

# Rock the Campus: 45 years ago, the Clash descended on Clark University :: Reader View

<https://eu.worcestermag.com/story/entertainment/mu...>

---

*(This story was updated to replace photos.)*

The year was 1979, and punk rock had come into its own. [The Clash](#) was already a big deal in their native U.K., but still a band to watch in the U.S. That would all change with the release of “London Calling.”

“Back then, the whole punk thing was like this dangerous thing to the establishment. A year earlier, you have reporters following the (Sex) Pistols around the world. ‘Oh my God, they left a beer can on the TV at the hotel,’ like it was this dangerous thing. And that was part of the allure too,” Doug Geer said, “It was just weird that this group from England ends up playing in your town at the pinnacle of them as a live act. And, the fact that they came to Worcester meant something. It made us feel like we were a part of it.”

Sept. 28 marks the 45th anniversary of when The Clash played [Clark University's](#) Atwood Hall, roughly three months before the release of "London Calling." Those who were inside (and those who weren't allowed in even though they had tickets) are still talking about it.

During their short stay in Central Massachusetts, The Clash stayed at the Holiday Inn on Route 12 in West Boylston. Across the street was the West Boylston Drive-In. Inside the “London Calling” liner notes is a black-and-white picture of

Paul Simonon, The Clash's bassist, with the drive-in sign clearly behind him.

Simonon is also seen smashing his instrument in a shot taken a week before the Clark University gig in New York that was used for the cover of the "London Calling" album. Both pictures were taken by famed rock photographer Pennie Smith.

Members of The Clash were also spotted at the Honey Farms at 194 Park Ave. in Worcester, buying snacks and sundries.

## 'Like a burst of nuclear energy'

WCUW 91.3 FM disc jockey Brian Goslow, invited to show by Ivan R. Lipton, manager of Paperback Booksmith at the Worcester Center Galleria and future president of Strawberries Inc., was allowed access to The Clash at Clark before the show.

Goslow, who first played The Clash on WCUW in the spring of '77, remembers how, during the soundcheck, The Clash came up with an impromptu reggae tune about the Howard Johnson's they were staying at in West Boylston.

"All I remember is 'We don't like no Howard Johnson's,'" Goslow said.

Goslow said he also had a meaningful conversation about music with Barry "Scratchy" Myers, who was The Clash's tour DJ, and Nicky "Topper" Headon, the band's drummer, both of whom cut radio IDs for WCUW.

Geer was a 13-year-old Chandler Junior High School student who just started up his first band in the summer of '79 when he saw The Clash at Clark.

“It was unbelievable because we saw The Clash the week before in Boston. My only previous concert experience was KISS. And then I go to see these guys at the Orpheum,” Geer recalled. “The Clash came out like a burst of nuclear energy. It was unbelievable. So when they came to Clark, the buzz was happening how great this band was.”

Because he was in the local garage band The Performers that was part of the city’s thriving punk rock scene, Geer got to know some of the musicians in other bands, which worked to his advantage the night The Clash played Clark.

“One of the other bands was in line right in the front. We got there a little bit later than we probably should have. But the band said, Stay with us,” Geer recalled. “It was like a Wormtown conglomerate, because the Wormtown punk scene was us (The Performers), the Commandos and Blue Moon Band. Back then, you knew everybody that liked The Clash. You knew everybody who liked the Ramones. There weren’t many people involved in that scene at that time, 1979. There was like eight of us in town, when we first started out.”

When the doors swung open to Atwood Hall, Geer and his older brothers were able to beeline right down to the front.

“We’re, maybe, five rows back from the front and the place was tiny,” Geer recalled. “We’re like, Oh my God, this is the best thing ever.”

## 'They were rock 'n' roll'

Clark University student Eric Lefcowitz wrote in the Oct. 5, 1979, issue of the student-run newspaper *The Scarlet* how The Clash raced through a frantically paced set that covered most of their old material along with a few new songs from their upcoming album “Take the Fifth.” By the way, the Clash never released an album with that title. They scrapped it in favor of “London Calling.” The New York-based power pop group The Necessaries opened the evening with a 20-minute set. Although the band included renowned avant-garde cellist Arthur Russell and Modern Lovers bassist Ernie Brooks, nothing was reported in *The Scarlet* about The Necessaries’ brief set other than that it happened.

