

**SKYNYRD / PISTOLS / HILLAGE / IGGY / BEBOP
SPARKS / SHAM 69 / JAGGER**

SOUNDS



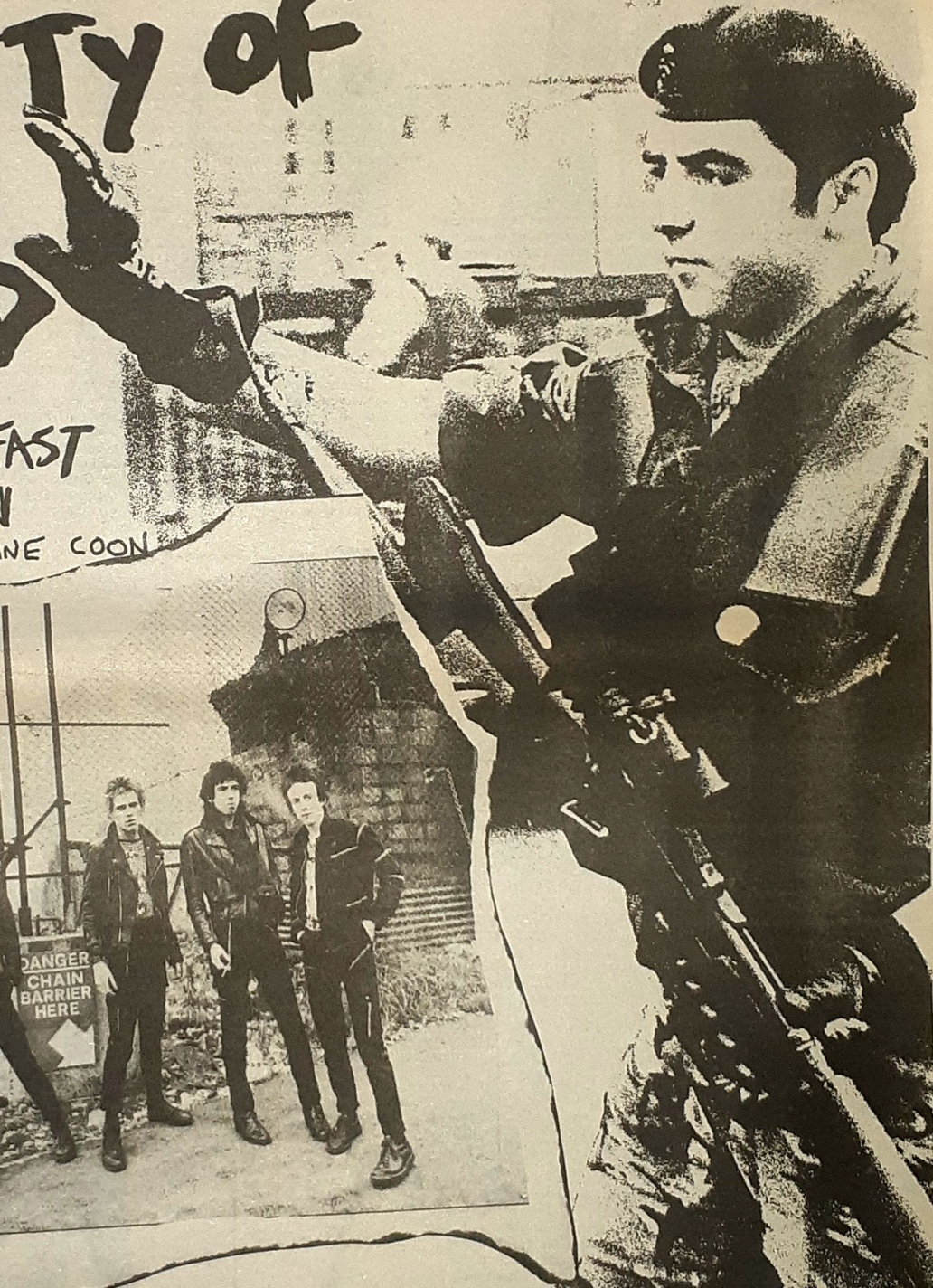
pic by Adrian Boot

Clash City Rockers

CLASH IN THE CITY OF THE DEAD

NO FUN IN BELEAST AND LONDON

BY GIOVANNI DADOMO & CAROLINE COON



PICTURES BY ADRIAN BOOT

CRAZY WORLD. Not five hundred yards and a corner away there's a former cinema still in the throes of conversion to pop-theatre. Big posters everywhere and one word in red: ELVIS. Huge speakers in the foyer belt out so-so Elvis impersonations so loud you have to listen to them even across on the opposite side of Charing Cross Road. London, England, capital of a free country this is. Meaning you have to suffer necrophiliac

abomination but you can't play a transistor radio in Hyde or any other city Park.

And just around the corner, up in the CBS building they've got this big rectangular room with a huge table taking up most of the floorspace and all around the wall there's framed and colourful mugshots of the people who paid for the room, the table and even the pictures themselves. Say hello to Bob Dylan, to Paul Simon, to a lot of other familiar faces everybody knows the names of.

"Where's ours? Where's our picture?" Joe Strummer wants to know where The Clash picture is and there isn't one.

Which might be a good thing really

because this is no ordinary room. You could n't live in this box with its technicolour saints looking down from every wall like Stations of the Cross in a church for record executives; this room with its clean, clean carpet, monster table, empty chairs and the blank cinema screen at one end.

You can't even be comfortable in a room like this. Strummer tries. Strummer lies across the end of the table like Roman Senators do in Hollywood orgy scenes but it doesn't feel too good so he has to keep shifting the elbow his head's propped on or moving his legs until finally he just gives up and looks for things in corners. He finds some paper and makes a plane with it, one of those

planes every schoolkid makes like they based Concorde on.

Mick Jones isn't quite so restless but then he's got a pair of impenetrable wraparound shades for protection. Mick sets himself down almost opposite Strummer and hardly moves at all.

Bassist Paul Simeon's up this end, relaxed by comparison to the others, feet up. Paul was here an hour ago, which was an hour too early so we had tea in a cafe around the corner. Even though he's dressed very modestly in t-shirt and dark trousers people still move a little awkwardly as they pass him at the counter or sneak sly glance over their late afternoon racing papers. Maybe it's the faint traces of pale two-inch parallel scars on his

