

# Trouser Press

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**TOM PETTY**

**THE RECORDS**

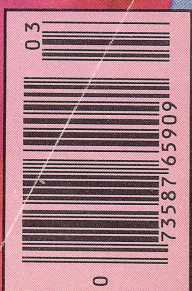
**ROY WOOD**  
A LOOK BACK

**BOOMTOWN RATS**

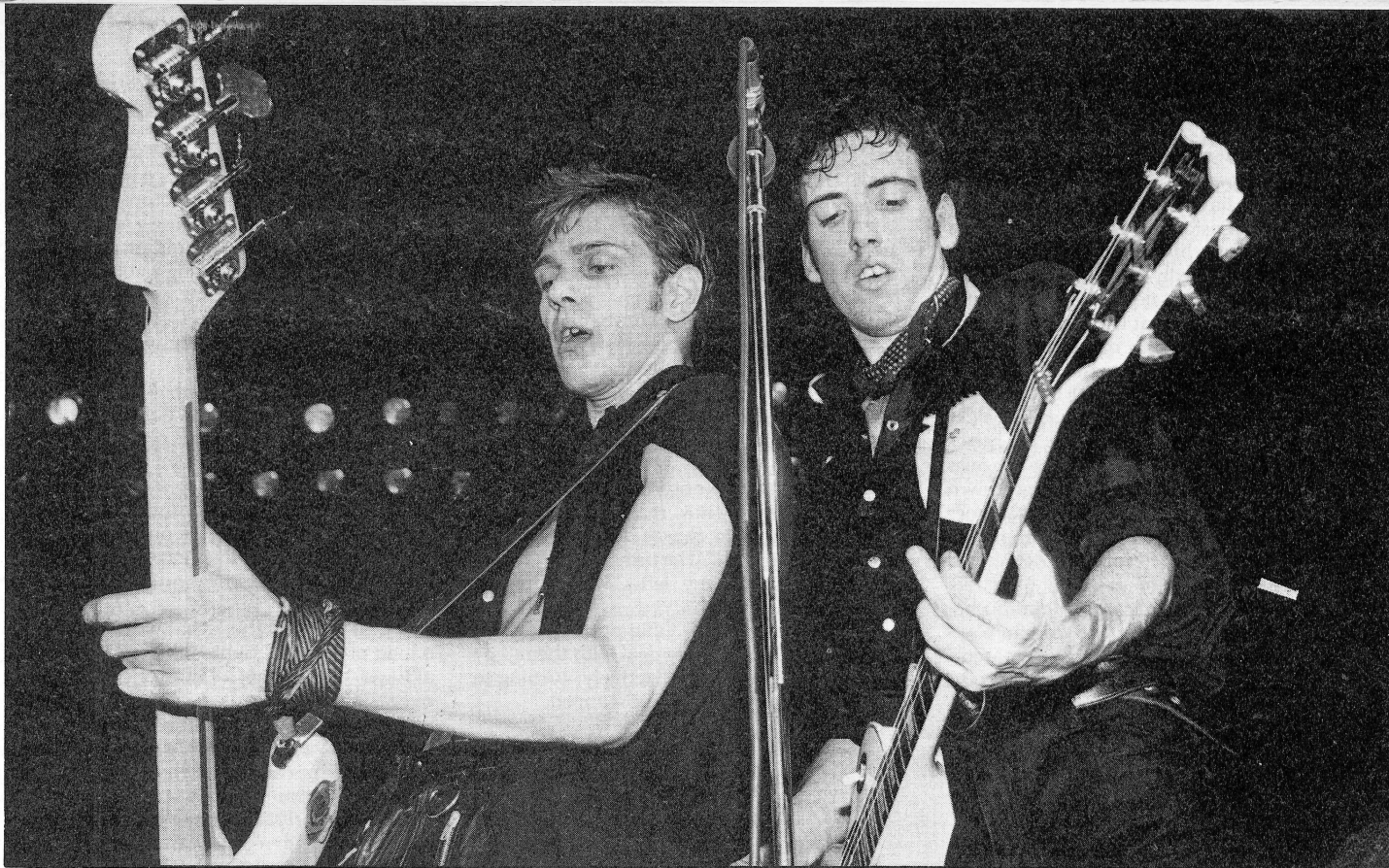
**GLEN MATLOCK**

**SPECIALS**

**CLASH**  
*Death or Glory?*







## THE CLASH PLAY REVOLUTION ROCK!

By Chris Salewicz

It's four days before Christmas. A dark, early evening damp with snow and rain. Immediately south of the Thames, in the inappropriately genteel Victorian suburb of Putney, the Clash is stashed away in a rehearsal studio. They are readying their set of reggaebilly rockers for a 40-date British tour set to start on the fifth day of the New Year. As elevated tube trains rumble past a few yards away from the building, the Clash—vibed in on several hours of playing and spliffing—are into serious work, running repeatedly through the backing track for "Rudie Can't Fail."

Drummer Topper Headon retains a spiky haircut (albeit growing out), but the three front-line Clashers now bear little sign of the band's punk origins. In keeping with their fascination with and love for their musical roots, they all resemble variants on late-'50s rockers. Lead guitarist Mick Jones sports a black slim-lapelled, drainpipe-trousered suit and pomaded black hair; all he lacks is a pencil-thin moustache to seem at home cleaning his nails with the end of a metal comb in a backstreet Italian bar. Bassist Paul Simonon wears a brown chalk-striped variant on the same cut of suit as Jones; his blonde locks are plastered back too, in homage to James Dean. (Simonon is due in Hollywood this March to act in a feature film.) Lead singer/rhythm guitarist Joe Strummer's dark blue woolen shortie overcoat proclaims

hitman cool, though this image is softened by faded tight jeans and battered shoes.

Strummer's seated at the organ in the middle of the rehearsal room, and pouring out his soul on "The Bankrobbing Song," an unrecorded slow blues featuring Jones on bottleneck. As he sprawls over the notes and squeezes his mournful words into the mike, Strummer invokes memories of countless anonymous bar-room bluesers, their voices husky from too many nights of booze and cigarette smoke—though Joe hardly drinks at all these days. (Live, the Clash's keyboards are handled by Blockhead Mickey Gallagher, who in another incarnation co-wrote Peter Frampton's fab smasher, "Show Me the Way.")

