

THE CLASH STORY

As told by Joe Strummer and Mick Jones



JOE STRUMMER vocals, Mick Jones guitar, Paul Simonon bass, Topper Headon drums.

If you want some information then this is where you'll get it.

In May 1979 a drummerless group began rehearsing in a small squat near Shepherd's Bush Green in London. Paul Simonon was the bass player and he'd been playing for only six weeks. He was from the wilds of Brixton, his parents had split up and he'd lived mostly with his father before landing a free scholarship to a posh art school.

Then a friend had said "Why don't you join my group?" The guy who said this was Mick Jones, the lead guitarist, also from Brixton. Mick's dad was a cab driver, and Mick lived with his parents until they divorced when he was eight. His mum went to America and his dad left home so Mick went to live with his gran. When the Clash formed he was occasionally showing up at Hammersmith Art School.

These two guys asked Joe Strummer to be the singer. At the time Joe was singing with a London pub band which he had formed in order to pass the time and pay the rent. Upon being asked, he quit the group immediately and joined the prototype Clash. Keith Levine, guitarist was also a founder member but he left the group early on saying he had some urgent business to take care of in North London.

In August '76 this group was refurbishing an abandoned warehouse in Camden Town. When it was finished the rock began. Terry Chimes, drummer, was enlisted and every day the warehouse shook with the sound of hard practice.

At this time there was nowhere to play. For example, the famous Marquee Club, supposed to be the home of rock & roll told the Clash: "Sorry, mate. No punk rock in here." So gigs were created by Bernie Rhodes, then manager. One day during a particularly nasty gig when the bottles and cans were coming down like rain Terry Chimes

quit after watching a wine bottle come flying over and smash into a million pieces on his high hat.

Oh well. A drummerless group is a no good group. So auditions were held every afternoon in Camden Town. 206 tried, and 205 failed. Nicky "Topper" Headon outdrummed all comers and won the hot seat. By this time, although the group had not noticed, they had caused a sizeable reaction in the outside world.

For example, CBS coughed up a load of money and signed them. They got to use CBS number 3 Studios in London, and they made an LP, 'The Clash', in three weekend sessions using their soundman as producer.

They went out as bottom of the bill opening act on the ill fated 'Anarchy' tour of December '76.

They put together and headlined



JOE STRUMMER

their own 'White Riot' tour in early '77 taking along the Buzzcocks, the Slits, and Subway Sect. No one had seen anything like it as the tour bus rolled further away from London. Journalists from The Sunday Times wrote detailed accounts as Rodent, the road manager, carved his arm up with Coke cans and cigarette ends.

The LP shocked the group by entering the chart at No.12. But luckily their singles, with a guaranteed lack of airplay, could not get past No.28.

So thus they were saved from Bay City Rollerdom on any scale, and just to make sure, they refused to appear on Top Of The Pops, which they considered an old pop TV show left over from the 1960's, which requires performers to mime along as their record is played at a low volume somewhere in the distance.

For a long time now the new "dub" and "reggae" from Kingston, Jamaica had been making itself felt to those prepared to listen in London. 'Police & Thieves' was a summer reggae hit in the clubs but not on the radio. The Clash recorded a six minute punk rock translation of this song and stuck it on their LP, although at the time most white musicians believed that attempting to play such music showed a lack of respect and an attitude of condescension. But luckily when they heard this they KNEW it was a good idea.

Lee Perry, or 'Scratch the Upsetter', was the co-author and producer of the original Junior Marvin tune, and when he heard their version he added a picture of the Clash to his Wall of Fame at the Black Ark Studios in Jamaica. There are the only white faces on this wall.

Scratch visited London in mid '77 and found himself producing a new Clash song, 'Complete Control'. Midway through the session the Upsetter was moved to tell Mick Jones that he played guitar "with an iron fist." The song also dinged the number 28 spot, but even this was not enough to stop the tour which played in every major town and city where the group were not banned (with Richard Hell from America and

the Lous from France completing the bill).

After the smoke cleared there was nothing but a big pile of bills, all addressed to the Clash. Since this time the group have found it a financial necessity to play un-seated venues, the replacement rate pegging around £20 a seat. This was also the heyday of spitting or "gobbing" and I would like to thank Richard Hell and Voidoids on behalf of the Clash for drawing more than his share of the fire.

The Clash rode aeroplanes all round Europe. Ceaselessly for more than a month they struggled with police and hoteliers in Munich, irate TV producers in Bremen, bomb threats and attack from the Rageri in Sweden, beer and short change from the Rhineland bar keepers, threats on the Reparbahn. And when



MICK JONES

they got back home they found that everything was different. Many of their contemporary groups had splintered, their daily movements had become a subject of interest, some of the clubs were shut and generally a great depression had settled on the town.

