

Parade of the

THE 600-strong line, which last Monday straggled across two blocks outside London's 100 Club in Oxford Street, waiting for the Punk Rock Festival to start, was indisputable evidence that a new decade in rock is about to begin.

Two 18-year-olds from Salisbury were at the head of the queue. "I've been WAITING for something to identify with," says Gareth, hopping up and down. "There's been nothing for years. I just want to be involved."

Michelle and Bruno are both 16. Their hair is short and neat. Their shirts and ties, leopardskin jackets, stiletto heels, pointed toes and dramatic make-up is variously repeated down the line.

"These are the best bands around," says Michelle, already a seasoned fan. "They're playing the music of the people."

Isn't it all rather aggressive? That's a load of rubbish. The violence is part of the music. It's not going to have any psychological side-effects.

Over the last eight months a generation of rock fans have quietly developed an extraordinary sense of belonging together. Excited by the new (to them anyway) blast of energy in the music played by bands like the Sex Pistols, Eddie and the Hot Rods (although these particular bands have little time for each other, many of their fans love them both) and most of the others on the Punk Rock Festival bill, they are creating a new cultural identity for themselves.

They have their own clothes, language, "in" jokes and fashions. There is both healthy camaraderie and competitiveness.

The established bands share their equipment and rehearsal space, and most of the established musicians are encouraging friends to form bands of their own. Even apart from the 30 musicians actually playing in the festival, the audience is seething with new talent.

Tim, Pete, George and Bill, all 17, are from North London and Southend. "We listen to everything from Weather Report to MC5," says schoolboy Tim. "But we come here to pick up tips. Our band's called 1919 Alteria Motive Five, 'cause there's four of us, see."

Johnny Moped is there, looking to find musicians for his band the Morons. Chronic Illness is on the loose. Fat Steve of the Babes says he's rehearsing. Fourteen-year-old Rodger Bullen, a Rat Scabies protégé, has just joined later.

Caroline Coon reports from Britain's first punk rock festival at London's 100 Club last week. Pictures by Barry Plummer

The creative buzz, the feel that something is "happening," is infectious. There is a continual stream of criticism and rude abuse poured over each other's favourite enterprises, but having and giving back that kind of attention is part of the fun.

"Do It Yourself" could be the motto down at the 100 Club. Everyone wants to get in on the act. Everyone can.

For the Subway Sect, it's their first-ever gig. There's Vic Goddard (19) and Paul Myers (bass). Paul Smith (18) has played for five weeks and Robert Miller (lead guitar) for three months. They are familiar faces, having been in the audience at many Pistols gigs.

It's been tough for them to find rehearsal rooms, but after a weekend at the Clash's spacious studio their set is debut-ready.

They stalk purposefully on stage and, without looking at the audience, start a lengthy, foot-finding warm up. Already they look like they belong together.

"We're the, er, Subway (pause) Sect," announces Vic, turning at last to face the sea of people before him. And, with an abrasive kick, their first number, "No Love," voices the expectancy within the club.

"Love is not what we need. We're part of the U.K.," sings Vic, his voice medium-pitched and clear.

They are unashamedly inspired by the Pistols. Vic stands before the mike, both arms stretched behind his head, just like Rotten used to.

Halfway through the set he thrusts his left hand deep into his trouser pockets and stuffs his mouth with little pieces of something — like pills or nuts. That's original.

Their sound is a grind of frantic, jagged discords which, whether by chance or design, mostly resolve into acceptable patterns of unadorned simplicity. Paul and Robert, standing next to Vic, their faces screwed up with intensity, flash their fingers across their guitars as fast as white lightning.

Drummer Paul, though, seems to float his drumsticks through the air. He chews gum and pounds away with the studied suavity of a young rating on his first day of home leave.

They're all dressed in underground grey jerseys and casual grey trousers. The effect is utilitarian and bland. It suits their nail-biting rhythms and doomy lyrics.

"Everyone's a prostitute and everyone's in prison," are words caught from one number. "Nobody's scared," "seen it all before," "beautiful plastic" are some more. And then, in one of the last numbers, "we're splitting. The end. Take hold of your life. There's something



SEX PISTOLS: private party is over, they're public property now

you've got to prove." At the bar, where through the festival roopy company P.R.K. executive, T.V. and radio personalities musicians, the press and punk scene regulars and opinions on "form" in Jockey Club stewards, feelings are mixed. Great-Tribble!

But Debbie (15) feet Bronley gets it right. In the last two months her hair has been mauve, yellow and raspberry pink. "They're good! There, I said it," she confesses. "They're good!"

Suzi And The Banshees It's never the same as the Pistols gig nowadays (London, anyway) if what is known as the "Bronley Contingent" isn't there. The inseparable unit is Stan (21), Bill (22) and Sam (19) — he sells hot dogs of a mobile stand during the day — raspberry-haired-Debbie and Suzi herself.