"The Bankrobbing Song" completed, the Clash replenish the energies of several hours' playing with Chinese and Indian foods brought in during the last song by personal assistant Johnny Green. Jones and Strummer check carefully to ensure no animal flesh comes their way (Jones: "Chrissie Hynde once told me that if you eat meat you inherit the fear of the animal as it was killed"); the assorted dishes are shared around until a no-waste situation is achieved.

**London Calling**, the new Clash double LP, has been in the shops for about 10 days, and entered the British charts at number nine. With legendary, supposed loony, producer Guy Stevens at the controls, the album—cut in three and a half weeks prior to the band's

summer '79 US tour—transcends the introversion (not to mention the Blue Oyster Cult sound) of the Sandy Pearlman-produced **Give 'Em Enough Rope**.

Dealing with emotions, decrying self-defeatism, **London Calling** is direct spiritual heir to **The Clash**. Just as that LP was probably the best debut album ever made by any group, so **London Calling**, appearing at the tail end of 1979 is possibly the definitive '70s rock 'n' roll record, an ironic antidote to Me Generation selfishness and self-defeatism.

"It's our 20 Greatest Hits currently," Mick Jones comments after dinner. (Only 19 titles are listed on the cover; the closing "Train In Vain" was a last minute inclusion after a plan to give it away free with *New Musical Express* hit insurmountable technical problems.) "We knew it was coming out at Christmastime so we thought it would go up well against all the other 20 Greatest. We think ours stands up quite well against Lena Martell."

"Tell you something," the lead guitarist turns to Strummer, clambering back to the organ like a kid returning to a school desk. "We're going to have to do something to make the album come out as cheap as possible in America. That's quite important. How much is **Tusk**?" Jones turns to me.

About \$15, I hazard.  
Strummer: "But that's made of ivory, isn't it?"

Simonon: "Must be."  
Jones: "Well, I reckon we must definitely

go for about ten bucks. And we'll have to stand by it, 'cos, you know, once you've said it—"

Strummer: "Stand by your price."

