

Nuns on the run! Ken Russell on *The Devils*



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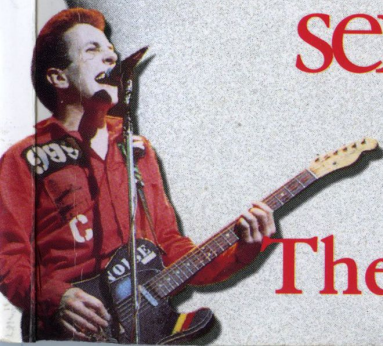
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The Clash Their legendary '79 US tour



Banging on the White House door

In January, 1979, The Clash set out on their chaotic first tour of America. Allan Jones was with them

CLEVELAND SQUATS UNTIDILY BESIDE THE bleak winter expanse of Lake Erie, like a ragged child on a street corner begging for relief. A lunatic February wind whistles up its skirts, a blizzard of snow whips relentlessly down upon its frozen municipal heart.

The TWA Boeing out of New York bucks and shudders in the virulent turbulence as it circles above the city in a nervous orbit. Beneath us, Cleveland grins with callous indifference to our distress, a city as attractive in the chilling dark as an elbow in the throat.

Cleveland! Cleveland! Home of the Rockerfellers and Standard Oil. Home of the Hanna Mining Corporation and Republic Steel and the Consolidation Coal Company, economic dynasties that for two generations have controlled the industrial heartlands of America with imperialistic authority.

Cleveland! Hey, ho – home, too, of the Cuyahoga: a river so polluted by the waste of Ohio's industrial expansion that it once exploded into flames.

Burn on, big river, burn on!

LISA PICKS ME UP FROM THE AIRPORT IN HER battered Pontiac cab. A rusted, scarred relic of some former affluence, it now seems a tired apology for Cleveland's present economic disasters. Cleveland used to be a great city, Lisa says. Now it's on the edge of bankruptcy, already in the throes of an urban crisis more severe than that of virtually any other city in the United States.

The city owes more than 15 million dollars to six Ohio banks. The banking interests are demanding either the money or financial control of the city. Cleveland's young mayor, Dennis Kucinich, is fighting for the city's independence and for the welfare and future of the poor whites and blacks lingering helplessly in the slums and ghettos of Cleveland's inner boroughs, from which the affluent white middle-class has long since retreated.

We drive on through derelict downtown areas. Cars pass us in a somnambulant parade, creeping and sliding through the treacherous slush. Ice and snow are banked high on both sides of the road. Lisa says Cleveland is enjoying a mild winter. I shiver and chainsmoke. The streets through which we are skat-



All pics: Bob Gruen

ing are illuminated by the dull, exhausted glow of neon signs, flickering from pool halls, bars, porno cinemas – "Eroticinemas" – and assorted lowlife dives.

A drunk stumbles down the sidewalk like a newsprint yeti, wrapped in old newspapers. He collapses head first into a snowdrift and doesn't move. Groups of bored men gather in windswept doorways along the route. They stamp their feet, pass around bottles. Their breath is frozen on the night air like signatures of disaffection.

Unemployment and crime are partners here in an unholy marriage. Lisa says it ain't so bad in the winter. People are too cold to kill. The summers, though, that's when it gets real heavy.

"In the summer," Lisa says, "it's like someone declared war, you know, but forgot to tell the other side. There's so many unemployed, they get drunk, they get restless, they kill people. There's a lot of dope murders, a lot of drunk killing. They say the unemployment ain't so bad no more. But I don't see my man in work. No, sir. Times like this, though, in the winter – it don't get so bad. People don't get out so much, you know.

"Mosta the guys who get killed know each other, see. They hang out together in the bars and they got no one else to fight. They get intoxicated and argue and start fighting, and – *bang!* – someone's dead. I'm just surprised there's enough of them to go at it again after other folk when it gets to be summer again.

"I'll drop you around the backa th'hotel. It's kinda safer."

ACCORDING TO THE SCHEDULE PROVIDED FOR me by CBS in London, The Clash are by this time meant to have checked into Swingo's Celebrity Hotel. The Clash, however, are lost somewhere between Oklahoma City and Cleveland.

Their Pearl Harbour '79 tour of North America opened on January 31, in Vancouver. They then travelled to San Francisco for two gigs. These were followed by a concert at the Santa Monica Civic. Then, while the road crew drove directly across the Midwest to Cleveland, the band lit out for the Southwest, on a three-day trip through Arizona, Kansas and Texas, travelling in a coach hired from Waylon Jennings.

"We wanted to see America," Mick Jones tells me later. "It wasn't entirely successful. I kept falling asleep. It was a long drive."

When I arrive at Swingo's, The Clash are flying in from Oklahoma. Their bus had clapped out at some point during their trek. It's now in Nashville being repaired. I am, however, presently indifferent to any problems encountered by The Clash. At the hotel, it's a definite Bethlehem vibe. They don't have a room for your exhausted correspondent. The fellow at the desk suggests I try the Holiday Inn on East 22nd Street.