They first heard the Pistols at their local tech in January and they've been faithful followers ever since. They made the trip to Paris in a roopy old car to see their heroes' first overseas performance, and Suzi, shocking in her semi-nudity, got punched on the nose.

She is nothing if not magnificent. Her short hair, which she sweeps in great waves over her head, is streaked with red, like flames. She'll wear black plastic non-existent bras, one mesh and one rubber stocking, and suspenders (both various), all covered by polka-dotted, transparent plastic mac.

Over the weeks the Bronley Contingent's parade of inventive dress (it's rarely the same two weeks running) has set the fashion pace of the scene. It was only a matter of time before they took their street theatre to the stage.

Apart from Suzi, it wasn't decided who would actually end up doing the festival until the day. Every one thought though that they'd carry out their much-advertised plan to sing "Goldfinger."

It was not to be. At the last moment, in an orgy of rock iconoclasm, they decided on "The Lord's Prayer" spiced with "the most ridiculous rock songs ever written."

Two-tone Steve (his hair is



CLASH: glimpse of their considerable potential



THE DAMNED: all born performers

punks

black on top, white at the sides) was on the bass he picked up for the first time the night before. Sid Vicious, Johnny Rotten's friend and inventor of the Pogo dance, was on drums. He had one rehearsal. And a mature gent called Marco was the lead guitarist.

The prayer begins. It's a wild improvisation, a public jam, a bizarre stage fantasy acted out for real. The sound is what you'd expect from, er, novices.

But Sid, with miraculous command, starts his minimal thud and the blat doesn't fluctuate from the start to the finish of the, er, set. Against this knobby sound, Suzi, with the grace of a redeemed ghoul, rifles the senses with an unnerving, screeching recital of "Twist And Shout" and "Knocking On Heaven's Door." Sid's smile flickers. Marco, his guitar feeding back, rolls up his sleeves, and Two-tone Steve two-tones.

The audience, enjoying the band's nerve and audacity, eggs them on, gets bored, has a laugh, and then wonders how much more it can take. Twenty minutes later, on a nod from Marco, Sid just stops.

The enthusiastic cheering is just recognition of their success. If the punk rock scene has anything to offer then it's the opportunity for anyone who wants to get up and experience the reality of their wildest, stage-struck dreams. The bar-flys are horrified.

"God, it was awful," says Howard Thompson, an A&R man from Island. But Suzi is not interested in contracts.

"The ending was a mistake," she says. "I thought we'd go on until they pulled us off."

The Clash: "They're great!" shouted a bespectacled youth halfway through this band's set. "I used to listen to Yes and Genesis." At last, after three months' intensive rehearsal and three gigs, the Clash hit close to top form. We see just a glimpse of their very considerable potential.

They have reduced their line-up. Rhythm guitarist Keith Levine is off forming a new band. This has left Joe Strummer (lead vocals and guitar), Mick Jones (lead guitar) and Paul Simonon

(bass) more room to move.

They pitched like rockets, powering through their first number, "White Riot." The audience is instantly approving. The band is fast, tough and lyrical, and they've mastered the way of dovetailing Joe's mellow approach with Mick's spiky aggression.

They blaze through "London's Burning." Terry Chimes (drums) breaks up his solid bass drum surge with hi-hat splashes. The sound, though disciplined, is bursting forth.

They play 11 of the 18 songs in their repertoire, including "I'm So Bored With You," "Protex Blues" (with Mick on lead vocals), "Deadly Serious," "Denigh" and "Janie Jones" — about a man thinking of her — and they end the set with "1977."

Later, I asked Paul Simonon, who has only played bass for six months, how he felt about the set. "I've got to get better. I'm never content. I know I can do a lot with the bass. Most of them stand still like John Entwistle. I want to move around and give the audience a good time. And give myself a good time, too."

Joe Strummer, whose last band was the now fabled 101'ers, has played with very experienced musicians. What was it like with someone like Paul? "It's really great," he said. "When a musician knows all his outs it gets boring. It's not exciting for them, and they start playing for playing's sake, and the emotion disappears."

The Clash are a fine, visionary rock band with a wild style. I've seen them four times now, they've never played the same set. Their humour and spontaneity is uncontrived and, now that they've settled into their new line-up, they'll be a cornerstone for the developing punk rock scene.

The Sex Pistols: The atmosphere in the club is feverish and high-pitched. This band is what everyone's been waiting for. Not everyone, however, is happy about the Pistols' growing success and notoriety. The private party is over; the band are public property. It had to happen.

But with mixed feelings

the band's nucleus of fans are holding their breath as their champions start their steady climb. Will the businessmen spoil them — that's the anxious question?

