cigarettes and coffee. It's forever.

I never liked heroin. I never even took it. I might have smoked it once in Holland. I remember the bloke said, "Zis next joint has the heroin in it."... I took like a show puff, the one where you keep it in your mouth... And that was the only time I ever got really near heroin.

Was the Clash as political as people made it out?

Probably not. I always tried to stress that in the later interviews. I didn't want to pretend to be somebody I wasn't. I kept saying, "Hey you know, we're drug addict musicians." That's what I used to say to journalists – "Hang on, don't get the wrong idea that we're carrying around *Das Kapital* and loads of pamphlets." We had Mott the Hoople records and reefer, you know'?

I often felt that it all got a bit unbalanced. I kept trying to stress that – "Hang on, we're be-bop guys, we're down in the alley on 57th Street. We're not in there with John Reed and *Ten Days That Shook the World*. We'd be in the alley with (Charlie) Parker shooting up junk. That's where we were at really. I mean not shooting up junk, but if you had to say which camp are you in I'd have to say hey, we were up Bop Alley. I often felt worried that people thought we were Che Guevara.

Where did the politics come from?

Don't misconstrue me. I'm a human being. I'm not dumping on what I've done. I mean I know we were doing social (stuff), all right? I just don't like boastin' about it, OK? I know what we were doin'. I know damn well what we did. But I ain't gonna start crying about it now, all right?

But the fact is that we were drug addict musicians first and foremost. We loved Chuck Berry, Slim Harpo. We never heard of Friedrich Engels, you know what I mean? The politics were on the street in front of us, man. I didn't have anywhere to live. Don't ask me where my politics came from. I couldn't find anywhere to live. I was willing to wash dishes. I washed plenty of dishes. I dug graves. I cleaned the toilets. I'm not joking on any of these. None of that is an exaggeration. I did exactly what I say. I washed dishes, made omelettes, I dug graves, cleaned toilets. And cut grass in the parks. I did the usual things that young men do. I didn't have nothin', behind me. I didn't have nowhere to live.

What are you proudest of that the Clash did?

'Rock the Casbah'. It's such a groove. Long live groove. Screw the rest of it.

Meanwhile can I interject something about 'Rock the Casbah' here? The true genius of 'Rock the Casbah' is Topper Headon. I was in Electric Ladyland (studio) and he said, "Look, I've got this tune, can I put it down?" I said, "OK, Tops, let's put it down... ." He ran out in the studio and banged down the drum track to 'Rock the Casbah'. And then he ran over to the piano and he banged down the piano track to it, and then ran over to the bass and he banged down the bass part. This is, like, I suppose, within 25 minutes, and 'Rock the Casbah' is there, boom. Topper Headon did that in 25 minutes. And now he's serving 15 months in (prison)... For partially supplying the heroin that killed some guy.

Where's your home?

I live in West London. I grew up in Ankara. It's the capital of Turkey. My father was in the foreign office. I was born there. I also have Armenian blood. And Scottish... I grew up 18 months in Turkey, 18 months in Cairo, two years in Mexico, two years in West Germany, then I went to boarding school in Epsom and I visited my parents in Tehran for 5 years, and then Malawi for a few years, and then went to art school, dropped out, became a bum, better chew gum.

Are you married?

JS: I have two children, with a girl I've lived with for 10 years. Two girls, aged 4 and 2. And we live in West London.

Are you uncomfortable talking about your personal life?

JS: Do I give that impression? Well I don't hide nothin'.

Did the birth of your daughter change your outlook?

I'll tell you something. When you see you become part of the cycle of generations, you lose your ego in the process, because you ain't nothin' special. You're just another cipher in the generations. When you devote all your interest into another person, you lose your self-obsession, and

that's when you understand what it is. You don't know (anything) without that moment. You don't want anything to harm this helpless being. That's a fantastic change. And that's when you understand what's happening. I never understood anything until my first baby looked at me. I didn't understand (anything). Now I understand.

Are you as driven to create as you were, to make music?

Creativity don't stop. It just gets more intense if you feed it right. The only people that have to worry about their creativity is the junkies. The coke freaks and the heroin freaks, they're the ones that have to worry.... Bet you Paul Simon ain't no coke freak or no junk freak, you know.

Do you feel good about things now generally?

Oh man, you know. There's certain things you gotta decide in life... If you ain't confronting them – if you ain't thinkin' about man and God and law, then you ain't thinkin' about nothin'. There ain't no use thinkin' about sex or drugs or rock 'n' roll. That's all red herrings. If you ain't thinkin' about man and God and law then you ain't thinkin' about nothin'.

What do you think about man and God and law? Do you believe in God?

Well, I would say it was about time that you believe in something. And sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll ain't it... A lot of people used to think they were.



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