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# new MUSICAL EXPRESS

A night  
in the cells with  
**THE CLASH**



**JONES,  
MICHAEL**

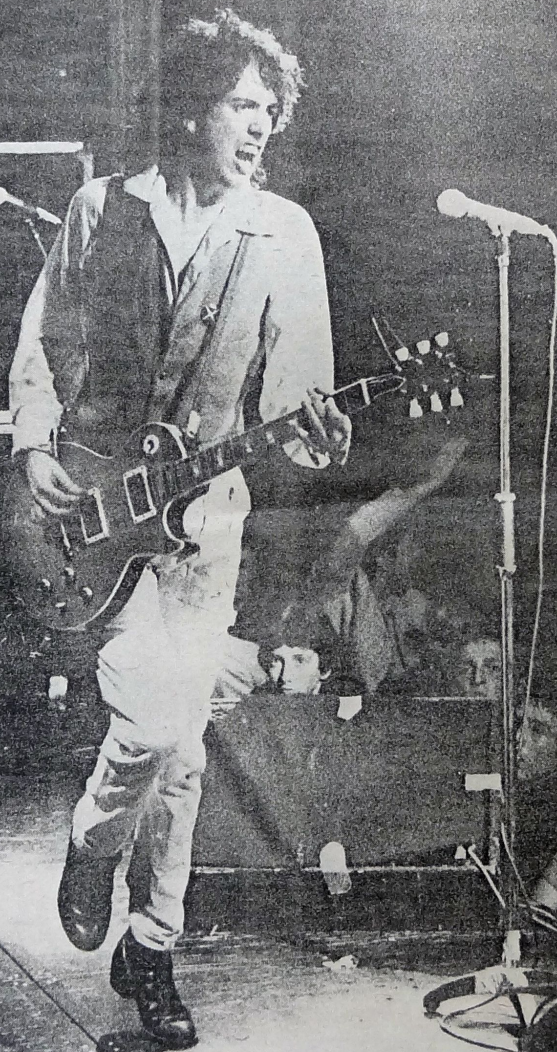
Age: 23  
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Occupation:  
Guitarist in a bloody good rock band  
(Subject of bloody long feature P.27-30)

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pic: PENNIE SMITH



# CLASH ON TOUR



## FORCES OF LIGHT & SHADOW

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Pictures: PENNIE SMITH  
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**I**T'S AS IF THE Clash's "Police And Thieves" stage backdrop has suddenly transmogrified into moving 3-D.

The scene: the cobbled street down the side of the Glasgow Apollo. Round about midnight.

The dramatis personae: The Clash, fifty to sixty Clash fans, Clash drivers and security guys, an indeterminate number of members of the Glasgow constabulary.

The sound:  
*C-R-U-N-C-H!!!*

There it goes again: Paul Simonon, impeccably street-cool despite the Johnsons royal-blue shot-silk suit and Scotch House scarlet cashmere sweater, sinking down on his DMs onto the damp cobbles in a perfect staccato frozen-frame sequence as the back of his neck becomes the object of a manic, self-brutalising, truncheon-waving charge by an anorak-clad plainclothes Glasgow cop.

It's a disgusting incident. Highly emotive, riddled with flashes and waves of fear and terror and shock.

There's a whole pattern of ironies binding this little scenario together: the Apollo bouncers, the police, even some of the kids outside the back of the theatre, all hating The Clash because The Clash threaten the basic status quo on which their hatred has been erected. As the plainclothes cops suddenly emerge, chain-weighted truncheons in hand, from the shadows, they stir up eerie images of battles between the forces of good and evil.

**B**ACKSTAGE BEFORE the Apollo gig, a Glaswegian punk is haranguing Simonon. "You still doin' all that politics stuff? That's not music."

"It's not politics," Simonon replies, taking a hit from a bottle of Smirnoff vodka. "It's just the difference between right and wrong."

"Yeah. But a lot of punks don't understand the politics. They're just here for the music."

"Well," Simonon shakes his head, "I don't understand it either. I just know what's right and wrong. Like closing this place — that's wrong."

There's something horribly appropriate in The Clash being the last rock band ever to play the Glasgow Apollo — always (in)famous for having some of the best rock audiences and the most psychotic bouncers in the UK — before it's turned into a bingo hall.

More than any other band, The Clash really do *care* — no, not *care*, *love* — their audiences. And, by extension, their fellow-men, though maybe that's another matter.

Anyway, the bouncers, apparently, have long been standing by for this night.

Tonight's the night, Jimmy, when they get their own back on the kids. "Here!" One of them proudly pulls up his vest to show the band's 'personal', Steve English. "This scar's from the David Bowie show. And this one's from The Faces. And this" (he shows a thick welt across his belly) "is from the last time The Clash played here."

The instant the band hit the stage it's like the Apocalypse is upon us and performing live in the stalls. Pogoing kids being dragged to the back of the hall and having the shit kicked out of them . . . Pogoing kids having the shit kicked out of them in front of the stage . . .

