APRIL 19, 1980 25p

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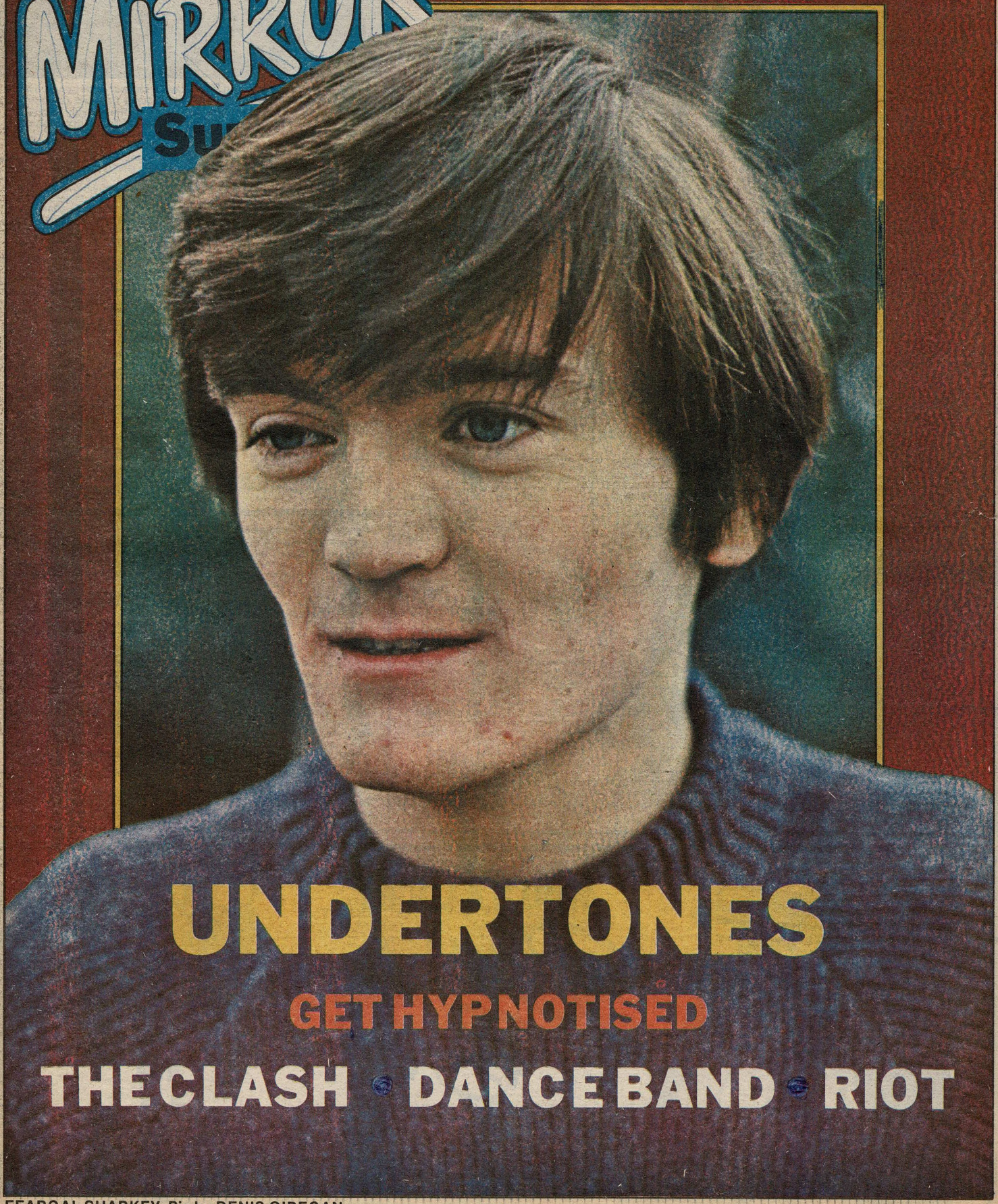


UNDERTONES

GET HYPNOTISED

THE CLASH • DANCE BAND • RIOT

FEARGAL SHARKEY Pic by DENIS O'REGAN

Afghanistan Afghanis

DANCE LIGHTLY

The CLASH get America on its feet quicker than JIMMY CARTER can say Ayatollah.

"YOU DON'T understant mate. You just can't leave those chairs there." Joe Strummer, the Clash's lead singer and rhythm guitarist, is really wound up. He takes another puff off his cigarette and moves closer to the manager of San Francisco's Warfield Theatre. "Don't you see," Strummer continues in an urgent guttural whisper, "people will destroy those chairs, rip 'em right out. They come here to dance, and that's what they're gonna do. I don't wanna see kids smashed up against the stage in front of me just because there's not enough room to dance."

