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GRAFIX: THE CLEVO CRÉTIN

THE CLASH AT THE Agora!

Live Review: The Clash, Bo Diddley, Alex Bevan- Agora Ballroom-
February 13, 1979 +++++ By Tony Morgan

These days I'm fond of telling my non-punk acquaintances that aside from a few isolated enclaves in towns like Detroit, San Francisco, and New York (and of course our beloved Clevo), the only place where anything worthwhile is happening in modern music is England. Sure, England is a dump and a shithole, culturally and morally disintegrating, with a stone cold busted economy and half the working age population on the dole, but look at it this way: if you and I hadn't heard and gotten off on all those terrible stories circulating in late '76 and early '77 about the Sex Pistols pissing in the street and puking at airports and molesting record company secretaries, a good many of us would still to this very day be listening to the Eagles.

My sentiments became permanently bound to punkdom on Saturday, August 6, 1977, the day Peter Frampton came to town. It was a cloudy day, I remember, as I walked down Euclid with my hands in my pockets. There were all these kids with long hair and portable beer coolers and disco T-shirts hurrying to the Stadium, glassy-eyed like lemmings, to see their boy. I was depressed as hell, so I stopped by Record Rendezvous. Scott Krauss was working there at the time (though I was as yet unaware of his true identity), and he sold me two import 45's: "God Save The Queen" and "Pretty Vacant." I went home, played them, and was blown away. I was firmly convinced that England was the best place in the world to be.

Yeah, I hear it already. "But what about the Ig?" you say. Well, what about him? Sure, I saw him in March 1977 at the Agora and immediately made him my god, devouring every piece of data on the Stooges I could find--but IT WAS A BRITISHER who had turned me on to the whole Iggy thing. Like half the people there those two nights, I had initially come to see Bowie.

So score another point for England, for without it I would not be a punk today. It was via England that I discovered "new" American bands like the Dead Boys, Ubu, the Ramones and Devo; when I heard through people like Krauss, Dwayne Whatshisname (former Rec Rendezvous employee) and various others who used to hang around at the Drome when it was still in Clevo Heights that there were U.S. (not to mention local) groups possessing the same ideas as those in England, I became a partisan of home grown punk.

It's only fitting, then, that on February 13 my punk consciousness finally came full circle when I saw one of the British bands that essentially made me what I am today. That's right--I SAW THE CLASH.

England's front-line new wave band stopped off at the Agora on their first North American tour. Previous plans to invade the U.S. Had been shelved because "America wasn't ready for the Clash." But on February 13, anyway, the whole midwest was ready. Well dressed punks descended on Cleveland from as far away as Kentucky and Minnesota.

Surprisingly, the out-of-towners I spoke to seemed quite knowledgeable and enthusiastic about local underground bands like the Lepers and the Pagans. This support of the Cleveland scene by outsiders

puts our own nearly apathetic non-crowd to shame. But that's a gripe I'll save for another day and another Mongoloid.

At any rate, the Clash did come, laying down to the mob of goggle-eyed Yanks in no uncertain terms the a's, b's and c's of how "it" is done.

In dealing with this concert you first have to realize two things: 1) that the Clash are England's biggest band, with a reputation five times as long as your arm and a million tons of responsibility piled onto their shoulders, meaning that if they fuck off in front of an American punk public that's been slobbering for their blood for the past year and a half they'll probably be flayed on the spot, and, 2) that they realize every bit of this but are so cool THEY DON'T EVEN GIVE A SHIT. These guys know they're one of the best bands in the world, downright stars, etc., and that they're so good they can on any given night of the week de-fang and de-ball any crowd on earth. And that's exactly what they did.

It was no-bullshit time for the Clash on February 13. They took the stage unannounced, not walking, but strutting. Fashion conscious punks, well oiled with Michelob, stood on tiptoe to see, noting that in England the boys apparently favor the military look: tight, dark trousers, big ugly shoes, short hair, and kinda army-looking shirts with the sleeves rolled up.

Slight pause as Joe Strummer, Mick Jones, and Paul Simonon go for their guitars; Nicky Headon plants himself behind the drums and tosses off a flourish or two. The audience is going nuts, but the band doesn't even look at them until the explosive plunge into "Drug Stabbing Time."

They played everything. All those great skull-crushers most of us have on vinyl... you name it, the Clash whipped the snot out of it, thirty-three times faster and more muscular than on the records.

The selections that evening included, but were not limited to: "Safe European Home," "Complete Control," "White Man in Hammersmith Palais," "I'm So Bored With the U.S.A.," "White Riot," "Cheat," "Police and Thieves" ("A little rhythm and blues," explained Mr. Strummer), "Deny," and "Hate and War." There were three encores, with "What's My Name?" finally winding things up. The audience was insane, and I was nearly killed. It was great.

Clevo folkie Alex Bevan kicked off the evening. I was initially under the impression that some unruly punks would wind up storming the stage and hanging him with his own guitar strings. But actually only a few beer cans were lobbed, and Alex escaped in one piece, though visibly pissed off. If it means anything to anybody, he didn't do "Skinny."

Prior to the concert, a rumor had been circulated that the Pagans would open for the Clash. That would've made sense; the Pagans are, after all, the hottest of Cleveland's young bands. For them to precede the Clash on February 13 would've been the perfect confirmation of their arrival as a powerful force in new music. Why they were overlooked by the people who assembled the bill is beyond me.

Bo Diddley followed Bevan. A letter appeared recently in Scene Magazine, criticizing Cleveland's punks for their alleged negative reaction to Bob who happens to be one of rock 'n' roll's founding fathers. Maybe some members of the audience did abuse the guy, but that happened out of this writer's earshot. I was in front, on the right, and it was the punks surrounding me who were getting off the most.

I'm not a musical fascist or anything--I'm all in favor of

EVEN MORE CLASH!

living legends and rock 'n' roll roots; but I personally couldn't get into Bo Diddley that much. As far as I'm concerned, the presence of the Clash ("the only British band that matters," according to some critics) weighted the night heavily in favor of new wave; anything else just didn't fit. The organizers of the concert must be criticized for such a poorly balanced bill. Any asshole knows that you don't mix punk with folk and blues, not in Cleveland, Ohio on February 1979. Patrons of those respective styles simply are not tolerant enough of each others tastes.

I must find fault with the Agora management as well, for the way that some Cleveland punkers were hassled. Certain people were told at the door to remove the chains they wore on their clothing, and were not permitted to buy beer in cans. Hippie types who had come to see Alex Bevan went unbothered.

Criticism must also be levelled at the Clash themselves, for not insisting that the Agora's 18-and-over rule be waived. The Sex Pistols did for their aborted Clevo stopoff in January 1978; I would expect at least the same from the Clash. It was grossly unfair for this area's under-18 crowd--among whom are some of the most rabidly loyal punks this side of London-- to have been unable to see one of their favorite bands because of an age restriction.

Overall, though, February 13 goes down in my book as a night never again to be equalled. I left the Agora drunk, deaf and exhausted, but thoroughly satisfied. My punk consciousness had been renewed.

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munks , "all we wanted was to be loved." The ultimate end of the song comes as the fire extinguisher is turned on. Unique, huh?

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