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# Trouser Press

Room 801  
147 West 42 Street  
New York, NY 10036  
Phone: (212) 354-4376

**Editorial Director**  
Ira A. Robbins

**Editor**  
Dave Schulps

**Art Director**  
Scott Isler

**Associate Editor**  
Jim Green

**Publisher**  
Ira A. Robbins

**Associate Publisher**  
Dave Schulps

**Administration/Production**  
Louise Greif

**Staff Person**  
Tim Sommer

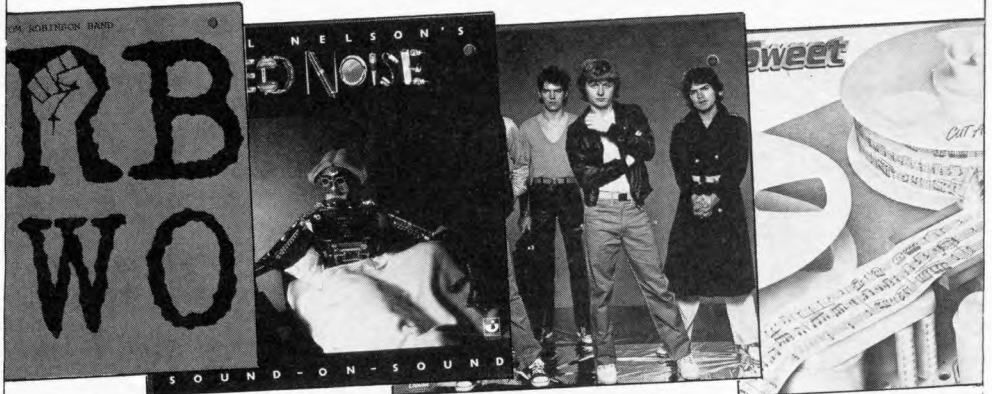
**National Advertising Representative**  
*Trans-High Media Corp.*  
Sheldon Schorr  
800-221-3517  
*In New York State, call*  
212-481-0120

**Advertising Sales**  
Joel Webber

**Invaluable Assistance**  
Jon Young, Peter Hoffman,  
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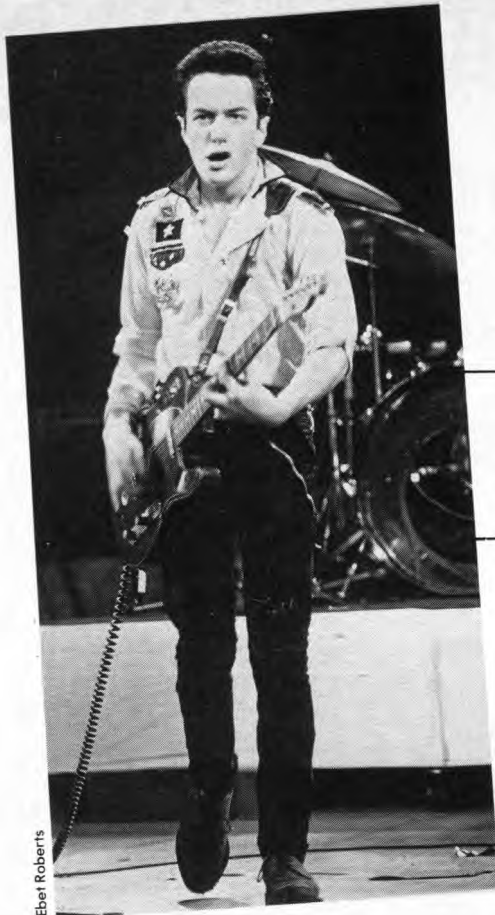
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# CLASH CITY TALKERS

## New York meets Jones and Co.



Ebel Roberts

By Ira Robbins

There's nothing quite as frustrating to watch as the hypocrisy of press, radio, and record companies rushing to get behind some new band that has successfully survived their initial indifference and become some sort of hot property. The Clash, who couldn't get a record released in America until nearly two years after their first LP was unanimously acclaimed by the English press, suddenly became the darlings of the season when they toured here in February. Epic Records, which had first cleverly chosen not to release the debut LP in 1977 and then later failed to commit itself to the Clash enough to see the release of a proposed amalgamation of that album and subsequent single sides, couldn't wait to take credit for the success of the tour, and the critical reception of *Give 'Em Enough Rope*. The few people in the press who had been supporters of the band from the start were either exploited (for promo quotes) or ignored as the publicity machine proudly pointed to a story praising the Clash in *Time* Magazine, while those NYC fourth estaters newly converted to the band fell all over themselves to meet, greet, eat, and interview the Clash.

