



Pic by Virginia Turbett

"Punk was about change. We don't want to belong to any tradition... we don't walk around with green hair and bondage trousers anymore. We just wanna look sort of...flash these days."

PHONE RINGS, whispered messages. Ligger and gigging. Get taken aside. Taken into confidences. "Don't tell no-one I told you, but..." Slowly but steadily we got the

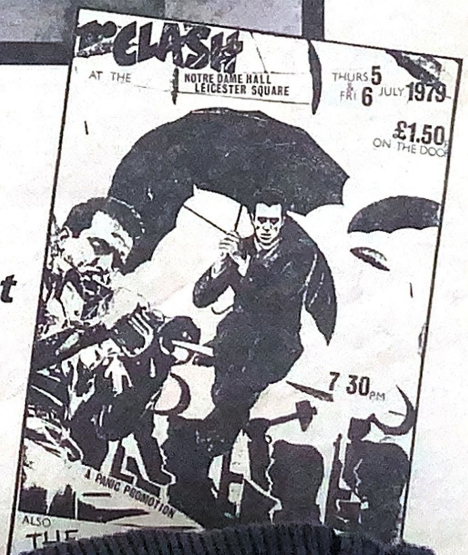
word. Word that 'our' group, the group we both put so much faith and love in were playing London again and at last.

Secretly. The Clash were playing two secret gigs at the Notre Dame hall at Leicester Square. Benefits for deprived

children as a warm up for the laudable Southall do at the Rainbow this Saturday. With one stipulation. No press. No photographers. No publicity.

A con perhaps? Someone pulling our legs. But no, the phone didn't stop with tip-offs. Eeee, ain't it grand to have mates

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Thursday evening. 7.30. Leicester Place. Tonight's the night, gonna be alright. A couple of hundred punks queue up outside the church hall. Word's got out. But not too much. Just enough. 600 punks rule. Bet it's murder tomorrow. Hey ho and let's gooooo.

Whoops. Tightish security. No cameras. Virge looses her box brownie. Bollox. Down in the cellar hall, the different gangs assemble in their rendezvous for the night, Tipping each other the 'wink. Y'knew then? Course.

Getting excited. Always do for the Clash. Ever since Harlesden firmly established them as the BUSINESS so long ago.

Wait. Chit-chat. Cans of lager. Support groups... The Low Numbers are up first. Camden Town mods with impressively pogoable sound. Music as burly and stocky as guitarist/vocalist Phil. Hefty chunks of fast, Jammy rock. 'Ard and 'andsome. And Ten Pole Tudor up for a silly 'Respectable' finale. See them.

Wait some more. Modettes next. About as Mod as Alan Lewis (*How unkind. — Hurt Ed.*) They kick off with 'Sound Of Music' fave 'My Favourite Things' and plummet thence forth like a beheaded budgerigar. Ho hum.

Drinks some more full scale saga. Pick ya nose. Clash next. GOT TO BE. 10 pm. They're on. Watch 'em run down the front. Watch us run down the front.

'Clash City Rockers' kicks things off. Jonesy's mighty chords blasting out as your whole body tingles with excitement. Floods with adrenalin. Then 'White Man In Hammersmith Palais' rocks you gently, swaying and singing. It's been soo long. KARRASHHHH and light unit stage front explode into 'Safe European Homes'. Punk apocalypse. Feels so good.

Ho. A new one. Look at each other. Yeah. Well, all right. Not too earth-shattering. Hum, another newie. Bit harder, this. Yeah better. Then Topper rolls out the drum red carpet for 'I Fought The Law'. That's more like it.

Another newie. This one's one's good. Punchy. Like it. And yet another new song — reggaefied. But that bloody chorus is a direct retreat of 'White Man'. Buddy Holly fights the law in 'Amersmith Palais. What's going on? 'City Of The Dead' rings out. Pogo again. Nice one. Oh not another new song... guinea pigs are we? Hold up, this one's better. Slow but catchy. And another one. Nice fast start, but. But... it don't seem right. Don't sound like they mean it..

Jonesy grabs the mike and it's away on 'Stay Free', moving and spot on. Excellent. Yet another new one. Reggae. Dull reggae. Joe's eyes bleeding somehow. Some kid in the audience shouts out 'Bring back the Clash'. He's got a point.

Maybe the boys agree cos they take off into a succession of unabashed Clash dynamite. 'Capital

Radio', a slow crapola version of 'Janie Jones', 'Hate And War'... We're down the front. Pogoing like the rest. Trying to will ourselves into enjoying the best band in the world. 'English Civil War'. 'London's Burning'. Well it oughta be. Come on don't walk off. MORE. COME ON MOORRE!

Yeah. 'Complete Control'. T-shirts soaked in sweat and we don't care. 'What's My Na-a-a-a-a-ammmme Come on. The end. Finito.

