

Aggro chic

NME SEPT 11 The Clash and the Sex Pistols play an Islington cinema. Teeth are broken.

THE SCREEN
ON THE GREEN
LONDON
LIVE!
OCTOBER 17

"Someone's got to come along and say to all of us, 'All your ideas about rock'n'roll, all your ideas about sound, all your ideas about guitars, all your ideas about this and that are a load of wank. This is where it is!'... Someone's got to come along and say, 'Fuck you!'"

Alex Harvey, November 1973

IT'S ALMOST FUNNY. Not quite worth an uproarious explosion of uncontrollable hilarity, but definitely good for a wry chuckle or two when it happens to someone else. Trouble is, no one's laughing because all the professional chucklers just found out that the joke's on them.

Any halfway competent rock'n'roll pulse-fingerer knows that this is The Year Of The Punk. You got Patti Smith doing Rimbaud's-in-the-basement-mixing-up-the-medicine, you got Bruce Springsteen with his down-these-mean-streets-a-man-must-go stereologues, you got the Ramones as updated Hanna-Barbera Dead End Kids, you got Ian Hunter doing I-used-to-be-a-punk-until-I-got-old-and-made-all-this-money, you got everybody and his kid brother (or sister) crawling out of the woodwork in leather jackets trying to look like they were hell on wheels in a street fight and shouting Put The Balls Back Into The Music.

Ultimately, if the whole concept of Punk means anything it means Nasty Kids, and if Punk Rock means anything it means music of, by and for Nasty Kids. So when a group of real live Nasty Kids come along playing Nasty Kids music and actually behaving like Nasty Kids, it is no bleeding good at all for those who have been loudly thirsting for someone to come along and blow all them old farts away to throw up their hands in prissy-ass horror and exclaim in duchessy fluster that oh no, this wasn't what they meant at all and won't it please go away.

In words of one (or, at the most, two) syllables: you wanted Sex Pistols and now you've got 'em. Trouble is, they look like they aren't going to go away, so what are you going to do with them? Alternatively - ha ha - what are they going to do with you?

In a way, it's a classic horror-movie situation. Dr Frankenstein's monster didn't turn out according to plan but he was stuck with it anyway, Professor Bozo opens up a pyramid/summons a demon/goes up to the Old Dark Mansion despite the warnings of the villagers and gets into a whole mess of trouble. Don't rub the lamp unless you can handle the genie.

The current vogue for Punkophilia and Aggro Chic has created the atmosphere in which a group like the Sex Pistols could get started and find an audience, and - dig it - it is entirely too late to start complaining because they behave like real Nasty Kids and not the stylised abstraction of Nasty Kiddery which we've been demanding and applauding from sensitive, well-educated, late-20s pop superstars.

Anyway, time's a-wastin'. Their gig at The Screen On The Green has already started; in fact we've already missed the first band, a Manchester group called Buzzcocks. All kinds of folks in Bizarre Costumes - the kind of clothes you used to find at Bowie gigs before 'e went all funny like - are milling around the foyer playing the wild mutation. The occasional celeb - Chris Spedding, who has eyes to produce the Pistols, and Sadistic Mika - is mingling.

Up on the stage it's Party Piece time. A bunch of people, including a chick in SM drag with tits out (photographer from one of the nationals working overtime, presumably with the intention of selling a nice big fat look-at-all-this-disgusting-decadence-and-degradation centrespread) and a lumpy guy in rompers are dancing around to a barrage of Ferry and Bowie records. Every time the lumpy go-go boy does a particularly ambitious move the record jumps. He makes elaborate not-my-fault gestures and keeps dancing. The record keeps jumping.

This goes on for quite a while. Movies are projected on the

screen and someone gets creative with the lights. The area near me 'n' the missus reeks of amyl nitrate.

There is nothing more tedious and embarrassing than inept recreations of that which was considered avant-garde 10 years ago. Someone has obviously read too many articles about the Andy Warhol/Velvet Underground Exploding Plastic Inevitable Show. Andy and Lou and Cale would laugh their butts off. This ain't rock'n'roll - this is interestocide.

Sooner or later - later, actually - a group called Clash take the stage. They are the kind of garage band who should be speedily returned to their garage, preferably with the motor running, which would undoubtedly be more of a loss to their friends and families than to either rock or roll. Their extreme-left guitarist, allegedly known as Joe Strummer, has good moves, but he and the band are a little shaky on ground that involves starting, stopping and changing chord at approximately the same time.

In between times, they show Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*. The Pistols' gear is assembled in a commendably short time with an equally commendable absence of fuss and pissing about and then the Pistols slope on stage and Johnny Rotten lays some ritual abuse on the audience and then they start to play.

Any reports that I had heard and that you may have heard about the Pistols being lame and sloppy are completely and utterly full of shit. They play loud, clean and tight and they don't mess around. They're well into the two-minute-thirty-second powerdrive, though they're a different cup of manic monomania than the Ramones. They have the same air of seething just-about-repressed violence that the Feelgoods have, and watching them gives that same clenched-gut feeling that you get walking through Shepherd's Bush just after the pubs shut and you see The Lads hanging out on the corner looking for some action and you wonder whether the action might be you.

The Pistols are all those short-haired kids in the big boots and rolled-up baggies and sleeveless T-shirts. Their music is coming from the straight-out-of-school-and-onto-the-dole deathtrap which we seem to have engineered for Our Young: the '76 British terminal stasis, the modern urban blind alley.

The first 30 seconds of their set blew out all the boring, amateurish artsy-fartsy mock-decadence that preceded it purely by virtue

of its tautness, directness and utter realism. They did songs with titles like "I'm A Lazy Sod" and "I'm Pretty Vacant", they did blasts-from-the-past like "I'm Not Your Steppin' Stone" (10 points for doing it, 10 more for doing it well) and "Substitute" (a Shepherd's Bush special, that) and they kept on rockin'.

"Should I say all the trendy fings like 'peace and love, maaaaaaan'?" asked Johnny Rotten, leaning out off the stage manically jerking off his retractable mic-stand. "Are you all having a good time, maaaaaaan'?" Believe it: this ain't the summer of love.

They ain't quite the full-tilt crazies they'd like to be, though: Johnny Rotten knocked his false tooth out on the mic and had the front rows down on their knees amidst the garbage looking for it. He kept bitching about it all the way through the gig; Iggy wouldn't even have noticed. Still, they got more energy and more real than any new British act to emerge this year, and even if they get big and famous and rich I really can't imagine Johnny Rotten showing up at parties with Rod'n'Britt 'n' Mick'n'Bianca or buying the next-door villa to Keef'n'Anita in the South of France. And if Elton ever sees them I swear he'll never be able to sing "Saturday Night's Alright (For Fighting)" again without choking on his Dr Pepper. Charles Shaar Murray

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