

UPBEAT

The Clash are making musical sound waves

By CLINT ROSWELL

THE CLASH ARE CALLING out the music world. They are four musicians from London who have played a rebel hand in the game of pop music. They have almost vigorously resisted success, even now, with the critically acclaimed "London Calling" climbing the charts, because they still consider themselves outlaws in the corporate world of rock music. An early song in their career has characterized their social status. It's called "I Fought The Law and The Law Won."

But there is a substance to their music that goes beyond the mouthing of juvenile anthems. They are punk without pretension. There is energy without hype. They are direct without being simple. The Clash are trying to get a message across, even if sounds sometimes as bracing as a slap in the face. They want to wake us up to the rhythms of the age.

"A lot of people think we're either too aggressive or too despairing, but we're saying there's really not too much we can do about the world so we try to inject a punchy feeling to our music," says Mick Jones, the lead guitarist and founder of the Clash. "The aim of our music is to make people feel good and then make them think."

Urge to dance

Most people want to dance when they hear a Clash tune such as "London Calling". Yet its tone is hostile, its lyrics contain phrases that speak of nuclear errors and coming ice age. "It's angry, sure, but we're singing about the reactionaries," says Jones, whose slicked-back black hair reveals a hardened baby-face. "We'd like our fans to get involved, to participate in the music because then we all get a sense of shared feelings. We're not keen on coming in and playing to an audience that wants to be entertained in their seats from afar. We don't want to be enjoyed from a distance."

The Clash are anything but a group of cheerleaders on stage. They are overwhelming in their intensity despite exhibiting a natural spontaneity as performers at last week's concert at the Palladium. They had wanted to play in a dance-hall or "festival seating" arrangement to allow their fans the freedom of dancing and mingling. The Garden's Felt Forum turned down the Clash's request for a "festival-seating" arrangement.

"The tragedy in Cincinnati with the Who was the factor why they ruled against it," said Jones. "We like the

atmosphere festival seating creates. A lot more bands today are playing at dance halls where everyone can participate. I think it's a lot healthier because it's a more real environment. We always want to play in that type of situation."

The show at the Palladium didn't show any adverse effects of formal seating. Most everyone in the orchestra got up and danced as the evening progressed. But it did point to a problem that success poses for the Clash. They have become too big to play in small clubs anymore. They attract too much attention. They are the recognized leaders of punk music today, playing a tough brand of chordal-based rock that plunges forward with striking rhythm forays.

"We call it punk because that's what we consider ourselves," says Jones. "I doubt if any of us think of ourselves as leaders of a movement or being involved in new-wave. New wave sounds like a hair-do. Punk has gone through a quite a bit of sorting-out. The initial flash of energy hit me around 1976. I guess I was fed up like everyone else with the mindlessness of disco although I did like some of its performers. But punk is not new, it has just come of age."

The Clash is unique because it can mesh different rhythms and different styles while still being true to its musical direction. It is a derivative band which has synthesized past musical formats into a new approach. At the Palladium concert, they added Micky Gallagher, a member of Ian Drury's band, on the keyboards and the sound took on a riveting quality. The Clash like hard rock but veer away from soaring solos. It's the discipline in their music that makes it powerful.

"I would like to do more reggae," says Jones. "It has a certain strength to it that makes it attractive and it is flexible. I'd like to see more of it around."

The Clash performed several reggae-like numbers at the Palladium and finished the second encore with Billy Williams. Their third LP, "London Calling", was the source of most of their concert and provided the most recognizable songs to the audience. The Clash did, however, play a repertoire of songs from their three-year career.

"I think we were all a little surprised how well-received 'London Calling' was because although we thought it was a really good album, we thought our fans would react the other way," says Jones. "We were very pleased with the reaction we have received so far throughout our East Coast tour, but I think it's safe to say we're still far from being complacent."



The Clash: Mick Jones at the top of stairs, bassist Paul Simonon below in a black hat, drummer Topper Headon in the white jacket, and singer Joe Strummer looking like a cowboy gangster at the bottom of the stairwell.

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