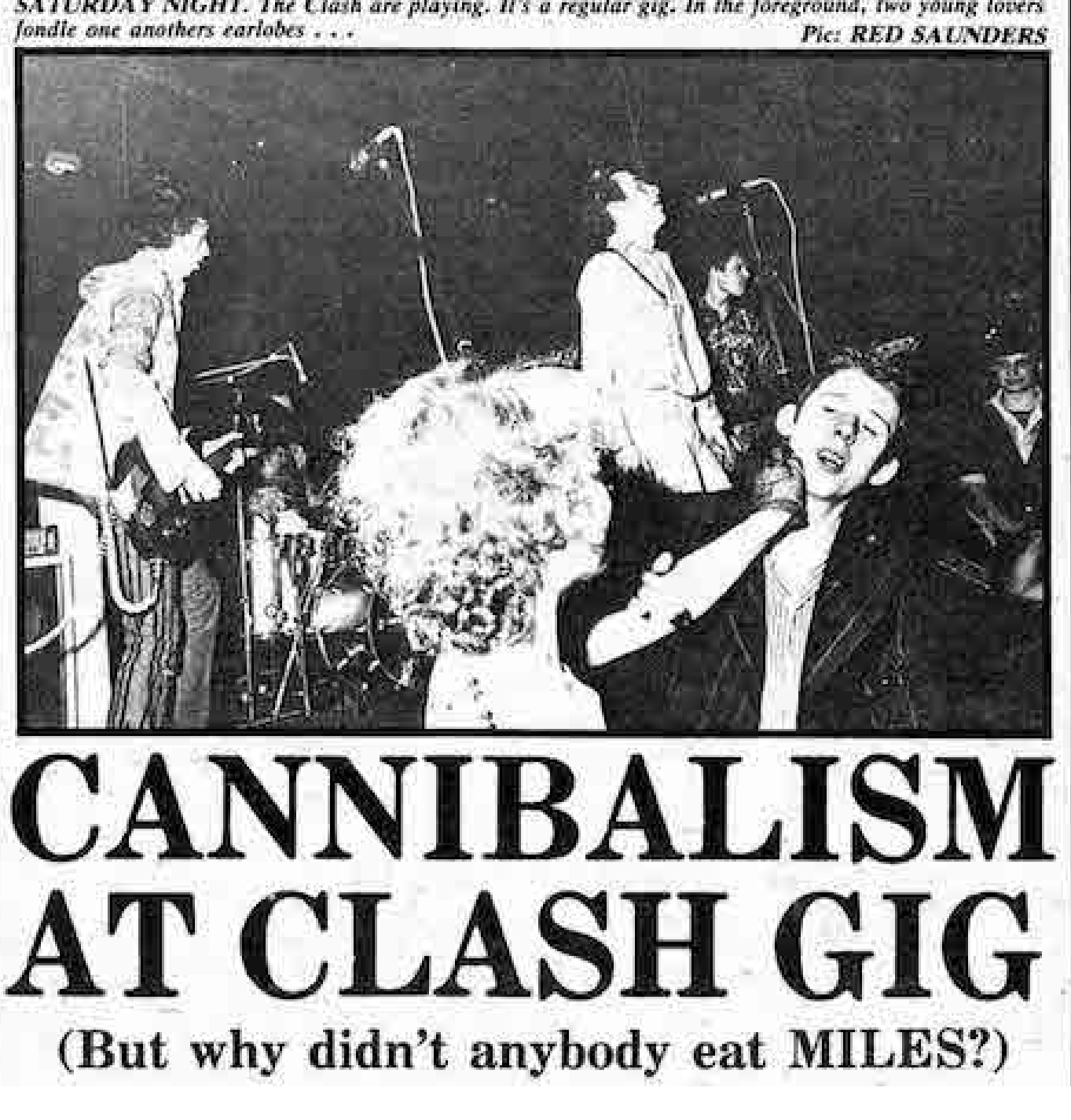


SHANE MACGOWAN PERPETRATES 'CANNIBALISM AT CLASH GIG,' 1976



CANNIBALISM AT CLASH GIG

(But why didn't anybody eat MILES?)

On Saturday, October 23, 1976, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London hosted a show by the brand-new punk sensation known as the Clash. It was an eventful evening by any reckoning.

The openers were Subway Sect and Snatch Sounds, who seem not to have made much of an impression. At that point the Clash and the Sex Pistols were in a category of two in terms of being at the absolute pinnacle of delivering pissed-off punk music and generating the electric excitement of punk (and the associated publicity too). The night before and that night too, Patti Smith was playing the Hammersmith Odeon but managed to make her way to the ICA so that she could dance onstage to "Im So Bored with the U.S.A." As will be easily imagined, the audience was in a rowdy mood and the alcohol was flowing freely. The show had been billed as "a night of pure energy," and it surely lived up to that.