Hang around. Wait outside the dressing room. Say the words we never wanted to hear. The new songs are naff. The Clash have run out of ideas? Kiss punk goodbye??

Jesus. You know WE wouldn't say it if we didn't feel it. But it's cos the Clash meant/mean so much to us that we gotta sort it out. Talk to 'em. Hey Joe, what's it all about... Joe's tired. Trains to catch. Wait till tomorrow. Cool down. Think straight. Meet you at Notre Dame at four, right? Be there or be square.

THE SCENE on Friday sets us up for a direct confrontation with the band. We sit watching the soundcheck and the new songs are rolled out again; they sound better. Tighter. Fiercer. We're worried.

The intro to this feature has already gone to print. Could we have been wrong? Nah, everyone agreed the new material was duff last night, and if honesty is to be our downfall, well, we're the first to admit it. But those chopping, skanking new songs DO sound good.

Fate has it that Bushell must leave even before the soundcheck ends, so it's D.McC who's left facing the band once the run-through's over.

They agree that all four should do the interview. They seem serious about the prospect, and even agree to go out later for photos.

The dressing-room is (literally) a toilet. Mick and Topper sit waiting for the other two. Topper is stoney silent while Jonesy, a more effete character than you'd perhaps imagine, chats amiably in clipped, clearly-vowelled tones: "Perhaps this isn't the right place to do what we want to do. Perhaps people (the audience) are a bit cool here or something. I wasn't surprised. I mean, nobody knows the songs. It's like the beginning for us this place. The last time we were here was at the beginning, when for some unknown reason we did this stupid photo session with the Pistols and Buzzcocks in '77. The feeling in the group is the same as it was then. It's like starting out again."

He talks about America: "I think we stirred people there ... emotionally. Maybe they'd go home and do something with themselves, I don't know. You see, I still believe in all that rubbish."

It's ages until we get out of the place. They ask me where I want to do the interview. I say a pub. Joe says he fancies a pint. We have to escape through a

black room that is dotted with invisible, painful chairs.

Topper goes for something to eat after some photos. An Iranian tourist recognises 'Loe Flummer' and gets an autograph. We reach the pub safely. "It's different nowadays," Joe reflects, "more people don't just come up to you to say hello, now you get guys wanting to have a go at you."

Round the table the band look grave and uneasy. Simonon jokes uneasily in whispers to Jones. Mick is quiet. Joe seems aggressively buoyant. "It did feel like the old days last night, yeah. It's better than doin' Wembley, know what I mean? We'd play football at Wembley, not music."

So how did the gig come together? Is it the first of a series of 'unofficial' gigs?

"We've got a few shows lined up, but they're in different parts of the world — if someone rings us up and we fancy the gig, we'll do it. We're doin' a show with The Undertones maybe in Derry, and there's one in the Mediterranean and another one in Canada."

(A serious plan it seems, personally given substance rather early later on when I saw Undertones' manager Andy Ferguson slip furtively backstage and sign what looked like a contract with Joe.)

What about records for the near future?

"We've got a few things up our sleeves for that, but we're not sure whether they're gonna work or not. We're gonna and try and turn a trick on some people."

ISAY that I thought the last single was disappointing.

Simonon sneers. Joe gets angry: "I was pleased with it. Look, if we're just gonna sell solely Clash records to solely Clash fans, there're groups like The Ruts and UK Subs who'll cover us. They can do it. It's better than us re-recording 'White Riot' 900 times."

But don't you resent that type of band just cashing in on something that's two years too late?

"Yes, I resent it," Mick admits, "because my head is too big for my boots, and I have a huge ego and I can't stand people copying us."

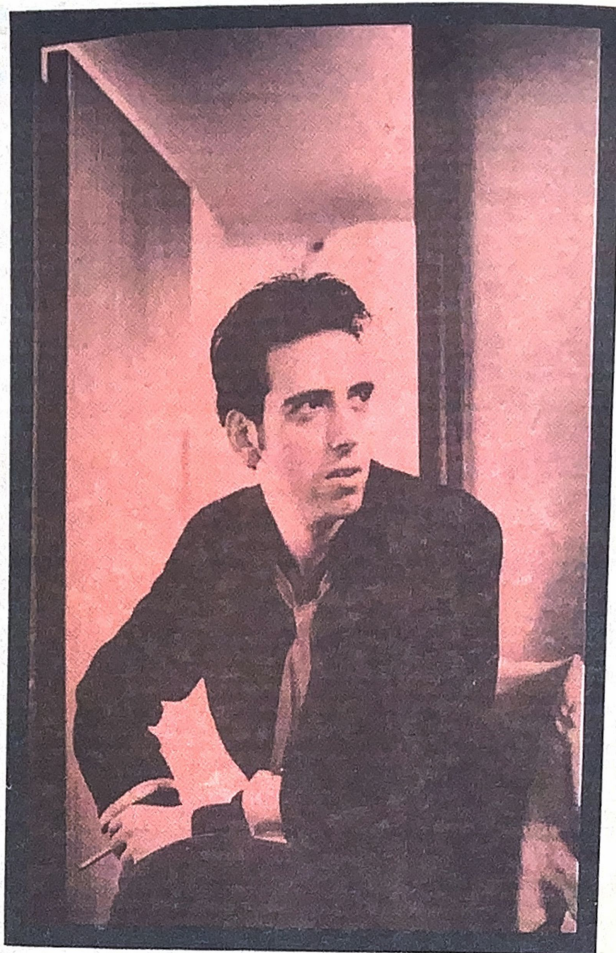
Joe: "Yeah, but it's also two years too late and it's wastin' everybody's time two years after. Personally, I can't stand it."

