

The Clash Newcastle Mayfair 12 June 1980

To stand within *The Pleasure Dome* (Xanadu, Rush, 1977).

Support Joe Ely

This was one of those nights where I was torn between two very different gigs. Heavy prog band Rush were playing at Newcastle City Hall and *The Clash* were playing at Newcastle Mayfair on the same night. I already had a ticket for Rush when *The Clash* gig was announced; I was going with a group of mates, and the gig was sold out. This presented me with a dilemma, as I hadn't yet missed a Newcastle gig by either band. I decided to buy a ticket for *The Clash* and try to see both bands. On the rare occasions I have done this, it usually hasn't worked out very well, and I've ended up not enjoying either gig. On the night of the gig(s), I went along to the City Hall to see Rush. This was the *Permanent Waves* tour, and my mates were big Rush fans who couldn't believe that I would leave the gig early to see *The Clash*. But that's exactly what I did.

The norm at *The Mayfair* was for the band to take the stage around 10.00 pm at that time, so I watched around one hour of *The* Rush gig then drove down the road to *The Mayfair* to see *The Clash*. By then I had missed support act Joe Ely. In fact, I arrived in the venue just as *The Clash* had started the first song of the night. I always find it strange entering a gig late. It's like coming into a party uninvited when everyone is already drunk. Picture this. I enter a packed ballroom, *The Clash* are playing 'Safe European Home', and the place is going crazy. I stood on the balcony and wandered around the place, taking it all in. *The Clash* played much longer that night than the previous times I'd seen them; they had a much larger repertoire of songs to draw from. They were excellent, but I didn't see as much passion and energy as at the Newcastle Poly gig a couple of years before. I thought the gig dragged at times, but picked up towards the end, and the place went crazy when they finished with 'White

towards the end, and the place went crazy when they finished with 'White Riot'. The audience was a mix of punks and rock fans, and there was much less spitting at the band. This was almost a standard mid-1970s rock gig – as if punk had not happened. The Clash had become part of the rock establishment, and was now playing at The Mayfair, which was Newcastle's traditional rock club, and had hosted 1970s gigs by Led Zeppelin, AC/DC and Queen.

Copyrighted material

So my aim of taking in two gigs on the same night worked, although I didn't see that much of Rush, and couldn't really get into their set as my mind was more focused on getting my timings right in order to catch The Clash's set. The Clash were excellent, and for the first time, I didn't feel in danger as I left one of their gigs. The Clash had graduated to playing tours in the tradition of the 1970s acts they were initially rebelling against, and their concerts had become 'rock concerts', as Chris Bohn wrote in his *Melody Maker* review of the London gig of the same tour:

Fings an't what they used to be. ... Clash gigs these days aren't the backs-against-the-wall experience they used to be. The political tensions and confrontations they once represented are now just so much fuel for a purer rock 'n' roll fire which makes them, with The Pretenders, the best British Saturday-night band of the moment. Passionate escapism – no more and no less. (1980)

Clark argues that punk rock was already entering the mainstream, and was effectively dying by 1980, citing the 'elections of Margaret Thatcher in England (1979) and Ronald Reagan in America (1980)', the break-up of The Sex Pistols in 1978 and the death of Sid Vicious in 1979 as evidence of the death of the punk subculture (2003: 231).

This could explain why the contrast between metal prog giants Rush and The Clash was not as great as I had imagined. Three years earlier these two bands would have seemed worlds apart, yet seeing them minutes apart on the same evening clarified something in my mind. These were both great rock bands, and the distance between them and their audiences, was narrowing. The Clash remained a powerful force, but they could no longer create the tension, the chaos and the shock, that their presence and their music had created a couple of years earlier. They were becoming the new rock establishment.

The Clash Newcastle City Hall 1982

Disintegration

Support: Nod The Geordie Poet

The Clash returned to Newcastle in 1982 to play two nights at the City Hall. By this time The Clash were starting to disintegrate. Topper Headon had left

Copyrighted material

to be replaced by Terry Chimes, and it was the beginning of the end for the band. They had just released *Combat Rock*. Although my ticket shows the gig as having taken place in May 1982, it was actually in July 1982, the tour having been rescheduled after Strummer went missing (Gray 2003). I remember a group of us went along to the gig, and that we were sitting pretty close to the front. I don't think the venue was full; the Fifth Wall that had been the focus for much anger and violence had been replaced by the open doors of the City

for much anger and violence had been replaced by the open doors of the City Hall. The Clash had truly come full circle, playing for two nights in a council run venue, the same venue from which I left the Rush concert to see The Clash two years earlier. Support came from Nod, the Geordie Poet, a strange choice, who recalls the gig: 'My prize gig was supporting The Clash at Newcastle City Hall. ... Most of my work was delivered in a broad Geordie accent' (Nod the Geordie Poet website). There was also still evidence of violence: 'Nod the Geordie Poet here. I got beaten by the stewards at the City Hall trying to get in to perform. Not a good start' (Clark 2012).

This was a band moving towards the end of their career. The initial rush of power had gone. Strummer had become a modern-day Eddie Cochran, a rock star spitting out his tunes in front of a new band that didn't quite work or fit. A year later Mick Jones left the band, and the inevitable split followed.

This was the last time I saw The Clash.

Summary

This chapter has analysed The Clash concerts which took place in the Northeast and which I attended between 1977 and 1982, in an attempt to explore the importance and impact of The Clash, and to also illuminate the development of punk culture in the region. Punk came more slowly to the Northeast, with a delay of approximately one year between what was happening in London and similar occurrences happening in the region. Accounts of punk in the north are few, and tend to focus on the use of northern stereotypes to characterize specific gigs. These accounts suffer from issues of nostalgia and the problems of personal memory (Medhurst 1999). What is clear is that punk culture in the Northeast was very different to that portrayed in the London-centric literature.

