



● Left: Joe Strummer, and (above) with The Clash.

A crusader who is calling for truth and honesty

**ROCK by
Peter Trollope**

Are The Clash just a radical chic to cheek dance band or are they still the potent force to lead rock through the wilderness of the 80's into the promised land

Joe Strummer still firmly believes they can. He won't be denied his belief that The Clash, like caped Crusaders, still carry the fight wherever and whenever the cause needs defending.

"The only way is through truth and honesty in the music," said Joe, doing his Billy Graham bit.

Actually, it turns out he's not the rabid reactionary most people think he is. He believes in Socialism, but doesn't pin you down under a crossfire of criticism or linger over a lecture.

Joe comes across as an O.K. guy. Forget the angry young man tag. "I'm 28 now anyway." He is almost shy, at first, softly-spoken and distinctly ill at ease in the bustling surroundings of the Echo foyer, when we meet.

He's painfully thin, dressed all in black and carries a portable cassette recorder, spreading some eerie dub reggae rhythms around the room as we talk.

For openers we discuss

Sandinista, the new triple album that's selling for the price of one.

"It was just something we wanted to do. We had all the material and we just thought why not give value for money.

"We have foregone the rights of royalties on it so unless it sells in the millions we won't make any money, but there again although it's a gamble it might just pull off, besides which we like to let the fans have something spe-

FAITH'S IMPORTANT TOO, SAYS JOE FROM THE CLASH

cial," he says, slowly, carefully picking his words.

Did The Clash miss not being out on the road? "Yeah, y'know sometimes after a long tour you feel totally drained but then after a few weeks you want to get back out there.

Did he miss playing the smaller venues and that personal contact with the fans?

"God yes, y'know it's a vicious circle. You start off playing smaller clubs and then everyone wants to see you so you have to play

bigger places and you find you are becoming distant.

"We don't like to be distant from our fans. I mean we talk to anyone, but it is hard to try and keep in touch with what is really happening on a street level. That's why the music Press should play a really important role but it doesn't."

It turns out that Joe is "totally paranoid" about some aspects of the music media. "The power they seem to wield is almost

frightening. A bad review in some Press can really hit a group very hard.

"I don't mind if the criticism is constructive but when it seems to be just of a personal nature and nothing to do with the music, more to do with egos, then I feel sick."

Talking about the earlier days and the pressures on the group, Joe admits he turned to drugs for "a short while".

"I did try acid but believe me it never did any good. I think drugs are over-rated. I don't get

involved with that scene any more, the best drug for me is music."

The talk switches to Liverpool and inevitably John Lennon.

"I was stunned by the news, sickened by it. I just think it's such a tragic waste. The guy had a lot of talent and now it's gone. I'd just like to see the guy who did it strung up."

I remember one hot night way back when The Clash were just on the road and they finally arrived at Eric's. Strummer and Jones were unstoppable that night.

I came away thinking that may be The Clash were right, may be they could change the world.

It's been a long time since then. The world still keeps on turning and The Clash are still working on the conversion job.

"It's a long term process. We just want honesty in music. I think people thought we came on very strong at first and have now stopped even trying.

"I tell you this," he says leaning forward to make his point, "we'll never stop trying. The Clash are not in a rut. The Clash are as strong as ever.

"We have faith in what we are doing and that's the most important thing. If you don't have faith, if you don't believe, then you just should forget it."