

Punk! On stage!

IT WAS hard to imagine how the sell-out first night of the Sex Pistols' banned and besicged tour would go down with the students of Leeds Polytechnic. Although the single "Anarchy In The UK" is played on their refectory juke box, 95 per cent of them have never seen the band before. When the Clash stride on stage, the audience are subdued. They stood silently, the quietest rock and roll crowd I've seen in years. Lead vocalist Joe Strummer, with newly bleached hair, grabs the mike. "I've been going around for two days thinking Big Brother is really here," he shouts, but the students, whose collective policy is obviously when in doubt don't react at all, give him a blank. The band's fast, committed songs are the quintessence of new-wave rock and fight hard to stir the impassive crowd, but well though they play "White Riot," "London's Burning" and the debut of their new number, "Hate And War," there are no encores.

The Heartbreakers (soon to be renamed the Junkies) managed to thaw the audience. Johnny Thunder (guitar, vocals) and Jerry Nolan (both ex-New York Dolls) with Walter Lure (guitar) and Billy Roth (bass) present speedy if traditional rock and roll. Johnny, moving like a pneumatic steer, slides through a slick battery of moody poses. Numbers like "Chinese Rock," "Let Go" and "Born Too Loose" are delivered with raunchy, gut-level grind, and are free of the sound problems that plagued the Clash. They are explosively well-received.

The Damned are next. They never deal in half-heartedness and Dave Vanian lifts on stage in full yell. He sings "Heat, neat, neat, help" from their single "New Rose" with idiosyncratic deadpan aggression. Brian James (guitar) is the perfect foil, as is manically grinning Ray Burns (bass), and Rat Scabies punishes his drum kit with compound riffs of machine-gun precision.

and packed with dynamic energy.

When Johnny Rotten at last stands in the spotlight he is greeted like a trooper returned victorious from wars. "We're dedicating this event to local councillors, Bill Grundy and the Queen" he cynically leers. It's a popular gesture. But, although the Sex Pistols are playing with the flood-gate release of frustration you'd expect from musicians locked in hotel bedrooms escaping the national press for four days, it takes Johnny a whole set to allay the audience's suspicion of him.

Unimpressed by the local talents' "London boys" taunts, he sneers, glares and finally goads the audience into a laughing reaction to his jokes. He steers the band through a trouble-free, thunderously powerful set, but after the encore, even though the students want him back for more, everyone is left wondering what all the fuss is about. — CAROLINE COON.