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THE CLASH

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cheekbones, African tribe style. More likely just his attitude, the way he stands, that suggestion of harnessed power about him.

Weird really, all that vibe nonsense — Paul's always the most easily talkative of The Clash. He laughs easily and often and he doesn't play with words or say more or less than needs to be said. We chat easily about the just-completed European tour. Less than a week ago the London office of CBS was half expecting to have seen the last of The Clash forever. They were playing Sweden that weekend and the word was out that the local motorised bully-boys, the Rags, were out to get them. And where they normally went for their victims with chains or coshes — and 'punks' were high on the destructible list — this time around they were said to be carrying guns.

Simon's reply's a short laugh. In fact, he reveals, The Rags and The Clash got on very well, the former even acting as unpaid bodyguards on some occasions.

For the most part the tour wasn't too much fun though. One place in Germany was a bomb scare at a restaurant and the band had to leave just as their food arrived. "We hadn't eaten for a couple of days and just when food arrived we all had to get out."

"By the time we got back it was cold but everyone was so hungry that we ate it anyway." The Clash didn't feel too well the next day, to put it mildly. We talk about other things too but there's no tape and most of it's just obvious chat in any case — Scabies' having quit the Damned, Nolan's exit from the Heartbreakers — all the things that happened while the group were away.

Before he splits to look for the others Paul reaches down for the carrier bag he's brought with him. It's full of fan-mail, complete with answers he's written himself. One thing he's really pleased about is being able to play Northern Ireland. He proves his point by showing me a letter from a kid in Belfast who'd written saying how much he digs the band and how much he'd like to be able to see them. Pinned to this is Paul Simonon's hand-written reply, thanking the fan for this letter and telling him about the forthcoming gig in Belfast. Yeah, he's gonna get some photos and badges together and he'll be sending them back along with the letter.

