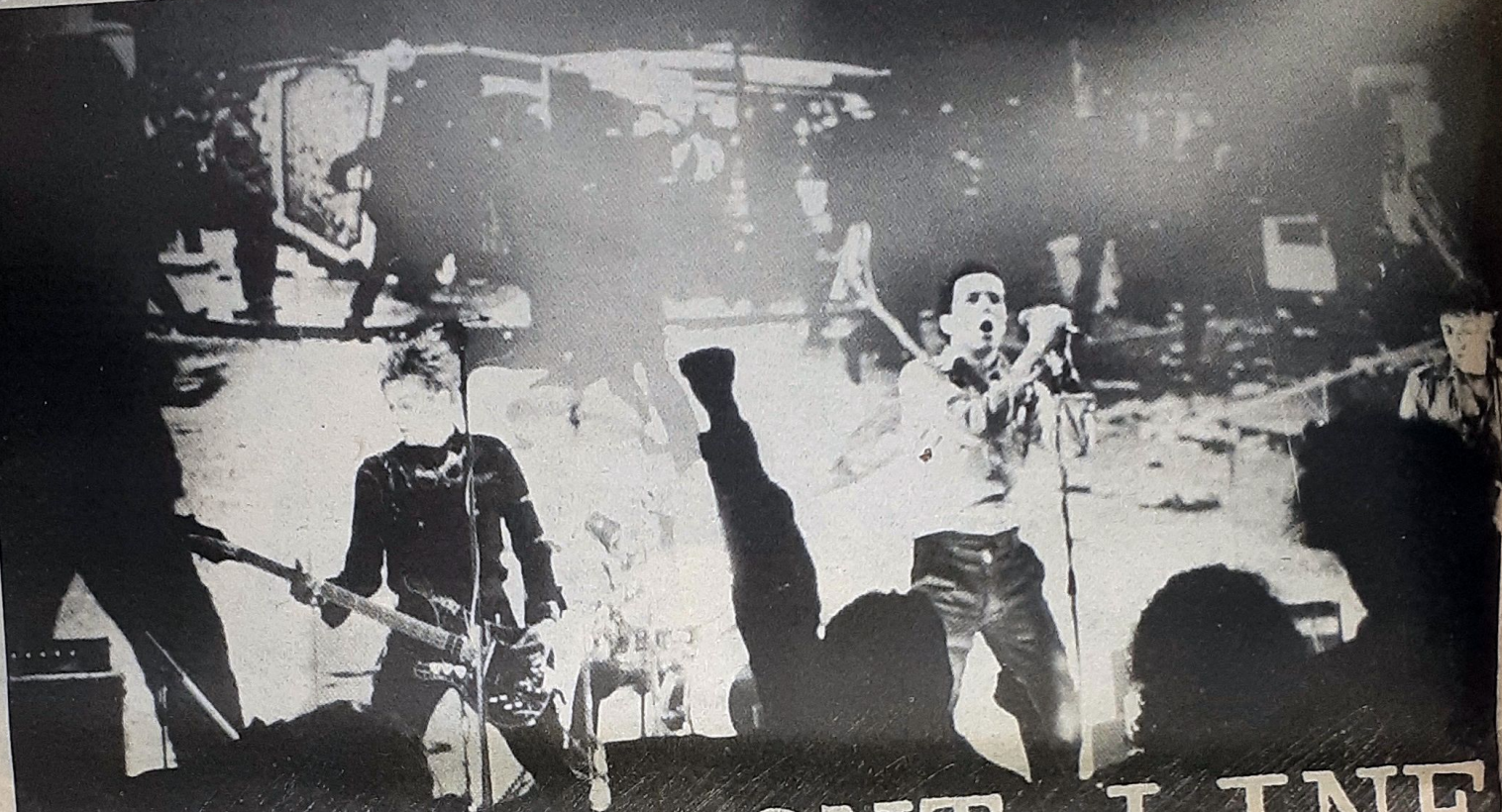


pix by Annette Weatherman



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 sellout 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.