“The Necessaries had a song called ‘Give Me the Keys.’” Geer recalled. “‘Give me the keys/I’ll even say please/And I will trust you with my sister.’ It’s kind of like The Vapors’ ‘Turning Japanese’-kind of song.”

Next came *The Gang War*, featuring ex-New York Dolls guitarist Johnny Thunders and MC5’s guitarist Wayne Kramer.

**More:** [All-female cast in The Hanover Theatre Repertory production of 'The Crucible'](#)

**More:** [Screen Time: Demons, dolls, walking dead await you at Terror Con](#)

In 1975, Kramer was arrested for selling illegal powders to a government agent and was jailed for four years. Many of the Wormtown punkers were surprised the legendary MC5 guitarist was there, because they didn’t know he’d gotten out of jail.

“You could tell that they had been around the block. They were rough. They were rock 'n' roll. You knew you were seeing the real deal,” Geer said of The Gang War. “And I remember Wayne Kramer because he was mentioned in the Clash song ‘Jail Guitar Doors.’ So he was on my radar. I knew it was kind of a big deal that he was there because he was a big deal. And it’s a bigger deal now.”

The Gang War “staggered onstage” to the sound of Nazi soldiers goose-stepping, according to Lefcowitz.

“The Gang War assaulted the ears and insulted the senses of the audience during their short 20-minute set,” Lefcowitz said. “Many had been half-deafened by the overwhelming volume that shook the hall’s renovated walls.”

According to Lefcowitz, the highlight of the set came when Kramer took the microphone to sing Jimmy Cliff’s “The Harder They Come,” but that wasn’t enough to save the set.

Roughly two and half years later, Thunders would earn a place in Wormtown rock history for being booked to play the second night at Xit 13 on March 12, 1982. Although the rocker showed up, Thunders reportedly was in no condition to play and the show was scrapped. Thanks to The Scarlet, we have a photo of Thunders in Worcester.

By the time the Gang War “staggered offstage,” the audience, which consisted of an even mix of bewildered students and punk rock-loving townies, was becoming restless, Lefcowitz said.

## **'We have to open these doors'**

Outside a “White Riot” was brewing. Unable to get in, many drenched and defiant Clash fans were reportedly outside Atwood Hall in the rain for hours, refusing to leave.

“Shortly after The Clash came out, they stopped the show. Joe (Strummer) was like, ‘We have to open these doors in the back and let everybody in,’” Geer recalled. “The Clash completely stopped the show for the fans. They let people into the foyer and open the door for people to hear it, probably avoiding a riot.”

The Clash concert was originally scheduled to take place in Clark’s Student Activities Center, which holds 3,000, but this plan was dropped two days before the concert, due to poor ticket sales within the Clark community, and the concert was moved to Atwood Hall, with a capacity of 650. Big mistake.

The lack of collegiate student support for The Clash forced the Student Activity Board to subsequently allow Strawberries Records and Paperback Booksmith to sell tickets.

Concert flyers started popping up all over, advertising “Live at Clark University, The Clash. Friday night, September 28 at the Student Activities Center. Tickets \$7.50 available at Strawberries and at the door.”

The switch of venue caused the number of people allowed in to see the concert to drop by two-thirds and poor lines of communication, and errors caused almost 250 extra seats to be sold.

When The Clash found out there were more than 200 people denied entrance in their concert at Clark University, the band refused to go onstage unless those 200-plus

people were let in for free and permitted to watch the show from the lobby.

Quoted a few weeks after by The Scarlet, Campus Police Chief Richard Lacaire called the non-Clark students who came to the show with tickets in hand “scum.”

“The Clash were on their way out the door,” Michael Clebnick, head of security for SAB, said, in The Scarlet. “And something had to be done right away. I was getting no help from the Campus Police, whose comments on what to do consisted of ‘You’ll never see Atwood Hall again come Monday.’”

