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Clash's grey riot

IT'S somewhat depressing to be reminded that however hard bands like the Clash try to avoid becoming the subject of intense and almost uncritical devotion, it is an inevitable part of becoming a successful rock 'n' roll band.

The white riot of two years ago has been tempered to just a conventional celebration for the masses that now pack the band's concerts, and Sunday night at Manchester's Apollo Theatre proved to be no exception.

The two support acts met a sea of blank faces and a reaction of complete indifference and ignorance. The audience was there for the Clash, and for the moment they could leap out of their seats, rip them up and join in a ritualistic display of frenetic dancing.

Suicide, the cult duo from New York on their debut tour of this country, literally died a death on stage. Their curious presentation and challenging sound were right out of place in this cabinet cinema.

They resemble a sort of 21st century cabaret act and they create what is best described as electronic toasting. Singer Alan Vega had all his vocals wildly over-echoed and it came out as a blend of distorted chanting and primal screams over the top of the synthesizer work of Martin Rev.

It's an eerie experience, and while it wasn't enjoyable, it was intriguing. The lyrics of their brief 25 minute set were completely lost, due to the poor sound and the impatient slow hand-clapping of the crowd, but it was just possible to make out a cybernetic

version of the old ? and the Mysterians hit "96 Tears."

They would probably make more sense in a small club and it would certainly be worth finding out. This perverse experimental outfit must have something to justify their growing cult status in the States, and the rave reviews of their debut album.

And so to the Clash and to 60 minutes of really fine high-speed rock 'n' roll, which ended with two thundering encores and a deliriously happy audience.

They also suffered from sound problems and mid-way through the set seemed to have lost their direction slightly — but the highspots far outweighed the low ones.

"Clash City Rockers" really set the place alight and then "White Man In Hammersmith Palais," which looks set to be their first real hit single, saw the band in excellent form. The real gem of the night, however, was an immaculate version of "Police And Thieves," which they have improved tremendously with really exemplary guitar work from Mick Jones and the complementary voice of Joe Strummer.

There was a stack of new songs, which they steamed through at a rate of knots, which were well-received; favourites like "Janie Jones" and "White Riot" were saved for a superbly executed climax.

The Clash have certainly no cause for concern. They've become professional and their audience predictable, but they have achieved complete control. — ANDY HARRIES.