

S M A S H

HITS

30p FORTNIGHTLY December 13-26 1979

**CLASH
TOURISTS
WINGS**

Words to the
TOP SINGLES
including

**Crawling From The Wreckage
Off The Wall
Living On An Island**

Secret Affair **in colour**

PINK FLOYD LPs TO BE WON



JOE STRUMMER sips his pint and collects his thoughts. The gruff, livewire Clash vocalist is sitting opposite me in a poky public bar no more than a stone's throw from the band's current rehearsal room. Shrouded in a battered Crombie overcoat and a jacket at least two sizes too small, he blends unnoticed with the early evening boozers.

Joe obviously enjoys the fame he has found via The Clash. But, paradoxically, he also revels in the anonymity he acquires in this dismal south London pub. As he readily points out, if Jimmy Pursey, Bob Geldof or any other new recruit to the Blankety-Blank Generation were sitting where he is, heads would turn.

In shying away from the cheap publicity that has made the likes of Pursey, Geldof and even Lydon household names, Joe Strummer has retained not only his dignity but also his perspective. He still sees things from a streetwise, almost worm's-eye point of view.

JOE STRUMMER is one of those rare types who can win you over by sheer force of character. In the space of a C60 Philips cassette, he shows glimpses of anger, passion, dismay and cruel wit. He also remains as fiercely committed to The Clash as when they played their first gig, supporting The Sex Pistols over three years ago at Islington's Screen On The Green cinema in London.

The fact that The Clash still survive where so many of their contemporaries have gone under or lost all sense of purpose, Joe attributes to the thrill of discovering new sounds. The Clash, despite continually looking to be on the verge of splitting up, are still very much alive.

"These guys are the only people I could ever play with now," Joe says over the pub din. "If we had a big bust up tomorrow, I don't see the point of finding anybody else to play with."

"I don't see the point of being Steve Jones and Paul Cook and going around doing a bit of this and a bit of that. They come up with something strong as a group but, from there on, it's mediocrity all the way."

But not for The Clash. Their latest masterpiece, "London Calling", a double album that retails for the price of one — shows a distinct change of direction. As Joe puts it, they've gone Motown — but not in the crass and blatant manner of, say, Secret Affair.

"We're still digging our reggae ditch but what we've added to that is Motown. It's that kind of thing, but as a simple four piece group plus two tablespoons of organ and half a pint of horn. To me, it's a feeling that just comes out naturally, so you try to choke it off a bit and tense it up so it comes out sounding even harder."

"To me, music is a feeling, the best that there is. The reason I'm in it is 'cause I believe we can get the best feelings and I believe in the people I work with."

Not surprisingly, Joe still sees The Clash, perhaps childishly, as a great quest, something akin to Journey To The Centre Of The Earth in 3-D with a soundtrack by Chuck Berry.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm really into the whole grandeur thing. I don't like doing things by half. We really like to get going. It helps to build up morale and keep things exciting. Like, if someone comes up with a wild idea, it's immediately recognised for what it is and not disregarded. You have to crank yourself up like that."

"LONDON CALLING", according to Joe, is far and away the best Clash record ever. And he picks out a couple of rather strange reasons as to why.

First, the tension between the four individual members of the band — Strummer and guitarist Mick Jones in particular — was at fever pitch when the songs were being written.

"That's had a really good effect on the music. When you're playing for your life, it makes for a good record."

Secondly, Joe subscribes to the unusual theory that subjecting yourself to mediocrity sparks off the creative powers. The mediocrity in question is none other than the great blandness of British radio.

Sneers Joe: "I subject myself to the radio all the time. I must be a masochist or something, but I force myself to listen to it just for the annoyance, the irritation."

The two biggest offenders in Joe's books are Messrs Geldof and Sting.

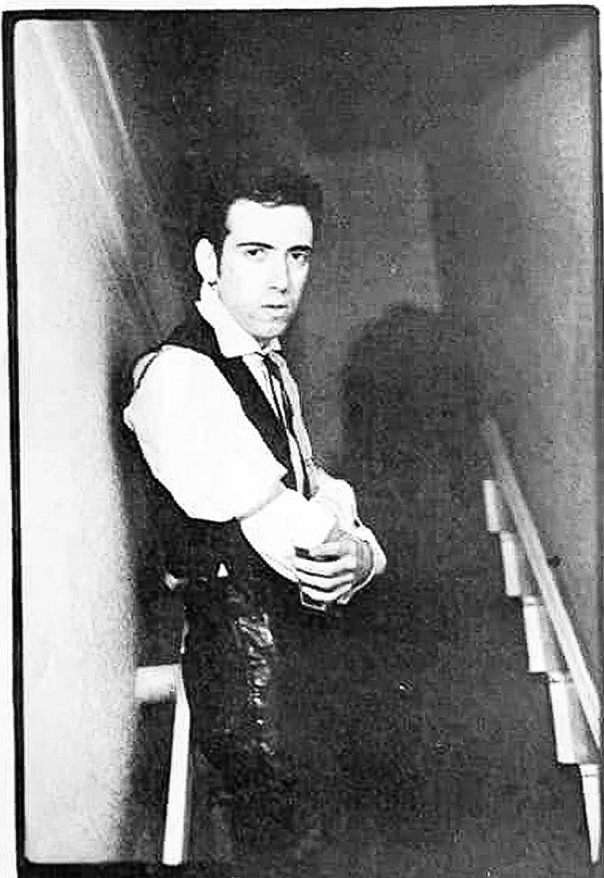
"If there is anyone left in Britain who can stand that bloke's voice — PC Sting — they should get a medal or telegram from the Queen."

