

Politics Rock in Clash's 'Rude Boy'

"Rude Boy," a musical film with The Clash and Ray Gange. Produced and directed by Jack Hazan and David Mingay. At the Tower Theater, 69th and Ludlow Streets.

By JONATHAN TAKIFF
WORKING CLASS blokes in England talk politics the way Americans rap about baseball. It's idle chatter, sport, hobby, and also a way of life. Political stances run to extremes — from arch conservatism to neo-fascism. Everyone wants to know "Which side are you on?"

The fierce political rhetoric of The Clash's music has already made them kings of the English punk rock movement — and a bit of a bafflement to a political American listeners. But now with The Clash's film debut "Rude Boy," many will wise up to what the saw-toothed singer Joe Strummer and his songwriting partner Mick Jones and their buddies are screaming about.

"I think the Left is better," Strummer tells a band fan named Ray

FILM

(Gange.) "It's not just for the few, the many slavin' for the few." Later, Strummer offers that "To me, the Left and Communism is no difference."

"Rude Boy" follows the story of The Clash's reluctant rise to the top in a radically disjointed, yet effective docu-drama fashion. Our viewpoint is through the eyes and ears of the crass and inarticulate "rude boy" Ray.

CLASH MUSIC — more varied than you'd find with most punk groups — is used in parallel construction to the plot, so that lyrics can comment on the story. After Ray has spent a night in jail (merely for giving lip to some coppers) and ventures off to a rock club, The Clash is on stage singing about "Police and Thieves." At a rehearsal scene, they're doing "Gara-geland." When the group takes the

stage at a Rock Against Racism rally in Victoria Park, they warn the throngs that "London's Burning." Setting off on tour, they perform "White Riot" in a Glasgow theater, while burly bouncers are smashing kids heads into walls. After Joe Strummer chats cheerily in his hotel room about Italian terrorist groups, the band has a go with "Tommy Gun." So it goes.

The suspicion The Clash must share that their own rhetoric is hollow, misplaced or otherwise ineffective is personified by Ray — a nice enough guy but as dim-witted as they are. In the ultimate groupie fantasy, The Clash offers him a job as a

roadie, and he blows the opportunity badly.

As dramas go, "Rude Boy" is not thought to win any prizes. No scene or thought is ever resolved, though that may be the idea. Frustration runs rampant!

THERE'S NO QUIBBLING over the performance footage, though. Shot largely from the viewpoint of the band members, and with a superb sound mix, the concert scenes kick butt and then some. Yes, this non-believer was converted. Or at least stunned into submission. All the old rock clichés seem new again, when delivered with The Clash's pure conviction.



Ray Gange: Dim-witted

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