FRIDAY POP

RAY KING looks at the local scene

An album in the city

RIGHT: The Clash —seen in Manchester this week

TOP TEN

1 (1) **Rat Trap**—Boomtown Rats
2 (2) **Hopelessly Devoted To You**—Olivia Newton-John
3 (5) **My Best Friend's Girl**—Cars
4 (-) **Do Ya Think I'm Sexy**—Rod Stewart
5 (7) **Pretty Little Angel Eyes**—Showaddywaddy
6 (6) **Darlin'**—Frankie Miller
7 (3) **Summer Nights**—Travolta/Newton-John
8 (8) **Instant Replay**—Dan Hartman
9 (-) **Hanging On The Telephone**—Blondie
10 (4) **Sandy**—John Travolta

THAT unlikely chartbuster Jilted John, the daft lad who lost his love to Gordon the Moron on one of the year's strangest hits, is spearheading a bid to win Manchester a bigger slice of the recording business.

For the Manchester student is currently hard at work just off Deansgate in the city centre cutting True Love Stories for EMI International, his album follow-up to his debut single success.

In doing so, he is carrying with him the hopes of the Arrow Recording Studios in Jackson's Row for a major breakthrough in the music business. In an industry where nothing succeeds like success, a big seller would make the Arrow name practically overnight.

Jilted John's sessions in the studio follow those of punk poet John Cooper Clarke, whose Disguise In Love on the CBS label was cut at Arrow and is now bubbling just under the album chart.

And that band of pop mimics the Barron Knights laid down several of the tracks on their album Night Gallery — aimed squarely at the Christmas market — in the Manchester studios.

Arrow was born out of a merger earlier this year with Indigo, which operated its pop and commercials business in nearby Gartside Street, and the new set up is under the umbrella of Greendow (MPS) Ltd.

Boss Gerry Dow arrived in Manchester 10 years ago as a film editor, and since has set up a mini Wardour Street in the city, developing the biggest film post-production house in the North. Now his ambition is to repeat that success in sound, wooing away business that has traditionally gone to London.

Coincidentally, at the same time — 1968 — that Dow came to Manchester, a young musician called Eric Stewart was making the initial moves that were to develop into the now firmly established Strawberry Studios 10 miles down the road at Stockport — the first major studio outside London.

Aiming for the same sort of success, Dow gutted the old Arrow Studio and refurbished it with an array of advanced recording gear including the first computerised 24-track mixing desk in the North.

The suite also provides facilities for artists and musicians to relax and a special lift enables vans containing group's equipment to be hoisted to studio level on the first floor.

From the new studios to the New Wave . . and two major album releases from the movement's leading exponents: Clash, who appeared at the Manchester Apollo this week, and X-Ray Spex, who gig there next Wednesday night.

I wonder what Joe Strummer and the lads - the band who shunned Top o' the Pops as being inappropriate to their style — will make of the instant commercial success of their album **Give Them Enough Rope** (CBS) which has rocketed to number two in the charts.

Raw vocals

Despite those who claimed the New Wave "died" when the Clash "sold out" to a big record company, the band still sound pretty angry to me. Tracks like Tommy Gun, the English Civil War and the Guns on the Roof are hardly middle of the road.

And they are delivered with raw vocals over screeching guitars, crashing drums and wailing brass which as often as not make the messages indecipherable. Perhaps The Clash don't particlarly care anyway. .

Personally I prefer wit to weaponry, and wit and parody are there in plenty on Spex's excellent album **Germ-Free Adolescents** (EMI), the title track of which has made the top 30 as a single release.

Poly Styrene's invention and observation of the contemporary throw-away world makes the band's debut LP worth waiting for. It features Spex's two previous EMI singles, the amazing The Day The World Turned Dayglo, and Identity, both of which made the charts.

In addition it showcases tracks illustrating the direction the band's music, and Poly's writing are likely to take in the future, from Art-I-Ficial to the remarkable Plastic Bag.

With four singles from the film Grease already hits, veteran heart-throb Frankie Avalon bids to make the score five with **Beauty School Dropout** (Mercury) but may find the going harder than Mr Travolta.

That versatile English actor-singer David Essex turns composer producer and arranger too on his new single **Goodbye First Love** (Mercury). It's a complete contrast to his last two hits, but his ballad should succeed too.

Sally Oldfield also takes all the credits on her melodic composition **Mirrors** (Bronze), one of the best produced singles for some time. With enough airplay this could make the 20.

Finally, I thought I'd heard it all with Mecco's disco version of the Wizard Of Oz, which I reviewed last week. I was wrong. Try to avoid the disco **Dr Who** by Mankind on Pinnacle. If I were a Dalek I'd exterminate . . . exterminate. . . .

TONY JASPER meets the Clash and asks them whether they talk politics just to package their product.

The banned band

THE Clash may be the only white faces adorning famous Jamaican producer Lee Perry's Wall of Fame because they made musical sense with reggae song Police And Thieves which Perry had co-authored, produced for Junior Murvin — but outside of that tribute there are precious few from any quarter, save from their fans.