"And the same goes for Bob Geldof. I just can't stand that smart-alec, gubbering, twittering - while - you're - desperately - hamming - it - up - with - the - old - cliches - against - a Bruce -

STRUMMERTIME BLUES

THE CLASH'S JOE STRUMMER
PUTS DOWN BOB GELDOF, THE
POLICE AND THE CURRENT
CROP OF NEW BANDS BUT
SAYS THINGS WILL
GET BETTER





**TAPE OPERATOR: ADRIAN THRILLS
CAMERA CREW: PENNIE SMITH**

Springsteen - piano - intro. I just can't stand the way it comes out of the radio every five seconds.

"But," Joe continues, "Every time Bob Geldof comes out with that emotionless eunuch's voice, it boosts me ten miles in the soul, just for the irritation. In fact, if you sat down in a corner with 'Diamond Smiles' playing on a loop tape through stereo headphones, you'd get up and write the sequel to 'Blue Suede Shoes', I swear you would."

As if to push the point home, Joe tells about a mate of his who wrote a great song after spending an hour at the piano trying to learn a Mozart ditty note by painstaking note, before chucking the book over his shoulder in disgust.

THE CLASH have spent a sizeable chunk of this year in America on an exhausting coast-to-coast trek, a venture which has left a decidedly mixed impression on the band. Strummer, for example, claims to love New York and the redneck Deep South, but moans about the narrow-mindedness of the American audiences.

The States, however, did provide The Clash with the chance to work a host of new songs into their act and, in fact, totally re-vamp their live show. Paul Simon now takes over lead vocals on one song, "Guns Of Brixton", with Joe switching from rhythm guitar to reggae bass.

The new material previewed by The Clash on their American jaunt crops up on the new album — self-penned songs along with a couple of covers: Willie Williams', "Armageddon Time" and The Rulers' "Wrong 'Em Boyo".

"With some of those songs, the Americans didn't have a clue what we were playing," explains Joe as he swirls a glass of lager perilously close to my non-beer-proof cassette recorder.

"And we did a lot of the new stuff on that tour so it was quite funny to see their reaction. Like when we did our Clashified version of 'Wrong 'Em Boyo', none of them had a clue what was hitting them.

"We tried a lot of new things over in America because we resented the way a lot of them treated us. They talked about us as 'The Clash — currently the best available live adrenalin rush in town!' They talk of you in terms of drug effects, not as musicians.

"Obviously, we resented that, so to be contrary we'd do things like playing an acoustic song in the middle of the set, just to get up their noses. I think you have to do things like that just to keep awake."

GETTING UP people's noses is something The Clash can do pretty well, whether they are biting off more than they can chew, and consequently falling flat on their faces, or haranguing an apathetic audience. One of Strummer's hobbyhorses in the States was the typical American rock fan's apparent ignorance of rock 'n' roll's black roots.

"All day over there, the kids are worshipping those blokes in tight trousers and stack heeled boots. And what they've forgotten is that it all comes from the blacks.

"It struck me the other day," Joe offers, "if there hadn't been any slavery, there wouldn't be any rock 'n' roll.

"Like, the southern American blacks were singing all about putting on drape coats and brothel creepers and doing the Hugga-Hugga in 1948, six years before the Memphis Sun Studios did it! All (producer) Sam Phillips did was to switch a white man for the black singer and hey presto — rock 'n' roll, six years later!"

Talk of Sun Studios and Elvis P reminds Joe of a story passed onto him by an old guy he stumbled across on one of The Clash's Yankee dates. The missing link in rock 'n' roll history, no less.

"This is the actual story he told me," babbles an excited Strummer. "Rock 'n' roll was discovered in a coffee break! Back in Sam Phillips' studio, Elvis and his band had done about 17 takes of some old country song so Sam Phillips goes 'Take Five!' which means coffee break.

"So they take five and Bill Black puts down his bass, Scotty Moore puts down his guitar, and DJ Fontana chucks down his brushes. Then, just to pass the time, Elvis starts singing this Big Boy Cruddup song 'That's Alright Mama' that this black guy had taught him.

"He was strumming it out in the coffee break 'cause he didn't want to waste valuable studio time. Meanwhile, Sam Phillip's eyes were popping out! He reached straight for the record button and from then on they concentrated on rock 'n' roll. The country stuff went out the window!"

MOVING a little more up to date, Joe is pessimistic about the current crop of British bands. The only groups that kindle his interest are the 2-Tone groups, namely The Specials, Madness and The Selecter, and even then Joe has his reservations, mostly concerning their dependence on cover versions instead of original material.

"I used to love going to gigs. My whole ideal of living is to put on some natty dread clothes, go along to a show, have a beer and dig the show. But I can't stand what's on show at the moment. Every week I scan the sheets, look at the bills and reject them."

But Joe finishes on a message of hope.

"It's going to be better. The harder Margaret Thatcher sets in, the more benefits you'll see for rock 'n' roll."

Not to mention Bob Geldof or The Police.