"It's not too far," he advises. "You can go out the back way. That's quicker. But, if I were you, I'd go out the front. It's a longer walk, but there's more light – you'll be able to see anyone coming at you."

I WAIT AN HOUR FOR A CALL FROM SWINGO'S telling me that The Clash have finally arrived in Cleveland. It doesn't come. I decide to investigate the city's nightlife alone. I don't, however, feel inclined to wander too far from the hotel, and settle finally into Bumper's, a bar close to the Holiday Inn.

One of the cops who'd earlier been working security at the hotel ambles in for a drink.

"You're new," he latches at the waitress. She smiles indulgently, and avoids his fat, groping arm. "Kinda cute, too," smirks the cop. "I'll have a shot of bourbon. The name's Don. What's yours, huh?"

The waitress scurries off, a look of bored anguish on her face.

A pianist on a dais next to the bar begins to play "My Life". No one's listening. He tries to attract the



Good morning, America:
Mick Jones and Joe
Strummer get ready for
another day on the road

So bored with the USA:
the ever cheerful Clash on
Waylon Jennings' tour bus



attention of a couple of women sitting across the room from him. One of them, a blonde with make-up on her face so thick it resembles an aerial photograph of the Colorado mudflats, smiles back at him. There's a cage hanging from the ceiling behind her. There are two parakeets in the cage. They begin to squawk hysterically.

"Shut those fucken birds up!" someone yells.

A passing waitress smacks the bars of the cage with a plastic tray. The birds scream and fly about the cage, smacking into the bars. Feathers float down into the drinks of the two women. The pianist begins a soulful version of "Help Me Make It Through The Night". He smiles suggestively at the blonde. She turns away with exaggerated coyness.

Outside, a police siren is serenading the moon above Lake Erie.

So this is Cleveland. I feel an immediate nostalgia for my safe European home. I return to Room 607 at the Holiday Inn, carrying my jetlag like a sack full of bricks.

An hour later, Caroline Coon – who took over the management of The Clash last year when they sacked Bernie Rhodes – calls from Swingo's. The band have finally arrived. They'd been held up for five hours because of fog at Oklahoma airport. They're in the bar at Swingo's if I want to join them. I tell her I'll meet them in the morning. She tells me nothing will happen until the group meets for the soundcheck at Cleveland's Agora club at 4.30 the following afternoon.

I say goodnight.

Down in the street, there's drunken laughter and someone screaming somewhere.

'Just think.
If we had
a bazooka or
some machine
guns, we could
blow it all
away. Just lob
a few grenades
over the garden
wall and wipe
them all out.
It's worth
thinking about'
Joe Strummer at the White House

JOE STRUMMER COMES TUMBLING INTO THE cocktail bar at Swingo's, resplendent in a fluorescent pink jacket, his hair in a Brylcreemed quiff, eyes hiding behind aviator shades. His face is swollen from a visit that morning to a Cleveland dentist. He's got an abscess on a tooth, which he refuses to have extracted. He's suffering, too, from the prolonged after-effects of the hepatitis he contracted last year. Furthermore, he has a savage gash on his lower right arm. He cut it on his guitar during the Vancouver gig.

"I keep ripping it open," he mentions. "I have to bind it up with Gaffa tape before a gig. I think it's turning septic." I wince as he rolls up his sleeve to show me the weeping wound.

The gig in Vancouver had been especially memorable, apparently. The audience, from all accounts, went berserk. They'd refused The Clash an easy exit, demanding three encores before the band had been able to leave the stage. Then they canned the road crew as they attempted to clear the equipment. To prevent a riot, The Clash reappeared to play another number.

"Trouble was," Topper Headon recalls, "they didn't stop canning the stage. Bottles kept bouncing off us as we were playing."

Headon finished the gig with his head split open in three places.

Strummer, meanwhile, has an anecdote about The Clash's gig at the Santa Monica Civic.

It seems that to celebrate The Clash's introduction to America CBS (or Epic, to be precise) decided to fly over to Los Angeles many of its most influential higher-echelon executives.

"Everyone deemed important enough," Strummer continues, with a bitter disgust he makes no attempt to disguise, "to get a return ticket and an expense account weekend in Los Angeles was flown out to see us."

There were, he estimates, about 40, maybe 50, record company executives in California to see The Clash: vice-presidents, area vice-presidents, regional managers, regional vice-managers, all speaking the same bureaucratic Esperanto: "Hey, ho — have a successful day and keep thinking platinum . . ."

Strummer was having none of it.

"I was disgusted they were there. They've done nothing for us. And there they were, poncing about backstage with their slimy handshakes and big smiles. I just ignored them, you know. I don't have any time for it. All that record company bullshit.

"Like, I heard that they'd been taking the journalists who were coming to see us out for, like, nine-course meals before the gig. Nine-course meals! I've never had a nine-course meal in my life. I can't even imagine what a nine-course meal is like. I mean, what kind of person eats a nine-course fucking meal before a rock'n'roll show? I think it's disgusting, a disgrace that we should be even associated with something like that."

The Clash played the gig. The audience, again from all accounts, went berserk. The group, exhausted, fell into their dressing room.