In New York, the next-to-last date of the seven-city tour, the Clash headlined (and sold out) the 3000-seat Palladium, playing a very enjoyable set which included large portions of both albums, as well as non-LP single tracks. On the whole it was a really good show, though not the cosmically transcendent experience some later claimed it to have been, just an impressive showing by a great band. The afternoon following the date, an industrial age mass interview situation was arranged in the Indian restaurant connected to the hotel in which the

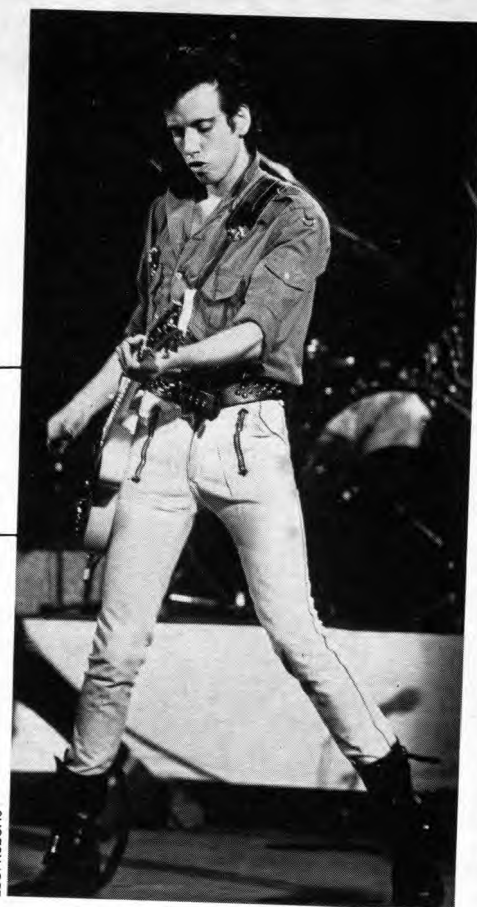
Clash were staying. The numerous invited scribes were presented with tables of interviewees—the band themselves, their manager Caroline Coon, and roadies. Brief, round-robin interviews were conducted over buffet lunch as several nervous publicists hovered about, deciding who had talked with whom long enough, and in what order people should line up for the chance to chat with their favorite Clashperson. Truly a new wrinkle on the press conference concept. As various over-enthusiastic writer-types attempted to fully express the cataclysmic life-altering effect the previous eve's concert had had on them (where were they when only TP and the *Village Voice's* Robert Christgau had the courage to run rave stories in the US?), the tired-looking musicians ran through the repetitive interviews patiently, with much more apparent interest than I would have expected, judging by their published ability to destroy thick-headed writers with their cultivated British scorn. After some bartering with the powers that be, I managed to acquire the company, for 20 minutes each, of Paul Simonon and Mick Jones, in order to inquire about their impressions of the USA, now that they had experienced it from the stage-side. Jones seemed ebullient and much more willing to talk than on our first encounter, months earlier.

*Is it easier to play when no one's spitting at you?*

Yeah. It's easier when there's not spit on the guitar, cause you slip a lot worse if there's gob on the guitar. Not many people spit anymore—only up in the North of England—they're a bit behind. It's not happening because we just said we don't dig it, and people have got enough respect for us that they won't do it. I've lived through the spitting. I've had bricks thrown at me, and bottles thrown at me as well. We've had some very heavy times.

*Are you over your Keith Richards fixation, Mick?*

Without a doubt. I still love his playing, but sometimes I think he seems like an ass. Townshend's something more, 'cause he's still there and he's one of the few people in England speaking up for us. He's standing up saying that he thinks we're the strongest band. He's amazed me—that he can get through all these years, and a death in the band, and still have some kind of vision. Ian Hunter has that too—these are the guys I dig



Ebel Roberts

because they didn't feel that we were pushing them out of the way. The people who feel that are the Aerosmiths and the Bostons; the people who are scared and useless anyway, and they're gonna go because of it.

*Do you see yourselves as Mott the Hoople 1979?*

No, but Ian Hunter has definitely blessed our band. He was there for the making of the first album—when we did "Police and Thieves"; he was in London for the making of the second album and we conferred. He's always been there—one of my great spiritual guidances. I was very fond of Mott. No, we didn't name "All the Young Punks" for him—that was something else. We didn't have a title for that one, though that was the obvious one because of the chorus. It was nothing to do with "Dudes," and the whole "New Boots" thing was a joke with Ian Dury—that was a mistake as well. You can call that number anything—it's kind of a statement, like "Garageland" was on the first album. It's our message of what's happening with us.

