

The Jam

Music Machine

Dozing at the back of the lower layer of the multi-tiered Music Machine I couldn't help wondering what it is to be charming, chillingly nostalgic and contemporary. That sounds like a combination of Peter Gabriel and Julie Andrews.

But no! Lo This is The Jam, says the survey, and who am I to argue? One who fears the street, who frowns at suits, who abhors witless sloganeering.

Who, indeed?

The Jam onstage. A lot of space, for leaping and roaming. Abrasive and systematic lights, bouncing off and brashly pampering three strictly garbed stiff-limbed musicians who grasp and grope polished, sparkling instruments. Tautly animated, wilfully anguished, The Jam's unyielding antics depress — barely elaborated-upon standard rock choreography delivered with humourless, almost weary, cool.

As with all successful rock groups their show is primarily about effect, impact and assault — rigidly rehearsed and numbing.

The Jam are cold, old fashioned — and enormously effective.

Their's is the plodding world: bright, clear, nothing to fear. Clipped tales of decay, destruction, viciousness and violence sound as distant and vacuous as the World Service news. All the appealing abstractions zealously attributed to The Jam — power, passion, poetry — are at best feeble frameworks.

They're a shadow of what it's claimed they are (and purport to be), such shallowness is amply disguised live by their major asset — artificial presence. Hollow myth helps, too. Look

In the tradition that made Pinocchio great...

hard and see right through them.

Their songs — some singles, some not, a half hook and a careful slogan usually the distinction — were rammed out smooth and established. Forceful chords, neat bass, specific drums, raucously apt vocals, it's a dense sound, with little colour but much detail. Their earnest, ritualistic ditties lack, due to contrivance and pride, any fun or frivolity, and thus any actual substance, or at least something that seems proper projected with all the empty extravagance that is the Jam show.

The crude seduction of the stage show is an odd way to present their fastidiously-serious brutal ballads, but then The Jam ultimately are confused and contradictory, disciplined only in dress and musicianship.

I looked for might, tenderness, insight. What did I get? Blast, flash, debris, emptiness, no fun. I got wary parody. The Jam don't stretch imagination, they suffocate it.

The Jam's reputation is the dots of an intriguing ideal (a majestic, lyrical power trio) joined ridiculously prematurely.

Where do The Jam go from here? Wherever they're sent? They just get better? They can only get better.

The Gang of Four, using the same instruments, proved the potential and genuine power of rock with a short, subtly-disorientating set crammed with alert, evocative songs that dripped with mood and atmosphere without resorting to drowning lights, sexually orientated pantomime and fancy footwear. Their songs scratched, stretched, absorbed, as delightfully deep as you always read the Pop Group's were.

The austere, imaginative Gang of Four were absurdly refreshing next to the stale Jam. Their records are amongst dozens eagerly anticipated during the coming months. The Jam are a damaging diversion.

Paul Morley

The Clash

Music Machine

Like the few other rock bands that occasionally verge on genius — such as The Rolling Stones and the original Roxy Music — The Clash are notoriously unpredictable.

This is why I was unable to quibble with Ian Penman's damning review of their Harlesden Roxy gig (*NME* 4.11.78). Although I completely disagreed with certain of his conclusions, it was perhaps the worst Clash performance I'd ever seen.

But that was inevitable, considering the bad karma created by the organiser, the departing Bernie Rhodes.

However, this was a truly great Clash show at the Music Machine, and not because the karma of a Sid Vicious benefit peals merrily with a heartfelt joy and is therefore the antithesis of the Roxy event.

Aware that they rarely play at their best in the capital although regarded as a 'London band', they determinedly rammed a revealing passion into the concert. And there was a restless tension within the band which undoubtedly contributed to the power of their performance.

Long before the band hit the stage Joe Strummer was said to have been enraged that Mick Jones played guitar on the three numbers Philip Rambow performed, including one called, "A Song For Sid". With Rambow on acoustic guitar, Rich Kid bassist Glenn Matlock and The Slits' new drummer, Budgie, they showed impressive traces of Crazy Horse.

