

Clash concert intriguing but hardly transcendental

Reviewed by JON BREAM
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"Their concert surpassed the three best shows I've ever seen," read the review from Boston. "It was the best rock show most people had ever seen," was the report from San Francisco. "The most intense rock band ever," declared New York's Robert Christgau, who calls himself the dean of rock critics.

Indeed, the buildup for the Clash—the survivors of the British punk rock movement who made their local debut Wednesday night at the St. Paul Civic Center Arena—was nothing less than spectacular. The Clash cult was expecting nothing less than the second coming.

Well, the concert was hardly cathartic or transcendental. The first half was curious, but something was missing; once the quartet clicked in the last half, the performance was intriguing if not convincing.

Punk rock may have died earlier this year with Sid Vicious of the defunct Sex Pistols, but the four members of the Clash haven't lost their punk attitude. In England, punk rockers were an angry, politically oriented bunch. For them, punk was a way of life that was reflected in everything from their dress and music to their politics and practice of living on the edge. By contrast, American punks tended to display a sense of humor that prevented them from going off the deep end.

Joe Strummer, front man of the Clash, certainly seemed to cultivate stereotypical punk offensiveness Wednesday, as if to demonstrate in his own self-righteous way how punk (read hip) he could be. After the group opened with "I'm So Bored with the U.S.A.," he blasted the Midwest as a wasteland. Later, he told the 2,000 or so fans that if they didn't like the Clash's performance, they should "tell us limeys" where to go.

Strummer ran around kicking guitar amplifiers and swinging the microphone stand. His angry antics



Star Photo by Steve Schluter

Joe Strummer displayed punk rock's offensiveness

seemed more anarchic than purposeful. However, once the singer-rhythm guitarist turned the lead vocals over to lead guitarist Mick Jones, the Clash finally began to click. Listeners began to realize that this group was talented and well-conceived, not just a garage band that manically banged out intense, rudimentary rock 'n' roll.

However, the Clash was little more than an amateurish garage

band that was formed in June '76 after Jones had left art school and Strummer had been frustrated singing in a soul band. The Clash's first album is raw musically, militant politically and generally negative. But, the music mirrored the times. And the British rock press loved it, and so did the fans.

When the Clash's second album, "Give 'Em Enough Rope," was re-

leased in mid-'78, it entered the British pop charts at No. 2. It is a bolder, more violent and more political record. It's more worldly in its scope, but perhaps less developed in its vision.

Yet, if the politics are becoming naive, the Clash's music is clearly growing. Melodies, subtlety and even humor were evident Wednesday. There was some reggae, some pop-styled songs and even a cabaret jazz number. Oftentimes, though, it was difficult to decipher the words Strummer was shouting with his coarse voice; Jones was a more lucid singer, but he, too, had a rather heavy accent.

Nevertheless, even if the Clash's heady politics or raucous style are not everyone's cup of tea, few can deny that the quartet is a great dance band. The group had most of the concertgoers on the main floor of the arena dancing for the 70-minute performance.

Nicky Headon's booming, almost orchestral drumming was impressive, and hard-working Paul Simonon complemented the drums perfectly with his machine-gun bass. Jones was a surprisingly adventurous and accomplished lead guitarist and the unexpectedly advanced sound techniques also provided some nice touches.

Appearing before the Clash was David Johansen, whose early '70s band, the New York Dolls, was the prototypical American punk group and an influence on the Clash.

His performance was wonderful but all too brief. He demonstrated a charming rock sensibility, with just the right mixture of humor, outrageousness and meaning. He indicated he has definitely developed into a force to be reckoned with.

Johansen sang an old Four Tops song and a Dolls number. But most of his material was drawn from his two solo albums. He offered thoughtful ballads and intelligent, full-bore rockers. Especially memorable was "Wreckless Crazy," a wild tune from his new album, "In Style," one of the most stylish rock albums of 1979.