*That's sort of what all of Give 'Em Enough Rope is, though...*

But it's important that people don't see it as a kind of corny bio pic. Some do—some see it as a system of living. That's not all it is—we're more than that. It's all for them as well as us; it's for their imaginations. We're raising consciousness. It's the only thing that young people can do for other young people that's worth doing.

*Were you scared about coming here—scared of failure?*

No, it would just have meant that we wouldn't come back.

*The gig last night went well—you looked like you were having fun.*

It was real nice. We had a big stage to fill and we wanted everyone to feel a part of it,

which is really difficult. You couldn't do it if the audience was any larger. That [3000 seats] is the most you can do it to and still communicate effectively—I'm not keen on playing Wembley Stadium. The biggest we've played was outdoors in that Rock Against Racism thing [see TP 31] to about 50,000. Indoors, the most we can manage is about the same as the Palladium. We've worked those bigger places, but bigger shows aren't communication shows. I can't see it working.

The last time they asked us to headline the Reading Festival [England's yearly mini-Woodstock—Ed.] we told them to stick it, so they got Tom Robinson or somebody like that.

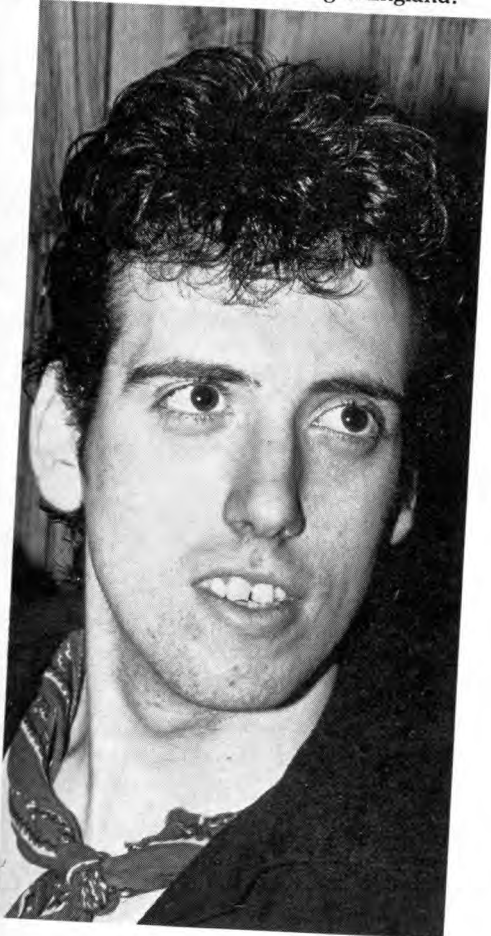
*Do you like the Public Image album?*

It must really be hard to be him [Lydon]. I think people are slagging him off because they're not going to let him do what he wants to do. I think it's a bit of a con for the kids, that's the trouble. I really like "Fodderstompf," that makes a lot of sense to me, and the single is great. There's some good songs on that record, it's just a bit overindulgent. It's too long. The audience that bought it rushed out and got it 'cause he was a Pistol, and it wasn't. But I can see his point of view.

*The song on your album that I really love is "Stay Free."*

Yeah, even the skinheads cry over it. It really moves them. It's very difficult to do it every night; we certainly don't always do it. When we do it, it changes the whole tone of the set. It's like our ballad.

**Mick Jones reveals why he was turned down for toothpaste advertising in England.**



Janet Macoska/Kaleydioscope

**T**alking to Paul Simonon proved somewhat less rewarding, although not uninteresting. The blond bassist, not usually a target for interviews, tends towards minimal answers, although he does seem as interested and aware of the affairs of the group as Mick and Joe Strummer (who spent part of the afternoon standing on a table, causing general consternation among the restaurant staff). After complaining about the raisins in the chicken tandoori, Simonon entertained a few questions. Well, sort of...

*What do the Clash think of America?*

It's been a pretty good tour, it's been alright, good reaction everywhere... It's just been a tour innit?

*Is America what you expected?*

Yes and no. It's just like every other place, really. It's nothing that important.

*How has it been since you split with your manager, Bernard Rhodes?*

It's been better—we now know what's going on. We tell Caroline what we want and it happens.