LESS THAN an hour later we're in the big conference room and there's a lot of dead air. For why? Maybe it's my fault. It's always much harder to talk to people you've met before than total strangers, harder still when all the obvious stuff's been said and written time and again. So, rather than rattle off pat questions (this was intended to be a 'chat' rather than an 'interview') I'm just waiting for things to fall into a natural shape.

It takes a very long time, as things turn out. First we're waiting for drinks to arrive, after that it's Nick Head on who's the reason (or so I think). Nick's apparently in the building somewhere and should be here any minute. Joe's finally settled down at the near end of the table opposite Paul but there's still a lot of silence. Roadie Roadent's here too and he's mooching about in the

corners. He and Paul agree that Topper should hurry and get there so there'd be someone to take the piss out of. Mick's still more or less immobile behind his glasses, hair parted on the left side and his hands deep in the pockets of the long, straight black leather he's wearing. The Clash are all bored. No pose, I'm assured by Paul. "This is what we're always like. We're like all the other kids. We've got nothing to do when we're not playing." Paul says he watches TV all the time now. "I don't go out much 'cause if I go out and see a group and I like the group I get really jealous. And I just wanna be up there playing. If I don't like the group I just get really bored."

Strummer's views are similar. Joe says he saw Jonathan Richman at Hammersmith. "The best thing about it was able to fall asleep at a concert. I haven't been able to do that before."

It's down to Mick to bring things up to date. Is there much point in going on with this, he asks. Fortunately Strummer leaps in immediately after I've answered and most of the next ten or fifteen minutes sees a sudden reversal of roles as Joe becomes the questioner, the former reporter as interviewee. Out of this series of exchanges a few spots of Clash information also appear. Like we're talking about movies at one point and Paul mentions having seen 'A Bridge Too Far' and 'The Iron Cross'. Paul says he preferred the latter because its slow-motion death scenes were more authentic. "In the other one there's this bit with this bloke's gut hanging out. And that weren't even nasty — it could've been better."

Paul describes this somewhat grisly image with such detachment that there's no element of surprise when he immediately follows up by asking if anyone's seen 'Fellini Casanova'. Joe has. "It's alright but it can get a bit boring," he says.

Simonon is n't too concerned with plot and dramatic timing anyway; "What were the settings like? That's what I'm interested in," says Paul. He likes Woody Allen too. Records follow. Strummer wants to know if I listen to 'any of that old hippie music.' He says he hardly ever buys records himself but he might buy a Ronnie Spector album soon. Strummer and Jones both name the singer's 'Say Goodbye To Hollywood' single as current favourite.

We discuss 'Holidays In The Sun' too, every one pretty much in agreement that it's the least slick Pistols single to date and at the same time the nearest to the band's live sound. No stick? None.

Meanwhile there's The Clash's own recording situation. Joe tells me they're going into the studio on the coming Sunday. For the next album or a new single? Single says Mick. "We need another one 'cause this one's going down." Won't tell me which song though. "A secret," says Joe, with a faint trace of mischief.

THEN, SUDDENLY as it arrived, the brief period of rapport vanishes and the freeze is back. So why do interviews at all if they're so boring, I ask, patience on the ebb.

"Cause we were told to come here," says Mick. "to get coverage. To sell records."

Joe asks if I think they should stop

doing interviews altogether. What can I say? Only if you enjoy it, surely.

Another question springs to mind — do they manipulate their press, use it as an avenue of access to their fans?

"D'you mean are we manipulating you?" says Mick. "No, we're not that clever."

Ho-hum. Apathy Time again. Things get really slow for a bit, everyone poker-faced and playing various degrees dumb. But I thought that one of the things that was special about The Clash was that they were at least trying to get information — very specific information a lot of the time — across to people. Surely there's more to it than just playing for their own gratification?

"Because playing for a lot of people's better than just doing it at home in your room," says Strummer.

But there's more to it than that, right? You don't just get up and play and that's it? Then what happens?