In a few hours, the Clash are supposed to be onstage at this 2,200-seat art-deco palace in the first date of nine - shows - in - 10 - days blitz of the US.

But despite this hectic schedule, the Clash and their US record company, Epic, realise they had to strike now. After watching their first two critically acclaimed albums go virtually ignored by radio stations and record buyers in this country, the Clash released 'London Calling' earlier this year. Broader and more accessible than its predecessors, the album — a two - record set that sells for little more than a single record — was immediately picked up by FM radio. At this moment, though, the Clash are faced with another problem; they feel that some of the halls selected for this tour aren't right for them.

"Just take out a coupla rows," Strummer pleads.

"But we can't do it," the manager replies. "It's too late. Besides, kids have tickets for those seats. Your fans waited in line for hours to get those seats."

"Good," says Strummer. "If they're our fans, they won't mind, 'cause they'll wanna be standin' anyway."

"So what do we say when they come in with tickets and their seats are missing?"

"You tell 'em Joe Strummer took 'em out so they could dance. If they're upset, we'll give 'em a free T-sirt or somethin'."

"But it'll take hours."

"We got lots of people here who can help. I'll get down on my hands and knees and help if I have to."

"We just can't do it . . . "

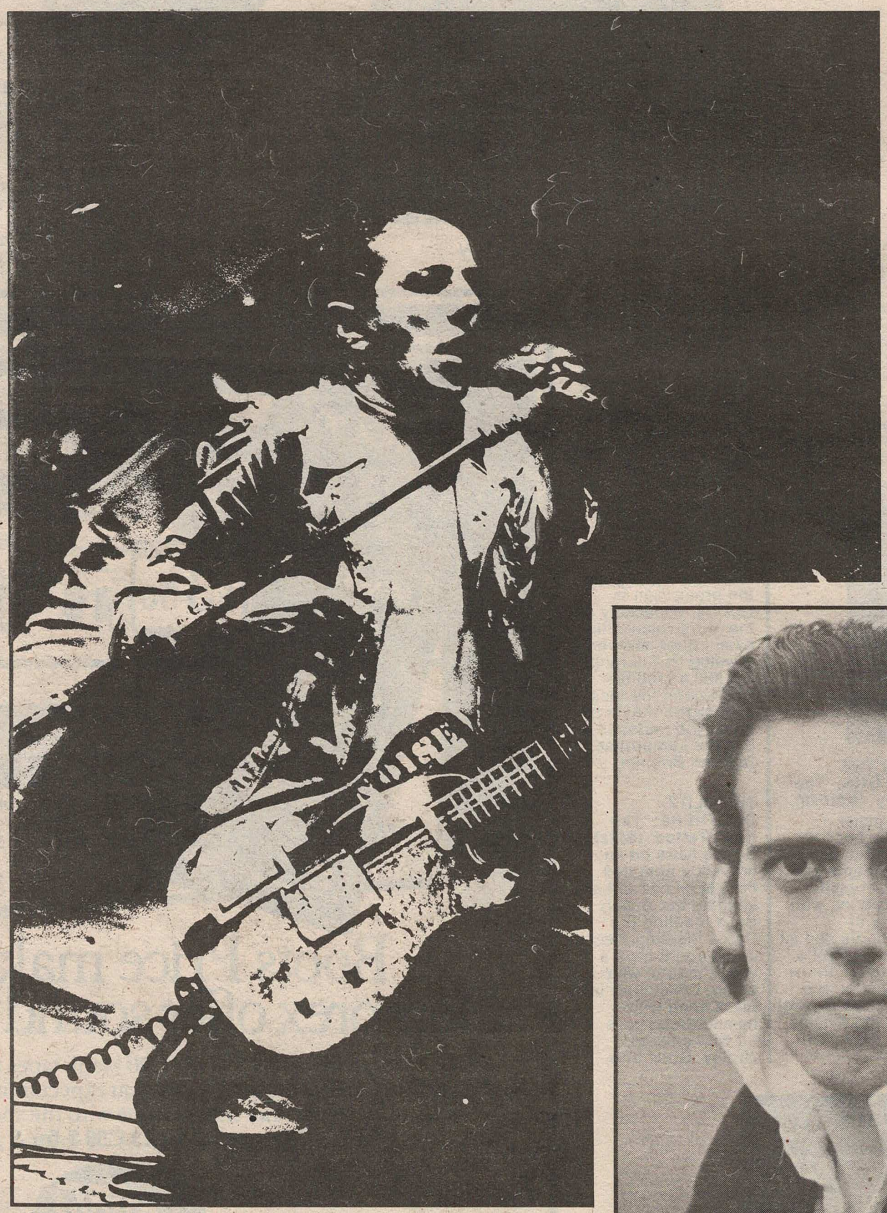
A little more than an hour later, the front two rows of seats have been removed. And Joe Strummer didn't even have to get down on his hands and knees.

