

pix by Annette Weatherman



THE FRONT LINE

JOE STRUMMER says he'll smash my face in if I so much as print a syllable of what's said in the dressing room of the Aberdeen Students Union hall in the first few minutes of last Saturday morning, so I won't.

It doesn't matter anyway — not what was said at any rate, even less who said it. What matters — and all I feel obliged to communicate — is that despite the fact that the selout crowd of eight hundred-odd kids has mostly trickled its way out into the Scottish night, Joe and the rest of the band are still up on that stage, still communicating with their dispersed audience.

And what also matters is that despite rapturous applause and cries for at least a second encore which were only beaten into submission by the somewhat — to say the least — inapposite introduction of a Steve Miller track onto the PA emitted at maximum volume, The Clash are far from happy.

Well alright — you show me a rock 'n' roll band who come offstage having gone down as well as The Clash did tonight who pat one

another on the back heartily and then immediately set about getting high and/or laid and — ninety nine times out of a hundred anyway — I'll show you a shitty rock 'n' roll band.

The real rock 'n' rollers, the ones who — no matter how competent their technique, how rich their repertoire, the volume of their wit and wisdom etcetera etcetera — are worth caring about, are the bands who don't stop the moment they step off that stage.

Strummer's face is as red as it is when he's spitting out the lyrics of 'London's Burning', his eyes just as vivid. Mick Jones' face isn't as easily read as Joe's; his unrelieved pallor merely heightens the inscrutability of his features.

All the same, when he says he just wants the kids to get their full thirty bob's worth there's not even the tiniest suspicion in my mind that he means every word. And that he'd be saying the same thing if he were the only person in the room. The fact that there's around a dozen people here doesn't make one jot of difference because — with the exception of yours truly

— everyone here's a part of The Clash, all — like the band are shamelessly, proudly even, always quick to remind anyone from 'outside' — part of the family.

And you show me a family that doesn't fight occasionally and I'll show you a unit living in a tangle of lies and illusions.

In fact, as time passes and tempers cool, it'll turn out that at least half the band — namely bassist Paul Simonon and drummer Nick 'Topper' Headdon — were a lot happier with tonight's show than yesterday's. But that's for later.

EARLIER GOES something like this: at around seven the kids are already blocking the entrance and the downstairs bar has till drawers which keep popping out for just one more mouthfull of moolah like till drawers will when there's a dry mob pressed up against the bars. Paul's downstairs playing a slot machine. Mick's at the foot of the improbably high stage waiting for the others to do the soundcheck. Nicky's already behind his

kit, making exploratory runs.

The rectangular hall's empty, the only activity at present being on the stage itself and at the back of the hall where the mixer and turntables are located. The Clash's backdrop — a large blow-up of the police rioting at Ladbroke Grove last year as featured on the back of the album cover — is in place. Black curtains open and close in front of it.

Manager Bernie Rhodes follows his pink shoes around the room, mouthing his displeasure at its dimensions, those of the stage and the various other inevitable kinks lurking in the corners of an unfamiliar venue. Finally Joes turns up and the band do a brief soundcheck. The room's cold.

Not so an hour later with eight hundred assorted bodies in it, a fair number of them twitching in and out of time with the group's homemade filler tape of old and new sounds from JA.

Downstairs Clash roadie Rodent shows another member of the road crew how to open a bottle of beer with the palm of his hand and a tuppenny piece.

Subway Sect are wandering about in their lower than low profile on and off-stage outfits.

They look like displaced schoolboys in third generation hand-me-downs of that murky grey nearest black, the kind you have to wear in those schools whose controllers have Public School pretensions — a uniform but only just — and whose kids can't afford any better. Clothes you want to set fire to as soon as you leave, burn away all the egg and cum and piss stains and darned pockets along with as many of the memories as possible. As an attitude it's interesting but uninspiring. If, on the other hand, you spent six or seven years in the kind of zoo that insisted on just such a look it's more than a little unnerving.