Fair dues. However lots, including myself, were not impressed by the band last night.

"Yeah, but that again is the 'good ole Clash at Wembley' attitude. If we're gonna do that we'd charge £8 a ticket to let you hear 40 versions of 'London's Burning'. On the other hand, we can build up our sound and play our new tunes the way we wanna play them."

I say I thought the band should in that case have played an entire new set. Besides, one of the new songs was a dead-ringer for 'White Man'.

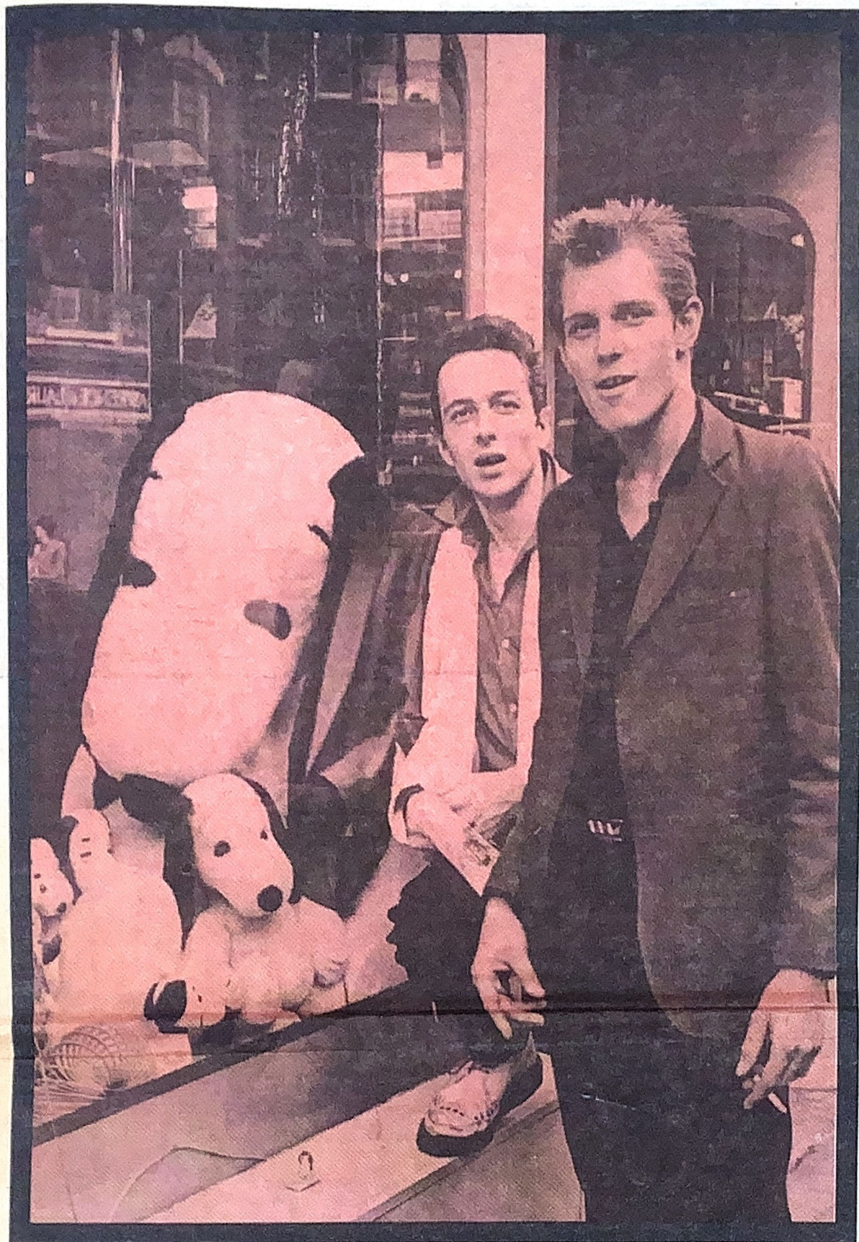
"He's thinking of 'Rudie'," Simonon



**"There will be
no six quid
Clash LP. Ever."**



Words by Dave McCullough and G



suggests.