"I'M SICK OF BLOOD. I'M SICK OF FUCKIN' BLOOD." Joe Strummer backs off from the mike and shakes his head to himself after pleading with the bouncers and kids to stop attempting to dismember each other.

They do stop. A little bit. But there are still obscene sights like a bouncer with shoulder-length hair diving head-first off the front of the

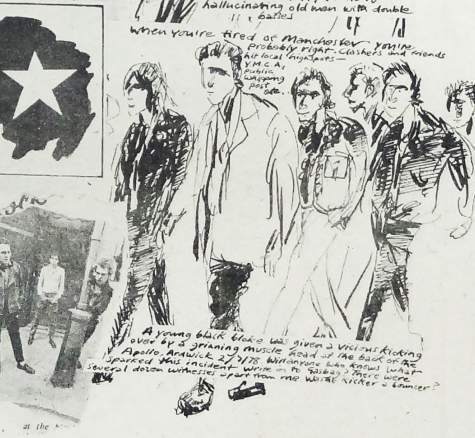
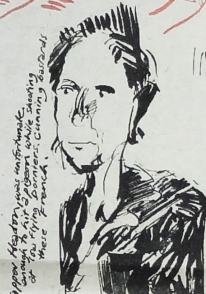
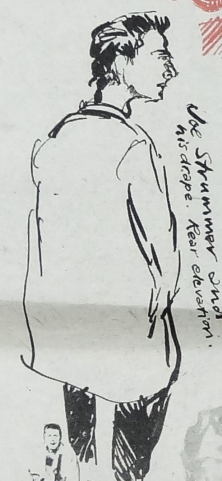
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# ELECTRICAL SHOCKERS

## CLASH OUT

## ON PAROLE



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orchestra pit onto the heads of the audience...

As he's coming off the stage, one of the bouncers is waiting in the wings for Joe. Whisky-breathed, he leans six inches away from Strummer's face: "Ah'm gonna have y-e-e-e-w."

The word is that the bouncers are intending to come up to the dressing-room to tear the band apart limb from limb. They are detained, however, by a young lady whom the theatre management have thoughtfully hired to stand on the stage and remove her clothes and do clever tricks with bottles.

Meanwhile, the band, Strummer with a bottle of lemonade in his right hand, head for the car that's parked just a few yards away from the stage-door.

As soon as they're out the door Joe is screamed at by kids who'd been kicked out of the theatre by bouncers. "Why'd you no' do anything to help us?" berates a guy who was beaten on and kicked out for pogoing during the first number. "Ye're jes' big eoged pop stars," snarls another.

Strummer, who'd been in tears after the gig over the way the fans had been treated, swears back and exasperatedly flings his bottle of lemonade onto the road. Instantly his arms are grabbed by two uniformed cops who've appeared from nowhere. As he's dragged out into the road, both uniformed and plainclothes cops appear to emerge from every crack in the pavement.

Simonon moves in to attempt to drag Strummer free... which is where you came in.

Topper Headon is chased up the road and manages to slip away and get back up into the dressing-room where Bernie Rhodes, the band's manager, is entertaining an American promoter who maintains he's never seen anything like the scenes he's just witnessed inside the theatre.

Mick Jones is dragged away in a state of total shock by some fans, who smuggle him through the prow-car filled streets and back to the band's hotel...

**S**TRUMMER, ONE of his brothel creeper laces replaced with a guitar string, and

Simonon spend the night in the cells. "The people inside," says Strummer later, "the people up for drinking and nicking, they really treated us great. Giving us dog-ends and stuff."

A certain new wave spirit is maintained by the arrested punk fans spending much of the night singing chorus after chorus of "The Prisoner", the B-side of "White Man" in Hammersmith Palais.

Contrary to the fears of those waiting for the pair back at the hotel, neither Joe nor the bassist have too rough a time of it down the police station — although as Joe points out, "Just as we were leaving for the last time one of the cops on the door said to the one in charge of us, 'How come you didn't beat them up? Are you reformed or something?'"

"So I suppose they could've done that. But it never really seemed on the cards."

The magistrates court where the pair appear the next morning — both are on breach of the peace charges, with Simonon also charged with something like "attempting to free a prisoner" — reeks of austere, tiled Scottish Calvinism.

After a whole troop of casualties — crippled eighty-year-old drunks, 18-year-old hookers — have been led before the magistrate for him to sharpen his wit on, Strummer, appearing under his real name of Joseph Mellors, is called.

So authentic is Strummer's quite classic Brando slouch — head to one side, left lower lip hanging open, hands thrust deep in the pockets of his semi-drape jacket — that the real Gorbals heavies on the front bench of the visitors gallery turn round and nudge each other respectfully.

"Do you understand the charge against you?" demands the clerk of the court.

"Yeah," snarls Joe.