Mick Jones says then they go home. Paul's a bit more flexible. "We just say things everybody knows," he begins. "But they don't do they, some people don't even realise they're bored."

This is all very vague, very ambiguous stuff but it's really quite crucial. Like there's still a lot of people put off the band by what they take to be a militant political attitude and it seems pretty obvious that — at this particular point in time in any case — that The Clash aren't too keen on coming across like a bunch of

urban guerrillas.

I explain that my attitude to the whole politico angle so far as the band are concerned was that the good thing was that they were taking some kind of stand. It's pretty obvious that no-one's going to take everything they say as gospel — nor even necessary that the band themselves should be saints in armour. The point surely was that gradually something of what they were struggling to put into words and music would seep through and hopefully that would be useful for them, would set them asking questions at least, even if the answers might not always be clean-cut. Surely that's reason enough for The Clash to exist and go on doing what they're doing, especially when the great bulk of the media — records, movies, TV, the lot — is playing for the other side, doing its best to keep everyone nice and quiet and as ignorant of who's pulling the strings, what the strings are and so on, the whole sickening, disorienting web of lies, distortions, false goals, roles and so on ad infinitum we're all trapped in.

Heavy, or just plain confusing? Both, more like. What it boils down to is it's good to have The Clash around. They make you think, and whether they do it on purpose all the time, or by accident or just so you'll make them rich and famous isn't as important as the fact that they're acting as catalysts for a whole new generation. And much as they insist

that they're bored you just know they put their fair share of thinking in too. Like the way Strummer always asks for any word he doesn't understand to be explained — sometimes he might be joking but a lot of the time he's learning too.

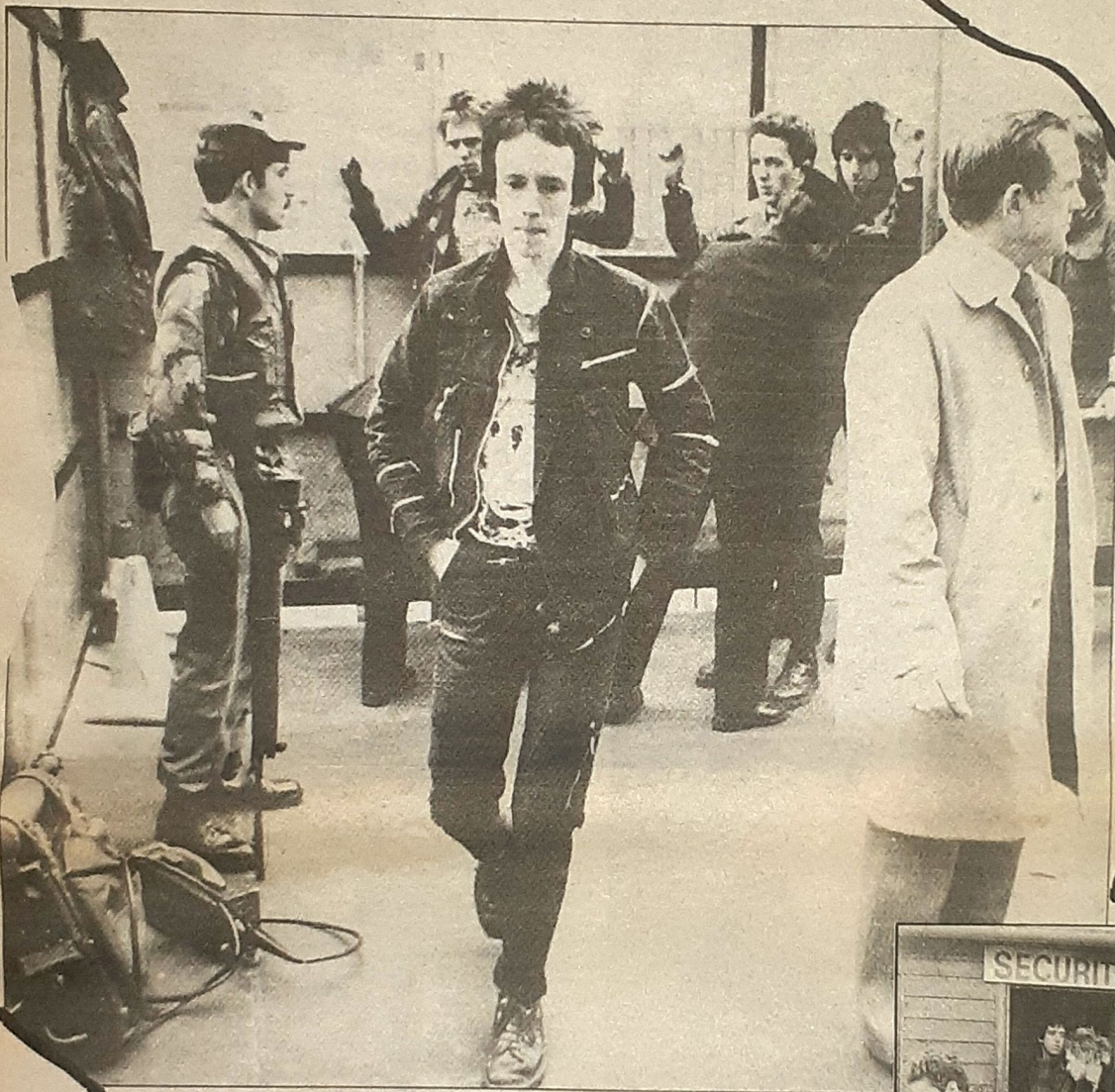
The other great thing about The Clash is they also make great rock 'n' roll music. This doesn't come by magic either. Joe Strummer can afford to dismiss the past ('No Elvis etc.') because it's his past too. Mick's the same; more so perhaps — still checks out most of the new bands who play in London, isn't too embarrassed to admit to the occasional failing like buying a Rolling Stones bootleg or two. He can even tell you which side of the live double's worth hearing, if you want to know.