**D**oubters have suggested that the Clash's open derision towards their record company is little more than a chic urban pose; this is hardly a worthy estimation of the intensity of passion within the band. The Clash just despairs at the generally ham-fisted lack of humanity displayed by the soulless super-corporation, and their company's depressingly low level of understanding of what rock music is all about. Consider Strummer's appalled reaction to the news that, prior to the band's spring Los Angeles show, Epic Records execs had gorged down nine-course meals. "What sort of person goes out and eats a nine-course meal and then goes to see some rock 'n' roll?" he demanded incredulously.

Despite constant public confrontation between the band and their Babylonian Paymaster General, genuine Clashfans apparently exist at boardroom level. There seems to

be little question of the band's being dropped by Epic should *London Calling* fail to shift the required number of units. Headon hands me a highly laudatory, slightly unctuous cable from an Epic bigwig comparing the Clash to such mighties as John Lennon. It says he will love them always and that they are jolly smashing.

"There you go then," Jones says with a decisive nod of his head. "That's what they think of us... Though they probably will turn against us if [the new album] doesn't happen.

"It's not as though they almost haven't anyway. Perhaps they haven't in America, but here it's different. They've always got so many problems with us; we're the problem cases.

"You see, they're not very musical people at CBS. They're not really interested in *music*. The ones in charge don't know anything about music." He turns to the bassist who is sitting on my left. "What do *you* think of CBS, Paul?"

"I don't really know." Simonon shrugs his shoulders. "I don't really deal with them."

"Yeah," Jones adds reflectively, turning to me. "We don't really. We've stopped."

Simonon: "But before it was always a pain. I can't bear to go up there."

Headon: "We never ever speak to them."

Jones: "See, they're the sort of company—their latest Christmas card, right, is a classic. It's in full color: a picture of the managing director holding his dog's paw..."

Simonon: "...which is holding a pen..."

Jones: "...which is signing a contract..."

Headon: "...in front of all these gold albums."

Simonon: "That must be what they think of us."

Jones: "People on our label are the same as dogs. Anytime it looks like you're going to get out of it they find loads of different ways for you to owe them money."

Simonon: "They sort of say, 'Well, here's some money to help you out'; but it doesn't help at all. It just appears on a bit of paper later. You think, 'Oh, great. We've got out of the mess we're in.' And there it comes again."

Jones: "We did think that we could just do a load of records, right—like just quick, jazz albums—hand them all in at once and it'd be over with. But this is a contract we signed when we were naive youngsters. It says the records have to be made over a certain period of time. So it's just a case of us doing our time, really."