"Yeah what?" interrupts the magistrates.

"Yeah, sir," Joe snaps back sullenly.

"What is the name of your group?" enquires the magistrate.

"Vuh Clash," Joe enunciates proudly.

"How appropriate," titters the magistrate, just like he's seen them do in court-room scenes at the movies, too.

Both Strummer and Simonon, whose appearance is something of a replay of Joe's, plead guilty. (Hey Joe, how come Paul pleaded guilty when he was quite obviously innocent? "Cos I told him to. So we could get on to Aberdeen.")

Joe is fined £25, whilst Paul, who must be especially punished for going to the assistance of a friend, has to cough up £45.

As each leaves the court to pay their fines, the hard man poses are dropped and first Joe, then Paul, beams the kind of broad smirk that the bad kids in class always used to have on tap for walking back to their desks after they'd just been slipped in front of the whole form.

In the street outside the court Strummer turns to Simonon and grins: "Maybe it was a mistake calling this tour 'Clash On Parole'."

**A**LTHOUGH HE BELIEVES himself to have "trouble with words" and had equal difficulty adding up, Clash bassist Paul Simonon is actually far more articulate than the average rock musician.

Like guitarist and group founder Mick Jones, Simonon spent the early years of his childhood in Brixton, South London. Also like Jones, the bassist is the product of a broken marriage — although both would appear to present strong arguments for the single parent family.

In fact, Simonon tells me, it was because his father was always looking for some place to dump him for a few days that Paul became interested in art.

Sent out to stay with a painter friend of his dad's in East Acton when he was about seven, Paul waited until the artist had gone out one day and then sat down with a book of paintings by Matisse and copied them all out in pencil. "After a while," he tells me, "you find you can like draw a woman with just one flowing line."

Sitting in his Earls Court flat following a secret pre-tour warm-up gig in Fulham, Simonon recalls how he first came to join the band.

Mick Jones and Generation X bassist Tony James were attempting to get the London SS out of the rehearsal studio and onto some kind of stage, when Simonon turned up one day from the exclusive Byam Shaw art school in Holland Park, to which he had a scholarship, and, as a perfect David Bowie lookalike, auditioned for the role of lead singer by singing the words "I'm a roadrunner, I'm a roadrunner" over and over for ten minutes until he was requested to stop.

Later, Jones looked him up again and told him that if he wanted to be the bass player in a new group he was forming then he (Jones) would teach him.

Since taking up the bass and joining The Clash, Simonon feels his drawing and painting have suffered. "But then," he says, pouring me out a cup of tea, "I'm getting better on the bass all the time. I just want to transfer that simplicity from drawing and painting to bass-playing, to say an incredible amount with just one flowing line of notes just like Leonardo used to paint."

Leonardo Da Vinci, in fact, is one of Paul Simonon's major influences. All he wanted to do when he went to the Byam Shaw was to learn how to draw cars and tower-blocks "in the style of Leonardo." Going into the bed-room of his flat to get me a Clash tour poster, he shows me one of his paintings, a stark, sinister car dump with (almost a Clash cliché) the Westway as background.

Simonon learnt his bass technique by playing along with The Ramones, the Pistols and reggae records. Although a skinhead in his early teens, he claims he never actually got into their field sport of Pakki-bashing, though he didn't blanch at going thieving down Pakistani supermarkets.

West Indians, though, were viewed very defiantly. "When I was at school in South London I used to always want to be mates with the hardest kids in school. So I could get to figure 'em out. And most of those guys tended to be black."

"Anyway, I used to hate all that Deep Purple and Hawkwind stuff and just listen to reggae 'cos I was a skinhead. Those reggae records really used to say a lot to me. Some of them really meant quite a lot."

As an English bassist who doesn't stick himself away back by the amps but chooses instead to move and dance about by the mike, Simonon is something of an iconoclast. And that's just for starters. "I want to be able to stick the bass behind my neck

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and play it like Jimi Hendrix played the guitar. Really elevate its status. Show people all the possibilities that it has in its simplicity."

He puts a Rothmans between his lips, flicks his Zippo lighter but holds it, flaming, in front of him without lighting the cigarette. "The last couple of years," he muses, "have been like being born again."

"Although I did always believe in doing the best in everything that I did... Even if it was only carrying carpets."

**A**H YES, THAT CLASH Pursuit Of Excellence that is the prime reason for my being at Simonon's... Simonon, in fact, is about to play me the rough tapes of some of the new material The Clash have recorded for their next LP, the record for which the group have been in the studios laying down tracks since last summer.

After the slightly abortive alliance with Lee Perry — apparently whilst they wanted Scratch to give them a reggae production, the Upsetter himself was anxious to learn how to get a 'punk' sound — the band spent some months working on their own, though mainly only in the rehearsal studio, until the sudden appearance at the beginning of this year of one Sandy Pearlman, Witchfinder General for Blue Oyster Cult.