It was full of Epic executives. They were escorted by Susan Blond, from the Epic press office in New York. She organised the beaming, sycophantic executives into a neatly defined group, for a photograph with The Clash. The group, sweating and tired, were hustled into the front row and asked to pose, happily, for the camera.

"There were these four seats and they told us to sit on 'em," Strummer recalls. "This was right after the gig, right? We'd just come off stage, right? We were worried about how we'd played, right? We were worried about whether we'd given a good show, right? We were wondering what those people — the ones who'd paid for their tickets — had really thought about us, right? We'd wanted to give them the best fucking rock'n'roll show they'd ever seen, right . . . and these . . . these people came in from the record company. And they want their photos taken with us. For *Billboard*, or some crap like that.

"We don't care, you know, if it's some fan with an Instamatic backstage at the Glasgow Apollo. We'll pose for the picture or whatever, sign autographs, talk to him — you know, that's part of the reason we're there.

"But these creeps, you know, they're all lined up, and we line up in front of them, smiling, like the good little boys they want us to be. And, just as they're about to take the photo, we just walk out, all four of us. And they're all looking at us as we walk out, with their mouths open. Cos they've flown right across America to, like, have their photo taken with us. They haven't come to see us play.

"And this guy comes out to us, where we're standing in the corridor having a beer, and he says, 'If I was you guys, I'd go back in there and apologise.' We told him to fuck off. We ain't cattle. And we were just standing there when all those guys came storming out. They didn't even look at us. Didn't say a word, you know. Just walked straight past us. You could see them fuming.

"It was great. It's the only way to treat them, you know."

Caroline Coon later verifies Strummer's account of the incident.

"Susan Blond came up to me and begged me to get the group back in. I told her I couldn't. That they'd only come back in if they wanted to. She told me that the group had humiliated the people from Epic."

"They deserved worse than that," Paul Simonon commented.

It's to be presumed that the aforementioned, humiliated Epic executives are no longer "thinking platinum" where The Clash and *Give 'Em Enough Rope* are concerned.

"I don't think they ever believed we'd sell more than 10 copies of the record over here," Strummer will counter. "They don't want us here. They think we only want to cause trouble. We only wanna play some music. They cause all the trouble."

THERE IS SOME TRUTH IN STRUMMER'S assertion. As we drive to the Agora, Caroline Coon tells me about some of the difficulties The Clash encountered when they first began to prepare for this tour.

Give 'Em Enough Rope was released in America at the same time it hit the racks in Britain — to even better reviews. Greil Marcus in *Rolling Stone* and Lester Bangs in New York's *Village Voice* were especially enthusiastic about the record.

From reviews like these and the past interest in The Clash, which had grown around the import sales of their debut album (never released by Columbia in America), it was clear to the group and their manager, at least, that there was a potentially substantial audience for them in America.

The majority of their contemporaries had already made brief appearances in the States; and the major competition — at the time, The Boomtown Rats and Elvis Costello — were planning exhaustive spring campaigns. They couldn't afford to miss the chance of cutting in between the Costello tour, which was already under way when The Clash opened in Vancouver, and the Rats' offensive later in the month. A hit-and-run, seven-date tour was suggested, taking in Vancouver, San Francisco, LA, Cleveland, Washington, Boston and New York.

These were all areas in which The Clash believed — quite correctly, it would transpire — they could be assured of maximum audience attendances. They told Epic of their determined intention to tour America. Epic weren't enthusiastic.

"Basically," Caroline Coon recalls, "they told us not to come. They said the album wasn't getting any airplay. We told them we didn't care, we were coming anyway. They told us they had The Fabulous Poodles and Toto on the road, and that they wouldn't, therefore, be able to look after us properly. We told them we didn't care, we'd look after ourselves. They said they didn't think they could afford to subsidise the tour. We'd worked out a budget of 40,000 dollars — which is relatively cheap, since we were bringing our own crew — which they said they couldn't give us.

"By this time, I'd spent £3,000 of my own money, flying over here, organising the tour, talking to promoters, finding Bo Diddley who we wanted to support us. They said they still didn't want us to come.

"I said they couldn't stop us, we were coming anyway. That was a bluff, really — we couldn't have afforded to come. Then they said they didn't want Bo Diddley. Even the promoters who were enthusiastic about The Clash didn't think it would be a good idea to tour with Bo Diddley. They said that he'd be bottled off stage or something. That audiences wouldn't listen. I said that if Bo Diddley got bottles thrown at him at a Clash gig, then The Clash wouldn't play.

"It was getting absurd. We were all set to come. Epic still wouldn't give us the money we wanted. Then they agreed to a budget of 30,000 dollars. So we agreed. Now we're having difficulty getting that out of them."

THE GIG IN CLEVELAND IS A BENEFIT CONCERT for a Vietnam veteran, Larry McIntyre. McIntyre got both his legs blown off in Vietnam while serving his



The Clash fly in from Oklahoma



Beat on the brat . . .



Lost in the supermarket



Topper, Simonon and new best friend



Strummer goes shopping



The last gang in town turn
on the charm for the
American press





Paul Simon checks out America



Simon backstage at the Santa Monica Civic



The Clash get a thumbs-up from Bo



'Are we nearly there?'