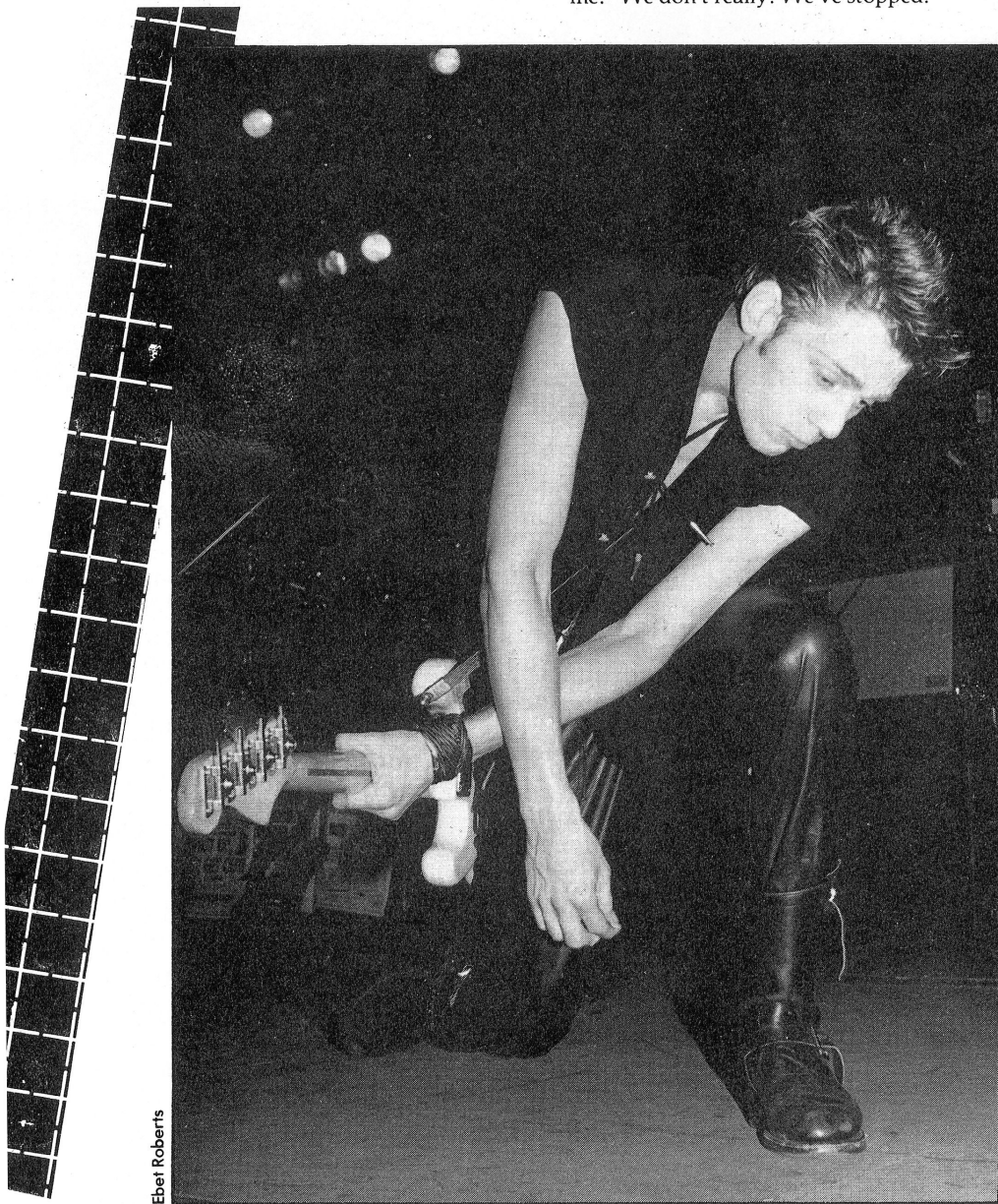
Besides guerrilla warfare with their record company, until recently the Clash was involved in a similar situation with former manager Bernie Rhodes (who signed the band to British CBS the same day the group thought they were signing with Polydor). The diminutive Rhodes, former second-in-command to one Malcolm McLaren, appeared to thrive on tensions and disharmony at direct odds with the growth of the group's collective strength. Having settled out of court with Rhodes, the Clash is now managed by Blackhill, one of the world's more trustworthy management operations. The original managers of Pink Floyd currently care for the career of Ian Dury, as well as Roy Harper and Philip Rambow.

"You've got to get ripped off," Strummer concludes, "to know what it's all about."

**L**ondon Calling is littered with allusions to and pastiches of rockabilly, R&B and especially reggae, not forgetting rock steady and ska. These are sources, though, not Bowie-type steals. There's nothing self-conscious or sneaky about them; it's all out in the open. The Clash wit, and the fiery positivism it hangs out with, sees to that.

Of all the sources, reggae is certainly dominant. It pervades *London Calling*, sometimes unobtrusively, sometimes not. The Clash listens to a lot of reggae; on-the-road traveling music is invariably chosen from the Paul Simonon cassette collection. "Rudie Can't Fail," "Wrong 'Em Boyo" (originally cut by the Groovers in '64), "Lover's Rock" and "Revolution Rock" are obviously under the influence, but it's all over the place: "Hateful," "Jimmy Jazz," "Death or Glory," "Clampdown" and others.

For the B-side of the "London Calling" 45 the Clash cut their version of Willie Williams' summer reggae single, "Armagideon Time." The original was released on Coxson's Dodd's Studio One label, a company re-



Ebel Roberts



nowned for some of the best sounds that come out of Jamaica (and also for the philosophical manner in which its artists seem to accept not being paid).

"Armageddon Time" used one of the most popular rhythms of the year, Sound Dimension's "Real Rock." The Clash had hoped to go to Jamaica after their US tour to use the same rhythm track. Studio One expressed no interest whatsoever. "They didn't want to know," Jones says sadly, "though they don't mind selling us the publishing! I was bitterly disappointed that I had to come back to England instead."

