

Rude Boy
Directed by Jack Hazan
Starring The Clash and
Ray Gange
(Tigon)

RUDE BOY has been guaranteed patronage thanks to the histrionic copy of the Fleet Street cinema hacks, and the less chauvinistic but equally provocative advance comment in the music press has guaranteed it substantial interest among its own readers.

It seems probable that an impartial judgment will be deemed unlikely, irrelevant or unconvincing until some time in the indeterminate future when the fuss has died down. So it goes.

As one who enjoys both rock and film, though rarely in the same cocktail, *Rude Boy* is a shattering experience. Filmed between '77 and '79 by Jack Hazan and David Mingay (who had previously collaborated on the intriguing, if fey, *Bigger Splash*) it traces the history of Ray Gange, ex-dole queue lout, ex-sexshop salesman, ex-Clash roadie, during the Clash tours within the period.

Only *Gimme Shelter* has previously attempted to show the other side of rock and its effect on a nation's youth through documentary evidence. But that was contained within the events of the Altamont Festival and it depicted a British band in an American context. *Rude Boy* utilises documentary footage intercut with the re-enactment of related sequences to trace the careers of a British boy, a British band and a British politician in Britain of the late '70s. While many of the specific problems are peculiar to this scepter'd Isle, the implications of the film are universal.

At the socio-political level, it illustrates the confusion

THE CLASH



experienced by 'disaffected youth' in the face of an increasingly repressive climate. While Maggie Thatcher campaigns for political leadership on the platform of increased police power, young black pickpockets are monitored on video by sinister plain-clothes detectives. They are later busted in a series of raids that reek of *Starsky And Hutch* overkill.

Earlier, we see a series of confrontations between groups of NF and SWP supporters tenuously separated by a wave of blue uniforms. Ray, uneducated, naive and alone, is easy prey

for the radicals, and thanks to the hero ethic which associates power with ambition and reward, and pacifism with cowardice, it's hardly surprising he leans towards the Right. Vaguely aware that The Clash stand for something else, he eventually manages to join them on the road.

Closely interwoven with the events is another theme that increases in significance as the film progresses; artistic responsibility. Chosen not because they are the quote Greatest Rock And Roll Band In The World unquote, but because they were the most influential new wave group



RUDE BOY

and are still maturing, The Clash reveal more about themselves and rock than any amount of objective reportage can do.

Mick Jones is the actor, playing his part to the hilt

whether it's on the steps of Clerkenwell Magistrates Court or in the studio laying down the vocal to 'Stay Free' in front of an idolising Ray. Topper and Paul are in many ways the most dangerous, being

almost solely responsible for the glorification of a violent and maverick lifestyle; shooting pigeons or stealing from Caroline Coon's handbag, they are the naughty boys of the group. But of all The Clash the single most crucial figure is Strummer. In repose, he has the riveting presence of James Dean or the young Brando. On stage, he is the quintessential rock martyr, and frequently unable to control the forces he has summoned. His anger and despair at the audience and at himself are among the most vivid memories of the film.

The lurching, inarticulate figure of Ray is the focal point and, ironically, from start to finish he remains a speck in The Clash's vision. And that is the inevitable tragedy. For while the film charts the growth of a movement through the eyes of a typical member, it also shows how far away the agents of that movement are from the individual problem. The Clash have never doubted the reason for their existence; Ray was never offered a reason for his.

As a testament to The Clash in performance it is magnificent and as a depiction of life in a rock band it provides some of the most honest moments you're ever likely to see — ranging from the back stage boredom to subsistence-level sex, and curiously touching moments like Joe at the piano playing 'Let The Good Times Roll' as Ray careers drunkenly around the rehearsal room.

A sprawling, monstrous, necessary film, it ultimately shows The Clash in imminent danger of sacrificing their humanity for immortality. No wonder they don't like it.

Neil Norman