Already the band has changed — especially Johnny Rotten and Steve Jones. Once Rotten would poke his pretty mug into any camera lens. Now he's likely to sweep his arms across his face with an Ava Gardner gesture of exclusivity.

Jones, once the brooding loner unsure of his sex appeal, is now exuding a confidence which guarantees exotic women. Glen Matlock and Paul Cook, perhaps because they've been less "visible," have yet to zip into their rock-star mantles.

But, if the band are more detached from their audience than they used to be, it's for self-protection. Their fanatical following is growing fast. Fans follow them all over the country. They are the unquestioned stars of the Punk Rock Festival and, as they step onstage, they are greeted with lung-bursting cheers.

"We've got another underground at last," shouts an ecstatic youth, almost in tears. "I've waited seven years for this."

Over the nine months the Pistols have played together, Rotten has developed his stage presence beyond the realms even his most ardent fans imagined.

He is still presenting audiences with dark fragments of his psyche. He once moved over the stage, squirming and jiggering, rarely motionless. Lately, he doesn't move. He can be quite sickeningly still. He sets my skin crawling.

He wore a bondage suit for the festival. It's a black affair, dangling with zips, chains, safety pins and crucifixes. He is bound around the chest and knees, apparently a confinement symbolising the urban reality which he sees around him.

The set begins. The band hit their instruments in unison. It's the fanfare intro to "Anarchy In The U.K." SMASH — and their instantly identifiable, eviscerating splurge sends the fans wild. Johnny strains at his jumpsuit. He breaks and burns into "I Wanna Be Me." The crowd sprawls at his feet.

"All right," says Johnny, calmly disengaging his feet from the melee, "all off the stage, chuckies..."

The photographers fight for better shots, the pogo dancers leap above the crowd, sweat pours, and the crush rolls forward and back from the stage.

The band, lifted by the positive vibes, deliver perfect versions of "Seventeen," "I'm A Lazy Sod," "New York," "Pushing And A Shovin'." The fans call out for "Sub-Mission." "Next number," draws Johnny. It's the Monkees' "Stepping Stone." Then "I Love You," their cynical anthem to suburbia.

Steve breaks open, flinging his guitar diagonally across his chest and, slicing up his turt, leading the band through a breathless one hour and 15 minutes of thunderous rock 'n' roll. They play "Sub-Mission," "Liar" — a favourite with the audience — "No Feelings," "Substitute," and "Pretty Vacant," and they finish the set with "Problems" and "No Fun." They are called back for an encore.

The Sex Pistols were terrific. Compulsively physical, frightening in their teenage vision of world disintegration, refreshing in their musical directness. And, behind the brave, aggressive front, they are utterly winning, with their shy, good-humoured charm. Whether their music will make the Top 20 or not is irrelevant. They're doing it for a new generation of rock fans who think they're fantastic.

Even though there was a couple of punk-type argie bargies (definitely settled by Ron the promoter), and even though Stinky Toys didn't get the chance to play (they ran out of time), the first evening of the festival was a huge success.

THE AUDIENCE on the second night of the festival was conspicuously longer-haired and more denim-clad. The atmosphere is competitive still, but without the reigning kings there's not the same buzz.

Ellie (20), the Stinky Toys

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CHRIS SPEDDING: ideal to jam with THE VIBRATORS

Punk rock

singer, has calmed down. The night before, when she realised the band wouldn't play, she'd made the not too successful exit of a prima donna — kick, push, tut-tut at tables as she ran out onto Oxford Street where, it is said, she was saved from wounding herself under a bus.

Her band is very French, i.e. very, very serious. They've frowned for two days and they frown even more when, after three very short numbers, including "Under My Thumb," they get nil reaction from the crowd.

There's Bruno Carone (lead guitar), Jacno (rhythm), Oswald (bass) and Herve on drums. They play completely out of tune, even though they spend minutes between numbers tuning-up.

Ellie's voice, one of those "typical shrews" with a high-pitched whine, has 90 per cent of the older male population diving back to the bar. And yet? Well, even though she sings in English and not one of the words from songs like "Pe Pe Gestapo" — or "Kill The Pain" or "Driver Blues" is intelligible, she has presence. You have to watch her.

Which singers, I asked Ellie before she dashed off to catch the last train to Paris, have most influenced her? "Brenda Lee," she said, "and Glenda Jackson." Ump.

The Damned: There's already something very special about this band. They've come a long way from the night three months ago when they played their first gig at the Nashville. Not that they actually played together that night. Rather, each one of them did his own number in a private daze.

Out of time, out of key, the cacophony was terrible enough to be great. The band took to the stage like famished maggots on an overripe cheese. They are all born performers, without a shred of inhibition.

Rat Scabies drums as solidly as an express train. Ray Burns (bass), whose lips always glisten with Woolworth's best 'pearly pink Tu lipstick, chooses to fool everyone with a front as mad as a village idiot's.

