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## THE CLASH MOVIE: A RUDE AWAKENING

BY BART MILLS

ONDON-A rock band which stars in a controversial new film was hired a year after shooting began. And, after working on the "rock opera/ social documentary" on and off for another year, the band threatened legal action to prevent it from being released.

It's a music film with no sound-track album. It's a political film that neither right nor left will espouse. "Rude Boy" could only be a product of Britain's punk culture. The band could only be the Clash.

"Rude Boy" is a \$1.1 million attempt, largely successful, to tell the world what the political end of punk was all about in 1977-79. Jack Hazan and David Mingay, co-producers and co-directors, combined newsreel-type footage of London street riots, shots of Clash concerts and reenacted scenes from the short career of a Clash roadie to suggest the tensions that underlie the calm surface of Britain.

As if to prove that fact, at the London premiere of the film a critic for the Observer walked up to Mingay, asked if he was responsible "for this rubbish," and punched him in the eye. Mingay reportedly knocked the man to the ground.

The film is an open-ended mixture of styles and points of view, similar in intent and accomplishment to Hazan's controversial 1975 documentary about artist David Hockney, "A Bigger Splash." Contentious Clash songs like "White Riot" and "Tommygun" are presented straight, but the roadie is filmed complaining to a member of the band, "It annoys me when music gets mixed up with politics."

Hazan and Mingay began the film by shooting scenes of fat-cat processions like the Queen's limousine leaving Buckingham Palace for the 1977 Jubilee celebration. "That was just the time when punk was coming to life," recalls Mingay. 'We didn't know where making the film would lead us, but we knew it would have to be a music film." Their working title had an Orwellian ring: "1980." The final "Rude Boy" title comes from a Jamaican phrase meaning "rebellious youth.'

Mingay began hanging out in punk clubs, where he met an imposing 18year-old called Ray Gange. As Gange recalls it, "This guy came up to me and said he wanted to put me in a film. I told him to ---- off."

After six months of urging, Mingay convinced Gange to help. Gange claimed to be a buddy of Joe Strummer, the Clash vocalist. Very soon, Gange said, he would be going out on the road with the band as a roadie.

"Guided 100% by Gange," the film makers concocted a scenario. "Based on reality and assumptions about what might have happened," Gange says, the film tells the story of how he chummed up to the band, hung on for a while and was discarded in the end.

In the film, Gange would be what he'd claimed to be, a friend of Joe Strummer and a Clash semi-roadie. In real life, Gange had had many dead-end jobs, but the film would show just one of them, as a cashier in a porno bookshop.

Gange's attraction to the Clash's sound and rejection of its political message became the point of view of the film. As Hazan says, "You must assume we're most sympathetic to Gange."



Clash Roadie Ray Gange

At the end of the film, Gange's drinking and his political blankness cause the band to turn against him: "Maybe I should be black," Gange whines after one insult. "I get treated like a nigger anyway." Later, the band and the crew throw Gange's beery carcass under a cold shower and kick him out of the hotel in the middle of the night.

It's not the usual sweetness-and-light conclusion to a pop-group film, from "A Hard Day's Night" to "ABBA: The Movie." If the Clash thought it was going to get a film that presented itself as lovable spike-tops, it was mistaken in agreeing to work with Hazen and Mingay.

The Clash is the one band that has stayed together and stayed angry and stayed popular since the late '70s beginning of the punk era in London's underground clubs. The punk era has long since ended, and the Clash no longer wears T-shirts bearing terrorist slogans. Its music still celebrates conflict but isn't so overtly a call to arms.

Its current album, "London Calling," is the band's first effort to appeal to a wider audience than Britain's disaffected urban teen-agers. For the first time, Strummer's vocals are mixed high enough to be heard. The album, and a single from the LP, "Train in Vain," both cracked the American Top 30.

s for the Clash's disavowal of the film (for which they get 10% of the producer's net), current cofilm (for which they get 10% of manager Andrew King will say only that "the band was worried about the totality of the film. The punters (fans) might feel it's a Clash film, but it's only a film that includes the Clash. The Clash stands behind what they say and do in the film, but not the rest. It's unfair that it should be sold as a Clash film."

"Rude Boy" was financed by London theater impressario Michael White, whose previous ventures into cinema included "The Rocky Horror Picture Show." Distribution of the film is being handled by Atlantic Releasing, which opened it last month in Boston and New York. It is set to open in other cities, including L.A., this month.

American audiences will see a shorter film than did their English counterparts. The reason, says Hazan, in L.A. editing the film, was that he was asked by the distributor to get rid of "irrelevant parts of the film, especially the National Front stuff." The film was originally more than two hours long, and some 20 to 45 minutes will be taken out.