



CULTURE | MUSIC

THE FIRST TIME THE CLASH PLAYED TORONTO

01/02/2019 CHERRYLBIRD LEAVE A COMMENT

It's been four decades since The Clash, known for their unique fusion of punk and reggae, played Toronto for the first time. The event was caught on 35 mm black and white film by two brothers.

Ex-Torontonian, photographer Nick Smash, also known as Nick White, along with his brother Simon White, were part of the Toronto post-punk scene at the time and were there to capture history.

Nick will give a talk on opening night and he and Simon will be exhibiting photos. It's part of an event called The Clash on the Danforth in celebration of the 40th anniversary of two memorable concerts played by Mick Jones, Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon, The Clash, at the Rex Danforth Theatre in 1979.

Punk's thrashing guitars, off-tone harmonics bred in underground bars and backrooms was beginning to take hold. The Clash had sold over 100,000 imported copies of their first album and set off on the Pearl Harbour tour to the US and Canada in 1979.

They started off at the Lyceum Theatre in London, UK with the Slits on Jan. 3 before crossing the ocean. Their second stop and first North American show was at the Commodore Ballroom in Vancouver on Jan. 31. Their first US show was not until Feb. 8 at the Temple, San Francisco Bay Area. Following that show, they enlisted legendary musician and rhythm & blues pioneer Bo Diddley for the larger venues.

Punk bands were able to fill the larger-size music halls by the end of the 70s. On Feb. 20 when The Clash opened up with I'm So Bored With The USA at The Rex, Nick and Simon were ready. The Clash would return to Toronto to play the O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts only months later on September 26.

"My brother Simon and I took photos of all the bands that played in Toronto from 1979 - 1983," Nick tells me by text.

"Many of the photos we took are in a book I wrote called, Alone And Gone." They published it themselves in 2015.



Alone and Gone book cover

"We were VERY independent. All the photos are ours and we own the copyright," says Nick - "independent and self published - NO BARCODES!" he added.

His aversion to barcodes is fairly ironic, since the exhibition is in a library full of them. But, it does show that the indelible spirit and aesthetics of the time that inspired the music, still lingers.

Nick moved to London, UK with his band Rent Boys Inc., where he's been living since 1983.

The Clash on the Danforth opens with a talk on Feb. 1 from 7-8 pm at the Toronto Public Library, Pape/Danforth Branch, 701 Pape Ave. It is a free event. The exhibition runs throughout February.

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