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May 2001



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**BOWIE!
IGGY!
QUEEN?**

Unseen photo
meltdown

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Orbital Stereo MC's
RIP Napster?

London bawling: The Clash say hello to the USA.



31 January -
20 February 1979

The Clash's First American Tour

Bored with the USA? Not The Clash, who were holed up in Dolly Parton's old tourbus, flat broke and frightened of their own support act, Bo Diddley.

31 JANUARY: Agora Ballroom, Vancouver, Canada

Topper Headon (drummer, *The Clash*): Not long before that tour we'd fired our manager, Bernie Rhodes. His basic method of operation was to set us all against each other and also we didn't seem to be getting the money we earned. We were a quarter of a million pounds in debt and our accountant told us flat that we had to get a new manager. We brought in Caroline Coon, a journalist who was also our bass player Paul Simonon's girlfriend.

Caroline Coon: The Clash were close to breaking up because of the problems with their former manager and we faced all sorts of other difficulties. Our record company, CBS in London, refused to finance an American tour. Luckily, our American label, Epic [a CBS subsidiary],



Lost in the supermarket: The Clash consider their purchases.

although a little afraid of the politics, knew this band could be huge, so I spent £3000 of my own money flying to New York where I arranged for Epic to give us \$30,000 to fund the tour.

Joe Strummer: We wanted Bo Diddley, one of the great original '50s rock'n'rollers, to be our support act.

Caroline Coon: When I told this to Epic, there was this gasp of horror. "You can't have Bo Diddley on the bill. He's black. He'll get canned off the stage." And given that we were going to tour through the South, they had some justification for thinking that.

Joe Strummer: We just stuck to our guns and insisted that Bo would be on the tour. Once all the details had been sorted out we

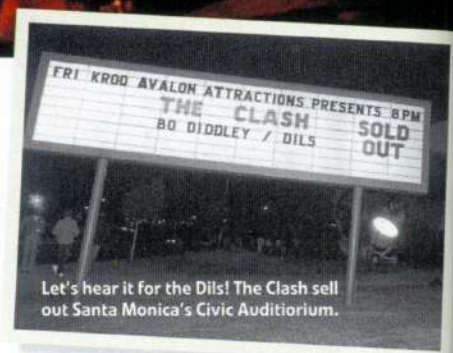
flew to Vancouver, which was where we first met Bo. In the flesh, he was more awe-inspiring than we could possibly imagine. He dressed like he was ready to fight. He always had his huge sheriff's hat on and a giant belt buckle, and you were unmistakably in the presence of someone who gave no quarter.

Bo Diddley: When they first met me, I think they were scared to death, you know, but they finally came around and we began talkin' and laughin' and jokin' and stuff. When they found out I was a cool dude, then everything was really beautiful.

Topper Headon: The Vancouver audience liked us but they didn't stop canning the stage. Bottles kept bouncing off us as we were playing.

2 FEBRUARY: The Clash arrive in California

Joe Strummer: We spent most of the day after Vancouver driving down towards California in a big shiny Greyhound bus with two Southern drivers. We dosed in some faceless motel and the next morning I woke up to be told that Sid Vicious had died. I couldn't eat my breakfast. That was our first morning in America.



Five thumbs fresh: the band (from left: Mick Jones, Joe Strummer, Paul Simonon, Topper Headon) thumb a lift with Bo Diddley.



“He was more awe-inspiring than we could possibly imagine. He dressed like he was ready to fight.”

Joe Strummer on Bo Diddley

7 FEBRUARY: Berkeley Community Theatre, Berkeley, California

Joe Strummer: We started the show with I'm So Bored With The USA because we wanted to find out if they had a sense of humour in America. And the answer was that they were double into that number. They loved it, because we were saying we were sick of the cheap rubbish on TV, all the sub-standard cultural imports that came out of America. The kids were as bored as we were with all that rubbish.

9 FEBRUARY 1979: Civic Auditorium, Santa Monica, California

Caroline Coon: All the top record company people came to that gig, the very people I'd had to get the money from to make the tour possible, and I really wanted the band to meet with them and say thank you, but The Clash were determined to be as rude as possible.

Joe Strummer: They hadn't come to see us play. They'd flown across America to have their photo taken with us for the trade papers. These creeps were all lined up and we lined up in front of them, smiling, like the good little boys they wanted us to be. And, just as they're about to take the photo, we walked out, all four of us. And they're all looking at us with their mouths open.

Straight after the show, we had to head off for the next gig, which was in Cleveland. Bo sat up front in the bus slugging Rock 'n' Rye and pouring out anecdotes from his 23 years on the road. Topper sat with his feet up showing off his new spurs, watching the videos or playing tricks on Bo.