Simon, Caroline Coon, Bo Diddley and Strummer

country, his flag and his God. He recently moved into a new apartment in Cleveland. The apartment block had a swimming pool for the use of its tenants. McIntyre likes swimming. It's one of the few recreational sports in which he can participate.

One day, he wheeled himself up to the pool and plunged into the water. His neighbours were horrified. They called the owners of the apartment block. There was a man with no legs swimming in their pool, they complained. Larry was banned from the pool because the sight of him swimming around with no legs was more than his neighbours could possibly tolerate. They thought it distasteful. Larry's now suing them. The benefit is to raise money for his legal fees.

Caroline Coon and I arrive at the Agora to find The Clash mid-way through their soundcheck.

The club has the look of a more salubrious 100 Club. It's much larger, for a start. It has carpets, even. A games room, too, full of pinball machines. Two long bars flank the stage. There are potted plants hanging from the low ceiling. There are oak beams, and chandeliers hanging above the tables. There are mock Tudor arches and heavy oak doors.

The band complete their soundcheck and head back to the hotel, leaving the stage to Alex Bevan, a boring local folksinger who'll later be opening the show. I hang about the gig with Caroline Coon. She complains about the lack of any promotional display in the club's foyer. There's all kinds of paraphernalia for The Ramones, who'll be playing here within the next week. There's only the sleeve of *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, loosely pinned to a wall, to advertise The Clash. Caroline curses the local Epic marketing man. "He said it wasn't his fault," she will later say. "But he's on the list, anyway," she adds, ominously.

Bo Diddley, a massive man whose mood swings unpredictably from high good humour to exaggerated, almost theatrical, pessimism, stops to talk with Caroline. I sit in some awe as he enquires after Strummer's health. He's heard about Joe's inflamed tooth, and he's full of sympathy.

Bo's had personal experience of toothache on the road, as he informs us with an obvious flair for melodrama.

"Ah wuz on tour one time. Got this sunuvabitch tooth playin' hell, man. I wen' ta this den'is, yeah. He tol' me Ah'd be fine. Ah wuz half way 'cross Texas when that dude went. Gave me no warnin'. Jes' hit me. Sonuvagun. Ah made mah driver pull over right there. Got tah th' neares' den'is an' got him outta bed. Made him chisel that dude right outta mah head. Yah tell that boy tah watch hisself. Get s'me oila cloves," he adds, revealing a characteristically practical turn of mind.

"An' tell him not ta worry. If he can mek th' gig, he's doin' awright," he continues. "Ya meck th' gig, you got the money. Tek it from an' old hand. Tek that dollar. 'N fuck the res'. As long as you get that dollar in yo' hand, yo' doin' awright. Y'needs th' dollar. Cuz when yo' finished, that's it. Ain't no one gonna come nowhere wi' money for yo' when yo' finished.

"When a bucket loses its bottom, everythin' goes, man."

BO DIDDLEY'S PICK-UP BAND IN CLEVELAND –

"Cats everywhere can play mah music" – aren't up to much, but they make a valiant enough attempt to keep up with Bo's amusing digressions from the previously agreed script. Time and again, they end up playing one thing, while Bo's heading off in a quite different direction. They look increasingly flustered, but Bo seems highly entertained by their complete bafflement. The set, meanwhile, is dedicated entirely to history. To the Beat. To the legend of "Bo Diddley." He struts and hollers, and hollers and struts. He tells the audience how much he loves

them; how much he appreciates their support over these last 23 years. He holds up his new guitar, custom-built in Australia for a mere £28,000.

"Ah love you," he tells the audience. "Ah come up here tonight . . . Ah got the mos' terrible cold, y'hear . . . but that's how much Ah love yah . . . Ah come'n play mah music – even though Ah feel as poor as hell . . . Thank you. Thank you."

THE CLASH ARE WAITING BACKSTAGE AT THE

Agora. They're impatient. They want to play.

Mick Jones sits slightly apart from the rest of the band. "Come on come on come on come on," he keeps repeating. Paul Simon has his bass plugged into a practice amp. He plays the same nagging riff over and over. Strummer prowls around, running a comb through his hair. Topper Headon practices his martial arts poses.

I hadn't seen The Clash play since the Mont de Marsan punk festival in the summer of 1977. They had been shambolic then, and are often a shambles again tonight.

They begin – predictably provocative – with a raucous "I'm So Bored With The USA", and already the audience are punching the air and clambering hysterically about the front of the stage, climbing upon one another's shoulders, gobbing – yes! – at the group.

A surprisingly powerful version of "Jail Guitar Doors" (which always sounded so weedy on record), is followed by a brief announcement from Strummer thanking the audience for "the bits of information and bits of paper in envelopes you managed to smuggle backstage . . ."

"Tommy Gun" is electrifying, the final passage of which – with Strummer screaming like he's being electrified – sends a hot flash up the spine.

"Glad you've all come tonight," Strummer shouts, "and been so free with your money for this guy wot's got no legs . . . and, uh, fuck you lot at the back with the American/English dictionaries . . ."