In the November 6, 1976, issue of the New Musical Express ran an account of the show written by Barry Miles, who preferred to go simply by "Miles" as a *nom de journalisme*. The cheeky, startling headline of the piece was "CANNIBALISM AT CLASH GIG," with the subtitle "But why didn't anybody eat MILES?" At the top and the bottom of the writeup were two pictures, taken by Red Saunders, of Shane MacGowan and a renowned punk fan named Jane Crockford, unflatteringly nicknamed "Mad Jane." The pictures show indistinct mayhem as well as a generous portion of blood flowing from MacGowan's right earlobe. Interestingly, both of the subjects were, or would be, in notable bands of their own; MacGowan was in the Nipple Erectors and (of course) the Pogues, while Jane was in the Bank of Dresden and the Mo-dettes.

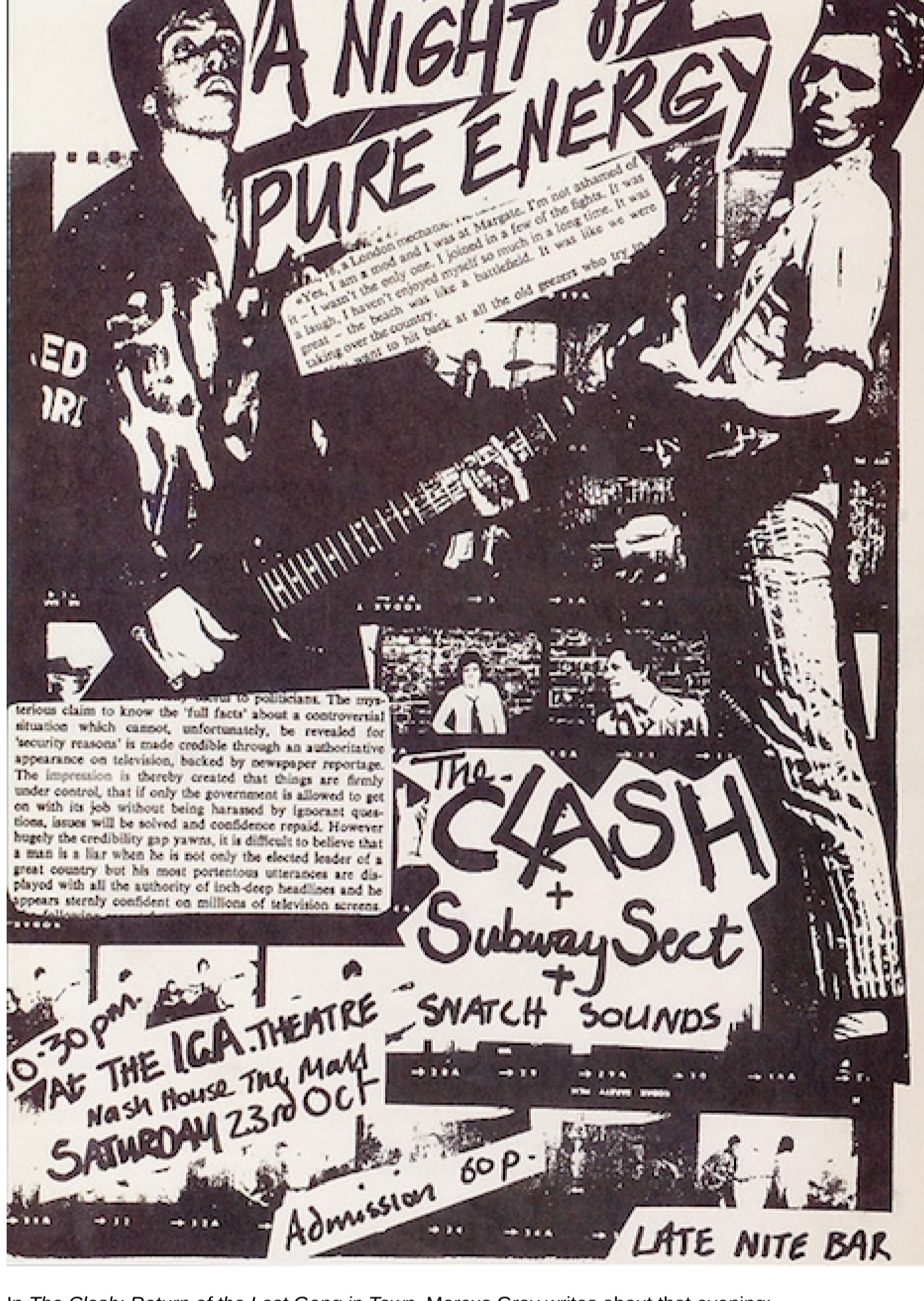


In Bob Gruen's must-own book The Clash he gets Mick Jones and Paul Simonon to comment on the show.

Mick: That was the night of Shane MacGowan's earlobe, wasn't it? He didn't really have it bitten off, you know. Isn't that the same show where Patti Smith got up on stage during our set?

Paul: That was the ICA—it was called A Night of Pure Energy. My haircut's gone very good; it had flopped down from all the jumping around onstage. In the beginning all that jumping about was a way of dodging gobs and missiles generally. There's Joe with his sharks' teeth—when I first met him they looked just like a real sharks' teeth.