"There were all these plans: we were going to have gone to Cuba. And to Mexico. And Japan. We were going *everywhere*. And instead we came back here as soon as it was all over." The Cuban tour idea fell through during the mini-crisis about Russian troops on the island.

**T**he last US tour seemed almost pre-destined to end in chaos. The organization completely fell apart at the last date in Los Angeles.

"Me 'n' Joe were stuck at the airport," Headon recalls. "We didn't even have the money to fly the luggage out. As soon as the last gig was over everyone did a runner. We woke up in the hotel the morning after the last gig and there was just the four of us left."

"We were in charge that night," Jones continues. "Kosmo [Vinyl, member of the Blackhill team and legendary rock 'n' roll visionary] had lost his passport and had to go up to Vancouver to fetch it. Then the geezers in the road crew wouldn't start the show unless they'd been paid. And there was this massive audience going bonkers. All bribes and things to get them to turn the power on. After that even the tour manager skipped."

How about the famous Clash vs. America stand-off?

"America hasn't really woken up to us on any massive scale. The concerts are good. I think we have a bit of a rep as a live band."

"I imagine"—Jones's lips curl contemptuously—"the Police—someone like *that*—must have sold quite a lot of records there. Like the Knack have."

And radio airplay?

"Some...It's like—[to the others] I mean, are we underrating it or what?"

Strummer: "Underrating what?"

Jones: "Do we get played on the radio a lot or not?"

Strummer: "Definitely *not!*"

Headon: "On John Peel-type shows."

Strummer: "What's that station in Boston?"

Jones: "Can't remember. We had a good time in Boston. Took over a radio station."

Headon: "Oedipus."

Jones: "That's the name of the DJ."

Headon: "We smashed all his records up."

Jones: "Yeah, we were taking his Boston and Foreigner albums out of their sleeves and scratching them. His most popular records totally fucked. The program director was talking to us as he stood on this pile of hundreds of records that had just been chucked down on the floor."

What sort of radio programs did the Clash find themselves stuck on?

Strummer: "Look at the latest drivel that's come into town."

Headon: "'Latest gimmick.'"

Jones: "'Four novelties from England.'"

Headon: "We'd play up to it 'n' all."

**C**hristmas Eve. The Clash is rehearsing in Acklam Hall off Notting Hill's Portobello Road, directly beneath the Westway flyover that is such a vital symbol in the group's mythology. On Christmas Day and Boxing Day (the 26th) the Clash is playing two "secret" gigs at the hall (tickets \$1) as an antidote to the holidays and as warm-up dates (with Mickey Gallagher) for their British tour.

Afterwards, Simonon, Strummer, Headon and myself walk to Simonon's basement flat a couple of blocks away. It's a modest two-room place, decorated and carpeted in various shades of red that are totally appropriate for a fire-sign person. The other two Clashers call for cabs to take them home. Simonon and I sit down in the kitchen with some rum and my tape recorder. His American woman friend and her friend watch a Gene Kelly film on one of the two TVs that are switched on in the front room.

Like Strummer and Jones, Simonon is a former art student. The offspring of a broken marriage (as are Joe and Mick), he used the first money he earned with the

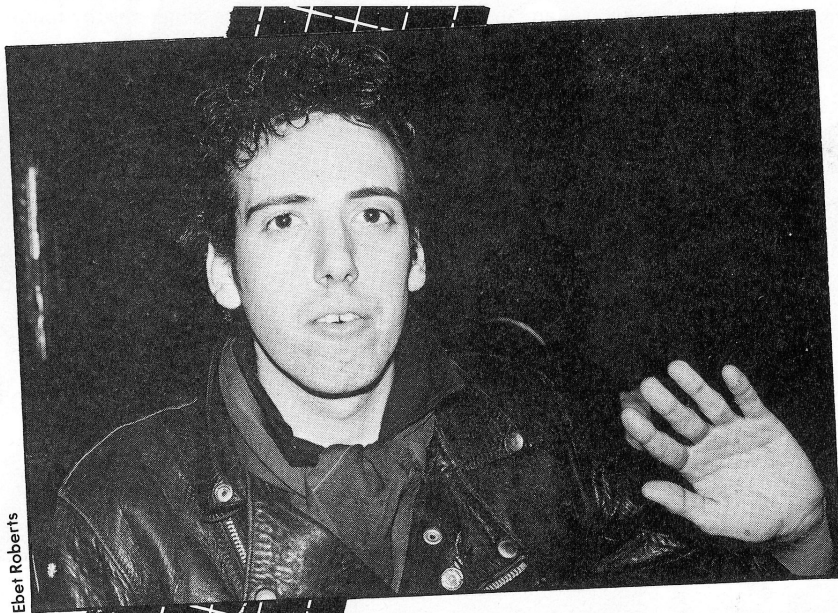
Clash as a deposit on the flat. He badly needed a place of his own after years of sharing bedrooms with his brother and living in squats. He bought this flat very cheaply indeed. "It's great in this neighborhood," he says. "There's this black family next door and really early in the morning they play all this dub. I don't even need to put anything on to listen to when I'm getting up."

