

'Rude Boy' may not be so hot . . .



REVIEW / MOVIE

RUDE BOY — A film starring The Clash. With Ray Gange. Music written by Joe Strummer and Mick Jones. Produced and directed by Jack Hazan and David Mingay. At the Nickelodeon Cinema, Boston. No Rating.

By Michael Blower
Globe Correspondent

Ray is alienated. He lives in a housing development rife with racial problems. He's unemployed. He wears a black leather jacket and rarely smiles. The politicians don't speak to his situation and the cops harass him. The only thing he listens to is punk music, specifically, the driving sounds of The Clash. He's a rude boy.

The term rude boy, according to press material, was first used in the Middle Ages to describe country boys who came to the city and fell in with the criminal elements. The upper class used the term to describe these ruffians who threatened the social order.

The lower class consciousness that energizes the music of The Clash is the raison d'être for "Rude Boy." In theory, a film that illustrates the disaffection of contemporary youth and the hypocrisy of established thinking should be welcomed during a summer of lightweight movies. But "Rude Boy" pulls a hit-and-run job.

It is clumsily directed with only fleeting references to the political, social and cultural climate that fertilized the punk movement. There is a subplot suggesting the double standard of the British judicial system. But a scene of a young black convicted of an alleged crime is never resolved. The audience is left hanging.

According to some unconfirmed reports, the film underwent severe editing before its release. The producers, in order to keep the running time under two hours, cut several scenes that might have explained the film's politics more clearly. They apparently decided that the music was more important.

The sound of The Clash is everywhere. We hear them rehearsing for concerts, on the radio and before huge, anonymous crowds. During one concert sponsored by a leftist group, the audience looks like they dropped in from the youth rally sequence in Len Riefenstahl's "Triumph of the Will."

The inability of Hazan and Mingay to integrate the story with the songs destroys the potentially dramatic impact of their movie. They should have either shot a few musical performances and made it a straight concert film or told the story of yet another Angry Young Man. They obviously couldn't do both.

REVIEW / MUSIC

. . . but the Clash is electrifying

By Steve Morse
Globe Staff

Even if the script of "Rude Boy" is ridden with holes and stereotypes the British punk scene as the seamy retreat of lowlife gutter-snipes, the music is among the most dynamic ever captured on the screen.

The film catches the Clash, Britain's most electrifying new wave band, in their angry early days in 1978, amid two tours that took them through cities like London, Birmingham, Aberdeen and Glasgow. The band has repudiated the film — partly because they were not given scriptural control and did not like the semi-incoherent end result — but they have nothing to be ashamed of in the taped footage of their performances — 20 songs, comprising more than half the film.

The Clash's overwhelming energy comes through most clearly; every song is played as if there's no tomorrow. The camera focuses unrelentingly on singer Joe Strummer, but his contorted face, savagely spit-out vocals and spontaneous acrobatics (one minute he's leaning over the crowd like a psychotic pied piper, the next he's writhing on his back, screaming about political injustice) make for much more exciting concert footage than the monotonous closeups of guitarist Jerry Garcia's fingers in "The Grateful Dead Movie" or the fatiguing, I'm-more-clever-than-you grin of Neil Young in "Rust Never Sleeps."

The music has something to say to all rock fans, not just Clash devotees. It documents the seething, revolutionary roots of punk, and there are moments of chilling self-appraisal forced by high-velocity numbers like "I'm So Bored with the USA" (which occurs during a tense Glasgow show marred by overzealous bouncers), "Tommy Gun," "White Riot," recorded in the film's peak, during an outdoor anti-racism benefit in London, as the crowd goes wild from the song's fury) and a climactic version of the rock classic, "I Fought the Law (and the Law Won)," in London's Lyceum.

The Clash performs many of the staunchly aggressive songs heard during their early-1979 Harvard Square Theatre debut (the songs all precede their more toned-down "London Calling" album). The film's sound is surprisingly well-mixed (which their Harvard Square debut was not), and pains are taken to show punk's affirmative links with reggae, as when the Clash's live cover of Junior Murvin's reggae anthem, "Police and Thieves," is followed by Murvin's recorded version, played as background while the film's protagonist walks through an arcade the next day.

The film's script is a mishmash, but the music strips away your defenses and goes right to the gut.

Ray Gange and Terry McQuade just hanging around in the streets with nothing to do in "Rude Boy."

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