The Clash have built their massive following among music addicts of vaguely New Wave persuasion, by stirring up the creditable ingredients of behaving obnoxiously, spitting out facile political diatribe and trying to shock.

For all that, they do write some songs and provide sound to get the adrenalin flowing. They are an exciting act, even if unfortunately misguided. The Clash enjoy the dubious honour of being banned from countless towns. This wonderful feat achieves precisely nothing other than preventing their loyalist followers from both seeing and hearing the band.

In recent the Clash have have played only venues where there are no seats. Even they have found it both boring and financially disturbing paying repair bills.

Change though is afoot. Well, not exactly on the recorded front, if the latest album, Give 'Em Enough Rope is the evidence.

That displays the ingredient I've mentioned but bass man Paul Simonon told me a few days ago: "Well, we have got fed up with the problems which seem to follow us. It's becoming crucial things get sorted out. We have to see eye to eye with the people around us. I suppose us getting banned really leaves the kids in a lurch because then they've got nowhere to go."

He felt criticisms amounted to sour grapes "You get up to the top and some people want you back again." When I sarcastically remarked that at least a great many of their lyrics couldn't be heard because of the sound balance he replied, "It's a lot clearer these days. There's improvement on the LP. When we started we sounded awful, but that's past."

OLIVIA Newton-John is in Manchester next Thursday. TONY JASPER writes of the girl with two images.

Home-lovin' bombshell

SALUTE the new Olivia Newton - John — the girl of 1978. In Grease, she is a bombshell. She has confidence. She struts and walks like a tiger looking for prey. It's not the same girl as the fresh - faced, quiet, unassuming lady who first hit the British charts in 1971. Then, she sang her version of the Dylan song, If Not For You. It made the top ten. Rumour has it that Olivia stunned herself in Grease She didn't realise she had the required charisma and magic. Nor did she really think so many heads could turn as she transformed herself with hairstyle and tight clothes.

Full of smiles, an infectious chuckle, eyes of warmth — that's the Olivia I knew and I hope still remains beyond this new dynamic lady of 1978. I knew her as the girl who once lived around the corner from me in London, unaffected and unassuming. And she is still all those things — I hope.

Olivia seemed to be someone heading for the world of American cabaret and country music conventions. She seemed an artist who would occasionally chart here with a class song like Sam. Grease has given her a lift, a change, expanded her world.

Reticent

Over the years she had hit the singles charts and appeared on countless television programmes. Take those hit singles — there have been **If Not For You, Banks of the Ohio, What Is Life? Take Me Home Country Roads, Long Live Love, I Honestly Love You, Sam** and now she is booked for the top with **Hopelessly Devoted To You.** To these can be added the double with John Travolta, **Summer Nights** and **You're The One That I Want,** both chart - toppers.

The list isn't long for seven years but well spaced and is now reaching heights unimagined in those early days in 1971.

Romantically she has been linked with Cliff Richard, partly because she was on his TV shows with the inevitable duet with both of them gazing into each other's eyes. For a time she became engaged to Shadows man, now Cliff's producer, Bruce Welch.

She's always been reticent in making pronouncement upon women's lib and other concerns which interest progressive women. She seems content with her lot and not particularly interested what is or is not being said for and against her sex.

She's always been aware of America being more kind to girl singers than here. She says: "There are more doors open and people take women singers more seriously. There are a lot of good writers as well."

"When I come to Britain it's a never ending run of photographs, interviews, radio, television and seeing people. I never get five minutes to myself. You go away and you realise you haven't been back in Britain for seven months and things have changed, like the record charts."

Home-type

I remarked to her on one occasion that once she could just go back to her West Hampstead flat in London and cook a meal and I wondered whether her stardom had taken away the one-time simple pleasures. She answered: "Life doesn't totally change. I haven't stopped cooking because I've had success. I'm still very much a home-type girl."

Olivia Newton-John — old and new

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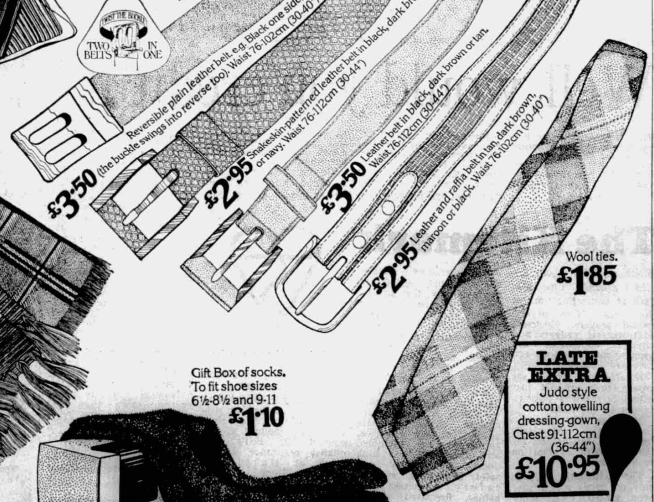

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