"The words to the next number are in Japanese." The next number is "City Of The Dead".

"WHEREVER WE GO," MICK JONES SAYS BACK-

stage at the Ontario Theatre in Washington, "we're always given these bits of paper that say, 'From the City of the Dead'. They all think they're living in the City of the Dead . . . I got this one tonight, I got some more in Cleveland . . . actually, I think they were probably right in Cleveland. It was a bit awful, wasn't it?"

"THE NEXT NUMBER," STRUMMER IS TELLING

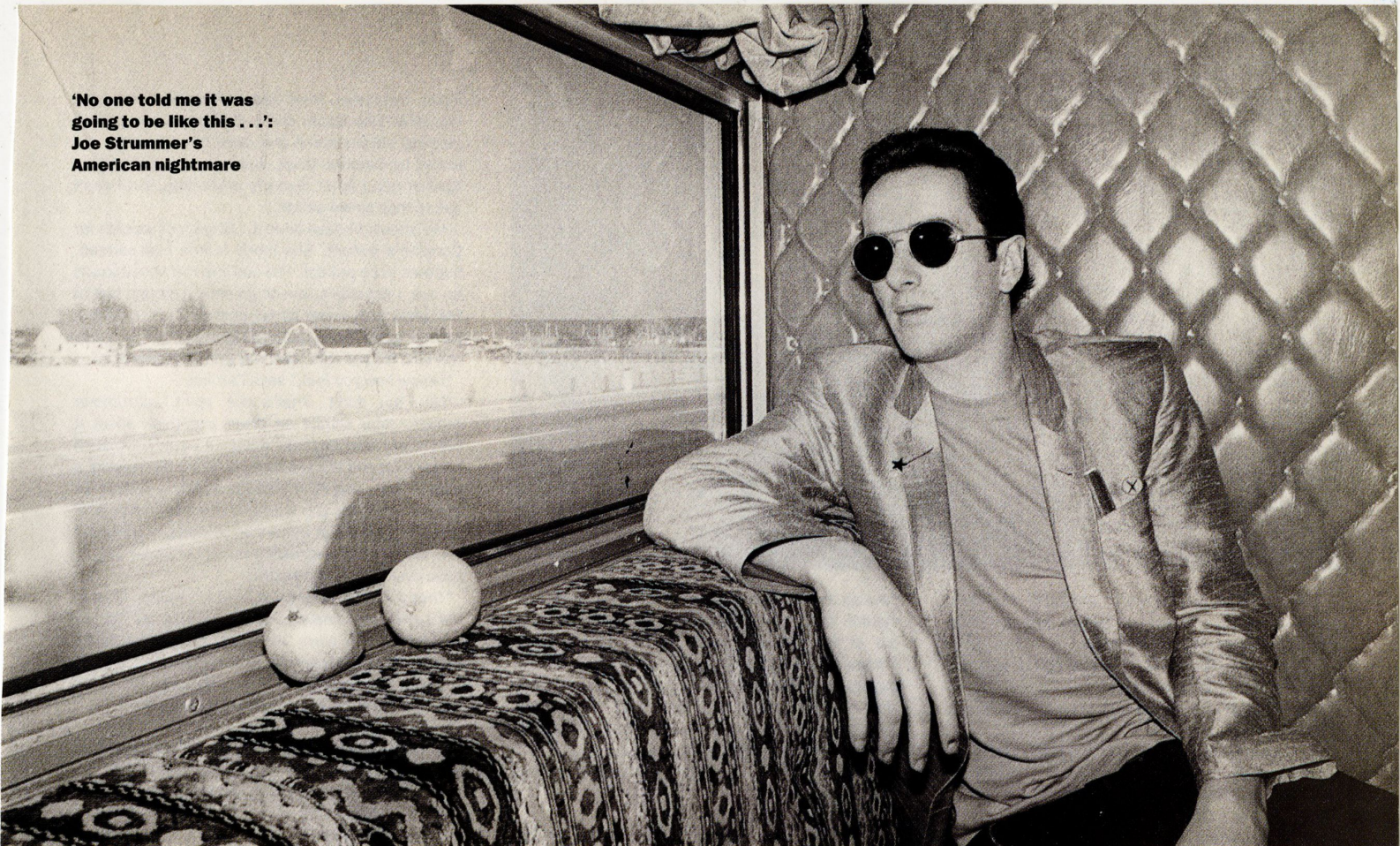
Cleveland, "is off our first LP, released in 1965 . . . 'Ate'n'Wah'." Mick Jones hops across the stage to take the lead vocals. It sounds impossibly quaint. It's followed by an indifferent "Clash City Rockers", with a weak guitar solo and typically garbled vocals. "White Man In Hammersmith Palais" is interrupted by the flow of bodies being dragged over the footlights and passed backstage. The crush at the front is by now murderous – much to Mick Jones' concern. His face is washed with anxiety.

