

ON THE ROAD

The Clash still pack the power

Clash/Richard Hell Newcastle

THE VENUE was Newcastle Poly, the line-up was: Clash/Richard Hell & The void-Olds plus an all-girl French band called the Lou's.

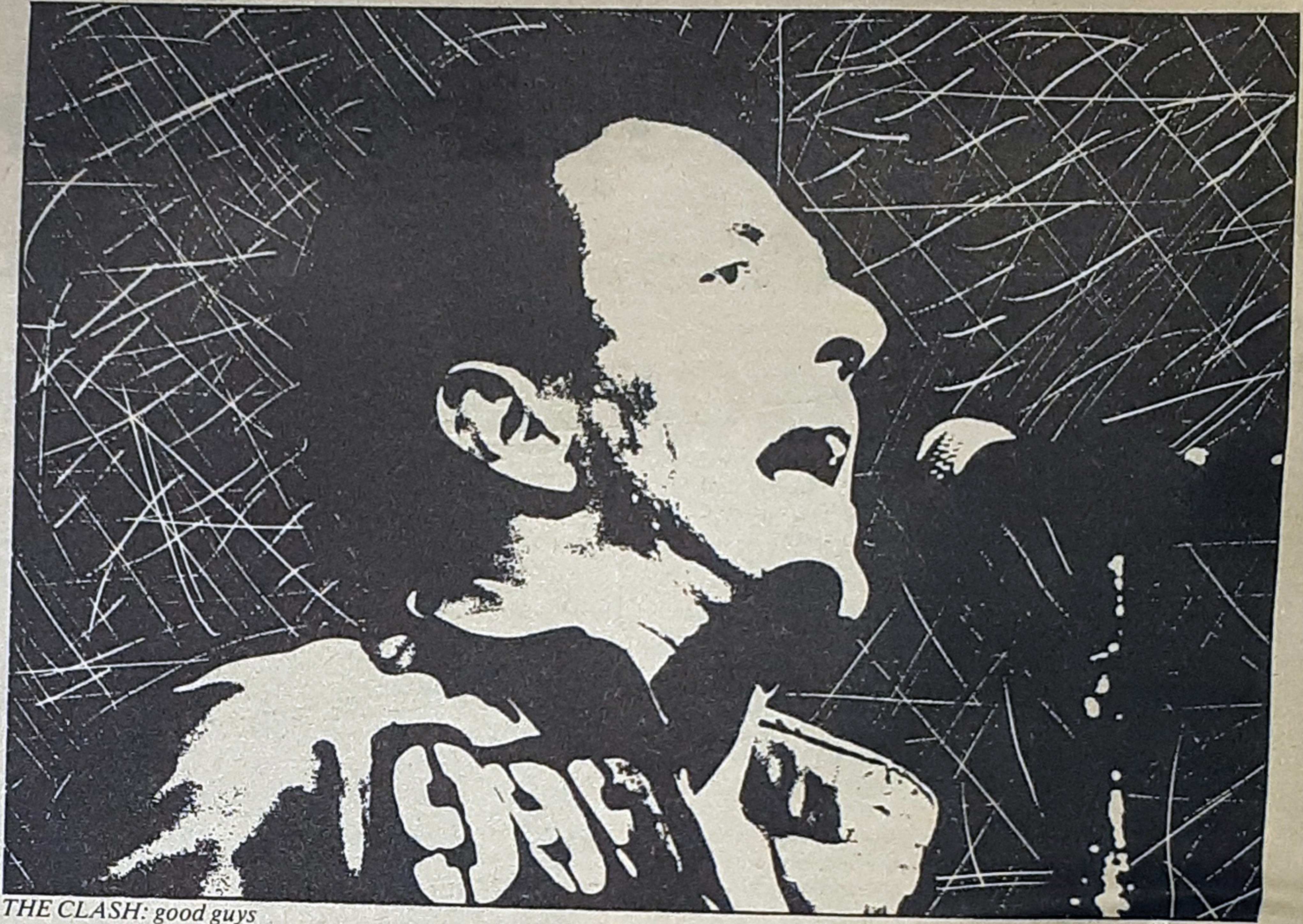
Due to late arrival we unfortunately missed the French contingent. Opinions seemed varied, but Mick Jones liked 'em. I wandered out front to watch Richard Hell's set clutching my official backstage pass (an Alvin Stardust ticket with 'Clash back stage' scrawled on it) lest I should have to beat a hasty retreat in the face of some provincial violence (I remember Glasgow, kids). Nuthin much happened, though, even when the band came on. It was a typically varied, across-the-board type audience who had obviously come to see the Clash and who remained pretty unimpressed by Hell's New York credentials.

