

ON THE TO

LEEDS CITY SHOCKER

The Clash

LEEDS

BANDS DON'T play Leeds Queen's Hall for the music; they do it strictly for the loot. Specifically designed for exhibitions of the Earls Court non-rock variety, the atmosphere and acoustics are so zero it's like hearing long distance discs and looking at insectile imposters from the far end of a vast aircraft hanger.

When The Stranglers played here last October (on a night which clashed with the Leeds Live Stiff sell-out) 4,500 showed up and Hugh Cornwell was all but embarrassed that his band had achieved such a mass mandate, saying (very unconvincingly), "This is as big as we want it to get. We don't ever want to play to more people than this."

Similarly (no doubt) The Clash and their promoters hoped for a repeated comprehensive turnout. But the venue was chosen as badly as the original punk ethic was abused.

The frugal hundreds who came hardly justified the extravagance of the setting; in a word, this Clash concert failed. (Not because their musical significance has declined or because they can't exit or don't have substantial promise — but just because someone somewhere over-rated their drawing power (though it's probably an indication that The Clash's superior punk is going the way of all the other species' rather than a straight forward representation of the band's relevance rating.)

With Suicide having pulled out of the support slot, a lot of people were feeling a little put upon having to make do with Siouxsie Banshee and

Chelsea, the bands whose job it was to kill some time and close some open spaces. They made the best of it, though, and helped to generate some kind of tension for the City Rockers — the rest being supplied by a phoney intermission comprising some frenzied punk waxings and a shakey hand on the lights network, leading ultimately, to the Meserschmitt/Notting Hill projected backdrop and the band's definitive entree.

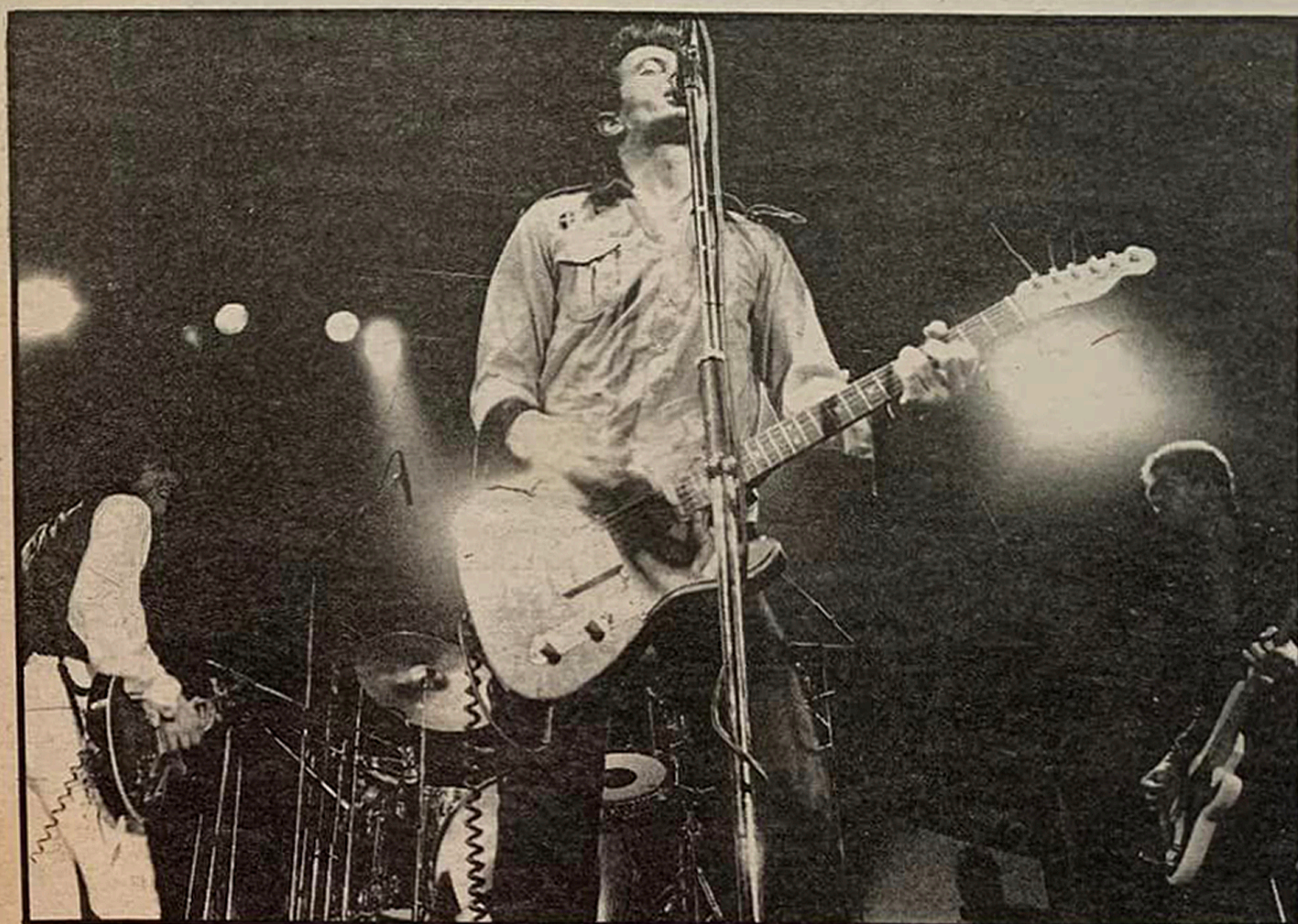
Always one of the more charismatic of the new bands, The Clash, as ever, looked good; Mick Jones in white straights, blouse and red waistcoat, Strummer in yellow (the smart-assed trouble-making high school kid having difficulty — would you believe? — holding his pants up "With A Sham 69 badge"), and acquitted pidgeon shooter Simonon with his customary Nazi-chic outfit and Richard Hell stances at the axe.