Then they hit the audience with a pulverising "Safe European Home". They pursue the climax of their set through "Stay Free", "English Civil War" ("What are you on – stilts?" asks Strummer of someone trying to get on the stage, via someone else's back), "Guns On The Roof", the obligatory "Police And Thieves", "Janie Jones" (more instant nostalgia), and "Garageland". They commit the final chords of the song to Cleveland's memory, and split.

"Sex Pistols! SEX PISTOLS!" the guy behind me begins to chant, reviving a yell he had begun much earlier.

"Did you ever see The Sex Pistols?" I ask him.

'No one told me it was going to be like this . . .': Joe Strummer's American nightmare



"SID!" he shouts, his eyes wild, his girlfriend staggering on his arm.

"You ever see The Sex Pistols?" I ask again.

"Naaaah, man . . . never saw 'em . . . wish to fuck I had, man, I'd throw tables to see The Sex Pistols . . ."

The Clash race back on the stage, whip through an uninspiring "Julie's Been Working For The Drug Squad" – easily the weakest number in the set – "White Riot" (flying the banner of '77, again), "Complete Control" and "What's My Name", which is a weak climax to a frustratingly inconsistent show. The audience, however, is ecstatic.

I talk to a guy called Eric Schindling backstage. He and six friends have driven from Lawrence, Kansas to see The Clash. It had been a 20-hour drive – it's 900 miles from good ol' Lawrence – and it's taken all their money to finance the trek.

"Hell . . . yeah . . . sure it was worth it, man. We saw the Pistols in Tulsa. And, after the Pistols, there was only one other group to see. The Clash. Nah – it wasn't too much of a drive. Like, people drove right across the States to see the King Tut exhibition. Us coming to see The Clash is just like them driving across America to see King Tut.

"And at least The Clash are still alive."

THERE HAD BEEN A BIT OF A PARTY AFTER THE show at the Agora, so the next morning in the lobby of Swingo's no one looks too healthy.

The original tour schedule had The Clash leaving Cleveland at noon for Washington in Waylon Jennings' bus. Two hours later, we're still sitting around in the lobby of the hotel.

It turns out that The Clash are for the moment financially embarrassed – they can't pay the hotel bill. Caroline Coon has been on the telephone all morning to Epic in New York, demanding that they wire out enough money to Cleveland to cover the bill. The Epic person to whom she must speak to authorise the payment of the bill is in a meeting, she keeps being told. It looks at one point as if the group

will have to do a runner.

"I told Epic," says Caroline, "that they could meet us at the State border. We'd be the bus with the Highway Patrol chasing it."

Topper Headon appears. He's been watching a television news report on last night's benefit at the Agora. It had stated that Bo Diddley headlined the gig. There was even an interview with Bo. There had been no mention of The Clash.

"Which channel was it on?" I ask.

"Channel 8."

"Which network is that?"

"It's CBS," a local fan confirms.

"Whaaaaa?" cries Headon, incredulously. "Fuckin' typical. What a circus."

THE BUS FINALLY LEAVES THE COLD CLUTCHES

of Cleveland at 3pm and we settle down for a 10-hour drive across America to Washington, DC. It starts snowing heavily as we hit the Interstate. Things look grim already. "It's gonna get a bunch worse, too," says Bo Diddley, pessimistic to the last.

Strummer, Simonon and Mick Jones have retired to the rear lounge of the coach. The rest of us sit up front in the main compartment listening to tapes and watching television and videos.

The countryside spreads out on either side of us; a vast plain of ice and snow, frozen lakes and rivers, isolated farmhouses, truckstops, a multiplicity of zeroes. I begin to wonder whose movie I'm in. Darkness falls as the giant Exxon signs light up and snow piles down harder, freezing on the windscreen. We have to stop regularly to chip off the ice.

Everyone apart from me and Bo has by now crashed out. We're up front still, watching a video of John Carpenter's Elvis biopic.

"Maaaa-a-aan, it's gonna be a baaad night," Bo intones gravely, rolling his eyes beneath the brim of his stetson. "Ah wuz drivin' this way once," he recalls, passing me a bottle of Rock & Rye – his

favourite drink, brewed to his own specifications, and absolutely fucking lethal. "Th'road jes' wen' from unner me. Wen' straight over th'hill, whh-hooooosh . . ." His large hand glides through the air.

I ask him whether during his years on the road he's got into a lot of trouble. This cracks him up even more. He howls with laughter.

"Yoah a comic sonuvabitch," he laughs. "Lissen – Ah'm 50 years old. Ah've lived all mah life in the United States, travelled in every goddam state, an' Ah'm black. An' you ask me whether Ah've eveh been in trouble . . . sheeeit. Yeeeeeueuch. Ah been in th' kinda trouble Ah don't care even t'remember. Ah've had dudes come up to me and put a gun to mah head. An' they'd say – 'Nigguh! We gonna blow th' shit outta youh brains.' An' Ah'd allus be very polite an' say, 'Yessuh, sho' you are.' An' then get th' hell on outta there."

I ask which areas he found most troublesome and dangerous.

"Texas," he replies. Then, after a pause, "An' Alabama, an' Kansas, an' Virginia, an' Mississippi, an' Georgia, an' Tennessee, an' Missouri . . . America, you know. Yeeeuuuch."