Joe goes on, "It starts gettin' avant-garde if you play a completely new set of songs. You got the new stuff: so what, maybe it's a bit jittery? Sure, we'll play our greatest hits, but we're not gonna re-write 'White Riot'. At the moment we've got a lot of rock 'n' roll power. We're in between the lands of reggae and disco with pick-axes, chopping up the borders. We're really chopping hard 'cos we've got that 'n'r power to chop with, you know? We're really throwing reggae and disco over our shoulders: they've both had it..."

That's the most succinct assessment of where the Clash are at musically in the summer of '79 as you'll find.

The new songs, 'Lover's Rock', 'I'm Not Down', 'Hateful', 'Death Or Glory', 'Rudie Can't Fail', 'The Police Walked In For Jazz' and best of the lot the ominous, pounding, almost first album sounding 'London Calling' are more subtle rock formats than anything the band have ever done.

The Clash play muscular tunes now. Whereas the older material sounds simply either based upon reggae or straight rock foundations, these songs are much more a complete assimilated *entity* of the separate influences. They still explode, it's just that it's more thoughtful, perhaps more mature form of explosion these days.

But what about the old ideas? Playing 'The And War' as you did last night seemed an absolute chore.

"Listen man, there isn't one song I've written that I wouldn't get up on that chair and shout the lyrics of in a loud voice, and I would do it with the same gusto that I ever had. You don't slow down, you know. We got our own ways of working, I just don't wanna brag about it. We're kinda under the record-company's thumb at the moment; see, we got no dough."

We talk about the film the band have spent the last few months getting ready.

"We went up to Scotland and, like, everything in it was naff—the vocals were really out of tune, really shit, and Mick's been sortin' through all the tapes we've got, working really hard trying to get some sort of sound we can release... but we'd been gettin' pissed off with everything, the atmosphere, the bands, the music press, so we decided to knock out a few new numbers..."

HERE IT comes. My mention that the band have managed to hang on to some sort of ethics unlike the rest of the original punk bands.

I thought he was gonna hit me: "I tell you, we'll take that word 'ethics' and ram it down your throat, you'll see! All these people poncing around, we'll crush them with a hammer. You think I'm finished, don't you? Well, you better go look in your address-book and see my name there in big letters! Yeah," he seditiously switches. "WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO PUNK?"

"I tell you what pisses me off. Punk was about change. How many letters has that got? Six, right? It's not 'fuck' or 'shit' 'cos they're all four letter words. It's *change*. And now we've got a 'punk look', just a tradition. We don't want to belong to that shit."

It seems that everything has gone right back to the drawing-board for The Clash, then?

"That's one of my phrases, yeah. That's no big sweat for us. Maybe we've got nowhere, but at least we know what we're doin'. We don't walk around with green hair and bondage trousers *any more*. We just wanna look sort of... flash these days."

Joe's great. He's got that knack for sudden perception, for putting his finger on the pulse of what's happening NOW.

He talks about outside the Clash, about outside rock and roll: "You can laugh at what I've written, but I think things are gonna get worse, and I think in two years' time what I wrote two years' ago is gonna be even more relevant. I'm talking about the economy of this country, about butter and eggs, about the basic staples of life. I think we're entering a depression; like, telephones will only be on for an hour a day some time in the future, things like that. There's gonna be no money. Elton John fans will be the only ones buying records, and *that's* why we don't intend to release any. Mick and I have been thinking about this really hard for the last six months or so. Don't misinterpret what I'm saying; I'm saying that **THERE WILL BE NO SIX QUID CLASH LP EVER**. It's a fact. Why don't ya ring up the other bands and get them to say that?"

WE LEAVE for the gig. Outside the interview situation Joe is his usual self with me. Considerate, blunt and honest. We walk down Shaftesbury Avenue again and the ideas swim round my brain like baby dolphins. The new Clash? The revitalised, reconsidered Clash? It looks that way.

"I hate the idea of being in a big band," Joe reflects as we head back in the side entrance again.

Perhaps it's a band doing the impossible, cutting off their 'natural', 'inevitable' 'n'r progress into stale oblivion. Perhaps? The last I saw of Joe that night he was standing at the side of the stage watching the Low Numbers' set, grinning at a stunning young performance. The bassist broke a string half-way through one song. Strummer quietly raced backstage and without fuss handed over Simonon's long, languid guitar as replacement.

I remember something he'd said earlier about the phrase 'Sten-guns in Knightsbridge' and about how many people still think the sten-guns are in the hands of the Clash, whereas the phrase really means the guns are pointing at them from every direction.

Perhaps the sten-guns are about to return.



Harry Bushell, pix by Virginia Turbett