If you weren't supposed to be seeing The Clash just for their music, you'd probably get entertainment enough just seeing them move.

But the music, after all, is the stuff that shifts the units, and The Clash's apparent difficulty in "getting things right" for the second album leads you to expect pretty big things from them as they get to grips with another tour.

It's too early to say The Clash have progressed — the new album will probably stun just like the debut — but on the strength of this performance, they don't go out of their way to indicate progression (though as previously stated, the sheer inadequacy of this venue mitigates most shortcomings).

The one thing you can say about the band with total assurance, however, is that each and every



Pix: PAUL SLATTERY

member is developing considerable proficiency. The style may not have changed much, but the delivery has a solid propensity.

Jones solos impressively (frequently at will) and Topper Headon produces rock steady drumming with the occasional flash of quasi-virtuosity. Only Strummer hasn't really changed, though with an acid test of an impending album threatening/haunting him like an albatross, pulling out the stops for a few hundred punters in a Northern aerodrome is probably the last thing he needs.

The essential effect of this musical maturation is that The Clash seem to have graduated/shifted towards Heavy Metal music; distinctive, dischordant maybe, but Heavy Metal all the same.

Of the numbers, ironically, "Complete Control" loses its vitality live, while "Clash City Rockers" and "Tommy Gun", hardly seminal Clash numbers to begin with, come over like punk tunes a dime a dozen, drowned in volume and the ambition of each Clasher to feature at the death.

The very best, "Capital Radio" and a sequence

of songs from the first (first again?) album, followed — "London's Burning", "I'm So Bored With The USA", "Janie Jones", the band's classic immaculate "Police And Thieves" interpretation, and the inevitable standard, "White Riot".

"White Man In Hammersmith Palais" is the one song that looks forward rather than back, and a hint that the band can successfully experiment with *rhythms*, which (unless Strummer preserves his marginally political naive obsessions forever) are possibly the most plausible device to secure their safe and credible exit from this tight-time limbo.

Well over a year after The Clash set the standard with the best rock album of the New Age, the band must be aware that things are not as cut and dried as they should be.

The Clash maybe sometimes beg to be written off, but somehow you can't do it. While we await the album (in the meantime), the band should check out the suitability of their venues in advance.

Emma Ruth