THE CLASH BOOK INTO THE AMERICANA HOTEL IN

Washington at 2.30am, after a brief skirmish at the Barbizon Terrace, where they were originally going to stay. For some of us, the night is not over. Tour manager Johnny Green, Simonon, Strummer, Jones, DJ Barry Myers and I find a small Italian cafe, still open even at this time of the morning, even in this foul weather . . .

Simonon tells us about his trip last year to Moscow; he had been intrigued by the obliteration of Stalin's memory from the nation's consciousness.

"You won't find his name anywhere. In none of the history books, on any of the statues. They pulled them all down. They even dug up his body. They renamed Stalingrad . . ."

"You know," says Mick Jones, diverting the conver-



**'We are not worthy . . .':
The Clash backstage with Bo
Diddley at the Agora, Cleveland**

sation towards the group's erstwhile manager, Bernie Rhodes, "I think it was always Bernie's ambition to have a city named after him."

"Yeah," says Strummer, "he was gonna re-name Camden Town. Call it Berniegrad."

They are still in litigation with Rhodes, Strummer says.

"We haven't spoken to him for a while," he goes on. "He doesn't answer the phone. I suppose he finds it a bit difficult since they took him off to the hospital and put him in a straitjacket."

Mick Jones has a map of Washington. He decides he'd like to go sightseeing. Now. It's 4am. Jones wants to go to Arlington, the military cemetery, where there burns an eternal flame, dedicated to the memory of John F Kennedy.

"Great," says Strummer, "let's go and piss on it and put it out."

Finally, we decided we'll visit the White House.

It's deathly silent as we drive down Pennsylvania Avenue. We pull up across the road from the White House. It looks surprisingly small, unimposing, almost insignificant.

"That it?" asks Johnny Green, disappointed. "Looks like a toilet. It's a garden shed. Don't tell me they run the entire bleedin' world from that?"

"Just think," says Strummer, "if we had a mortar or a bazooka or some machine guns, we could blow it all away. Just lob a few grenades over the garden wall and wipe them all out. It's worth thinking about."

"Can we go, please? I'm getting nervous," says Mick Jones. "I can feel them looking at us and loading the guns. I don't want to be here when the bullets start flying."

STRUMMER AND HEADON ARE SITTING IN THE

back of a limo outside the Americana Hotel the next afternoon. They've been persuaded to drive out to the radio station at Maryland State University to be interviewed. Strummer is furious.

"I hate doing this. It's just so much arse-licking. I'm not prepared to do it. It's the worse thing in the world. I'm here to do a job. And that job is to play the gig, not spend all afternoon poncing about Maryland in a limo talking to idiots. I just wanna get on with my job."

I tell him that Bob Geldof and Johnnie Fingers on their recent radio promotion tour of America visited three or four stations a day for a month.

"They must have been out of their fuckin' heads, then," he replies, tersely.

We drive through the campus of Maryland State, Strummer's mood darkening as we make our way

through groups of duffle-coated students. We arrive outside the radio station building. Strummer gets out of the car and walks up the steps to the entrance. He scoops up a massive block of ice from the steps. He flings it viciously at the glass doors. It shatters with an enormous crash. The glass remains intact, but the impact draws inquisitive faces to the windows of the buildings around us.

"Place looks like a dog ranch," Strummer mutters as we step inside.

STRUMMER AND HEADON ARE BEING INTER-

viewed by a fresh-faced girl called Audrey. It's clear from her opening remarks that she doesn't know much about The Clash. Strummer and Headon are in no mood for this. They act dumb, answering her questions monosyllabically, with terse replies and occasional mumbles.

Audrey asks Strummer how The Clash got together. "We all met in the street one day," he replies.

"I bumped into him, and he knew the other two," Topper adds, not very helpfully.

"Me and him were odd-job merchants," Strummer says. "The other two were at art school . . ."

"How does an art major get into music?" Audrey asks.

"Because art is so boring, innit?" Strummer says.

Audrey wants to know if there was some concept behind *Give 'Em Enough Rope*.

Strummer thinks it over.

"Concept . . . mmmm . . . no."

There was no message The Clash wanted to get over to their audience?

"I just want to educate the world on how to speak Japanese," Strummer says.

"Yeah . . ." says Audrey, fascinated. "I didn't hear a whole lot of Japanese on the album . . ."

She's sure, however, that there was something more to the record; some significant message.

"Maybe," says Strummer. "But we don't like to brag about it . . ."

"How did you guys break into London?" Audrey asks.

"We kicked our way in," says Strummer.

"Literally?" asks Audrey, astonished.

'IT WAS A PATHETIC WASTE OF TIME. WE SHOULD

never have done it. Caroline told me that radio station reached 40,000 people.

"More like 40. If that station has 40,000 listeners, I'm Bob Geldof. It was like a hospital radio, where you go in and speak to all the cripples. I've done that in my time, too."

We're sitting in the restaurant of the Americana

Hotel, Strummer, Mick Jones, Paul Simonon, photographer Bob Gruen and I. Strummer is still complaining bitterly about the radio interview. We are joined by Caroline Coon. Joe turns his complaints against her. I don't mean to eavesdrop, but I can't ignore their conversation.

