

Local Current Blog

# International Clash Day: Remember when the Clash played St. Paul?



Paul Simonon and Joe Strummer of the Clash in February 1984, just a few months before they played in Minnesota for the last time. (STR/AFP/Getty Images)

by [Lydia Moran](#)  
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Perhaps [every day should be International Clash Day](#), but today in particular marks a special installment in KEXP's annual celebration of "the only band that matters." 2019 is the 40th anniversary of the band's seminal release *London Calling*, and, as the Seattle station puts it, "all across the globe, we're celebrating music as a tool for social consciousness, a band that made it sound so damn good, and an iconic record that still changes lives 40 years later."

For our part, let's look back at when these seminal punk rockers played it big in the Twin Cities. On Sept. 12, 1979 the quartet stepped on stage for the first time at the St. Paul Civic Center, located where the Xcel Energy Center now stands. The crowd, "just a few thousand," according to *Star Tribune* critic John Kerans, danced ceaselessly throughout the 70-minute set. Though, funnily enough, it seems both Kerans and Jon Bream, who was then reporting for the *Minneapolis Star*, significantly favored both openers (the Undertones and David Johansen) over the headliner.

The performance, according to Bream, "was hardly cathartic or transcendental," making a point of distinguishing himself from coastal critics who drooled over the band at the time. After the group's opening track, "I'm So Bored in the U.S.A.," front man Joe Strummer quipped that the Midwest is a wasteland and asked that the fans "tell us limeys" where to go. According to Bream, punk rock had died earlier in the year with Sid Vicious of the "defunct" Sex Pistols.

Sharing [photos from that show](#), local record retailer [John Kass](#) remembers meeting the Clash "in the parking lot of Sun Ray Shopping Center on the east side of St Paul. They had stopped to buy liquor and groceries on their way to Chicago, and I just happened to be next door applying for a job at J.C. Penny."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3oxviK1LVFg>

While the Clash sparked a movement in the UK, they didn't make it big in the US until 1982 when "Combat Rock" sold more than 500,000 copies. The Clash returned to the Civic Center that very year to 8,300 attendees (including Bob Dylan) and more lukewarm (at best) reviews in the local news — this time followed by a defiant reader rebuttal published a couple days later. "The Clash's stage performance was outstanding," the reader wrote, "Maybe your reviewer could have asked a few fans whether they enjoyed the concert."



One fan who did was The Current's Bill DeVille. "It was fantastic," he remembers. "It blew my mind. They were my favorite band at the time, by far. Went to Ragstock to get some new duds for the show. Went with all my buddies. We drove to St. Paul...it was a big night."

DeVille remembers a crowd that was "very receptive, very enthusiastic. It was electric." He continues:

I still remember getting there, in line really early. It was festival seating, and I remember thinking back to that concert that happened a few years earlier by the Who where people died. I thought when they opened the door the same sort of thing was going to happen, because people bum-rushed as soon as they opened the doors.

The local band [Shangoya](#), who were kind of a reggae/ska band around here, took the stage, and once they started playing there was a lot of pushing and shoving going on. This friend of mine ended up falling down, and he literally had to grab the tails of my shirt to pull himself back up again. Some people were actually jumping on stage. It was just insane.

Then, once the show started, I forgot about all of the nightmares. I had lost both of my shoes; I was barefoot. It was just insane. It was a big night, and one that I'll certainly never forget. As far as concerts, it's probably my strongest memory of a show that I have.



In May 1984, struggling to regain momentum in the wake of an onstage scuffle at the US Festival and the firing of guitarist Mick Jones, the Clash played their last show in St. Paul to a little over half the size of the audience at the band's '82 show. Bream wrote, "the teenage guys had come in their combat fatigues and the gals in their *Flashdance* fashions to vent some energy and witness (for the first time for many of them) a legendary name in rock history. However," he continues, "many of these young concert-goers found a legend that had lost its luster."

Just two years later the band dissolved, ahead of their time to the end. "They're not Top 10 material," a fan told the *Star Tribune* in 1979, "They're loud, fast, and simple. They're not a cerebral experience."

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