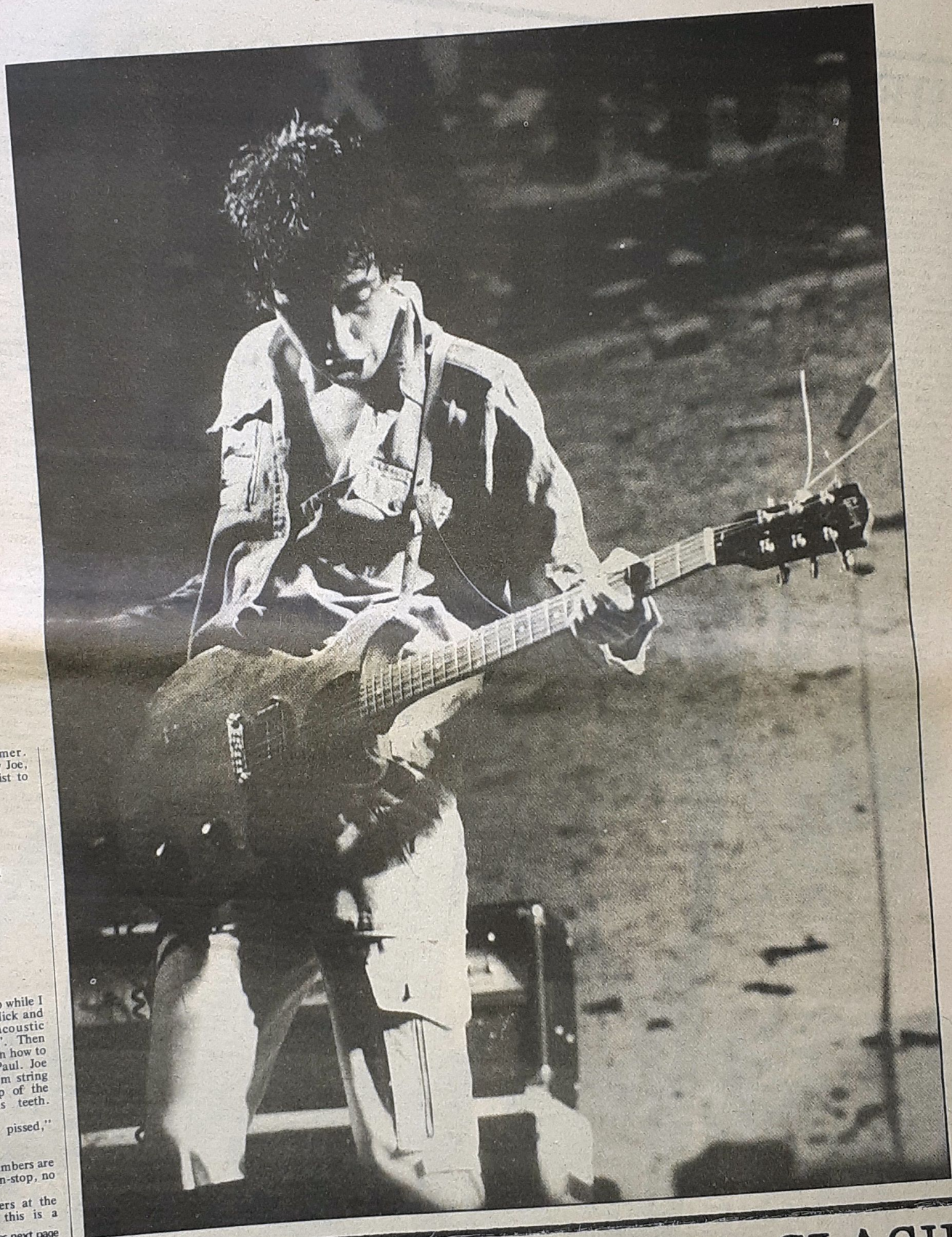
Like The Clash, Subway Sect have a new drummer, latest of many. He hasn't quite got used to the band's hatred of jeans and everything American just yet; very young and ever so green, his lower half in tight taboo denims. Says The Damned are his favourite band and he's nervous. Feels better when told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



black-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

THE FRONT LINE

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dance," snarls Strummer by way of introduction to the group's version of Toots Hibbert's 'Pressure Drop', totally transformed until it could almost be a Clash original. Plenty fire alright.

Something wrong with Joe's guitar though. He passes it back to a roadie and does the song empty handed. Then 'Deny' ("a sick love song") building up to 'Capital Radio' with its tiny pause clearing the air for Mick's searing re-entry on a path of death-blow chords. Temperature's high and still rising. At the end of the song this bloke leans across to a chick he probably met five minutes ago.

"Boring isn't it?"

"No!"

Too true toots — 'Cheat' and 'Career Opportunities' thunder across the hall, Mick Jones turning in a remarkable performance considering the fact that, with Strummer's instrument still out of action there's next to no room for him to solo and — vastly more important — that his all-important right index finger has gone septic and is consequently swollen some half inch thicker than its normal size. Poor bastard must be in agony but it doesn't stop him playing the way most established axe heroes ought to give a whole right arm for.

Finally the long postponed 'Police And Thieves', Joe finally has his guitar back but it's still cocked up. Strummer's reaction matches the cobra-strike sound of The Clash perfectly: as they hit the instrumental break he suddenly twirls around and hurls the guitar into the wings.

The music flames on — '48 Thrills', 'Remote Control', 'White Riot', 'Garageland' and a '1977' that's everything the Kinks forgot more than a decade ago and a little bit more. They encore with 'Janie Jones' and 'What's My Name'.