"We shouldn't have done it," Strummer repeats for Caroline's benefit. She looks a little exasperated, but tries to be patient. "No one told me what it would be like. I shouldn't have to go driving around half of Maryland with some pansy journalists. I shouldn't have to go to these radio stations and talk to these morons. No one told me it was gonna be like this."

"I know how you feel," says Caroline.

"No. You don't. That's the point," Strummer argues. "You should sit down and think about it before you arrange these things. It would have been better to spend the afternoon in my room, reading a book or watching TV or something. We're here to do one job - play the gig. That's what we should be concentrating on. What we should be doing is going out and playing the best rock'n'roll show these people have ever seen and piss off."

"That's what we are doing," says Caroline. "But at the same time I know that radio stations are the key to America. I'm sorry. I thought you wanted to get through to as many people as possible. I was wrong."

"Spare me the sarcasm, Caroline, will you?" says Strummer bitterly, ending the conversation.

JOE STRUMMER IS SITTING ON THE BUS AFTER

the Washington gig. People clamber over him, settling down for the overnight journey to Boston, another 10-hour drive.

"I don't feel unhappy, you know," he tells Mick Jones. "But I don't feel particularly happy, either. I just feel sort of good, you know? I'm just glad that it's over."

"I thought it was a good gig," says Mick Jones. "I thought it was all right in the end. Smashed the neck right off my fucking guitar, though. S'funny, I used to hate bands that smashed their instruments."

Mick had smashed the neck of his guitar during a final onslaught on "London's Burning"/"White Riot", as The Clash's set roared to a furious, triumphant conclusion. There had been hints of disaster earlier, however.

"Hate And War" had collapsed into chaos, probably the lowest point of the show. "City Of The Dead" - "This one's for Sid," Strummer declared - had rescued things, and another blistering version of "Safe European Home" had continued the improvement. They lost the plot again, however, with a stumbling, ragged "Police And Thieves".

But a powerful "Capital Radio" had set up the audience for the climax and the encores. Strummer was even smiling as he left the stage with a rose in his teeth.

"I thought we played fuckin' great," says Topper. "Why be bashful?"

The weather forecast on the radio predicts snow and ice and sleet and all kinds of horrors on the way to Boston. Bo Diddley rolls his eyes and tucks into his bag for his bottle of Rock & Rye.

"It's gone be a muthah of a ride. It's gonna be another baaaaaad night," he declares, as cheerful as ever. "We'd best be goin' before we're frozen."

The engine of the bus starts ticking over.

This is where I leave them.

I stumble off the bus, into the snow. You can feel the temperature dropping, point by point, as the snow falls in thick ballooning flurries.

The bus draws away slowly on the icy road, and is quickly lost in the frozen American night.

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DISPATCHES

News, views & opinions from the music and movie frontline

Clash city rockers:
The Boss and Elvis C



'Now war is declared and battle come down...'

Springsteen and Costello lead tribute to Joe Strummer at Grammys

LOOKING LIKE THEY MEANT BUSINESS in a big way, Bruce Springsteen and Elvis Costello provided the highlight of this year's Grammy Awards, held in New York on February 23, with a blazing version of The Clash's "London Calling", played in tribute to Joe Strummer, who died on December 22, last year.

With huge images of Strummer in all his rebel rock glory back-projected on a screen flanked by Union Jack graphics, Springsteen and Costello led a kind of superstar garage band that also featured Miami Steve Van Zandt and Foo Fighters' Dave Grohl on guitars,

No Doubt bassist Tony Kanal and Attractions drummer Pete Thomas. Springsteen, Costello, Grohl and Miami Steve rocked *hard*, Bruce looking slightly taken aback at the sheer velocity with which Elvis attacked the song, as the four-man front line delivered a dramatically choreographed performance.

On March 10, meanwhile, at New York's Waldorf-Astoria hotel, The Clash were among the inductees in this year's Rock 'N' Roll Hall Of Fame ceremony.

Before Strummer's death, it had been rumoured that The Clash would reform for the

induction and play together for the first time in almost 20 years, and even in the weeks before the ceremony there was talk of the three surviving band members performing live on the night. In the event, there was no reunion, and drummer Topper Headon was absent from the proceedings. Mick Jones, Paul Simonon and Terry Chimes were presented with their award by U2's The Edge and Tom Morello, formerly of Rage Against the Machine and now with Audioslave.

"I sadly miss my older brother, my big brother, Joe, with whom I shared my most life-changing

experiences," Simonon said. "Joe just had so much integrity and inspired us all," Jones added, dedicating the group's award to "all the garage bands who might have never dreamed of this kind of moment".

Other inductees this year to the Hall Of Fame included Elvis Costello And The Attractions (cue hilarious spat between Elvis and errant bass player Bruce Thomas), The Police (playing together in public for the first time in 18 years), The Righteous Brothers and AC/DC.



"Superstar garage band":
(l-r) Steve Van Zandt,
Dave Grohl, Tony Kanal,
Springsteen and Costello