

The Seattle Sun's Magazine of Music and Amusements

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THE CLASH

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Acapella Songbirds
From Washington D.C.



RANDY HALL

THE CLASH

By Robert Ferrigno and Steven Blaler

A true punk digs rock 'n' roll whatever kind it is — Joe Strummer

BACKED BY A huge bank of flashing colored lights, the Clash stalk the stage like starving alleycats. Guitarist Mick Jones does a modified shuffle at the mike, leers at the audience and races off, trailing a long guitar cord. The sound

is not heard so much as felt, tickling the inner ear like a rusty nail.

**White riot I wanna riot
White riot a riot of my own**

Guitarist/songwriter Joe Strummer is twisted against the mike, the muscles in his throat bulging out the veins as he roars.

**All of the power is in the hands
Of the people rich enough to buy it
While we walk the street
Too chicken to even try it
White riot I wanna riot
White riot a riot of my own**

Bassplayer Paul Simonon, dressed in tight leather pants and a white shirt, plays an effective bottom with drummer Nicky "Topper" Headon providing a driving rhythm. A final crashing chord and Headon throws his sticks out into the crowd. The crowd, on its feet the whole time, explodes.

JOE STRUMMER leaned back on the leatherette couch in the dressing room below the Paramount Theatre and blinked in the glare of the overhead light. The concert was over. The other three members of the band were sprawled around the room, each in a separate corner, relaxed and silent. It was as though the proximity to each other without the structure of a stage and audience risked a detonation, rather than the continuous high energy of their stage performance. A swarm of friends, lovers, roadies, reporters and assorted

well-wishers who had somehow made it backstage moved around them, mumbling compliments and questions.

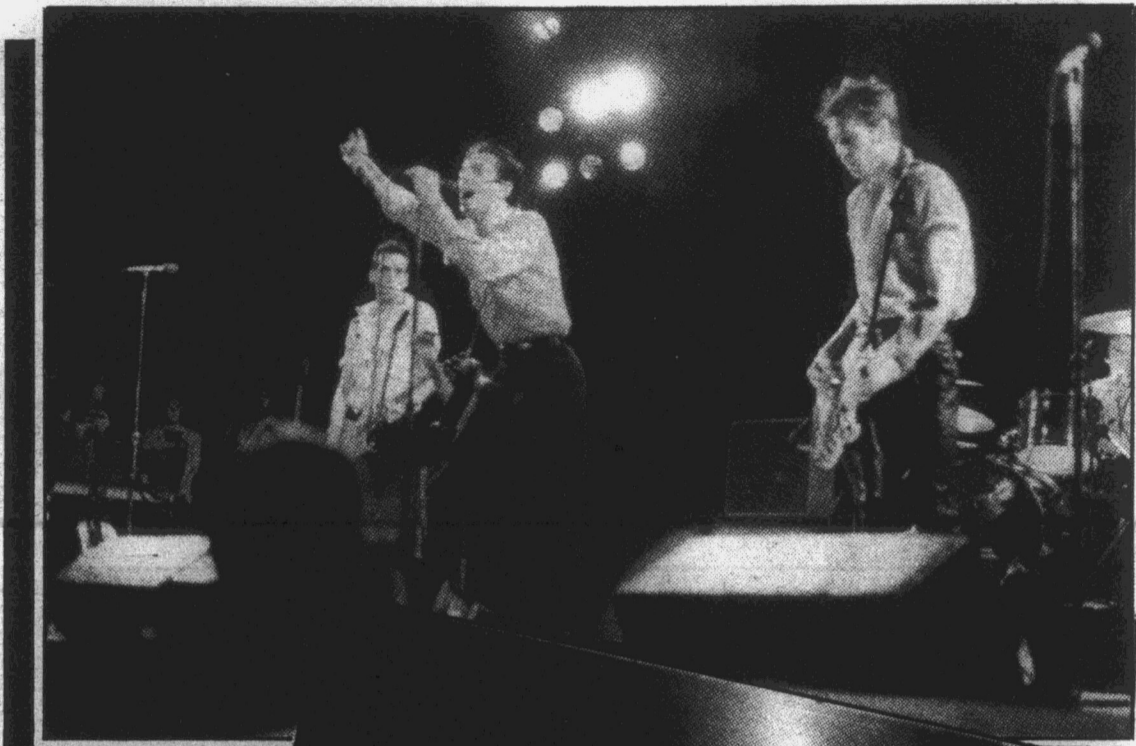
The Rebels, an L.A. rockabilly band that had opened for The Clash all along the coast, stood in the center of the room

They appear on stage like four surly sharecroppers, gangly arms, white-walls around their ears and protruding ribcages.

gulping beer. "Rollin" Colin Winski, vocalist and guitarist, sang scraps of a Carl Perkins tune and burped.