He started off with 'Love Comes In Spurts' and jerked

himself around with an admirable intensity through a short set which included most of his better known stuff like 'Blank Generation' and 'Another World', and finishing off with a lame retread of the Stooges' 'I Wanna Be Your Dog'. No encores for the man who told the kids that they were a little better than New York audiences but not what he'd been led to expect. The disappointment seemed mutual. Maybe it was the gym-hall type auditorium, the naff sound (which made all those MXR effects boxes I saw them wiring up in the dressing room seem pretty redundant) or a lack of rehearsal time, but whatever, he certainly didn't compare well with the recorded evidence.

This is just conjecture, but maybe the fault lies with his essentially depressing philosophy. I kind of like Huysmans' decadence chic too, but even he turned Catholic eventually which is some kind of vote of confidence in life at least. All this negative stuff may help create powerful/

intense records art, but it sure as hell (no pun intended) doesn't make for the beautiful, elevating force that is a live rock 'n' roll



THE CLASH: good guys

show. Comparing this band with Television, it seems really obvious now why Hell's departure must have been inevitable. Tom Verlaine's vision is directed upwards, while Richard's is definitely in line with his name.

This isn't a put-down, though. Maybe by the time he hits London, and with better sound, who knows... Still, I wish he'd done Sinatra's 'All The Way'.

The Clash are a different story altogether. They definitely advocate energy/commitment/optimism. I recently put forward the proposition in the pages of 'Sniffin' Glue' that the Clash's political stance is too basic and blatant and is something that can be subverted by the media all too easily. I still believe that to be true, but that doesn't mean I don't think they're a great rock 'n' roll band.

The crowd was bananas from the word go, of course; the Clash are a group who provoke instinctive reaction and identification in their fans. I'm not gonna take you through the set, telling you all about this number and that number and what songs were done as encores etc, etc. Wait till they hit your town and find out for yourself. Nevertheless, a few notes to justify my existence:

1. The Clash's energy is undimmed. They may be more controlled than at, say, the ICA a year ago, but that makes them more accessible to a larger audience. Kids can remember the songs, and (ulp!) relate, I guess.
2. Leading on from that, it should be noted that the new stuff is at least as good as the old. Songs like 'Complete Control', 'Clash City Rockers', 'The Prisoner' and 'White Man In Hammersmith Palais' are just as memorable as 'Janie Jones', 'Garage Band' et al.
3. Unusual bits and incidents: Well, Joe left his shirt at the hotel, so to compensate he's got this red stuff smeared on his chest. The cheapest form of decoration yet. And sad to say, Mick Jones's guitar came off the strap and somehow it got molested/damaged. The neck needs repair. Cliché: That's rock 'n' roll.
4. Final summation: It was a fine gig. I don't think the Clash have as yet made any truly immortal records, but they sure do cut it live. See them, and check out Hell too.

5. I think the Clash are the good guys. Sometimes good guys don't wear white. — SANDY ROBERTSON.

Stiff's Greatest Stiffs Live Lyceum

WHAT I'D hoped, maybe even expected, to be a warm, fun-filled trumpeting of the delights of English eccentricity turned out to be, for the most part, little more than a narrow celebration of mutual hipness, the warmth forced and the fun doubtful.

Ian Dury aside, Stiff's Greatest Stiffs no more convinced me than they disappointed the audience.

First on the boards was Nick Lowe but, because of the vagaries of London Transport, I missed him and my first sight of a live Stiff was the decidedly unmelodic Wreckless Eric. The only notable points in his seemingly interminable set were the simplicity of Denise's bass work, Davey Payne's raucous sax and Eric's one justifiable claim to a place on the stage, his single 'Whole Wide World' — and even that went on so long, it started to sound like the band were bent on becoming an eighth grade Cream.

Perhaps excuses could be made for him because of the horrific screechy and scratchy sound but I doubt it. He sounded as if he liked it that way.

Elvis Costello is certainly no wreckless quarter talent but he seemed so determined to reinforce his image as the latest moody enigma that he mostly resembled a puppet pulling his own strings... tentatively. And we all know what happened to Pinocchio.

He is undoubtedly a fine songwriter (although I think other people could do his songs