We return to the subject of America. The country does seem to be accepting more new wave.

"Yeah, slowly. Something seems to be stirring over there. I think all those other groups like the Police—and whether I like them or not is another thing—you do hear them a lot on the radio, so it does help us in some ways. Makes them a bit more open to our music."

"New York's really great for us. It's probably about the only place in America I really enjoy. Then again it's got all its bullshit attached to it."

"I think someone from England coming up against all that stuff can easily be taken in and sink with it. Everytime I go over there I'm aware of that. Funny thing is, after a



Ebet Roberts



Ebet Roberts



while it gets boring."

Recording also tires Simonon, although that wasn't the case with *London Calling*.

"Usually I get really bored because the producers and people aren't interesting. But Guy Stevens is really different from the others. He's much more than a producer, really."

Mick Jones had said that Stevens absorb all the nuttiness and tensions within the band.

"Yeah. You could just pour it all out. Great!

"Making the last one was terrible. CBS or Bernie or whoever it was kept us separated from each other. Blackhill, our new management people, seem okay so far, but we've got our eyes open more than before. We no longer sign things when we don't know what they're for. I suppose that showed stupidity—though it's good in a way that happened to us because we'll actually tell people about it."

**A**fter two superb Acklam Hall shows the Clash climaxes its holiday gigs December 27th at the Hammersmith Odeon as the "Mystery Act" on an Ian Dury-

topping benefit for Cambodian refugees.

Twenty minutes or so before the Clash is due on I meet Guy Stevens at the backstage bar. In addition to his incredible production work, Stevens was responsible for the release of about half the classic R&B and soul Britain heard in the mid-'60s. Music is precious stuff to him, and he deplores its bastardization by large record conglomerates for the sake of mere profit. The Clash, he knows, is true to the cause. The Clash is part of the Quest.

"Listen," he shouts in my ear, spraying the entire right side of my face with spittle. "Did you see Joe Strummer in the dressing-room just now? Down on the floor, ironing his stage-clothes on a towel? Gene Vincent would've done that! Eddie Cochran would've done that! Jerry Lee Lewis would've done that!" He has a firm hold on my arm, and a fan's passion in his voice. He loosens my arm and slumps down on a seat, as though in a trance, to contemplate this perfect rock 'n' roll image.

Midway through the Clash's set I look up from my seat and see a squirming Guy Stevens carried up the center aisle by four security

men. Fearful he may be kicked out of the theater or even beaten up, I go in search of him at the rear of the auditorium.

He's okay. One of the guards has recognized him and is mildly scolding him for causing them any bother. Carried away by the Clash's music, Guy had been dancing in front of one of the cameras filming the event. He is very drunk.

We are negotiating a swaying journey down the side of the auditorium to the backstage door when someone suddenly rushes up behind us and throws his arms about Guy. It is what seems to be an equally pissed Pete Townshend! Leaving Stevens in good hands, I wend my way back to my seat.

**E**ight days later I'm seated between Jones and Strummer on the mini-bus the Clash has rented for their British tour. It's about midnight. We're traveling up the M1 to Birmingham where the band will appear next morning (Saturday) in a children's TV show, *Tizwoz*. Hard Jamaican sounds pour out of the Simonon portable cassette player, filling the rather too warm vehicle.