The five- and seven-year-old sons of Mickey Gallagher, organist for Ian Drury and the Blockheads, ran around the

SHOCK TROOPS FOR THE GUITAR ARMY



RANDY HALL



room. Gallagher played keyboards on the last Clash album and had joined the band for the last half of their American tour.

Like the other Clash members, Strummer is gaunt and raw looking. They appear on stage like four surly sharecroppers, gangly arms, whitewalls around their ears and protruding ribcages. Bassist Simonon has a black space between his front teeth you could drive a '57 Chevy through.

Strummer speaks with a noticeable British accent, quietly and with obvious intelligence, far different from the "punk-suicidal-rebellion" image caricatured recently in the Dick Tracy comic strip, and the generally sensationalistic coverage afforded the new wave music scene in the American press.

"They're narrow-minded assholes. The one's that can't dig rock in all it's forms, those are the posers. That's how you tell a poser from a true punk. It's posing to say it stinks 'cause they haven't got zips in their trousers, when in fact, rockabilly is brilliant music."

STRUMMER WAS referring to the members of the audience who weren't ready to accept the Rebels on the same bill as The Clash. The first time Rebels' guitarist Jerry Sikowski, a chunky, deceptively agile rocker with a blonde pompadour, had moved to the apron of the stage, the whole right section of the audience had screamed FUCKYOUGETOFF! Sikowski had pretended to be deaf but stayed stage left for the duration.

The Clash have consistently showcased various styles of music. They travel with an English D.J., Barry Myers, who's just as likely to play Gene Vincent or reggae during a break as the B-52's or Throbbing Gristle. On their first album, *The Clash*, they featured a reggae song "Police and Thieves," and on a previous show in Washington, D.C. Bo Diddley played with them. They also give local new wave bands an opportunity to open the show, which not only gives a young band like The Dishrags (who opened in Seattle) a chance to play before a large crowd, but also gives the audience a welcome relief from the heavy metal bands that promoters always seem to stick before new wave acts.

Taking chances is what the Clash are all about. Inspired by the Sex Pistols

several years ago, Strummer left a previous band, The 101'ers and started the Clash. The group was formed to bridge distance between musicians and listeners, to get the crowd out of their seats and moving. In Seattle, Strummer argued with a security guard to let the crowd dance. The guard pointed to the wooden railings that separated the stage from the crowd and shook his head, no. Later Strummer left the stage, reappeared moments later with a fireax and eyed the guards and the guardrail. "I kept wanting to just start swinging, knock the thing apart and let the kids get closer. But then I realized I wouldn't be able to just chop wood. There were bodies everywhere," said Strummer. That air of tension, of violence about to burst loose, is an integral part of the appeal of the Clash.

This simmering energy emphasized their allegiance to all other manifestations of rock 'n' roll. Their music, while not merely repeating, carries the same charge as early rock, the raucous frenzy of Little Richard and Screamin' Jay Hawkins. The same dissonant fury runs through much of the new wave sounds, driving today's audience to the same emotional outpourings.

LYRICALLY, THE CLASH avoids the macho "Do You Think I'm Sexy" school of rock writing, instead performing songs that reflect the conflicts of modern life. In *Remote Control* they sing,

Who needs remote control from the city hall?

Push a button, activate, you gotta work
You're late
Don't make no noise
Don't get no gear
Don't make no money
Don't get outa here

Financial success for the Clash has proven elusive, so they are unlikely to soon lose their scuffling image. Their

"With the Blockheads the pressure is with the gig, with this lot the pressure is living and the release is the stage."

record company (CBS/EPIC) never released their first album in the states, (until the recent remixed version) despite it being the largest selling import album. Even though this is the band's first full American tour, the company has only come up with \$20,000 for expenses. And this for three months touring. The crew and the band weren't paid for the first two and a half weeks, and even here, their next to last stop, money was still scarce.

"Our record company doesn't seem to be interested," said Strummer. His voice was soft, almost wistful. He shook his head. "It's really screwed up. We finally got enough to pay the crew but the band won't be paid til we're back in England. That's cause we don't have a manger, which is our own fault. We need someone to go in there and say, 'Alright you fuckers, come up with the money!'"

Mickey Gallagher, drafted from The Blockheads for the tour, was still in a state of ecstatic shock. "With the Blockheads it's very arranged music we do, because Ian Dury demands it. You know, tighter arrangements. When you've got six or seven people blaring away, as we do in The Blockheads, there has to be some control. But this lot their energy comes from the anarchy which is around them 24 hours a day. The only time they really come together is on stage. I didn't believe it when I first joined this tour after where I'd come from. With The Blockheads the pressure is with the gig, with this lot the pressure is living, and the release is the stage."

The Clash are planning to record a single in Jamaica. They just completed a double album called "London Calling," to be released simultaneously in Britain and the U.S.A., and sold for the price of a single disc.

"You should see us at truckstops. There's all this great stuff to get, stickers and T-shirts. I love America. How could you not? It's where rock-n-roll began." —Joe Strummer