Withstanding scathing and sneering attacks in the press the Clash learned that you got to take the rough with the smooth and decided not to break up.

During this time various members of the group were continually being arrested and fined for petty theft and vandalism, culminating in an incident that took place on the top of the group's warehouse in Camden Town. A helicopter and armed police arrested two members of the group and they were charged with various gun offences and the shooting of some valuable racing pigeons. While the case was on remand the Clash released 'White Man in Hammersmith Palais' b/w 'I Don't Wanna Be The Prisoner' and took out on a 'Clash Out On Parole Tour' with Suicide from New York and the Specials from Coventry.

To get back to music, it was time to make a second LP. In order to prevent arguments producer Sandy Pearlman was hired for the job. He seemed keen to do it. The schedule was interrupted by the usual disasters. However, no one quits easily around here and the recording proceeded.

The new LP was recorded in London before going out on tour. The tour was the best ever with Suicide taking and handling a violent assault from the rougher British Clash audience. After the tour the guitar solos were added at the Automat in San Francisco and final mixing was done at the Record Plant NYC.

'Give 'Em Enough Rope' was completed and released in November 1978 and shot straight to number 2 in the British charts the week of release. It also gave the Clash their first bonafide hit with 'Tommy Gun'. The Clash embarked on another

British tour, the 'Sort It Out Tour' during which time they parted company with their former manager, Bernie Rhodes.

They did their first US tour in February, the 'Pearl Harbour Tour' taking along the legendary Bo Diddley as support. The Clash played in Vancouver, Toronto, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, Cleveland and New York, sold out everywhere and devastated both critics and fans alike.

Alone with my own cold thoughts
... The update is long overdue. It is something that should be done!

My memory does not serve me well — brief flashing images pass before me — things that had to be done, past achievements, places visited. They are all there in my memory, fragmented, timeless within me. I must extradite the facts from the mist around me. I must file them chronologically (up here and on paper) so that some sense is made of the story. How this is done or the actual circumstance of the task is far less important than *who* is chosen to do it. Certainly I was there and I have witnessed almost every breath The Clash have taken.

Joe Strummer started this (although I doubt if he wrote the last three paragraphs attributed to him) and now only a year later it has been handed to me to contribute (albeit a small piece of the whole) in the tradition of stories passed by hand or word of mouth with continual revisions and additions made ad-infinitum. Lots of great books were conceived and formed this way — many modern day scholars believe the Bible to be among them.

This of course is not the Bible and believe me I'm not trying to make any comparisons. It is simply just another story... "Ere! what's all this stuff about the Bible then" sneers a flake white apparition of Topper Headon — the Clash's solid stixman. "He's having delusions of Grand liquors" a second like - spirit interjects — The lean angled frame of bassman Paul Simonon — a playful presence hard to ignore (not that any would want to ignore him!)

"Oh we've got religion now have we" screamed the mass en masse. "Not really — all it is a fanciful thought, nothing more! there is.



PAUL SIMENON

after all, no telling what or whose writing will survive the next thousand years or so." Here was Strummer walking into my waking dream — always in my estimation a fair man, I've said it before a real "salt of the earth" type. From a crud to King Solomon through to D. H. Lawrence. He's a noble Turk that Joe the lion. Stop! wrong 'em boyo — back to the story, back to the facts —

On their return to England from their first US tour The Clash rehearsed, wrote new material, worked on an yet untitled film and recorded an extended - play record entitled 'The Cost Of Living EP' which was released on election day. We all know what happened on that day and it was no surprise when one critic exclaimed that the record sounded like "left-wing paranoia" and that "The Clash should relax and enjoy the ride like the rest of us." The Clash, who claim no allegiance to either the left or the

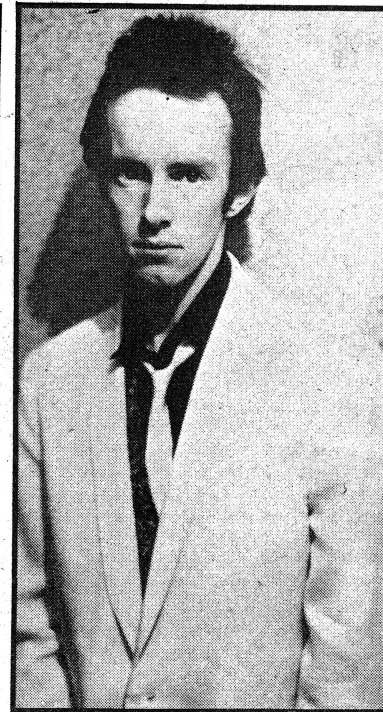
right, did not blindly dismiss that criticism but instead observed the so called "ride" itself more carefully than ever.