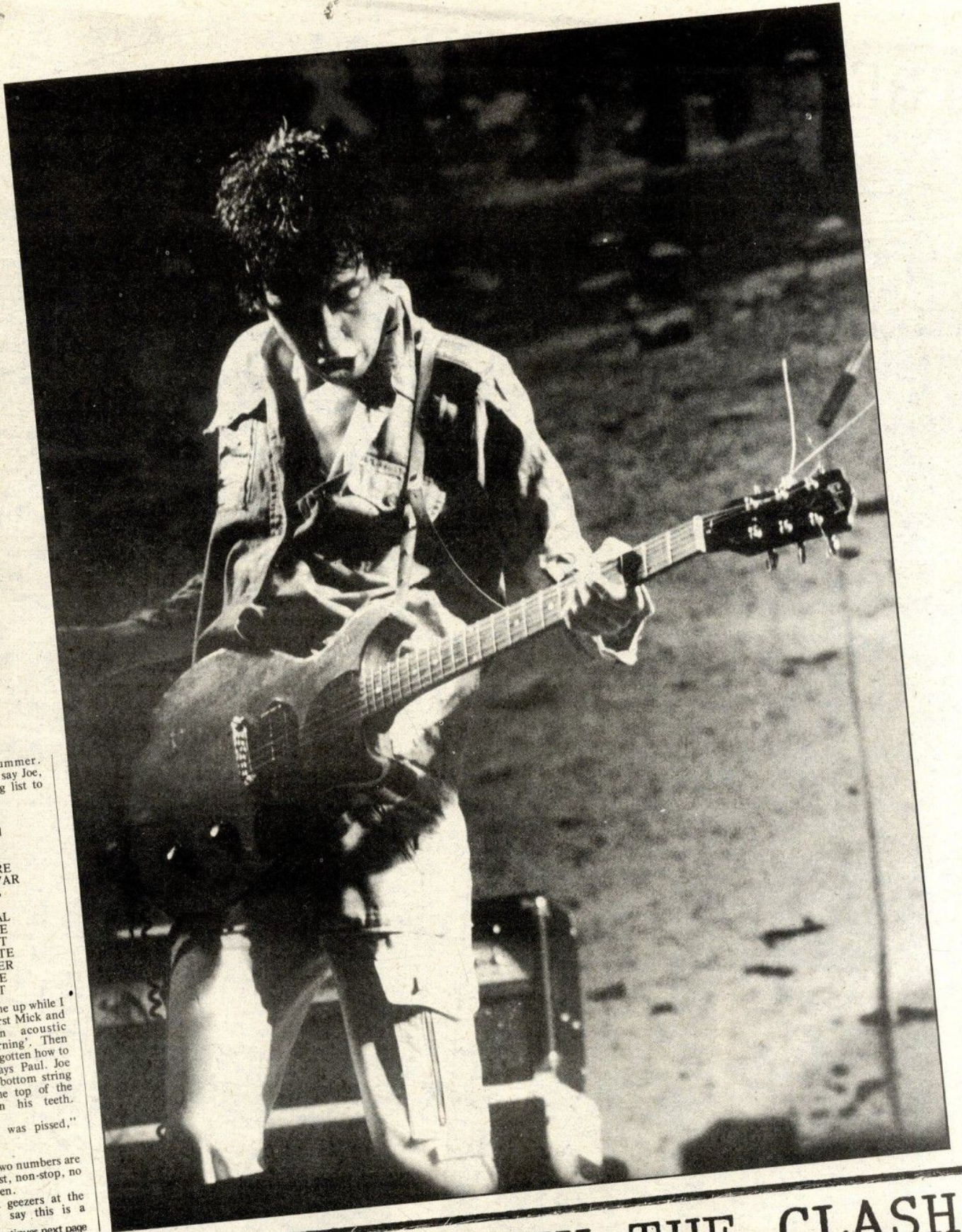
Like The Clash, Subway Sect have a new drummer, latest of many. He hasn't quite got used to the band's hatred of jeans and everything American just yet; very young and ever so green, his lower half in tight taboo denims. Says The Damned are his favourite band and he's nervous. Feels better when told Keith Moon throws up before

every gig: "He's my favourite drummer."

Ten minutes later the South London four-piece are on. Their sound is immediately recognisable for what it is — plenty shades of other, more familiar, bands living under the New Wave umbrella. Too nervous and too loose by far though; very green. Still, behind all the shoddy equipment and lack of experience there's a little promise. Time is on their side, and doing this tour will help them no end.

And what about the people who paid to be here tonight? One or two voices of dissent fure ("These people get written about in the papers," burrs an incredulous voice behind me) but the overall reaction is one of warm encouragement.

THE CLASH are almost ready. Strummer's in a black shirt with a screaming yellow stencil announcing FACE OF THE ASSASSIN. Someone comes in and introduces himself as a "retired rock critic". Wears one of those little Bogart badges which, from a distance, looks a lot like the



back-hired Strummer. You're a writer," say Joe, handing me a song list to copy out.

It goes like this:

- LONDON
- 1977
- BORED
- PRESSURE
- HATE & WAR
- 48 HRS
- DENY
- CAPITAL
- POLICE
- CHEAT
- REMOTE
- CAREER
- JANIE
- RIOT

The band tune up while I do my lines; first Mick and Joe with an acoustic 'London's Burning'. Then Paul. "I've forgotten how to play bass," says Paul. Joe listens to his bottom string by holding the top of the bass between his teeth. Ready.

"I wish I was pissed," says Joe.

"I don't."

The first two numbers are as per the list, non-stop, no words between.

"The old geezers at the front, they say this is a

Continues next page

ON THE ROAD WITH THE CLASH

By Giovanni Dadomo