**More:** [Hitting the right notes: Winchendon Music Festival relaunches with six free concerts](#)

**More:** [Worcester Magazine seeks spooky poems for spooky season](#)

“They (Campus police) were sure they had a riot situation on their hands if The Clash didn’t go on,” Pam Marcello, one of the coheads of the SAB, said.

“They were really worried but they wouldn’t make up their minds about what to do,” Clebnick added.

According to The Scarlet, Campus Police Lt. Louie Luivisi first said that everyone could go in *en masse*. Then he abruptly changed his mind and said that no one was going in.

Clebnick and Brian Levine, also SAB head of security, pleaded with the lieutenant to change his mind.

“The band was almost gone,” Clebnick said. “They would have been gone if Brian hadn’t spoken to them.”

Campus Police Chief Richard Lacaire called the non-Clark students who came to the show with tickets in hand “scum.”

## 'The Great Clark Rock 'n' Roll Swindle'

In 1979, WICN and WCUW disc jockey Leonard B. Saarinen, aka L.B. Worm, was a key player in the city’s thriving punk scene and the man who coined the moniker Wormtown.

On Sept. 28, 1979, Worm was waiting in line outside Atwood Hall to see The Clash. A light rain started falling and some poor kid was looking for a ticket.

Worm said he had an extra ticket in his car and went back to get it. That’s the kind of guy he is.

Unfortunately, when he got back to Atwood Hall, Worm was told he couldn’t enter due to the show being oversold.

In his photocopied fanzine Wormtown Punk Punk Press that was printed and came out the same night of The Clash at Clark in a direct reaction to the way the show was handled, Worm blasted “Two Clarky Administrators” and “Strawbabys Records” (aka Strawberries Records at 20 Front St.) for panicking that nobody would show up while selling too many tickets to compensate.

“There was a slight problem with the Clash Concert,” Worm shrugged in his article, which had the title “The Great Clark Rock 'n' Roll Swindle.”



Worm stressed that Clark's SAB was not to blame.

“It just goes to show ya,” Worm continued in his fanzine. “Ya got these (expletives) out there just concerned with money and they don’t care none about people. They don’t care.”

Worm said he did get his money back for five tickets he bought. And the girl at the ticket window, who felt bad for Worm, removed the black Clash button she was wearing on her lapel and handed it to Worm as a show of sympathy.

But the night was still young, and Worm had work to do.

## **'I challenged everything the guy said'**

Mark H. Lovejoy was also waited outside with the huge crowd in front of Atwood Hall.

“I was not permitted to enter despite the fact that we all had tickets,” Lovejoy said. “Apparently, they oversold the event and it was overcrowded. The fire marshal supposedly told them, No more people. The organizers came out and stood on the steps and tried to explain the situation to a bunch of very, very pissed-off people. I challenged everything the guy said and he was a total idiot.”

Lovejoy said he started getting the people outside the venue hall riled up but once the organizers told them that their tickets would be refunded, they retreated, grumbling with money in hand.

“I remember laughing at all these Worcester kids dressed like punks and being total wusses,” Lovejoy recalled. “Oh, well, I saw them (The Clash) the following year in Connecticut and they were horrible. Met Joe (Strummer)

though when he was eating in Ashley's (at the old Worcester Marriott) during his Mohawk phase. So nice and such a gentleman. He was the heart of that band."

Clark student James Phillips was also one of those 200-plus waiting to get in.

"I didn't even care if I got in to hear their three-chord, ultrasonic political statements," Phillips was quoted as saying in *The Scarlet*. "In fact, I almost sold my ticket with the rest of the scalpers who were receiving up to \$15 for a \$4 (Clark student priced) ticket."

Well, it turned out some did care. The Clash.

## **'Everything rock 'n 'roll is supposed to be'**

"The Clash cared and that's what makes them what they are. They cared about the 200 wet fans out there, who had come from who knows where to see them, standing out in the rain," Phillips said. "I praise The Clash, not for their music, because I only heard a bit of that for free and it still wasn't worth it, but for that they cared."

In *The Scarlet*, Lefcowitz chastised the college for not having the concert in the Student Activities Center, saying the ticket and sound problems would have been easily alleviated if it was held there.

When the Clash finally did hit the stage, they immediately made their stage presence know.