The intention is to discuss specific details of *London Calling* with the self-contained and highly romantic (a compliment, of course) Strummer. We start off with "Lover's Rock." The title refers to a reggae sub-division popular in England over the past couple of years and featuring what sounds like twee 14-year-old girls and electronic drum. The Clash song discusses just how lovers should rock, invoking Taoism through quotes from *The Tao of Love* ("You can make a lover in a thousand goes") and decrying the Pill's subtle Babylonian oppression.

"It's been misunderstood, that song, you know," Strummer half-grins, wryly self-mocking. "You have to be a bit gone in the head to try to get that over."

"The Right Profile" is about Montgomery Clift. I recall Guy Stevens saying he lent Strummer a paperback on Clift.

"I read two of them," he nods. "It's quite interesting to read two books about the same person because they both give you a completely different picture. You read one and you think, 'Oh, that's how the guy really was!' If you read another you get a totally different angle, and you think, 'Was he like this, or like that?' And you realize he was probably like neither."

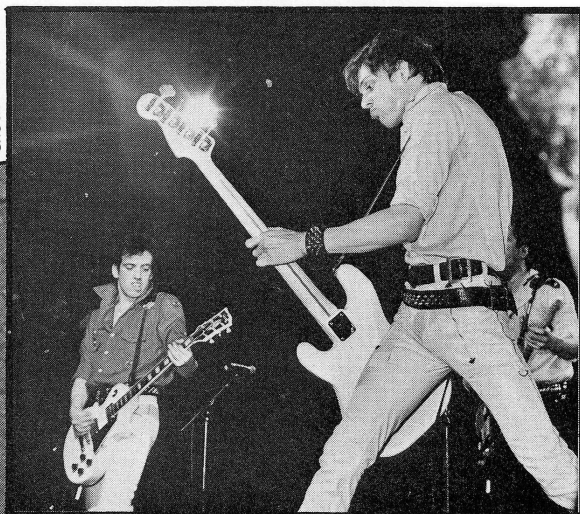
Through Strummer's recent reading, the conversation turns to the *Odyssey*, Greek and Roman mythology, the Basques and Atlantis, Karl Jung, Edgar Cayce and Rasta passivity. The last topic reminds me that *London Calling* advocates just the opposite: people should step forward, get on with it and blow out their apathy.

"Yeah, but—it's very hard to deal with apathy. Making like you've got the answers to everybody's problems—it's impossible, of course. Everybody must sort out their own problems; that's the key to everything. You sort one problem out and get the will to go on and sort another one out. You can't expect any help, I don't think.

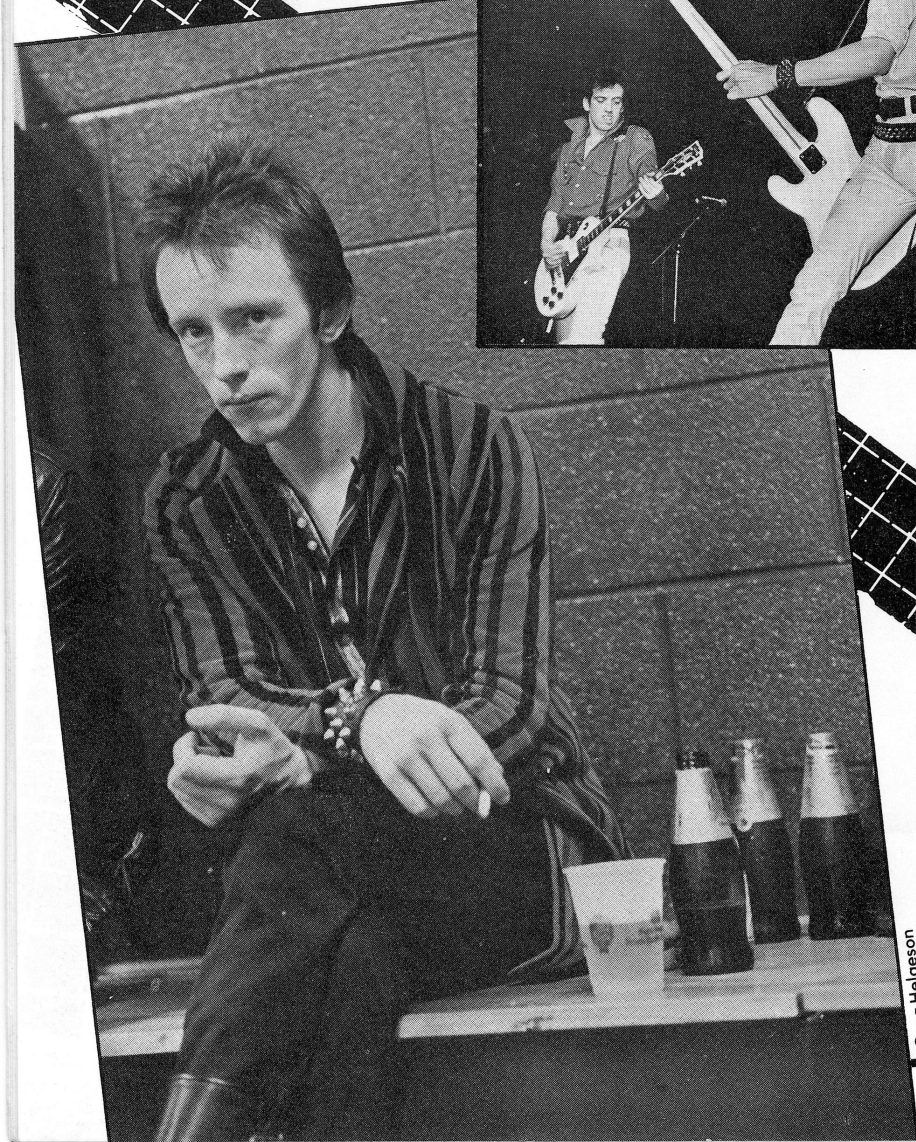
"Mainly, though, we were thinking about people accepting shit as gold. Just a little while ago we heard a record on the radio which was pure shit, and this guy goes, 'Mmmm...that's good.' It's just the Emperor's