Very human really The Clash. Paul leaves early because he finally does get really bored. Topper Headon exits at the same time; hasn't said a word all afternoon. Bet he's just shy, simple as that. Good drummer though.

What a bunch of wankers! Still wondering about Mick's shades and leather with the accompanying side parting? In Hamburg they all dressed up like that, just like this band who used to play there ages ago. Then they went to look for the Star Club. When they got there all they found was a strip club with a smooth-talking creepo on the door. Cheesed them off no end, that one did.

Well, a bit. GIOVANNI DODOMO





AT FIRST the band were reluctant to have their photo taken anywhere near the soldiers. "They'll think we're here to entertain the troops," said Strummer. They all felt that they didn't know enough about the political situation. They learned fast.

BELFAST is one long nervously obsessive security check. You can't cross a road, drive down the street, walk into a shop or hotel without passing through an elaborate system of flashing lights, concrete and steel barricades, high barbed wire fences or road blocks. At each of these frequent security check points, the hands of men and women in police or army uniform feel over your body and pry into your personal possessions.

Jesus (in whose name the fighting continues) Christ! The eroding invasion of privacy liquifies your guts in seconds. You're just about to scream and question the necessity of

the process when again the words "bomb scare" pass from mouth to mouth. Army trucks roll by, soldiers run and crouch ready with their sinister rifles loaded. Your palms begin sweating. There's no dynamite hidden in your handbag. But suspicion and fear prevail. On what side are the people next to you? Do you look Catholic or Protestant? And anyway, extremists on either side are frequently apologising for killing the wrong person. Danger stranger? You better believe it.

"Where are you playing tonight", a suited gentleman asks the Clash at the airport.

The Ulster Hall.

"Well, that's in a nice part of town. You won't get knee-capped there." Gulp. Ha Ha Ha. An Irish joke already.

"You see", the local BBC reporter explains later in the bar of the Europa Hotel, "when there have been people

dying at your feet for eight years, you've got to laugh."