With the possible exception of the Sex Pistols, the Clash have attracted more attention and generated more excitement and paeans from the press than any other new band in the past five years. Their first LP, 'The Clash', released in England at the height of the punk movement in 1977, has been hailed by some critics as the greatest rock and roll album ever made.

Considered too crude by Epic Records, 'The Clash' was never released in its original form in the US. Instead, a compilation LP that included 10 of the album's cuts plus seven songs from later British singles and EP's was issued in 1979 (Nonetheless, the English version of 'The Clash' is one of the biggest - selling imports ever.) Those British 45s expanded the group's musical range and lyrical attack, and made it clear that this was a group of musicians determined to leave its mark on rock and roll.

"Clash city rockers!" shouts Joe Strummer, slamming his mike stand to the floor of the Warfield Theatre stage. Immediately, Mick Jones rips into that song's power - chorded intro, and the American leg of the Clash's "Sixteen Tons Tour" is officially under way.

Like the Who, the Rolling Stones in their prime or any other truly great rock and roll band, the Clash are at their best onstage. The music, delivered at ear - shattering volume, takes on awesome proportions; for nearly two hours, the energy never lets up. Strummer, planted at centre stage, embodies this intensity. Short and wiry, his hair greased back like a Fifties rock and roll star, he bears a striking resemblance to Bruce Springsteen. When he grabs the mike, the veins in his neck and forehead bulge, his arm muscles tense, and his eyes close tight. He spits out lyrics with the defiance of a man trying to convince the authorities of his innocence as he's being led off to the electric chair.



JOE STRUMMER

But the Clash also convey a sense of fun, the spirit of a celebration. A Mick Jones and Paul Simonon race back and forth across the stage, and as Topper Headon flails away at his drums, you can't help but want to dance. And that's exactly what this audience — a surprisingly mixed crowd of punks, longhairs, gays and straights — is doing. Everyone is on their feet. Hundreds are mashed together, dancing, at the foot of the stage, while at the rear of the hall, people are bobbing up and down in their seats.

"THERE, I gotcha!" Joe Strummer snaps the shutter on his brand new Polaroid SX-70 Sonar camera, and out shoots another photo.

In some ways, Strummer is the least - accessible member of the Clash. He tends to keep his distance when among outsiders, and often appears to stay on the sidelines when the rest of the band is involved in some sort of merrymaking. 27 years old, Strummer (born John Mellor) is the son of a British diplomat; his only brother, a member of Britain's fascistic National Front, committed suicide.

"I grew up in a boarding school in Epsom, 15 miles south of London," he says, fidgeting with his camera, when asked about his childhood. "It's not a lot to go back to, if you know what I mean. My dad was working abroad, and my mother was tagging along. I don't think I really gave them a thought after a while."

Strummer is extremely soft - spoken, and because many of his teeth are rotting or knocked out altogether, it's often difficult to decipher exactly what he's saying. "I found that I was just hopeless at school," he continues. "It was just a total bore. First I passed in art and English, and then just art. Then I passed out. That was when I was 17; I left to go to art school, boy, that was the biggest rip - off I've ever seen. It was a load of horny guys, smoking Senior Service, wearing turtleneck sweaters, trying to get off with all these doctors'

MICK JONES

PAUL SIMONON

daughters and dentists' daughters who got on miniskirts and stuff. And after I took a few drugs, things like that began to look pretty funny.

"Like, one day someone gave me some LSD, and I went back into the school, and they were doing this drawing. I was really shattered from this LSD pill, and I suddenly realised what a big joke it was. The professor was standing there telling them to make these little puffy marks, and they were all goin', 'Yeah,' making the same little marks. And I just realised what a load of bollocks it was. It wasn't actually a drawing, but it looked like a drawing. And suddenly I could see the difference between those two things. After that, I began to drop right off.

"Then I just spent a couple of years hangin' around in London, finding no way to manage. I was studying this Blind Willie McTell number all day, and then I'd go down to the subway at night and strum up a few pennies (hence the name "Strummer").

"That was when we moved into squatters' land. They're demolishing all this housing in London, and all these places are abandoned. People started kickin' in the doors and movin' in, so we just followed suit. You had to rewire the whole house, 'cause everything's been ripped out. Pipes, everything. We'd get a specialist who'd go down to this big box underneath the stairs and stand on a rubber mat and take these big copper things and make a direct connection to the Battersea Power Station. Bang! Bang! I seen some explosions down in these dark, dingy basements that would just light things up.