Bryan James (lead guitar), the band's "elder," is likely to look up from his guitar and catch Rat and Ray acting out their holed star trips and crack up with spontaneous laughter.

Their lead singer is Dave Vanium. He was a gravedigger until last week, and he looks as if he's risen from Dracula's crypt. On-stage he hisses. And, for one so new to the game, he can keep a show going through appalling obstacles.

As they steam blissfully through "One Of The Two" and their soon-to-be released single, "New Rose" (Stiff), the sound is atrocious. Vanium's mike keeps crackling and cutting out, but the show goes on with the minimum of fuss.

Halfway through "Aione" they take off, pile-driving and crazy-fierce, but after their non-revivalist version of the Beatles' "Help," the music staggers to a halt. The new roadie has to fix the equipment.

"We're sorry to sound just like the last band," leers Dave, "but we can't help it," and he rips into the Stooges' "Feel Alright."

Suddenly he leaps into the audience. O.K., that's par for the course. But when he gets back up again he screams with a conviction which transcends a stage act: "someone has just hit me very near and dear to me." The show goes on, but Dave is on the verge of freaking.

Three minutes later three people appear at the back of the club. There is no commotion but they are bleeding. The atmosphere chills. On to the stage jumps the club's manager. "If there're any more glasses thrown," he yells, "you'll all have to go home."

The show starts again for "So Messed Up." The last number. The band scream through it, black and moody, slamming out the last riffs before they make a dash to the dressing-room.

Dave, whose girlfriend was one of the injured people,

heads straight for the street in time to sit in the ambulance as it heads for hospital.

A glass lobbed at the stage hits a pillar, and shatters and sprays the audience instead.

Malcolm McLaren, the Sex Pistols' manager, tries to buy a drink and is refused because the barman doesn't want any more missiles flying through the air.

"Why don't you serve drinks in plastic cups?" asked Malcolm.

"Who do you think we are?" is the reply. "We're civilised down here."

The Vibrators — and Chris Spedding: The show goes on. The first time the Vibrators — John Ellis (lead guitar), Knox (lead vocals) and Jon Edwards (drums) — played at the 100 Club, their manager-cum-bassist Pat Collins told me: "We don't really go along with the punk rock thing, but it's the fashion, isn't it?"

Since then they've gone deeper into the "punk rock" thing.

And, since Chris Spedding hasn't managed to form a band, they are the ideal bunch for him to jam with.

Their first number (Spedding joins them later) is a bluesy carnage of "I Saw Her Standing There." Then they spew into "Jumping Jack Flash."

By this time policemen, plain clothed and in uniform, are mingling with the audience.

The Vibrators play on. Spedding joins them. He's dressed in black from head to foot, and his eyes are like coal-holes in his white face.

He grinds into "Hungry Man." It's simple and bold. "I'm in a bad condition," sings Sped, "the doctor says I got malnutrition." He's just audible; holding back, not really fronting the band.

He humps into "Motorbiking." Ray Burns, who's standing at the side of the stage, can resist no longer. Up to the mikes he leaps. They are turned off until he

reaches the other side of the stage.

Spedding's cool. Ray sings the choruses, and the audience, seeing that Spedding is trying to slip away, cheer him back again.

They all mash into "Great Balls Of Fire," and for good measure, with half the audience groaning "boring," and the other leaping about — they wring life into "Let's Twist Again."

The Buzzcocks: This Manchester band was formed less than two months ago. The front line — Howard Devoto (vocals), Peter Shelly (who plays a chopped-in-half, second-hand "Starway") and Steve Diggle (bass) — are pint-sized. Howard, who doesn't speak to the audience much, has just dyed his mousy hair orange. All the band's energy implodes around John Maher's drum kit.

Through numbers like "Breakdown," "Organ Addict," "Boredom" and "Oh Shit," their sound is quaintly compact. But their approach, though very energetic, is unnecessarily defensive. Devoto insists that he is only in a rock band "temporarily," and his self-consciousness impedes them coming across. He hates being on stage.

The festival ends with the Buzzcocks fluttering into the audience and Peter Shelley's guitar, still on stage, feeding-back. It pounds out a gut-renting lub-dub, lub-dub, like the no-feeling sound of a robot's heartbeat.

It was a bitter-sweet two days. There was a fine display of inventive music, plenty of hope, a lot of fun, and revived spirits. The star bands gave their best, and the newcomers were very entertaining. But, echoing the black spots in almost all festivals this summer, someone was badly hurt by an alcohol container.

Thus the optimism of this otherwise milestone event was undercut with sadness. Nobody wants to see the fiery, aggressive energy in the music diminished. But, promoters, increasingly eager to book punk-rock bands, must take a few elementary precautions (like plastic mugs) to protect their very young audience. It's the only sensible way to present their scene.