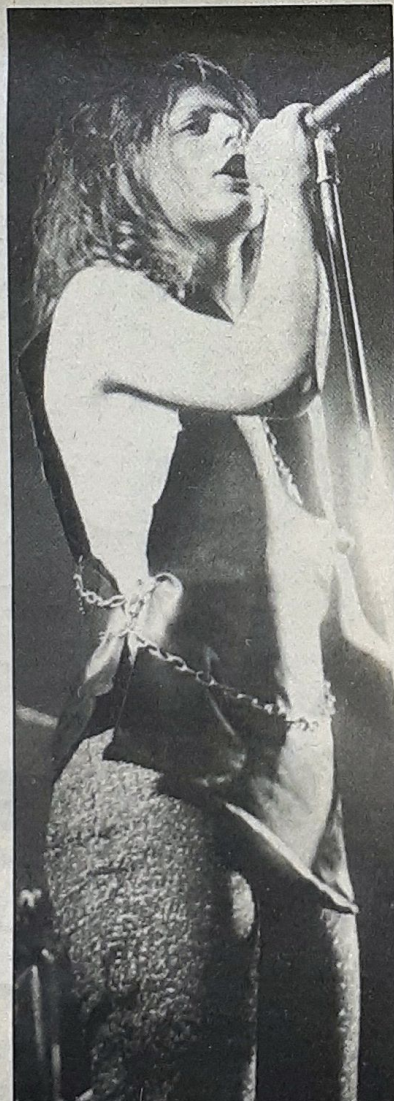
Then comes the dressing room scene. Outside the dressing room is a different kind of positive — like the guy who organised the gig wanting to shake hands with anyone even remotely connected with the group. "A lot of people weren't too sure about punk rock but they changed their minds tonight," he enthuses.

And it's true — if you'd never seen the band before you'd have to have been pretty decrepit not to have been amazed at the show. And if you had?

If you had but only twice this whole year you'd still have been amazed. Of course they could be even better, but the fact remains that even a handicapped Clash is an easy ten times more damned exciting than most of the bands I've seen in ten years of rock'n'roll consumption. And better than a record too, even if — like me — you happen to rate the group's album right up along with this or any other era's all-time peaks.



BUZZCOCKS: another record — now!



SLITS: Ari Up: contenders

SATURDAY'S Edinburgh with a paying cast of twelve hundred packing the stalls of The Playhouse Theatre. This one's a biggie — five bands on the bill and a PA which, says Bernie an hour before the gig, "is like two transistor radios."

I enjoy this one even more.

First up — The Slits. I caught them at their Harlesden debut and — to be totally honest — I thought they were crap. And crap's crap no matter who's responsible. This time around though there's no denying they came across as a band — period.

A lot of this has to do with some mean guitar courtesy of one Vivien, she who used to be in the group Sid Vicious had before he joined the Pistols. I forget their name and I don't think they ever played any gigs but V's the girl on the cover of 'Moron' fanzine with the amazingly thick fair hair. Ten out of ten image-wise too to drummer Palm Olive who came on decked out like Jimmy Cliff in 'The Harder They Come', right

down to the leopard-skin motif shirt. Great, even if I was too dumb to suss it until it was pointed out. Later the Slits didn't seem too happy with it at all. They should worry — from nowhere to where they were on Saturday is one heck of a hop. They're contenders, 'nuff said.

Subway Sect followed. Better than Aberdeen but still lacking. Trouble with my saying anything about them I realise is it's a real effort. So inspire me.

You out there shouldn't take my word for it anyway, as my next paragraph will demonstrate.

See, next set is The Buzzcocks and I think they're one of the most original and refreshing bands in England. Only the first time I saw them when they did the Screen with the Pistols and Clash in the Autumn I described them as — and I quote — "rougier than a bear's arse." Caught them again at the 100 Club fest and still hated them. Then they put out an EP called 'Spiral Scratch' and after four or five plays I was a fan. Still drop "Ba-dum

ba-dum" into all manner of conversations at every opportunity.

But you know about that I hope. At least some five thousand people who've bought the record do by now.

As for the set — aside from the superb 'Boredom' (from a bear's arse to superb, eh?) and 'Break-down', there's plenty of new songs that're just as good — 'Oh Shit', 'Orgasm Addict' and 'Fast Cars' among them.

Afterwards I made myself known to guitarist/singer Pete Shelley and he didn't even hit me.

Actually we managed to communicate with lubricated ease, Pete telling me among other things that he'd just had his measly ten quid-odd of dole money shafted because someone saw him on TV and assumed he was well across the breadline and in Maserati country.

And I say wise up gentlemen of the A&R and booking agencies and fill this sparkling little band's bellies. And make it soon. I want another Buzzcocks record. And I want it NOW.

THE CLASH ... Jesus, they're my favourite rock 'n' roll and it's a privilege to be able to see them two nights running. I don't ... y'know ... sit and scribble notes and all that shit ... I just get very high at actually being there.

So tonight Paul's bass breaks down and the show pauses for an uncomfortably long time until The Jam's very own Rickenbacker Kid hands over his own axe and saves the day. But that's detail, something for Mick and Joe and Paul and Topper (who's a great little drummer by the way) to lie awake worrying about. I really had a great time. And it's Monday morning and I've been up all night banging out this doodah and listening to the album over and over and I'm still bopping.

And I'm gonna see 'em again tonight alright alright alright and I can't tell you how glad I am this fabulous band exists ★ I just ★ just ★ wanna set ★ fire ★ to ★ the ★ bloody ★ TYPEWRITER ★ and ★

And dance to my favourite band.



SUBWAY SECT: promise behind the shoddy equipment