The introduction of the American Pearlman into the Clash camp can be seen as just one pointer to the fact that The Clash have now indubitably transcended 'punk' — in its musical rather than social definition — and become A Rock Band.

Not just any rock band, mind you. Indeed, it is probable that right now The Clash are the finest rock band in the world. The hassles of the past year — finding the right record producer, the constant frictions between the band and record company and, it appears, with their management too, plus Joe Strummer's hepatitis bout in the early months of this year and the band's regular run-ins with the law — all these troubles appear to have enriched the band with new inner strength and righteous power.

Whatever, it's fitting that the band should have cut a track entitled "Last Gang In Town" — because that really does seem to be how The Clash see themselves. "We're the only one left," Mick Jones tells me, though he'll later qualify that by offering a fairly substantial list of other outfits who are trying to remain true to what he sees as the essential spirit of rock 'n' roll.

Being on tour with The Clash, though, you do gradually begin to see the band as they seem to see themselves — or certainly as Jones and Strummer view it: like Peckinpah's vision of the Western outlaw in *The Wild Bunch*, the loners whose high moral sense is one of the last relics of another time.

Except that in The Clash's case they are not anachronisms but the forerunners of better times. The advance guards, the emissaries of the New Age when Babylon's flaky hold on rock music (and on life) will finally fall.

**T**HE CLASH now appear to be approaching the future from firm foundations.

Although none of them has been as big a hit as it should have been, The Clash have put out a trio of classic singles in the subversive "Complete Control", their very own group anthem in "Clash City Rockers" and now the near-epic ballad "White Man In Hammersmith Palais", probably the best single of 1978 so far.

Of course, had "Capital Radio" had an official release you could have chucked that up as four classic singles... but the band decided to give it away free instead. Still, Jah was probably quite happy about that.

Besides, "Capital Radio", along with "Complete Control", is being included on the U.S. release of the band's first LP. American CBS are finally beginning to wise up and, though it seems unlikely that anyone there fully understands what they're dealing with, they do at least see that The Clash are capable of earning them a large amount of money.

Listen, there is a lot of magic going on in the rough tapes Simonon plays me. All the indications are that when The Clash do finally release their second album it will be a rock music landmark.

Particularly notable are —  
 • "Safe European Home". Written



Above: PAUL SIMONON and friend

after Strummer and Jones returned to England from their trip to Jamaica shortly before Christmas of last year. Originally the lyrics were some fifty lines long, now shortened to twenty. (Much of the material the band have recorded was written, incidentally, whilst the pair were tucked away in their room at the Pegasus Hotel, Kingston, a matter to which we will return later. Topper Headon, incidentally, claims that they didn't just do a *bit* of writing whilst out in JA, but that the band's songwriting duo actually turned out some two and a half albums' worth of tunes.)

● "Guns On The Roof". The first Clash number to be co-authored by all the band. Details the Simonon/Headon pigeon-shooting incident, of which both Mick Jones and I heartily disapprove.  
 ● "Stay Free". A Mott The Hoople-like anthem written and sung entirely by Jones, about the gang he was in at school. A great, stirring number that could be a Top Five single hit were it not for the number of four-letter words.  
 ● "Tommy Gun". An uptempo rocker, as they were once described, that is fast becoming an onstage fave. None of the lyrics seem decipherable.

Other titles? "Julie's In The Drug Squad", "Groovy Times Are Here Again", "Scrawl On The Bathroom", "One Emotion" and the very excellent "Cheapskates".

It should not necessarily be assumed that any of these songs will be on the album, however.

**J**OURNEYING UP TO Glasgow from the Manchester gigs — in addition to the scheduled Sunday theatre date, The Clash also played a 'secret' gig at Rafter's Club the following day — Mick Jones and I have the choice of either a very cramped car or the wonder of British Rail InterCity.

As Jah has specially delayed the Royal Scot by nearly two hours, we pick it up at Preston three minutes after disembarking from the commuter train that brought us from Manchester.

This ensures that we arrive at the hotel in Glasgow at exactly the same minute as the rest of the band, thereby dismissing manager Bernie Rhodes' taunt that Jones was only travelling this way to be 'flash', and that he would inevitably cause that evening's show to be delayed.

The group founder, Jones, like Simonon and Strummer, is a product of the English art school system.

While the rhythm section, and particularly the bassist, provide the truly primal punk aspects of The Clash, the central core of the group's being appears to emanate from Jones, with Strummer operating as an

external expression of that soul. (It is interesting to note that although Strummer and Simonon are both fire signs — Leo and Sagittarius respectively — both Jones and Headon are Cancers, a water sign. Though logically one might expect the water to cancel out the fire, it seems reasonable to surmise that that indefinable warm tension within The Clash is a direct result of this astrological chemistry.)

Settling back in the empty dining-car which we've found, Jones crushes an empty Coke can in his right hand and soliloquises on his craft. "Rock 'n' roll really is an art form — the most immediate there is, the most vital in terms of reaching out to the masses.