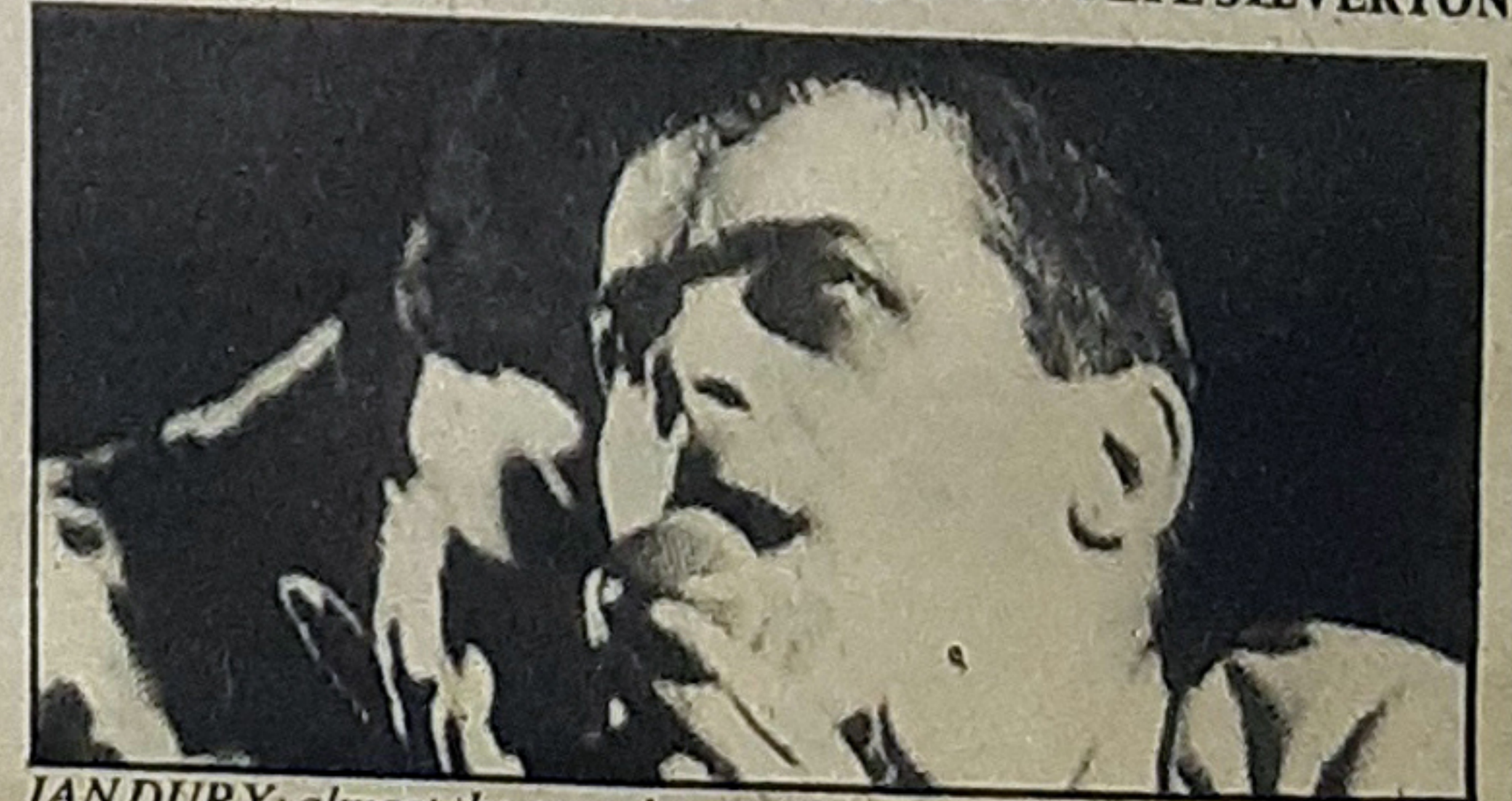
better justice) but his attempts to move beyond merely lecturing the audience and attempt to engage their emotions by communication with them were, depending on your viewpoint, embarrassing or laughable. Pressing the flesh with the audience requires a little more audacity than a few very careful steps from the stage. Elvis has presumably learned from Joe Strummer how to kneel with his guitar and pray to his fold-back. He ought to watch Joe dive on to the audience, adding a real element of danger and tension, before he tries 'walking on the water' again.

I've never been a great Dury fan and hadn't seen him perform since the Kilburns and accordingly reckoned he'd be no more than diverting. He was so riveting that I've been playing 'New Boots and Panties' almost constantly in the two days since the Lyceum show.

Everyone knows that comparisons are jive but if I wanted to pigeon-hole Ian, I'd place him as an English combination of Randy Newman and Woody Allen. His songs are text-book examples of wit, insight and compassion. His tunes (and his excellent band) are supple, simple and subtle. His stage-craft is an original mixture of approved school teacher and Max Miller.

If it wasn't for his obvious lack of appeal to the teen market, I'd say he was the complete artist. He only faltered once — when for the encore, a reprise of 'Sex Drugs and Rock and Roll', he brought on every Stiff igger that could still stand. They looked like so many jealous pigs gobbling at the trough of his talent.

As for the rest, it was a case of the audience allowing themselves to be mercilessly duped in their search for hip credibility. If it's a Stiff, at least it'll impress your neighbours. — PETE SILVERTON



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