

THREE CHEAS

By JAMES PARADE

CONCERTS FOR THE PEOPLE OF KAMPUCHEA Hammersmith Odeon, London

A conversation overheard down Hammersmith tube between two ex-grammar school Beatle freaks and one poor kid aged about ten:

First man: "Lennon's 'ere in' e?"
Second: "Yeah, some photographer geezer's seen 'im."
Poor kid: "Paul McCartney used to be in the Beatles didn't he?"
First man: "That's right, you might see three of 'em 'ere tonight, p'haps four."

Poor kid: "There was four people in the Beatles weren't there?"

And so it all began some rainy Wednesday night at the fog end of the seventies. One soggy Boxing Day in Hammersmith Odeon. The golden trail to the Beatles reunion. Some of "the best bands of the decade" all playing for charity and reaching for a sense of occasion with a Harvey Goldsmith promise of "more than a few surprises." My dears.

That first night began and ended with Queen. Outside, the touts were asking the same five pounds for a ticket that would've bought you one at the door as it wasn't sold out. I wonder how much of a donation the London Ticket Touts Collective made to the cause?

Queen came on in that same leather gear they've paraded on the TV screen in the last month ever since they discovered barbers, eschewed the opera and got back to their rockin' roots and svelte Freddie flung himself into 'Jailhouse Rock' to prove the point. 'We Will Rock You' and 'Somebody To Love' followed until, during 'Get Down And Make Love', Brian May's guitar seemed to be at odds with what was spilling from the vast wall of speakers. Was it a tape, was it him, was it real? No one really seemed to care. The band received slightly more than a polite response as they sauntered through 'You're My Best Friend' and a new single 'Save Me' which is a re-write of the last three 'Don't Stop Me Now' and 'Keep Yourself Alive' are both excellent songs though the latter would've sounded better without the guitar and drum solos. 'Crazy Little Thing' featured Mr Mercury on acoustic guitar and 'Bohemian Rhapsody' featured a tape recorder.

After that Freddie came on pretty aggressive and pushed over a huge side monitor and reappeared hoisted up on the shoulders of a hulky Superman to sing 'We Will Rock You'.

Freddie's singing and Brian Taylor's drumming were excellent throughout and Fred whipped out every early seventies rock pose from his encyclopaedia and a few new ones too but generally Queen failed to ignite their audience. They were loud, brash, dynamic and very tight but eventually became very boring too and without the promise of another band at the end of the night more than a few desperados straddled off into the drizzly night before the finale.

The second night began with a lot more rain, a couple more bands and even a few surprises. The touts kept watch at the doors while Matumbi took the stage (which looked like the warehouse department of Macari's music store) and asked us about five times whether we'd had a nice Christmas or not. They received a distinctly hostile reception at first and they knew it. Things brightened up with two passionate performances of 'Boy Oh Boy' which should be a single and a wondrous 'After Tonight' which sent applause ringing round the stalls. Some fun came along when the two lead singers decided to throw a few accents around from Brixton to Bermondsey and immediately they endeared themselves to the audience. Matumbi's vocal harmonies were excellent and with their catchy reggae vignettes and Dennis Bovell's perfect production it's difficult to see why they don't have more hits.

The first "surprise" came along in the shape of some half-wit in a Jonathan King wig who told some jokes about "queers" and managed to reach the same standard of comedy that ITV dished up over



Pic by Justin Thomas

PETE gives Paul the evil eye.



Pic by Justin Thomas

ELVIS: patchy performance.

Christmas. At least we were blessed with a discerning audience. He was quickly booed off. The second surprise came in the shape of the Clash.

The skeletons that once were the Clash burst into an excellent 'Clash City Rockers' and 'Safe European Home' and were rumoured to have come from the Palais across the road where they'd just given another secret performance. Strummer became Simenon and vice-versa for the unspectacular 'Guns Of Brixton' where the lead vocal was completely submerged until half way through and some of the songs lost their effect by being badly paced and including some dreadful backing harmonies.

Some of it though was magnificent. Jimmy Jazz' saw Strummer pacing the searchlights like some kind of Hardy Kruger clone from a sixties war movie and an emotive rendering of 'Complete Control' and 'Lovers Rock' reminded me of the golden days of the Clash before they acquired their autumnal tint and the habit of using five different guitars on stage. Mickey Gallagher joined them on silent Hammond at about the same time as Mr Guy Stevens was seen to be forcibly dragged up the centre aisle by some awful mean looking bodices and Joe Strummer clouted some chap across the jaw who got up to sing 'Janie Jones' with them for an encore.