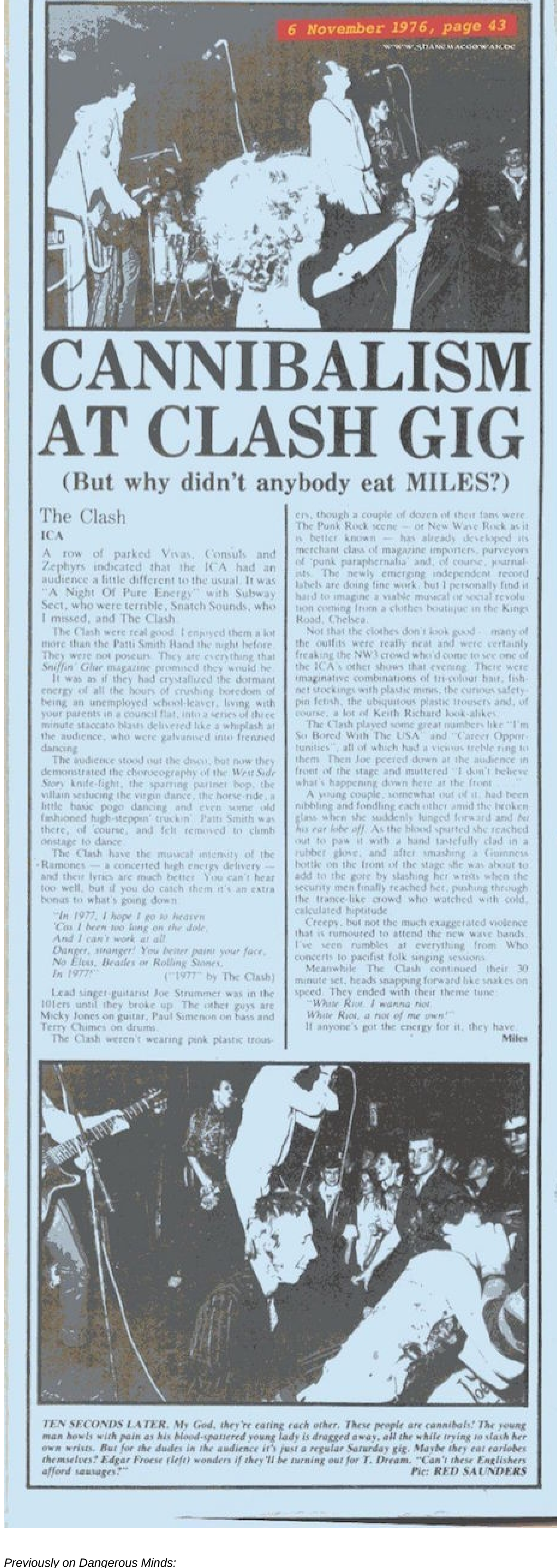
Gruen notes of the MacGowan incident that it gave the Clash "their first significant press coverage." He also quotes Joe Strummer as saying, "Without Mad Jane's teeth and Shane's earlobe, we wouldn't have got in the papers that week."



In The Clash: Return of the Last Gang in Town, Marcus Gray writes about that evening:

When the Clash started playing, a couple in front of Miles and Red were obstructing their view of the band. Apparently intent on attacking each other while laughing like maniacs, they refused to move out of the way. So Red took pictures of them. "I had no idea how famous those photos were to become." The NME used them to accompany Miles's report under the headline "CANNIBALISM AT CLASH GIG": "A young couple, somewhat out of it, had been nibbling and fondling each other amid the broken glass when she suddenly lunged forward and *bit his ear lobe off* [while the crowd] watched with cold, calculate hipitude." ... the Clash gig was a wild night fuelled by speed and alcohol. The bar staff entered into the spirit of the evening to such an extent that they gave away a further £80 worth of booze ... and the twosome Miles and Red observed, Mad Jane and Shane MacGowan, were by no means content to loiter at the back of the queue.

"Me and this girl were having a bit of a laugh which involved biting each other's arms till they were completely covered in blood and then smashing up a couple of bottles and cutting each other up a bit," Shane informed ZigZag's Granuaille in 1986, setting the record straight on the occasion of punk's 10th anniversary, and, in the process, offering another insight into the mythopoeitics of 10th. "That, in those days, was the sort of thing that people used to do. I haven't got a clue now why I did it or why anyone would want to do it, but that was how teenagers got their kicks in London if they were hip. Anyway, in the end she went a bit over the top and bottled me in the side of the head. Gallons of blood came out and someone took a photograph. I never got it bitten off—although we had bitten each other to bits—it was just a heavy cut." As Shane noted, though, the anecdote was exaggerated with each telling. "It's like the old story about the bloke who catches the fish. He says that it weighs *this* much and it's *that* big, and within a couple of days it's a whale." Over the years, few have been prepared to let the fact that his earlobes are both present and correct stand in the way of a good story.



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