"But maybe one day if this all becomes dissatisfying I might go back to painting. Though it's one of the most introverted existences there is.

"Every morning when you get up and go and look at what you've done the previous day, in those moments you almost have to examine every aspect of your life. And if you're a painter — or an artist of any sort, come to that — then it's a full-time existence.

"I've no patience with people who claim to be artists and then just talk about it. Just get on with it whatever you're doing."

Sandy Pearlman, Jones tells me, just appeared to "arrive" one day.

"There's definitely some inner magic circle — whether conscious or otherwise — within rock 'n' roll. We've encountered it enough times already to be certain of that. People seem to have been sent to see us, to tell us we're on the right path, to tell us to keep it up."

"I think Pearlman definitely saw in us all the possibilities of that black side of rock 'n' roll. He immediately seemed to see in us another possibility for what he really wanted to do with the Blue Oyster Cult. He knows the Cult don't really do it. And he knows we know it, too."

Working with Pearlman began to appear something like the Grand Quest. Which it was/is as far as the U.S. division of CBS is concerned: The Quest For A Hit Album.

As the producer has laboured in Island's Basing Street studio until six every morning, making the band go through as many as twenty takes of each track, executives from CBS in New York have flown in to check out the progress. As the tapes have been played back to these upwardly mobile young men, it has sometimes been necessary for all four members of The Clash to be present in order to have enough people coughing and

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# CLASHOCK

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dropping books on the floor when particularly subversive or obscene lyrics came through the speakers.

Towards the end of the sessions, Pearlman became increasingly anxious over leaving what it seems he had begun to regard as Sandy's Perfect Studio Album in the hands of the band for the final mixing — particularly as they'd already been bitching about the cleanliness of the sound and expressing a desire to muck it up somewhat.

Matters reached something of a head shortly before Pearlman flew back to the States just prior to the tour. At a Blue Oyster Cult party thrown by CBS, Topper Headon placed a large cake on the head of the wife of Blue Oyster Cult's "gnome guitarist" Buck Dharma. Unfortunately the cake somehow slipped and splattered all over the good lady's head, with the result that several Cult roadies were on the brink of tearing Topper to pieces.

Not so Pearlman, however. He knew who was the *real* culprit. "He turned to me and said, 'You put the eye on him, didn't you? You made him do that, didn't you?'" grins a somewhat bemused Mick Jones.

**T**HE ROCK AGAINST Racism festival in Hackney once again appeared to put The Clash in a

position of conflict with other bands. "We said we didn't want to top that bill," Jones shakes his head. "We just wanted to be part of it."

And then backstage there were all these numbers going down with Tom Robinson's management — and someone turned the power down on us and made sure the PA wasn't working properly.

"But," he nods with a smile, "when we went onstage the sun started shining, so obviously the forces must have been with us."

"However, there are so many groups who do treat their fans as if they're complete rubbish. I can't think of many groups at all who really still care."

"Who is this? Well, we haven't given up. Neither have The Slits either. Nor Generation X. I certainly don't think John Rotten's given up... Nor Jimmy Pursey. Actually, I don't think Keith Richard ever gave up really. Mick Jagger certainly did, though."

We talk for a few minutes about the new material. Joe had told me that the anthem-like new number, "Stay Free", was about a friend of Jones' whom I'd met on several occasions in his role as dilettante journalist.

"It's not just about him," the guitarist says. "It's about all my gang in Brixton. That guy's the lucky one — he's escaped."

"Two of the others both work in butchers' shops and are in the National Front. Twenty-three and they're in the Front."

"I don't talk to them because of that, though. I go and see them. Show them what I've done. Show them the possibilities."

"You know," he free-associates, "it seems to me there are only three types of possible relationships: master-pupil, or pupil-master, or — and this is the really rare one that I've had about twice — a one-to-one relationship where you both help each other. That's the one to quest for, isn't it?"

"Actually, I've been reading a lot about orgone energy lately. I've suddenly started realising that all of

these bands who're into pulling loads of girls backstage obviously can't be fulfilling their full potential when they're performing."

"Mind you," he admits, "all of this band are a right bunch of studs. I was the only one who slept on his own last night."

"But we do try and treat them with respect. In some ways we're probably the first group to ever do that. And it's quite difficult: making them realise that you really are a human being is something of a necessary strain in the job. It's quite understandable, though. When I first met musicians I never saw them as just people."

"But I think a lot of people are keeping their eyes on us. Waiting for it to crack. So it can't, of course."

"Listen, somewhere we played the other day there was some girl showing us the bruises this other band had given her."

"I mean, where's that at?"

**A**LMOST EXACTLY twelve hours later Mick and I are sitting in his room at the Albany Hotel in Glasgow, drinking whisky and smoking and recovering from the police aggro that's ensured neither Joe nor Paul will be using their rooms tonight.

