

Pistols CAN play, OK?



Johnny 100% Rotten

Sex Pistols, Clash, Buzzcocks London

A STRANGE affair, this. And then some.

The Screen's the nearest thing I have to a local cinema. Normally they deal in popular chic movies, ie lots of Clint Eastwood, tasty pulps and regular re-runs of 'Performance' and Morrissey/Warhol. I love it.

This though was something else entirely; an all-nighter featuring the above-named combos and one or two other things.

Like movies, a strange chap in sub-Edna Everidge drag who turned into a pink satin hot-panted male gogo dancer as the night tiptoed out the exit, and some — pardon the expression — disco.

Credit where credit's due — it was a brave attempt to do something different, to give the Pistols the kind of audio-visual environment they obviously can't get anywhere else right now. That the experiment didn't in itself completely work is no cause for complaint in itself. After all, it was a virgin run and just the plain fact that it happened at all should be cause for wild celebration.

On the other hand, there were certain aspects of the evening's 'entertainment' which I found objectionable on — koff! — aesthetic grounds, and which are, I believe, major flaws in the entire Sex Pistols circus.

Two of the movies, for example, were Kenneth Anger 'underground' classics 'Kustom Kar Kommando' and 'Scorpio Rising'. Today, the films just looked tame and redundant. In fact the whole black leather/SM/B&D midnight zoo phenomenon has been bugged into cartoonland by everyone from Lou Reed and artist Allen Jones to Bowie and Ferry (those last two took up a nauseating majority of the disco selections incidentally), reaching its ultimate ultra-emetic nadir with

the ridiculous Kiss.

Therefore the chick who danced onstage in the leather corset etcetera with the tit-slits didn't really contribute to the overall feel of the affair at all. For a start, she got her garters all wrong. But more than that — along with a coven or so of other garishly designed night creatures — the overall impression was of a bunch of failed auditionees for 'The Rocky Horror Show' having wandered into the first couple of rows. And that's just history.

Enough. The reason I carp so long and loud about these ultimately trivial appendices is that they cramp the style of what — I discovered to my surprise — is now one fine damned rock 'n' roll band.

I'll say it again because I've heard so much adverse criticisms of the Pistols in the last few weeks — many of them from people who'd never seen them or had maybe caught two numbers six months ago — that it has to be said long and loud. Like this: **ONE DAMNED FINE ROCK 'N' ROLL BAND.**

Because on the evidence of what I saw and heard on Sunday and again — I had to go, y'know? — on the following Tuesday at the 100 Club it was just that, **ONE DAMNED FINE ROCK 'N' ROLL BAND.**

You simply wouldn't believe how this band have changed, from an amiably aggressive but ultimately sloppy bunch into bona fide rock 'n' rolling mothers.

The most common criticism of course is 'they can't play'. Okay, I'm no musician myself, and when someone says that about a band I like I usually turn around and quote my favourite rock scribe Giuseppe Spaghetti right back at them. 'So what if they only know three chords?' quoth the Milanese genius, 'they play with passion and commitment.'

On the evidence of the last two showings of Pistol power however I feel absolutely no need to quote GS at all. Bullshit, they *can* play — the rhythm section would sound great if they were with Status Quo, The Flamin'

Groovies or Val Doonican, and I wish Pete Townshend would check out their guitar player for a few hints on how to handle an axe like it was a dangerous weapon.

A lot of the change is, I'm sure, down to the solution of that age old bastard problem of PA. Suffice it to say that the Pistols seem to have leapt that major hurdle in the time since I caught them last and it's made a world of difference. Like the fact that John Rotten's vocals were clear and crisp and there were no lengthy breakdowns so that he'd have to waste time making inane attempts at annoying his audience. Rather than pouring beer over his head and making a general asshole of himself for a third of the set Rotten is now able to concentrate on his singing, which is, after all, why he's up on that stage in the first place.

My only reservation re the Pistols nowadays is regarding the strength of their original material. They have a couple of killers with 'Anarchy In The UK' and 'Sub Mission', but aside from that the highlights of their set are still Iggy's 'No Fun' and the Monkees' 'Steppin' Stone'.

Still, the next few months should be fascinating.

By contrast, main support band Clash have exactly the opposite problem. Their all-original set has at least half a dozen great rock 'n' roll anthems in the making — particularly 'Janie Jones', which may well end up a close second to J. Richman's 'Pablo Picasso' in my 1976 All-Time Golden Greats. Their equipment however was to do the band a grave disservice tonight, losing Joe Strummer's hard to mix vocals until they became an unintelligible mumble and generally poleaxing the band's nuclear potential.

But shit, I thought they were amazingly good anyway and I caught their next two sets without any hesitation. Given time they will astonish, I'm sure of it.

Maybe the Buzzcocks will too, but on Sunday it took only two and a half numbers to convince me that they were a boring and highly unimaginative quartet and rougher, as someone remarked to me in a urinal the other night, than a bear's arse.

They were paradise though, compared to the Suburban Studs, the jokers who footed Pistols/Clash at the 100 on Tuesday. 'Starman' period Bowie and a cardboard cut-out of a policeman with a pig's head? Not in 1976, my little chickadees. Back to Butlin's, Skegness. Immediately. — GIOVANNI DADOMO.

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