Soon after the thinnest gang in town left the stage the masses were chanting 'Blockheads' and it wasn't long before Mr Dury and his crew of East End Teds and Yankee pitcher lookalikes were banging out exactly that little number. 'Clever Trevor', 'What A Waste' and all the hits followed as the band were joined several times by all of Matumbi on assorted percussion and Mick Jones on 'Sweet Gene Vincent' (even though he did spend the duration of the song trying to make his guitar function). A young American gol called Pearly Gates then joined Ian for 'Too Tired To Rock' and a hefty rocker from the Kilburns sat at the organ while they bashed through a couple of that band's evergreen hits.

With Fred Rowe's millions of relatives occupying the rows in front of me I couldn't help but be moved by the community singing on 'Rhythm Stick' but by far the best number of the evening was the beautiful 'Sink My Boats' which is possibly the greatest song Chas Jankel and Ian have ever written and should have been released as a single long ago. Eventually all the Matumbi and most of the Clash became a permanent fixture onstage (Nicky Headen excelled himself copying Charlie Charles' drum patterns) and the Odeon was still shimmering with the glow of a real festive night when the last tube train slid up the track to Earls Court.

Thursday night started early with The Pretenders who came on at seven-thirty and from then on looked as if they couldn't wait to get off. Chrissie Hynde's vocals were completely unintelligible for the first two songs until 'Stop Your Sobbing' which did actually sound - just like the record. I thought for some reason the drummer stopped half-way through the song, at which point Chrissie turned to say "Are you working tonight?" before they carried on with it!

The Pretenders did about 40 minutes which included 'Kid', 'Tattooed Love Boys' and 'Brass In Pocket' before they gave up the ghost and the audience grew a little tired of constant tuning-up and an altogether dreary attitude to the whole thing. Eventually Chrissie announced "I guess we're really a bit too small time for a place like this." I couldn't help but agree. The Pretenders make exquisite A sides but they really are awful live.

At eight-thirty the Specials came on and after a shaky start, where the whole sedate Who audience distinctly did not know what to make of it, that same audience were soon dancing frantically to the Specials' own splash-splash rhythms as the band made it clear that they intended to be the highlight of the week.

And they certainly were. Their lengthy set looked like some kind of

CONT OVER



CLASH'S Joe Strummer.

CONT FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

tribal New Year's Eve party alongside the fey poseyness of those sad Pretenders and from the third song in the audience never stopped moving around. 'Monkey Man' had one of them suspended in mid-air along a lighting cable towering above the crowd and 'Where Did You Get That Blank Expression?' and 'Rat Race' were brilliantly played and performed.

Before 'It Doesn't Make It Alright' we had to put up with a little chat about paying eight quid to help starving kids did not make it automatically OK, but this was the Specials' best-ever performance. 'Guns Of Navarone' was made to sound even more powerful with the addition of a brass section and 'Little Bitch', 'Rudi', and a superb 'Gangsters' finished the set off. The Specials came back for three very real and deserved encores and can claim to be the only band of the week who didn't bow to the dreaded 'courtesy encore'.

Seeing the Who after the Specials was like a funeral after a party. They really looked so old. Daltrey in faded jeans and capped T-shirt doing all his "meaningful" mike mannerisms. Townshend in a short kimono-type jacket and red velvet trousers gathered at the ankles, hoping he was the centre of it all. Entwistle was completely stagnant, playing over-complex bass runs and Kenny Jones was probably pleased to be there at all.

They launched into 'Substitute', 'I Can't Explain' and 'Baba O'Reilly' until Townshend said something about us being "glad to be born in London and not poxy Kampuchea" and the middle of the set became interminably boring and it seemed never ending. Newer songs like 'Sister Disco' (what a title), 'My Wife' and 'Music Must Change' just do not come up to the musical requirements set by the earlier stuff. By the time it came to Pete's guitar solo at the end, I'd have bet my ticket for the next night that 90 per cent of the audience couldn't wait for it to end. In fact some of them dribbled out soon afterwards. It was the standard Who set with the 'Tommy' excerpts, 'My Generation', 'I Can See For Miles' and 'Won't Get Fooled Again' finishing off the set.

The encores were 'Summertime Blues' and a surprisingly good version of 'Dancing In The Streets' which featured the horn section and was by far the most powerful sound of the night. I don't care how much in vogue or relevant to the history of rock 'n' roll the Who are at the moment all I know is that on Friday they played a tired old set of tired old songs. They looked exhausted and bored at least half of their audience. Is this what the Beatles would look like if they were still together?