"From the first power chord, lead guitarist Mick Jones was hurling himself around the stage with reckless abandon,"

Lefcowitz wrote. “Meanwhile Joe Strummer, lead vocals, strummed his guitar with manic aggression as the noise level resembled a jet taking off.”

“The Clash show was everything rock ’n ’roll is supposed to be,” Geer said. “It was super loud (but, he added, not louder than the Nervous Eaters and The Atlantics at E.M. Loew’s). You’re riding on adrenaline for their whole set. You leave sweaty. You’re hurting. There was something magical about that.” Going into Atwood Hall with two Clash shows already under his belt, Clark University student and Scarlet entertainment editor Jeffrey Siegel sat in the second row with cotton stuffed in his ears.

“For the relatively short time they were onstage, the Clash impressed me as only a handful of others have for their energy, musical power, and the importance of their music,” Siegel said. “They may have been too loud, but then, it was music that was meant to be played too loud.”

“When they opened with ‘Safe European Home’ (from 1978’s ‘Give ‘Em Enough Rope’) that was absolutely amazing to be hearing that live here (in Worcester),” Goslow said.

“The group’s second selection “I’m So Bored With the U.S.A.” was the most precisely executed song of the night,” Lefcowitz said. “The crowd, which was on and off their feet from the start, punched their fists in the air to the beat of the chorus.”

During “Jail Guitar Doors,” Strummer mentioned Worcester, which seemed only fitting because the legendary MC5 guitarist Wayne Kramer is mentioned in the song and was in one of the evening’s opening acts, Geer said.

Geer also remembers The Clash playing in front of a backdrop depicting Three Mile Island, which experienced a partial meltdown March 28, 1978, just six months before.

“I was thinking to myself, how are they more in tune to the (expletive) that’s going on in the world and the (expletive) that’s matters to people in America than America bands.”

Geer said. “They had the hand-painted background. They had the photographer on tour with them. They had a cartoonist on tour with them. And all their clothes were made by this woman, Alex Mishon, who went to school with Mick Jones. They didn’t look like anybody else. They had covered all the bases, whether it was visually or soundwise.”

## 'The music rumbled and snarled'

After a few songs Strummer asked the crowd about the sound. Apparently not too many people heard him and the intense volume did not relent.

“This was unfortunately because the sound from the guitars and Paul Simonon’s bass rendered the vocals indecipherable,” Lefcowitz said. “For the people who are unfamiliar with The Clash’s material, Strummer’s snarls and shouts were incoherent and subsequently all meaning was lost.”

During the set, The Clash played four songs from “London Calling,” including “Clampdown,” “The Guns of Brixton,” “Koka Kola” and the title track.

The Clash also played “Capital Radio,” “(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais,” and “English Civil War.”

By the time the group launched into the Sonny Curtis-penned/Bobby Fuller Four-associated “I Fought the Law” it was obvious that Strummer was fighting the sound system and the sound system won.

At this point, Micky Gallagher from Ian Drury and the Blockheads joined The Clash onstage to play the organ.

Although it was hard to decipher the lyrics to the songs, Siegel had nothing but praise for The Clash and what they played that night at Clark.

“The music rumbled and snarled from the amps as the band bashed out their selections in rapid fire succession, the musicians in perpetual action onstage,” Siegel wrote.

Just as the band was building momentum during “Clash City Rockers,” Strummer suddenly flung his microphone stand in the direction of drummer Nicky “Topper” Headon and slammed his guitar down before storming offstage.

Jones later explained that Strummer “had to take a piss” as the group returned to finish the song, according to *The Scarlet*.

“Strummer and company might as well have stayed off,” Lefcowitz said. “For the last six or seven songs were fairly repetitive and horribly mixed.”

Saying that poor sound mix left the crowd feeling like they were stuck inside a “ringing telephone,” Lefcowitz said that The Clash, despite how great they were and legendary they would become, never from its groove that night at Clark.

# 'The band that can save rock 'n' roll from itself'

Leaving the Clark campus after not being allowed in Atwood Hall, Worm and his friends bought some beer, went down to the print shop and put out a special edition of Wormtown Punk Punk Press.