Strummer's fury presumably fermented during The Slits' set, and by the time The Clash opened superbly with "Safe European Home", the first track of "Give 'Em Enough Rope", it had transmogrified into Pure Energy; or else Joe was about to suffer an onstage coronary.

Most rock audiences are strangely reactionary about their heroes ramming new material down their throats, and it's a tribute to The Clash's fire power and strength that the mood established with "Home" was intensified during the next two songs: their splendid unrecorded interpretation of the Bobby Fuller Four's classic mid-60s rockabilly song, "I Fought The Law", and their own "Jail Guitar Doors".

Although Strummer has now discovered how to keep his voice healthy for a whole tour, the most striking aspect of his performance was the way he Method Acted every song, totally immersing himself in their individual atmospheres, particularly on "English Civil War" and "White Man In Hammersmith Palais". And his uneasy omnipresent sense of tragedy was counterpointed by his intense but successful struggle to retain dramatic control of every single syllable.

Apart from this the set comprised all the new album, plus a bunch of singles ("I Fought The Law" may be the next one), and closed with a handful of songs from their first LP.

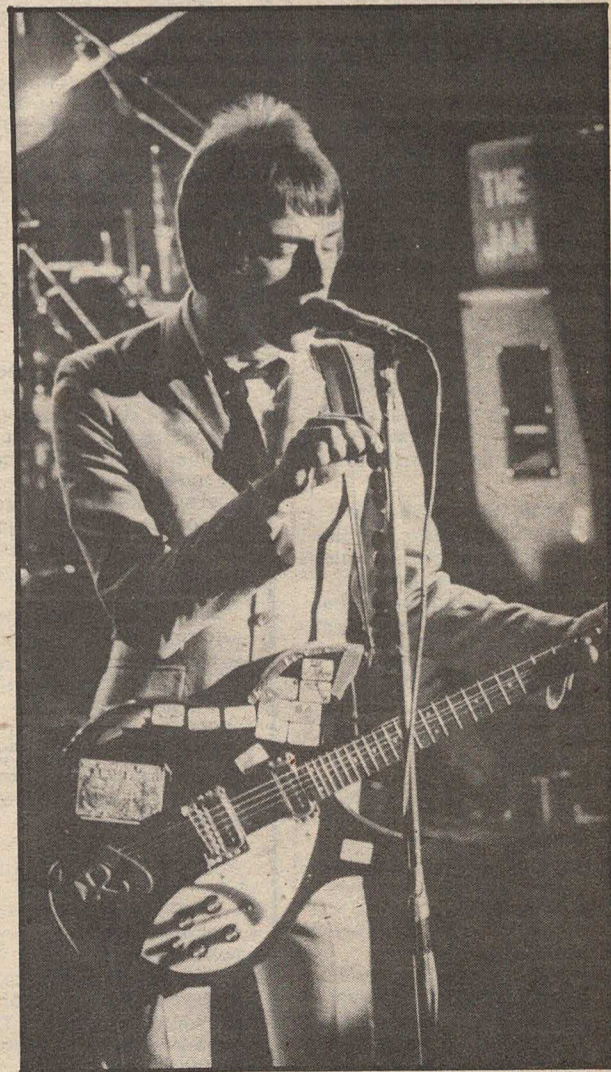
Other highlights were an excellent rendition of "Clash City Rockers", one of their most underrated classic hard-rock songs despite being a hybrid of "Garageland" and Lennon-McCartney's "You Can't Do That"; "Tommy Gun" featuring Jones' classic (almost) one note guitar solo; the stirring Hoople-like "Stay Free" with Jones on lead vocals as the number hurtled along at twice the speed of the

Requiem for El Sid

LP version; and a rock-solid "Capital Radio" with the rhythm section of drummer Topper Headon and bassist Paul Simonon harder than ever.

It was a pity that in the end the gig was marred by certain Music Machine bouncers trying to mash members of the audience.

Chris Salewicz



One minces, the other doesn't "GAB" & "WEL" snapped by PENNIE SMITH ("Pen") and ROB HALL ("Rob Hall").

Angler's Mail

Every Wednesday 15p

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