Mick, who has been unfairly criticised for being a poseur by people

where he is forced to decide between his emotions and his loyalties to the group.

"He's beginning to understand the full extent of his responsibilities," says Mick Jones, fortified by half a bottle of vodka, the drummer tapes up the hideous blisters on his hands that drumming on the tour has already caused him and drags himself out onto the stage.

Replacing Terry Chimes after the first LP had been completed, Headon joined The Clash just in time for the White Riot tour in the spring of last year. A karate freak — in Manchester Strummer spends his last sixteen quid in the HMV shop on a Bruce Lee import that he knows Topper ought to have — his musical pedigree includes having played with Pat Travers.

He now seems a totally integrated member of the band. "The real problem of The Clash is Joe Strummer," the days when Joe would be found lying drunk in the gutter outside Dingwalls with rain-water washing into his mouth, now seem to be over.

The occasional losses of control on the road are purely due to The Pressure, mon.

In the past, though, as Joe himself admits, they were down to "the demon drink" — a problem which was solved when his bout of hepatitis earlier in the year obliged him to lay off the booze altogether for the next six months if he didn't want a permanently weakened liver.

"It doesn't half make you lose your friends, though, not going down the pub," he laughs. He also vigorously denies that the hepatitis was due to an ingestion of impure stimulating powders. Cocaine he considers to be "complete muck. If you snort coke you're in on your own. You don't want anybody and you don't need anybody. Which is a horrible place to be."

Joe has a very powerful aura about him.

Onstage, he never smiles. This hard man stage persona, like the pre-hepatitis love of booze, may well be an extension of the belligerent Scotsman within him. His mother is Scottish and he claims that the sound of bagpipes renders him most emotional. (Jones, incidentally, is also a half-Celt — his mother is Welsh whilst his father is Jewish.)

He is also, as are all The Clash, a very sensitive and perceptive bloke, though not necessarily a near-intellectual in the same way that Jones certainly is.

When he was about 18 (he's 25 now) and just getting set to leave the minor public school in Epsom to which his parents had sent him (and where they told him he wasn't "university material", which is how he ended up going to Central Art School in London for a year before deciding it was a waste of time), Joe's brother committed suicide.

Although he comments no further than that "it happened at a pretty crucial time in my life," it seems certain that this event had a significant bearing in creating Joe Strummer, ally of the powers of positivism and light.

His brother, 18 months older than Joe, was a member of the National Front and was obsessed with the occult. In every way he seems to have been Joe's opposite. "He was such a nervous guy that he couldn't bring himself to talk at all. Couldn't speak to anyone."

"In fact, I think him committing suicide was a really brave thing to do. For him, certainly. Even though it was a total cop-out."

**H**E LEANS BACK on the bed-head in his Aberdeen hotel room. It's two in the morning and we're both pretty done in. All the time, he tells me, underlining what Mick had said earlier in the day, he keeps getting signs — whether in the form of actual emissaries or less tangible incidents — that he, and this band, are on the right path.

"I go in for that mumbo-jumbo a lot myself," he smiles. "Like, when me and Mick went to Jamaica I was quite convinced we were going to die. At Heathrow someone dropped this ketchup all over the floor in front of us — and then we get there and we're driving through Trenchtown and I glance up at this wall and just see this one word: BLOOD."

"Mind you, nothing happened at all like that, and when I got back I thought, 'What a lot of time I wasted worrying'."

Jamaica, mind you, was not a

particularly pleasant experience for the pair, who went over to Jamaica out as hard-line punks. Instead of welcoming them, black Jamaicans were calling them "white pigs" in the street. Unable to find anyone connected with the music scene — they spent their last Jamaican dollars on an abortive cab ride looking for Lee Perry's place — they stuck themselves away in their hotel rooms with a load of ganja and got down to writing songs.

Didn't they think they might look somewhat provocative?

"Sure," Strummer smirks. "We fuckin' went out on the streets dressed to the nines. We thought we'd show 'em where it was at." He laughs. "Cos they all like looking sharp, too. Sometimes when it got a bit heavy we'd pass ourselves off as merchant seamen."

Of course, one of the contradictions within The Clash is that all the warmth and positivism are hemmed in by overtly aggressive imagery — and here I'm thinking of the "White Man" gun logo, the militaristic stage backdrops, even the song titles: "Tommy Gun", "Guns On The Roof".

"It keeps coming up, doesn't it?" Strummer nods. "I think it's just a reflection of what's out there. I really do think we are a good force, but we're dealing with the world and those images are just a reflection of what it is."

Strummer first recalls singing "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" as a kid in singing lessons at school. Rather than being about the American Civil War, as is the original, The Clash's version is subtitled "The English Civil War".

"It's already started," says Joe matter-of-factly. "Sure it has. There's people attacking Bengalis with clubs and firing shotguns in Wolverhampton..."