Saturday night was the big one. Still raining and pouring and still

touts on every street corner and station platform. Thick-set record company execs, Wings freaks, Beatle freaks, Costello freaks and Rockpile freaks mingled in the foyer with Radio One DJs and just about everyone in London who's in a band. Everyone was there who could've been and there were some who definitely should've stayed at home.

Along the balcony of the circle hung banners proclaiming "We Love You Beatles!" and "Tonight Rock History Is Being Made". George and Ringo were said to be definitely there (the very astute would have noticed the extra drum kits set up behind the curtains) and just about everyone had seen someone who had seen "Lennon".

Billy Connolly came on. "I suppose you've all heard the rumours of a reunion tonight. Well, I can tell you now I've seen three of 'em back there. Yep, three members of the Applejacks are here."

Rockpile launched into the first real rocking set of the week and they made a hash of 'Girls Talk' and 'Queen Of Hearts' but worse was to come when Nick Lowe tried to sing 'Cruel To Be Kind'. A tinpot Phil Spector he may be but he should never be allowed to sing that song again. Those high notes on the chorus were not meant to be his and he knew it. You'll see for yourself when the concerts are broadcast within the next couple of months, unless Rockpile do a "Nixon" and start dubbing all over the song.

Actually Rockpile, especially Edmonds and Terry Williams, were one of the best bands of the whole week but for some reason something just didn't gel and by the time Robert Plant joined them on blues harp the game was up.

"I never though I'd see the Rockpile doing 'Stairway To Heaven' said little Elvis Costello before he launched into an excellent version of 'Oliver's Army' and at last fought the battle against the awful live sound as he began to recreate the atmosphere of his records. Costello's version of his own 'Girl's Talk' lacks some of the niceness of the Edmonds cut but the extended 'Watching The Detectives' and 'I Don't Want To Go To Chelsea' proved that the lifesaver of the day was the proper pacing of the songs. A new one called 'Possession' finished up being one of the highspots of the evening but about three-quarters of the way through he lost it somewhere and when he and the Attractions left the stage no one was much bothered.

Well, what exactly was going to happen now? People were talking. Was it a Beatles reunion? Mick Jagger was there, wasn't he? Bowie was there. Everyone was there. We waited. And waited. Then we waited just a little bit longer and Wings came on in black frock coats and



Pic by Justin Thomas

PRETENDER'S Chrissie Hynde.

played 'Got To Get You Into My Life'. Most of the Wings catalogue of candy floss hits followed. 'I've Had Enough', 'Goodnight Tonight', 'Every Night' and a stunning rendition of 'No Words' from the 'Band On The Run' album.

Unfortunately the sound just wasn't right and Paul knew it. During the first verse of 'Maybe I'm Amazed' the band stopped playing suddenly as McCartney ordered someone in the nicest possible way to "get rid of that buzz!" then they started it again (with buzz).

I have nothing but the greatest respect for new drummer Steve Holly whose beat and enthusiasm kept everything intact — along with Paulie of course, who battled on to the end. McCartney of course was magnificent (except for a few rotten notes) it's just such a pity that he must surround himself with chaps like Denny Laine whose image and on stage presence is so low it's even negative. Paul finished up with 'Yesterday' and invited everyone to sing along to 'Mull Of Kintyre' before Wings took off and Billy Connolly came back to keep us entertained for a few minutes.

Billy just escaped showing everyone his willie until it was finally time for him to reveal just who actually was coming on. Slowly he read out the list. No Beatles. Applejacks or Elvis in Hammersmith Odeon. We've got Paul McCartney and Wings, Dave Edmunds, John Bonham, John Paul Jones, Tony Ashton, Pete Townshend, Jimmy from the Pretenders, Robert Plant, Maurice Pert, Kenny Jones and about ten people no one had ever heard of.

On came Rockestra playing the Rockestra theme. Well, half of them weren't plugged in so at least half were playing it. Jimmy from the Pretenders passed the time sycophantically patting Pete Townshend on the back.

'Let It Be' followed with Plant and Linda on excellent backing vocals and here it became apparent that these two and Edmonds were the only ones taking any part of it seriously. For some reason the sound suddenly became superb as they sauntered into 'Lucy'. Townshend still playing and looking the fool and McCartney completely stealing the show on lead vocals and bass. Unfortunately this was what everyone had been waiting for and he knew it. Wings had had an off night and if this was the best that the seventies could rake up well, I can say no more. The eighties? Christ, if Ringo doesn't come back soon he's gonna be almost as legendary as Burl Ives. I never saw any history and I never saw any rock either.

We poured out into the night. You'll see it on your TV screens. It had stopped raining. Except in my heart.