

## The Clash Stimulin

Lyceum

THE PATH of Joe Strummer is, as we know, lined with well-intentioned, golden-hearted errors, and the first of tonight's was Stimulin, whose sound mix was from start to finish a disaster. Diehard Clash zombies didn't care too much for them either. Not that anyone threw beer cans at them, like they did at Grandmaster Flash in New York, but when Alix Sharkey announced the band's last song, there were loud cheers of relief.

Stimulin aren't much more than a very tight drum kit on the best of nights, but then their drummer is a veritable Robbie Mackintosh risen-from-the-grave. Tonight you could hardly hear the guy, which left a sort of muted shuffle of guitar, vibes, and trumpet to struggle under the PA-drowning boom of Alix Sharkey's voice. Sharkey, a kind of Edwyn Collins of the new London art-funk, is — to put it as briefly as possible — a bad singer, an ineffectual rhythm guitarist, a nervous stage presence, and a limited songwriter. I guess part of the appeal in this skinny white funk is its lack of fatback, but pure beat, stripped and streamlined for the Sweat set, is only another meta-music. Tonight's setbacks meant that even their one little bit of glory, 'Strippin' Down', sounded as though it were coming from under a pile of mattresses.

It's not The Clash's fault that their five-day binge at the Lyceum is really a small-scale replay of The Stones at Earl's Court. It's probably not their fault that two and a quarter hours of The Clash's greatest hits practically bored me to death. The fact remains that the majority of the audience — the equivalent of Rolling Stones "fans" five years ago — had "a good time". And who ever said The Clash were exempt from paying the price of fame?

There are more bozos than ever. There's Strummer trying not to be Strummer, but all the same emitting that absurd screech about five times during the course of every song. There's Jones flopping about like a great Pete Townshend puppet and playing some of the worst guitar the Lyceum has probably ever witnessed. And there's Simonon looking more like that oaf in *Rude Boy* every year. Only Topper isn't desperately trying to avoid self-parody, and thus only he avoids it. What can the poor boys do? They are, after all, inherently ridiculous.

This gig: The Clash aren't terribly exciting on stage — had you ever noticed? — and most of their post-'Rope' songs are just so fake and precious they don't bear thinking about. But then again they can be one shit-ass rock'n'roll band (Shit-ass rock'n'roll?! Rock'n'roll bogroll, surely? — Ed.): you can only love the mess of 'Stay Free', 'Career Opportunities', 'Brand New Cadillac' — the only track of real merit on 'London Calling'. As for 'Should I Stay Or Should I Go?', well, can I just say



Joe Strummer Pic: Pennie Smith

## THE PARODY LINGERS ON

thanks, boys?

The major part of the show, however, is all that piffle from 'London Calling' and 'Sandinista!'. You know, those wavering, sanctimonious pseudo-songs like 'Spanish Bombs', 'Somebody Got Murdered', 'Stand By Me', 'Charlie Don't Surf', 'Working For The Clampdown' . . . But what's worse is that Jones and Strummer seem to have forgotten how to play guitar, Simonon's bass had no body at all, and every song, rambling on feebly after their last choruses, simply petered out in a flurry of improvised blunders.

Stage appendages: tiger-striped barriers closing over the stage to the sound of air-raid sirens — in other words, nuked New York — conscience-appeasing news headlines for 'Guns Of Brixton' (tourist snapshots of Broadway for 'Magnificent Seven!'), Futura 2000 plus cans spraying up a very ugly backdrop and rapping his

cameo spot 'Graffiti' . . .

Is there any place left for The Clash to go? They're so darned cross-cultural! Playing this set must be like lugging around some encyclopaedia of ethnic musical forms. Which isn't to say the lugging hasn't paid off in the past — 'White Man', 'Armageddon Time', 'Magnificent Seven' — or that it won't again, but Strummer's earnest attempts to make cultures clash are always a case of hit-or-miss. There are certain Clash signatures which have got pretty wearisome — the screeches, the painfully-contrived angst, the "genius is pain" grimaces, perhaps the whole Clash beat — that decisively *unloose funk-rock* — itself.

What've we got for entertainment? A myth that can only further bind itself in chains, a rock'n'roll legend which can only be effaced by its own fame. Unless . . . but that's another story, an alternative universe.

Barney Hoskyns