"What really gets me is it's so-o-o-o respectable to be right-wing. All those big geezers in the Monday Club will probably switch over to the Front if they start making any headway. That's what happened in Germany — they turned round and said, 'Oo yeah, I've been a Nazi all along, mate.'"

"It's a pity when the skins go out on the rampage, that they don't go down the House of Commons and smash that place up."

"Any time there's any urban disturbances they always occur on the poor areas of town. Why don't they happen in the rich areas? More things would get smashed up if they did."

"If it's in London it's always in either the East End or in Notting Hill. Or it's in Belfast or in Londonderry — they're like bomb-sites, the slums out there."

"You know, I was in Notting Hill the other day and I was walking along and I saw that all of Tavistock Crescent is gone. And they used to seem to really know how to build houses fit for human beings to live in on those days."

"I mean, round by Westbourne Park Road these real egg-boxes have suddenly sprung up from behind the corrugated iron. Which is just brutal. I'd like to blow the head off the guy who designed that — or, better still, force him to live in it."

who don't seem to understand that a certain dedication to looking sharp and stylish has always been an integral aspect of rock 'n' rolling, demonstrates a vision all too rare among rock 'n' rollers.

"You know when Joe was going over the top a bit in the dressing room tonight?" he asks through tight lips. "Well, the first reason that he could offer for those kids getting hurt in the Apollo was that it was all because of his giant ego, all because of his obsessive need to appear onstage."

"Except that it's not that at all. Totally the reverse, in fact."

"I sometimes really do wonder if someone hasn't set out to get us."

"But then, everytime you start thinking that maybe the answer is not to play at all, I start noticing all these strange things which we can't put down to just coincidence. Like the train today, or talking about that guy from *Melody Maker* and then he walks through the door."

"Coincidence, maybe. But there's too many of them. It really does seem sometimes like there's someone out there caring for us."

"Joe understands all that, too. That's why it really is something of a strain sometimes. Like living out your destiny everyday."

**I**N EIGHT DAYS I see The Clash play six gigs — two of them, in Fulham and at Ravers in Manchester, totally unscheduled and slotted in the day before the gig because the band found they had the time and the facilities to play.

The Ravers gig is notable not only for not being sold out ("Not only is it a return to playing club dates, but a return to playing club dates that aren't even sold out — makes sure you keep your perspective," says Jones), but also for a certain drama involving Topper Headon and a girl — a situation that puts him in a position

where he is forced to decide between his emotions and his loyalties to the group.

More over, their sound, which in the past has frequently been erratic to say the very least, has now been sorted out to an extent where you know this is a big league rock band you're witnessing and not some mere experiment in anarchic creative situations.

The set is about 50/50 old and new material — which, considering the paradoxically reactionary nature already evident in certain of the hardcore punk fans, is brave indeed. And almost always it works.

After the first number — which I think is generally "Complete Control", although that might be complete mental aberration — you get (not necessarily in this order) "Tommy Gun", "Bang Bang" (featuring Mick Jones' Ron Wood-like runs across the stage), "Capital Radio", the splendid "Stay Free", a "Police And Thieves" that frequently segues into a verse of "Blitzkrieg Bop", plus the one that really seems to confuse them, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home".

The Clash also play "Chapskates" and "London's Burning" and "White Riot" (generally as the encore) and "Janie Jones" and "Clash City Rokers" and, of course, the superb ("White Man) In Hammersmith Palais". Plus several others that I've temporarily forgotten.

It's no wonder really that the kids at the front always seem into trashing the hall. The chemical fusion onstage is producing near-nuclear possibilities. After all, all influences duly considered, The Clash really do produce the best, the warmest, the most involving, the most enjoyable rock 'n' roll shows I've ever seen.

Indeed, there were even rash moments during the quite magnificent Aberdeen gig when I start hallucinating that The Clash really were the '70s Beatles.

**O**N THE WAY BACK to the Piccadilly Hotel in Manchester after Jones and Strummer had been out scoring some sounds — Jones had bought cassettes of Peter Tosh's "Legalise It!", Al Green's "Let's Stay Together", Neil Young's "On The Beach" and Randy Newman's "Little Criminals" — we pass a piece of Manchester United graffiti which, via an intelligent usage of paint, has transmuted into MU...NF.

"About the best piece of art-work they'll ever manage," snarls Strummer sibilantly through the gap in his front teeth.

A couple of hours later Mick Jones, Mary (the fan-club secretary, who's distraught at having only been given £15 by the Clash's management to form the band's appreciation society), and I are sitting up in Joe's room watching a highly emotive *World In Action* expose on the puerile macho fantasies of the Front, when a slightly tense version of the Strummer hip rockabilly gunslinger strolls in.

He stands scowling at the programme for maybe two or three minutes.

"Did you talk to Bernie about all these problems with the fan-club?" enquires Jones, as Mary disappears into the bathroom.