Continued on page 41

Chuck Pulin



Greg Helgeson





# Songs from the Heart of the Beast



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RECORDS/Cont. from page 27

just a question of getting a guy who can get the sounds on the desk." The release is targeted for April 1. I had to remind Birch that was April Fool's Day.

What are the Records' prospects? There certainly are enough difficulties. Even if they lick their studio sound problems, there's still the live sound to tackle. Beyond that, there's the performance quality level to deal with. Their US travails will be extensive; the band is in America from June until November, although with periodic breaks in touring.

Will Birch at last is doing what he wants at the level he wants; for that he'll have to face a difficult balancing act between aesthetic motivation and the compromises he knows a new band must make. Sue Byrom had said that "Virgin has long wanted to establish itself in the US. Bands like the Records, Interview and Shooting Star have more appeal in that direction than many of our other acts." She also said that the Records have already, by the company's own standards, "done quite respectably." No hard-sell is envisioned, nor predictions of mega-stardom made. The company will mobilize what support is available, but "at this point it's really down to the Records selling themselves."

I'm convinced that besides being a good, even potentially excellent, band, the Records' hearts are in the right places. They're genuine articles, from what I can tell, and if they can stay honest with themselves, determination on the order of Will Birch's should go far. Hopefully, where there's a Will there's a way.

CLASH/Cont. from page 20

new clothes again and again. Of course, it ain't good. It's just a load of fuckin' shit, y'know."

The Clash questions everything, which is why they're so positive. They don't believe in hopelessness; they believe we have nothing but hope.

"Only the lazy ones look to us for a solution," Strummer says. "We just made our feelings clear; other people happened to feel that way too, so they got behind it. But making your feelings clear is a long way from solving everything.

"That 'Bored with the USA' song has always been misconstrued. We say, 'We're so bored with the USA' having to sit at home and have it pumped into us. The second you turn on the TV you know it's in America somewhere, and there's this bird who's probably a detective, and then a car's gonna roll over a cliff—you know all the plots by heart. I'm So Bored with the USA' was about the importing of culture.

"A quick spree 'round the States taking in all the sights and buying all the crap you can lay your hands on—that's what we call fun. So long as we don't have to live there."

The next afternoon, arriving at the gates of the Aylesbury Civic Hall for the first date of the tour, Joe Strummer gazes out of the mini-bus window at the street filled with punks and punkettes.

"See," he turns to Paul. "We've sold out again. And we said we'd never sell out." ■

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