This was a much more DIY scene, and at least at first, it was not distinct from the established rock scene. Small groupings started to develop, helped by the emergence of local bands. Unlike the London punk scene of 1976, The Sex Pistols played relatively few concerts in the Northeast. However, the importance of those few gigs cannot be underestimated. Early Clash and Pistols gigs in the region were life-changing for a small number of people (including myself), shocking and annoying to some, yet also insignificant to most.

This is one of a small number of accounts of the growth of punk in the provinces, and is set particularly within the context of live concerts. As acknowledged by Copley (1999), further accounts from other regions are needed to develop the narrative of how punk rock grew outside the capital.

References

- Albiez, Sean (2005), 'Print the Truth, Not the Legend: Sex Pistols, Lesser Free Trade Hall, Manchester, 4 June 1976', in Ian Inglis (ed.), *Performance and Popular Music: History, Place and Time*, 92–106, Abingdon: Ashgate Publishing.
- Auslander, Philip (2004), 'Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 14 (1): 1–13.
- Bell, Elizabeth (2008), *Theories of Performance*, New York: Sage.
- Bohn, Chris (1980), 'Fings ain't what they used to be: The Clash, Joe Ely, Mikey Dread: Electric Ballroom/Lyceum, London', *Melody Maker*, 23 February 1980. Available online: <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-clash-joe-ely-mikey-dread-electric-ballroomlyceum-london> (accessed 16 March 2016).
- Calef, Scott (2009), 'Physical Graffiti', in Scott Calef (ed.), *Led Zeppelin and Philosophy*, 151–62, Chicago: Open Court.
- Cobley, Paul (1999), 'Leave the Capitol', in Roger Sabin (ed.), *Punk Rock: So What?: The Cultural Legacy of Punk*, London: Routledge.
- Coon, Caroline (1976), 'The Clash: Down And Out And Proud', *Melody Maker*, 13 November 1976. Available online: <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-clash-joe-ely-mikey-dread-electric-ballroomlyceum-london> (accessed 11 November 2015).
- Davies, Jude (1996), 'The future of "no future": Punk rock and postmodern theory', *Journal of Popular Culture* 29 (4): 3–25.
- Fitzsimons, Ronan (2013), *I'm an Upstart: The Decca Wade Story*, Cottingham, United Kingdom: Ardra Press.

- Gray, Marcus (2003), *The Clash: Return of the Last Gang in Town*, London: Helter Skelter.
- Green, Johnny and Garry Barker (1999), *A Riot of Our Own: Night and Day with The Clash*, London: Macmillan.
- Journal, *The* (2011), 'Reuniting the wild women of punk rock', *The Journal*, 23 February 2011. Available online: <http://www.thejournal.co.uk/culture/music/reuniting-wild-women-punk-rock-4439979> (accessed 26 June 2016).
- Lowry, Ray and Ben Myers (2008), *The Clash: Rock Retrospectives*, Chicago: Angry Penguin.
- Medhurst, Andy (1999), 'What Did I Get? Punk, Memory and Autobiography', in Roger Sabin (ed.), *Punk Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk*, 219–31, London: Routledge.
- O'Hara, Craig (1995), *The Philosophy of Punk: More than Noise*, Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Robb, John (2006), *Punk Rock: an Oral History*, New York: Random House.
- Savage, Jon (1991), *England's Dreaming: The Sex Pistols and Punk Rock*, London: Faber and Faber.
- Segal, Lynne (1990), *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, London: Virago.
- Sutcliffe, P. (1978), 'The Clash: Town Hall, Middlesbrough', *Sounds*, 25 November 1978. Available online: <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-clash-town-hall-middlesbrough> (accessed 26 June 2016).
- Turner, Jonathan H. (2005), *Sociology*, Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
- Turrini, Joseph M. (2013), 'Well I Don't Care About History: Oral History and the Making of Collective Memory in Punk Rock', *Notes* 70 (1): 59–77.
- Vallack, Jocene (2010), 'Subtextual Phenomenology: A Methodology for Valid, First-person Research', *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods* 8 (2): 109–22.
- Worley, Matthew (2014), "'Hey little rich boy, take a good look at me": Punk, class and British Oi!', *Punk & Post Punk* 3 (1): 5–20.

Online blogs

The following are all taken from comments contributed to the author's personal blog of rock concerts he attended:

Anderson, Paul (2016), <https://vintagerock.wordpress.com/2012/07/16/the-clash-newcastle-polytechnic-oct-28-1977-and-dec-2-1978/> (accessed 31 March 2016).

Copyrighted material

Clark, Alan (2012), <https://vintagerock.wordpress.com/2012/07/18/the-clash-newcastle-city-hall-1982/> (accessed 31 March 2015).

Forster, Stuart (2012), <https://vintagerock.wordpress.com/2012/07/15/the-clash-white-riot-tour-newcastle-university-may-20th-1977/> (accessed 15 November 2015).

Nod the Geordie Poet: <http://www.apclark.com/nod/> (accessed 15 November 2015).

Poolan, Tony (2014), <https://vintagerock.wordpress.com/2012/07/16/the-clash-newcastle-polytechnic-oct-28-1977-and-dec-2-1978/> (accessed 31 March 2016).

Simkins, Merv (2013), <https://vintagerock.wordpress.com/2012/07/15/the-clash-white-riot-tour-newcastle-university-may-20th-1977/> (accessed 15 November 2015).

Tappijoe (2012), <https://vintagerock.wordpress.com/2012/07/15/the-clash-white-riot-tour-newcastle-university-may-20th-1977/> (accessed 15 November 2015).