In a sudden spasm of rage, Joe takes a penalty kick at the wastepaper basket, a cassette just misses my head, and the band's onstage frontman storms out, followed shortly after by Jones who cools him down and discovers that the reason Joe's upright is because he's been told he's going to have problems getting kids in to the Ravers gig for nothing.

As a matter of fact, this Strummer incident is somewhat atypical — although, in typical Leonine manner, he goes over the top a couple of times more in the next few days. In the Glasgow Apollo dressing-room he grabs by the throat a fan who is berating him for not having done more to stop the bouncers (this is perhaps a salutary lesson for the fan: later it is he who leads Mick Jones through the streets away from the police). But the days when those close to the band would tell you that "the real problem of The Clash is Joe Strummer", the days when Joe would be found lying drunk in the gutter outside Dingwalls with rain-water washing into his mouth, now seem to be over.

The occasional losses of control on the road are purely due to The Pressure, mon.

In the past, though, as Joe himself admits, they were down to "the demon drink" — a problem which was solved when his bout of hepatitis earlier in the year obliged him to lay off the booze altogether for the next six months if he didn't want a permanently weakened liver.

"It doesn't half make you lose your friends, though, not going down the pub," he laughs. He also vigorously denies that the hepatitis was due to an ingestion of impure stimulating powders. Cocaine he considers to be "complete muck. If you snort coke you're in on your own. You don't want anybody and you don't need anybody. Which is a horrible place to be."

Joe has a very powerful aura about him.

Onstage, he never smiles. This hard man stage persona, like the pre-hepatitis love of booze, may well be an extension of the belligerent Scotsman within him. His mother is Scottish and he claims that the sound of bagpipes renders him most emotional. (Jones, incidentally, is also a half-Celt — his mother is Welsh whilst his father is Jewish.)

He is also, as are all The Clash, a very sensitive and perceptive bloke, though not necessarily a near-intellectual in the same way that Jones certainly is.

When he was about 18 (he's 25 now) and just getting set to leave the minor public school in Epsom to which his parents had sent him (and where they told him he wasn't "university material", which is how he ended up going to Central Art School in London for a year before deciding it was a waste of time), Joe's brother committed suicide.

Although he comments no further than that "it happened at a pretty crucial time in my life," it seems certain that this event had a significant bearing in creating Joe Strummer, ally of the powers of positivism and light.

His brother, 18 months older than Joe, was a member of the National Front and was obsessed with the occult. In every way he seems to have been Joe's opposite. "He was such a nervous guy that he couldn't bring himself to talk at all. Couldn't speak to anyone."

"In fact, I think him committing suicide was a really brave thing to do. For him, certainly. Even though it was a total cop-out."

**H**E LEANS BACK on the bed-head in his Aberdeen hotel room. It's two in the morning and we're both pretty done in. All the time, he tells me, underlining what Mick had said earlier in the day, he keeps getting signs — whether in the form of actual emissaries or less tangible incidents — that he, and this band, are on the right path.

"I go in for that mumbo-jumbo a lot myself," he smiles. "Like, when me and Mick went to Jamaica I was quite convinced we were going to die. At Heathrow someone dropped this ketchup all over the floor in front of us — and then we get there and we're driving through Trenchtown and I glance up at this wall and just see this one word: BLOOD."

"Mind you, nothing happened at all like that, and when I got back I thought, 'What a lot of time I wasted worrying'."

Jamaica, mind you, was not a



position of conflict with other bands. "We said we didn't want to top that bill," Jones shakes his head. "We just wanted to be part of it."

And then backstage there were all these numbers going down with Tom Robinson's management — and someone turned the power down on us and made sure the PA wasn't working properly.

"But," he nods with a smile, "when we went onstage the sun started shining, so obviously the forces must have been with us."

"However, there are so many groups who do treat their fans as if they're complete rubbish. I can't think of many groups at all who really still care."

"Who is this? Well, we haven't given up. Neither have The Slits either. Nor Generation X. I certainly don't think John Rotten's given up... Nor Jimmy Pursey. Actually, I don't think Keith Richard ever gave up really. Mick Jagger certainly did, though."

We talk for a few minutes about the new material. Joe had told me that the anthem-like new number, "Stay Free", was about a friend of Jones' whom I'd met on several occasions in his role as dilettante journalist.

"It's not just about him," the guitarist says. "It's about all my gang in Brixton. That guy's the lucky one — he's escaped."

"Two of the others both work in butchers' shops and are in the National Front. Twenty-three and they're in the Front."

"I don't talk to them because of that, though. I go and see them. Show them what I've done. Show them the possibilities."

"You know," he free-associates, "it seems to me there are only three types of possible relationships: master-pupil, or pupil-master, or — and this is the really rare one that I've had about twice — a one-to-one relationship where you both help each other. That's the one to quest for, isn't it?"

"Actually, I've been reading a lot about orgone energy lately. I've suddenly started realising that all of