



SOUND

THE CLASH AT THE MUCKY DUCK

4 July 2016 marks the 40th anniversary of a very notable debut which took place in Sheffield, namely punk legends The Clash's first live performance.

The gig was in support of the still-relatively-unknown punk icons The Sex Pistols, allegedly hastily arranged by the band's management in order to beat to the stage their London rivals The Damned, whose debut was scheduled only a few days later.

Less well-known is the fact that the gig took place at a relatively small venue in Sheffield. Apart from Joe Strummer, the band were all inexperienced and had only formed the previous February, after Strummer and Jones had witnessed a game-changing live performance by The Pistols. Strummer immediately left his current band, pub rockers The 101ers, and formed a new one in the vein of The Pistols with friend and guitarist Mick Jones.

The new band was already being managed by Bernie Rhodes, svengali and friend of Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren. Because of the risk of the first performance by the raw band going wrong, and because of Rhodes' determination to get one up on The Damned, it was decided the best plan would be to choose a venue outside London to test out the group, away from the capital's cognoscenti and nascent punk scene.

The chosen venue was The Black Swan on Snig Hill, just outside the city centre, known by locals as The Mucky Duck and in later years as The Boardwalk. Under all its names, the space hosted a variety of known or soon-to-be-known acts, including Genesis and AC/DC, but this gig was perhaps one of the most notable.

At the time, The Black Swan was a circuit venue for pub rock bands like The Feelgoods, and Rhodes must have calculated that it was far enough away from London for it not to attract any journalists or scenesters should anything unfortunate happen. The soon-to-be-legendary Buzzcocks, also Pistols fans and very recently formed, were also on the bill that night.

Apparently yet to be garbed in their customary ripped and paint-spattered attire, The Clash played to perhaps 50 fortunate Sheffield punters, including "a couple of punks", according to Mick Jones. It's hard to verify what songs were played, but one of the brief, four-song set is alleged to have been 'Protex Blue', later recorded for the band's debut album, whilst another was possibly a cover of The Maytals' 'Pressure Drop'.

Within a year, both acts would be notorious and by the end of the decade, world famous. But at the time punk was still months away from

the tabloids and the mainstream, and both bands were still in their early stages.

The gig was also the first of only a handful of gigs featuring guitarist Keith Levene in the short-lived five-piece version of the band. Two years later he would link up with The Pistols' John Lydon to form PiL, taking the by-then dying notion of punk elsewhere. For now, they were sharing the bill at a small gig in Sheffield. Both Levene and Lydon have discussed how they first met at this gig. The Boardwalk became a nightclub after shutting permanently as a music venue, and is sadly currently closed down and up for rental. This performance will nevertheless always be a great memory for the city.

Clash bassist Paul Simonon: "The day The Clash started really was when we played The Mucky Duck with the Pistols, which was great. It was the first time that I had ever played on stage. The night before it felt frightening but once we were on the way there then I began larking about. I tied one of Keith's shoes to a piece of string and hung it out of the back of the van – the door had to be open anyway so we could breathe. So there we were sitting with all the amps and luggage with a plimsoll bouncing around behind us and all the cars behind us slowing down to avoid it. But the moment that we walked out on stage it was like I was in my own living room. I felt really comfortable. Things went wrong during the evening, and Mick had to come over and tune my guitar, but it didn't bother me. I just wanted to jump around, but Mick wanted it to be in tune."

Artist: **Tom J Newell**



ROBIN DOWNE

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