Topper Headon: I got on really well with Bo. He used to tuck up his guitar, Lucille, in his bunk on the bus at night, and he would sleep in his seat.

11 FEBRUARY: The tourbus is stopped by police in Texas

Caroline Coon: Not long before we used it, the bus had been on a Dolly Parton tour. So one night, about 3am with the band asleep in the back, I was sitting up the front with the drivers. At that time, the way The Clash were dressing, in all their militaristic gear, would be anathema to any redneck cop. And we got pulled up for

speeding. The cops wanted everybody out but the driver, thinking very quickly, said, "Well, OK, but it's Dolly Parton in the back." Immediately the police backed off, apologised and let us drive on. Respect for the queen of country.

12 FEBRUARY: Oklahoma City

Caroline Coon: The whole Mid-west was in the grip of icy blizzards, freezing fog, the whole bit. It was like the Arctic.

Joe Strummer: We decided to abandon the bus and catch a plane in Oklahoma City to get us to Cleveland. There was plenty of snow, fog and ice at the airport, but no planes. The bus had gone, so all we could do was sit and wait.



Park 'n' ride: The Clash discuss life on the road with the cops (above) and (below) Bo Diddley.

14 FEBRUARY: Benefit concert at The Agora, Cleveland, for US Army veteran Larry McIntyre

Joe Strummer: This guy, Larry McIntyre, lost both his legs in Vietnam and when he went for a swim one day in the pool near his flat all the other residents banned him from the pool on the grounds that it was too disgusting. So we agreed to play a show for him, helping his legal costs.

Caroline Coon: That was a particularly intense show. There were kids fainting in the crush at the front. Most bands didn't provoke that kind of intense response from the crowd so the local security guys had never seen this kind of behaviour and their instinctive reaction was just to

get them off the stage the quickest way possible – by hitting them. We'd seen these goons just punching them back into the audience. The Clash instructed me that this absolutely must not happen, and it was quite a struggle. We had to keep watch constantly for anybody who was in danger. If the band saw gig security getting brutal they would just stop playing and tell the bouncers to cool it. We would bring the kids from the pit carefully up onto the stage and off through the wings.

Joe Strummer: The gig turned out great but, at the end, having forgotten McIntyre's name, I said, "Thanks everybody, this has

been a benefit gig for the guy with no legs." I immediately regretted saying it and, I think as a result, we didn't actually get to meet him. At least we raised a few bob for him.

15 FEBRUARY: Ontario Theatre, Washington DC

Caroline Coon: Having been royally ripped off in the past, Bo had to get his money in cash before he went on stage each night. So I had to go into Wells-Fargo every day to get 10 grand to give to him. It was costing The Clash a huge amount to have him on the show, but we felt the man deserved it. So he would have this big wad of money bulging in his back pocket as he performed.

Mick Jones (guitarist): I thought it was a good gig. I thought it was alright in the end. Smashed the neck right off my fuckin' guitar though. Funny, I used to hate bands that smashed their instruments.

17 FEBRUARY: At The Palladium, New York, celebrities wandering around backstage include Paul Simon, Carrie Fisher, Bruce Springsteen, Andy Warhol, Debbie Harry, Nico and John Cale
Tom Carson (reviewer, Rolling Stone): The Clash unleashed one of the most staggering performances I've seen. It was music of heroic grandeur, epic sweep and visceral force.

Joe Strummer: We were plenty nervous. Halfway through the show I checked the audience and became convinced that we were going down like a ton of bricks. But by the end the Palladium gig was absolutely fantastic. We felt we'd achieved something there, definitely. A night of nights.

The only person I remember talking to after the show was Andy Warhol, not that he says much. I got the impression of quite a sweet, shy guy.

Andy Warhol (diary entry): The Clash are cute but they all have bad teeth, sticks and stumps. And they scream about getting rid of the rich.

20 FEBRUARY: Rex Danforth Theatre, Toronto, Canada

Joe Strummer: We flew in to do the gig, which was in a cinema. The dressing room actually was a toilet and the PA sounded like it was filled with hamsters on coke. Even though it sounded rough we really enjoyed it and the crowd stormed the stage at the end. One of the funniest things I ever saw was these two bouncers trying to hold the whole audience back. Just the two of them! After the first number they were swamped so they gave up and went home.

And the next day so did we, because we didn't have the financial wherewithal to hang around. It was, like, get on the plane and fuck off home.

Caroline Coon: Despite all the problems, we had achieved what we set out to do. The band was still functioning and we had laid the groundwork for the next tour, which was massive.



Joe Strummer greets Blondie's Debbie Harry and Chris Stein.

Thanks: Luke Crampton, Marcus Gray, Allan Jones, Miles, Dafydd Rees, John Tabler.