'The Cost Of Living EP' did well and charted in Britain at number 22. One song on the EP — The Clash's rendition of the classic Bobb Fuller Four / Sonny Curtis tune 'I Fought The Law' was also released as The Clash's first single in the US. It received a fair amount of radio airplay (very unusual for The Clash, very — very important in the US) and this helped create more interest for the band's next tour there.

But at home "the ride" was getting rougher and with the constant threat of authoritarian violence and crippling inflation many people were righteously fighting the law in reality. Following the Southall anti - fascist demos a Southall defence fund was set up by Rock Against Racism and two benefit concerts at a *seatless* Rainbow theatre were presented. The first night Pete Townshend, Misty (brutally attacked by the SPG at Southall) and The Pop Group appeared. Sharing the bill that night were Aswads and The Members. Both shows were attended by capacity crowds and a good time was had by all with no trouble. All proceeds went to the before - mentioned defence fund.

After this event came more of what's commonly known by The Clash as the three "R's" — Rehears, 'Rite and Record. All the time closely observing what was going on around them they could not help but notice that despite the short-lived Tory tax cuts (specifically designed to help the already rich — *not* the poor) The Bee Gees did not return to these shores.

The Clash went to Finland for the day and when they returned set about recording their third LP. For their sins they recalled their first ever producer, one Guy Stevens of Forest Hill (formerly of Swiss Cottage). A somewhat legendary figure of the swinging sixties, Guy's trademarks were energy, excitement, a true passion for rock & roll and an ability to work fast. The group and the producer were made for each other. They were in fact so productive that it became clear after only a few days that the new Clash



TOPPER HEADON

LP was going to be a double album. This in itself caused problems, with an eye to the current economic climate. The solution was found — the record would retail two for the price of one!

After a month's recording in Highbury the band embarked once more for the new world on 'The Clash Take The Fight' tour. Ignoring the energy crisis the band, along with busloads of family, friends and roadies scoured the land from Monterey to Minneapolis, from Texas to New York, from Toronto to Hollywood and back round again. Incidentally, the group really did take the "Fifth" and the "Fifth" was the inclusion of Micky Gallagher of Ian Dury and the Blockheads on organ. He played on all the dates from Boston onwards.

Along the way the band had the good fortune to have such luminaries as Sam & Dave, Screaming Jay Hawkins and Bo Diddley play with them as well as

newer acts such as Joe Ely, David Johanssen, Cramps and The Rebels. Determined to make an impression The Clash found their sell - out shows generally well received with New York, Chicago, LA and the Texan performances standing out as the highlights of the excursion. After six weeks, which felt like six days, the tour ended almost abruptly in Vancouver. Then it was every man for himself back to Blighty.

The group drifted homeward to put the finishing touches to their new record which was to be titled "the new Testament" until someone said it had been done before and everybody else thought it too pretentious anyway. So instead the record was called 'London Calling', which is the first cut on the LP.

These are disappointing times even for the most optimistic. The Clash however are as optimistic as ever.

You may think this naivety!

You may think it stupidity!

But as the fourth man of the "El Clash Combo" I can positively say we are not living for the future we're living day to day.

Now, in the present — we shall have to see what happens!
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DISCOGRAPHY

- Singles:
CBS 5058 WHITE RIOT / 1977 18/3/77
CBS 5293 REMOTE CONTROL / LONDON'S BURNING 13/5/77
CBS 5664 COMPLETE CONTROL / THE CITY OF THE DEAD 23/9/77
CBS 5834 CLASH CITY ROCKERS / JAIL GUITAR DOORS 17/3/78
CBS 6383 (WHITE MAN) IN HAMMERSMITH PALAIS / THE PRISONER 16/6/78
CBS 6788 TOMMY GUN / ONE TWO CRUSH ON YOU 24/11/79
CBS 7082 LONDON CALLING / ARMAGIDEON TIME 7/12/79
E.P. THE COST OF LIVING EP
CBS 7324 I FOUGHT THE LAW / GROOVY TIMES / GATES OF THE WEST / CAPITAL RADIO 11/5/79
Albums:
CBS 82000 THE CLASH 8/4/77
CBS 82431 GIVE 'EM ENOUGH ROPE 10/11/78
CLASH 3 LONDON CALLING 14/12/79

101ers Joe

Cant play the Marque No Punk Rockers

Europe 77 Munich, Bremen, Sweden

Pearlman, Rope,

Sort it Out Tour,

Benefit gigs, Southall/Townsend,

London Calling,

Take the Fifth