"I FIRST saw Joe in the dole line," Mick Jones tells me. "That's no lie. We looked each other over, but we didn't talk. Then we saw each other in the street a couple of times; eventually we started talking, and he wound up over at my flat." That meeting took place in the summer of 1976. By then Jones had already formed the nucleus of the Clash with Paul Simonon and Keith Levine. (Currently a member of Johnny Rotten's Public Image Ltd, Levine, a guitarist, left the Clash very early on.)

Jones is an extremely affable fellow. His dark, riveting eyes and his warm, goofy grin quickly puts any newcomer at ease. He's so short and skinny he looks as if he could be easily blown over. And like most of the other members of the band, he's taken almost exclusively to wearing black - and - white clothes ("More subtle, don't you think?) and to greasing his dark brown hair back.

Both Jones and Simonon are twenty - four, and both come from Brixton, a grotty working - class area in South London. "It's pretty bleak, not paradise," Jones says. "You know — lots of immigrants and that." His parents split up when he was eight, and he was raised by a grandmother. Simonon's parents also were divorced when he was young; he was raised by his father.

"We just sort of bumped into each other," Simonon says of his first meeting with Jones. Though he comes across as the toughest member of the group, the tall, lanky Simonon, with his dirty - blond hair and chiseled features, has the look of a matinee idol. "I was goin' out with this girl, and she was friends with this drummer. Mick was lookin' for a drummer, and he invited this bloke to rehearsal. I just turned up, and that was it."

Headon, 24, comes from a middle - class family in Dover and still retains a fairly normal, middle - class appearance. His father is headmaster of a primary school, and his mother teaches. He left home at sixteen and moved to London, where he played in bands that ranged from soul revues to traditional jazz outfits, even doing a stint with heavy - metal guitarist Pat Travers. "I left London to join one of those soul bands that was going to Hamburg," he recalls. "I don't think Mick will ever forgive me."

"You made me cry out there, man." Freddie, a 19 - year - old Englishman transplanted to San Francisco, grabs Mick Jones around the shoulders and gives him a big hug. Jones gently pulls away, his dark eyes staring mournfully at Freddie. "I made you cry? How do you think we're gonna feel when they bring you back with a hole in your chest?"

Backstage at the Warfield Theatre on Sunday night, the Clash have just completed their exhilarating second and final show in San Francisco. Near the end of the set Jones dedicated 'Stay Free', a song from 'Give 'Em Enough Rope', to "someone I know who's going into the marines tomorrow." And now Freddie, that someone, has come to thank him.

"Aw, come on, man," Freddie says. "Stop it. You're making me cry again."

"I mean it," Jones says, his sadness almost turning into anger. "What do you think you're doing? One way or another, you'll never come back alive. They'll ruin you." Jones pauses and surveys Freddie's rock - hard physique. "Freddie here used to be as skinny as me," Jones says, turning to me. "We used to see him at our shows in London. Now look at him. He's joining the marines, 'boot camp,' I think he called it."

Freddie, straining to hold back tears, is obviously shaken. "But Mick, it's a roof over my head and $500 a month," he protests.

"Five hundred dollars a month!" Jones erupts. "F' lot of good that'll do you when you got a hole through you." Jones stops and looks around the dressing room. He spots Kosmo Vinyl, the band's assistant, PR person and jack - of - all - trades. The two huddle for a few seconds, then leave the dressing room.

Finally, Jones wanders back in. I ask about Freddie.

"He's not goin'," Jones says. "Me and Kosmo and Joe will give him the $500 a month. He's coming to work with us."

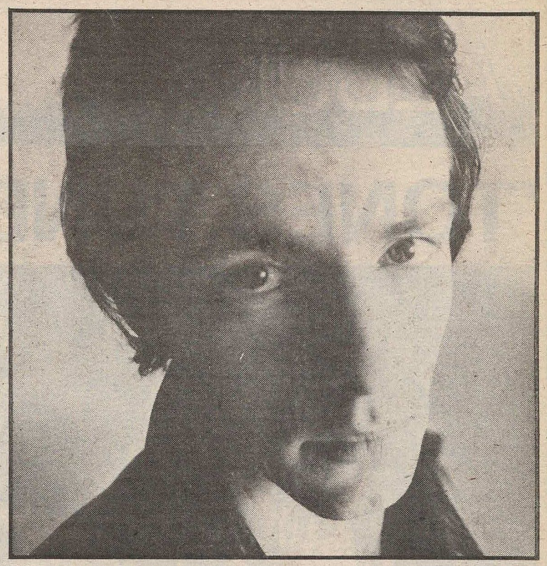
A LITTLE later that evening, I run into Jones in a corridor at a party being thrown for the band.

I ask what he'd do if England started the draft again.

"We'd start our own antidraft movement."

Would he go to war?

"That's out of the question. This is an important fact: people prefer to dance than fight wars. In these days, when everybody's fighting, mostly for stupid reasons, people forget that. If there's anything we can do, it's to get them dancing again."



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