After drinking more beer, Worm and his entourage went back to Clark and put the freshly printed fanzine underneath the windshield wiper of every parked car near Atwood Hall.

As they approached the venue, Worm saw the doors were wide open and ventured in to see and saw the last four songs The Clash played.

Worm found out that The Clash refused to go onstage until the “powers that be” let in all the people who were shut out.

“All I had to do was stand in the rain for two hours and I would have been all set,” Worm said recently.

And, if Worm waited, we would have missed out on this wonderful Wormtown Punk Punk Press fanzine issue freezing the moment in time.

“There are a lot of musicians on the scene who play better than Mick Jones, sing better than Joe Strummer, and keep better rhythm than Topper Headon and Paul Simonon,” Siegel said. “But no one plays music with more urgency and with more drive today. No one.”

In his review, Siegel also attacked rock radio of the day.

“There is a lot of music on the radio and on vinyl these days. Some of it is good. More of it is bad. But most of it is castrated rock ‘n’ roll. The balls have been left out, the guts that makes music important, not just diversionary,” Siegel said. “What these four young men played Friday night was music from the soul, music that is thrust out to us defiantly — take it or leave it.”

Many among the crowd were disappointed with the short set after fighting for seats, waiting through two warmup bands and putting up with various other minor hassles, Lefcowitz said.

Calling it a “a rather choppy and sloppy performance” by The Clash, Lefcowitz said there is no denying that the group has talent. But, judging from the crowd’s reaction, The Clash did not make many new Clark fans.

“The Clash’s highly energetic and extra-ordinarily loud concert last Friday at the sold-out Atwood Hall left a divided audience,” Lefcowitz said. “On one hand, there were The Clash fanatics, already familiar with the band’s material, who howled and pogoed along with their heroes. Then there were those who saw and heard the group for the first time — and, in most cases, the last time.”

Siegel also acknowledged that The Clash isn’t for everyone and most of the crowd at Clark that night would dismiss the band immediately after they left Atwood Hall.

“Many who saw the Clash Friday will elect to leave it, but for that one moment they had been exposed to something they may never hear again — music that matters, music that means something,” Siegel said. “I have seen the band that

can save rock 'n' roll from itself — and from the undiscerning fan — and that band is the Clash.”

## 'This is how this is supposed to be'

Geer said the two Clash shows played a week apart at Clark University and at the Orpheum in Boston stand as the two best shows he has ever seen in his life as well as the most meaningful.

“I can't say enough about The Clash live in that era. I haven't seen a lot of things that have even come close. They were just energy, just an explosion. And the music was phenomenal,” Geer said. “For me anyways, being my third-ever concert and just seeing them the week before (at the Orpheum), which changed my life, and then seeing them in a smaller place you're kind of setting the bar like, Oh my God, this is how this is supposed to be. It was kind of nuts how lucky I was to be able to see them there at Clark.”

In the wake of The Clash, Lacaire tried to put the clampdown on future concerts on the Clark campus.

Responding to what he called the outside “scum” that overtook Atwood Hall to see The Clash, Lacaire endorsed a policy in which tickets would be only sold to consortium students with a valid college identification card, in an effort to keep the “undesirables” out and make concerts run smoother.

“With an outside concert you bring in an element you don't want in a college environment,” Lacaire said.

According to the Oct. 18, 1979, edition of The Scarlet,” if the new policy were to go into effect, it would conceivably end



any possible large scale concerts in the future, and limit any use of the Student Activities Center for concerts, as the SAC requires large ticket sales to meet cost.

Marcello said she feels that campus police were overreacting to what she termed as “an unfortunate series of events” that led to problems at The Clash concert.

“Perhaps what we need is just better communication, not rash actions,” she said.

The Clash, without Mick Jones and Topper Headon, would go on to play April 13, 1984, at the former Centrum, while the Mick Jones-fronted Big Audio Dynamite opened for The Pretenders on Dec. 11, 1986, also at the Centrum, and Joe Strummer and his band The Mescaleros played Oct. 12, 2001 at The Palladium.

Roughly 14 months after playing The Palladium on Dec. 22, 2002, Strummer, 50, died from a heart attack.



[Facebook](#)



[Twitter](#)



[Email](#)