Everyone relaxes a little. For all the tension in the air, coming to Belfast is a positive gesture of optimism. Within minutes of arriving in town, the Clash are surrounded by fans. Heavy punks. Safety pins through their cheeks. Dog collars. Bondage straps. The lot. They are feverishly excited. Everyone's smiling and laughing. The Clash are examined as if they are visitors bringing a magic interlude from another planet. The atmosphere is unbelievable.

"We've come to play for all the kids here", says Paul Simon. "For everybody — who ever or what ever they are."

George, nineteen, a Protestant laboratory worker tells him: "It's so great that you're here. We've been waiting for this for weeks. Nobody ever comes here. It's marvellous getting to go to something like this.



Paul Simonon said: "Punk Rock is the Salvation of Northern Ireland. With the attitudes of parents and the Authorities as they are sectarianism will never end. But kids of both religions come together to hear rock 'n' roll."

What do they think will happen if the University allows the gig to go ahead, I ask them.

"Every window in the place will be smashed" is the instant reply*.

The band are stunned. Accusations of a publicity stunt make them feel sick. Mick Jones is refusing to leave the dressing room until he is allowed to play. Slowly the fact that there's nothing anybody can do to save the gig sinks in. Go home everybody.

The Clash are silent, inwardly seething, outwardly setting an example of responsible cool. Paul Simonon is the last to leave the dressing room. He rips a leaflet from the student's notice board. It reads: THE WORLD IS A BASTARD PLACE.

*The next evening the Clash played two shows at Trinity College, Dublin. The sets included their new numbers 'Complete Control', 'The Prisoner', 'Clash City Rockers', 'City Of The Dead', 'White Man In Hammersmith Palais' and 'Jail Guitar Doors'. Over a thousand fans packed the place. There was no violence and no damage.

Then the news breaks. The gig is OFF. It can't be. Panic. Two hours

before the show is dup to start! There must be somewhere else to play. Confusion. The Northern Ireland Polytechnic entertainment committee, the promoters, can't get insurance. The original company, Medical And Professional Insurance Limited, withdrew their cover at the last minute. In a letter, they refused to insure punk music.

Already, hundreds of fans are outside the Ulster Hall — just a stone's throw from the hotel. They know where the Clash are staying and the Europa is besieged. "We want the Clash. We want the Clash" they roar from behind the wire bomb guards. Police materialise out of the darkness. Inside, Paul and Nicky Headon realise the situation is explosive.

Simonon: "We've got to go out and talk to them. To explain."

They both speed through the security check and into the mob. "Please keep calm", they implore. "We're trying to find an alternative venue. Pass the word to keep calm. If there's trouble tonight, we'll never be able to play here."

Minutes later word filters through that fans outside the Ulster Hall refused to disperse. Bottles were thrown. Some kids lay in the road in front of police Land Rovers. Two have been rushed to hospital.

Again Paul and Nicky, joined by Joe, decide to face the angry fans themselves.

Outside the Ulster Hall they are mobbed. "Common Joe, PLAY!" "Don't sell out, Paul."

"We WANNA play", the Clash yell back. And their presence and pleas to "Keep cool" reassures the fans and the angry scene turns into a mammoth, good-humoured autograph session and talk-in.

"Whether you're a Protestant or Catholic here, you get it if you're a punk", says Maggie. On her way across town, she and her friend were stopped by soldiers. "Go Home", they were told. They climbed over the security barricades to get to the gig.

BACK at base, manager Bernard Rhodes is trying to salvage the situation. The social secretary of Queens University offers a hall. The gig is on again. The word spreads. Punks outside the Europa and the Ulster Hall converge on the University. The band arrive to a resounding cheer. They push through the crowd into the hall.

But the place is like armouree. Kids rush up to the band. They are crying. "The bastards have called off the gig again," they say.

In a back room, two University Officials are deliberating, negatively. Deputations from the band, the promoters, the press and the fans beg them to change their minds. The phrase "acceptable levels of violence" hangs in the air.

Two huge, uniformed police Inspectors enter. The crowd outside are calm, they say. If the University Officials say 'no' they can easily, sir, be dispersed.

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