*After the show last night a few people commented to me on the clothes you were wearing. [OK, so it's a dumb question—but the bright shirts and white jeans and boots worn by Jones and Simonon almost looked like a uniform...]*

*What clothes? [Fair enough—Ed.]*

*Give 'Em Enough Rope is a tremendous album.*

I think it's pretty good.

*A lot of people who like the second album don't like the first.*

I think they're both good.

*Do you think American kids understand the lyrics?*

Just as much as English kids can. I think they can get the general gist of the songs.

*How do you feel about Bo Diddley [who opened on the Clash tour]?*

I think he's great. I had never seen him before, but I had heard his records and saw him on film, and I thought he was great. When I got a chance to meet him, and travel on the coach with him, it was a real privilege.

*Do you care about the English press?*

I don't believe it much. I used to read it but I can't be bothered anymore.

*What are the plans for the next album?*

We haven't really got any plans yet, but we're working on it, slowly. We're putting out an EP of "Capitol Radio," "I Fought the Law," and two other songs that would have been on *Give 'Em Enough Rope*—"Groovy Times Are Here Again" and "Gates of the West." CBS wants another single off the album, so they're putting out "English Civil War" [#30 in *NME*, first week—Ed.] and another one of our old ones, "Pressure Drop." The EP will come out after that.

\* \* \*

Parting comment to Mick Jones as I am cajoled out of my seat to make way for the next tape recorder: "I think, if nothing else, the importance of the Clash would be that you force people to think."

Mick: "I hope so. This whole thing has forced me to think."

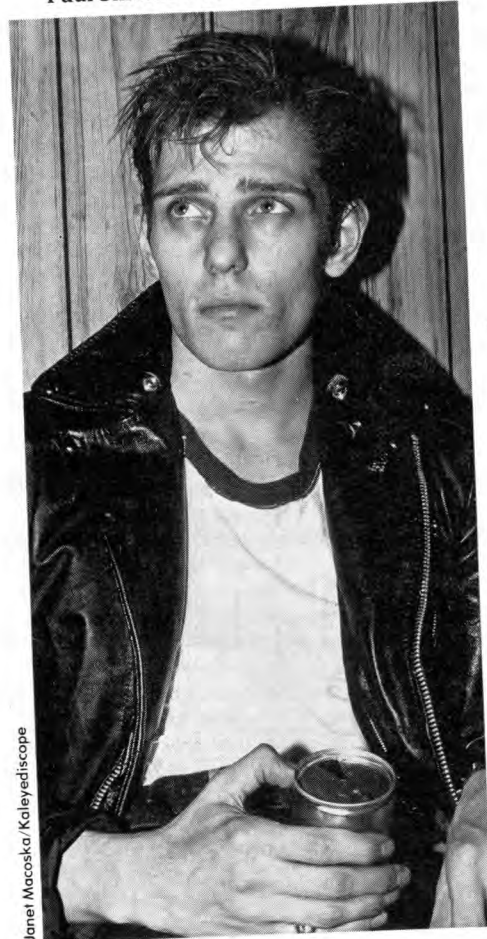
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A very interesting afternoon all round.

The Clash got a lot of interviews packed away in short order without having to resort to the impersonal press conference format where everyone goes home with the same quotes. New York's press cadre got to meet and greet (not to mention eat) their newfound idols, without having to face the individual challenge of trying to query the Clash without first gaining their confidence. The Epic folks successfully whipped up a lot of excitement and temporary enthusiasm for their momentary charges. And one supposes the restaurant was well paid for its time, trouble, and curry powder.

The second US Clash tour is scheduled for June, by which time several other British groups, emboldened enough by the Clash's successful February venture to attempt headlining tours on the theatre circuit, will have been and gone. The Jam, whose American future had seemed a bit uncertain the past six months; Tom Robinson (whose first US tour was a low-key club affair); the Boomtown Rats, and a few others not yet announced are all playing the medium-sized venues where the Clash did so well. One hopes, for their sakes, that the same bandwagon jumping occurs for them, considering all three have been generally ignored (except for the Rats, whose second album was totally forgotten as an import—only its US release caused any significant radio/press interest). What all this sudden interest in good music will do for the Clash in the way of record sales here (pitifully low to date) remains to be seen. For the moment, their future in America seems possible, if not guaranteed. It just may take a while. ■

**Paul Simonon doesn't reveal why.**



Janet Macoska/Kaleydioscope