

Reel and Rock

Exploring non-fiction film, rock music in movies and on record and related adventures on pop culture's time-and-place continuum



© Bob Gruen

I Have Seen the Top of Rock Mountain: The Clash live in Boston, Sept. 1979

One of the great action shots in rock history, ace photographer Bob Gruen took this snap of the Clash at the Harvard Square Theater in Cambridge, Mass., at the Feb. 1979 show mentioned below.

If I was backed into a corner for an answer as to what was my favorite concert ever, I'd have to say the Clash at the Orpheum Theater in Boston, 42 years ago tonight, in September of 1979. Opening acts were the Undertones fresh out of Derry, N. Ireland and R&B legends Sam & Dave (both great). The Clash had made their area debut about seven months earlier at the old Harvard Square Theater, a legendary gig 'round these parts. However, the band's stand-offish attitude kinda dampened their appeal at that show.

Not so on 9/19/79. By that time their first LP had been finally released in America (re-configured to include a fistful of their classic singles) broadening their fanbase while their collective surly demeanor had been replaced by more of a band-of-the-people image. That become clear three songs into the set during (appropriately enough) "Complete Control." (My memory has since been aided by a bootleg cassette of the show that I purchased in the 90s). Near the end of the song, Joe Strummer's ad-libbing to the "C-O-N Control" chant abruptly ends and there is a sudden roar from the crowd (at 9:55 of the above-mentioned recording, seen below). The brutish security guards employed in those days by monopolistic rock promoter Don Law were manhandling fans streaming down

the aisles for a closer look. The guards were not used to being challenged, least of all by a relatively scrawny lead singer from England, who had just come ten rows deep (with his Fender in tow) to confront them.

The Clash - Live in Boston, ...



After the commotion, Strummer went back to the stage and went all Popeye Doyle, demanding to know who's-running-this-operation? When the name Don Law was called out it was a bit of a laugh: the Clash's version of "I Fought the Law" was released as a single two months earlier. "Where's Don Law?" Joe repeatedly bellowed. When the man didn't show, he declared the area in front a stage open to all and the crowd went nuts. The goonish guards were obliged to stand down.

The Clash were spectacular that night, playing every song as if their lives depended on it, with a passion and ferocity seldom equaled. Guitarist Mick Jones further endeared the band to the fans by allowing, "This is a good crowd for us, don't think we don't

appreciate it." Mick got off another good one later, while introducing his song "Stay Free," saying it was about a couple of friends who were sent to the nick. "That's the penitentiary to you lot."

The cassette ran out before the end of the show, but I do remember the first encore, a new reggae number where Strummer came out from the wings swinging a train-signal lantern. This was "Armagideon Time" which would soon be released as a b-side to the title track of the album that would break them in the U.S. From that same month (Dec. 1979) that "London Calling" was released, here's them doing "Armagideon" at the benefit concerts for Kampuchea. RIP Joe, there will never be another.

Armagideon Time - The Cl...



Posted in [Rock on Film](#), [Uncategorized](#) and tagged [1970s Rock Music](#), [punk rock history](#), [The Clash in concert](#) on [September 20, 2021](#) by [Rick Ouellette](#). [4 Comments](#)

4 comments

1. [Alyson](#) says:
[September 20, 2021 at 9:29 pm](#)

Scary that your favourite concert ever was 42 years ago now, but I get it, and think I would be the same now. Nothing can compare to those first outings as a young adult, experiencing something that has now gone down in history

REPLY

1. Rick Ouellette says:

September 21, 2021 at 2:34 am

Yes, it is a little scary! I've been to a lot of great shows since, but you're right. The ones that stand out are (first) the classic rock bands I saw in high school and (later) the punk and New Wave shows from my early twenties.

REPLY

2. **Brett Peruzzi** says:

April 23, 2023 at 6:38 pm

I was at that Clash show at the Orpheum in Boston as well, and it still stands as the best concert I've ever seen. Thanks for the memories.

REPLY

3. Rick Ouellette says:

April 23, 2023 at 10:56 pm

Ur welcome, Brett, we are in agreement there!

REPLY

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