

TROPIC OF

This is a business lecture: to make money in Rock 'n' Roll you've got to play in a large auditorium and have all your expenses on one night. Whereas we play seven nights in small halls because we believe that to be R.O.C.K. it's got to be so close like theatre you've got to be able to see my face — see if I mean it: so we have to fork out seven nights hotel bills, seven nights crews wages, seven nights hire fees, you know what I'm saying?

"Now if we really wanted to make money we'd go to the Budokan as Bob Dylan did in Japan where there is 30,000 nips coughing up thousands of yens and all he had to do is just stand there for an hour then piss off to the airport, stuff the money in the plane and bingo — there you have Rock 'n' Roll".

Joe Strummer is explaining the concept of "Mag 7" to the hard core of Sydney's entertainment press who are chortling and tittering in response. Strummer has had them in the palm of his hand ever since he and the rest of the last gang wandered into the Clash approved venue for this press conference, the Museum Of Applied Arts and Sciences (mammal section) and apologised profusely for being late; "We're not trying to act like rock stars — honest".

It was clearly a crazy scheme to stage a press conference during a few hours stop over in Australia — a rest period between Tokyo and New Zealand — but certainly necessary to drum up ticket sales, with seven shows to sell out in Sydney and not yet one full house.

Not surprisingly, all four members of The Clash looked tired and jaded. Even the fifth juno partner, Kosmo Vinyl, seemed slightly frazzled in his tomato red suit — more like a carnival roustabout than a fabulous identity case. Manager Bernie Rhodes is somewhere out of frame, keeping a low profile.

Carnival? This is a circus — with Joe Strummer pacing up and down the room pouring out his heart and soul to anyone who listens.

The Clash have been through a lot in the last few months; they've been ensconced in the Electric Ladyland Studios, New York recording their fifth album, provisionally titled "Rat Patrol From Fort Bragg". From there they went direct to drug-free Japan, with Topper Headon facing a recent battle against heroin addiction. Then on to New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong and Bangkok before returning to England.

When the group arrive back in Sydney from New Zealand they are less hysterical. Back at their hotel Joe Strummer has acquired a 35 dollar ukulele and is softly playing a duet with Kosmo. They are celebrating Kosmo's birthday — 25 years of Vinyl — and soon they will be emptying 25 bottles of champagne, one for every year. There is no time for an interview. Joe Strummer fixes me with his world weary eyes, shakes hands solemnly and arranges to meet me the following day.

In Sydney, the Mag 7 shows started out shakily and ended on a note of triumph. "The slow start" had much to do with what Strummer refers to as "the heat treatment"; getting used to the eighty plus temperatures and the debilitating humidity.

Most nights Joe Strummer comes on stage in a Japanese headband, and jungle fatigues. He could be a kamikaze pilot, especially the way he drives himself along every night, for the full two hours, playing like a man possessed — his face an expression of agony, his body one big puddle of sweat.

Undoubtedly the highlight of the show, from the fourth night on, is 'Armageddon Time' when The Clash bring on Gary Foley, the Aboriginal Land-rights Campaigner, who makes a short speech while the group play softly behind him: "It's only 14 years since you people gave us the vote in this country, and we still have not got the land to give us economic independence. We need land, right. And we need it now. If you people can afford the time to come to a Clash concert, then you can afford the time, when aboriginal people march in this town, for their land-rights, then you should be there. . ."

Afterwards, Gary Foley said that the response he had from the Clash shows was phenomenal.

"Let's not talk about the black people because what do we know about them, but I think they need a leader and I'm surprised there ain't a black leader come out of England"

— Strummer — press conference, Sydney.



Peril! Instant death! Adventure . . .
Through steaming jungles and across the parched and arid wastelands, over cloud-enshrouded mountain-tracks, treacherous rapids and shark-infested seas, through monsoon, dust-storm and hellish heat-haze.

Yes, The Clash have read some jolly exciting books in their trek through the air port departure lounges of the Far East. Finally, our four intrepid explorers arrive in Sydney, Australia, only to confront the most terrifying challenge of all — a ROZ REINES interview for NME. Now read on . . .



Joe Strummer Gets Physical

At lunchtime on a beautifully clear Sydney day, Joe Strummer is hard at work in his hotel room trying to prove that he exists. The Clash have designated 1982 'The Year Of The Body', so Strummer is trying to build up his muscles to give himself shape and definition: flesh, muscle, strength, life.

"There's nothing in this room heavy enough to lift," he complains to me. I suggest he try the TV set. He immediately rushes over to the set, grabs it and lifts it up — then spends the next 15 minutes trying to re-assemble it. . .

This is the first official Clash day off in Sydney and Joe Strummer can hardly wait to get close to the sea. We go for lunch at a restaurant on the beach and he tears over to the water. He's wearing a black leather vest, no shirt, with black trousers, day-glo orange socks and Doc Martens ("The Clash Go Tropical").

We sit down at a table, me with my tape-recorder, Strummer with his mini-notebook, pen poised at the ready to catch any passing Australian colloquialisms or cultural info.

What's brought on this body consciousness then?

In 1982 The Clash have decided, and this is especially for the NME reader, The Clash have decided that this is not the year of the closet case, meaning that you put your cards on the table and say what you think and anyone who doesn't is a closet case and deserves what he gets. And secondly, 'the cult of the body' — none of this weedy, pop-star image, you know? Piss on that — just because the country is falling apart that means we have to build ourselves up.

Get strong for the Revolution?

Right, if you're going to stay in England, at least build your body up, be serious or emigrate. There's plenty of room in New Zealand, they've

only got a few million people there and the whole country is empty.

Emigrate? Isn't that a bit like deserting ship?

It's OK to desert ship. Try being a rat in the hold and see if you don't think it's cool to desert ship, you know. I'm talking about something positive for the rats in the hold. I didn't know it was like that here. They told me that New Zealand was like England and I imagined — grey skies, grey streets, grey buildings, grey people, rain, boredom, misery, no money, no excitement, no action, no future . . . all these things to me are England and should be written out on the Union Jack so we can't see the colours.

But then I got to New Zealand and it's like you're in blasted California. There are people walking around with knickers on in the street and the sun beating down, and the most beautiful scenery you've ever seen. A lush tropical paradise.

But emigrating there?

(Angrily) Look, if you're 17 and you're in England — the message is, there ain't no need for you. So if there ain't no need there — fucking emigrate. I don't believe in countries any more, I've decided that.

Aren't you looking at it from behind rose-coloured glasses?

I'm looking at it through a grey, miserable Englishman's eyes and it's very important that this message gets back, because I didn't know about it. To me Australia was some baked desert with a few tin shacks and a few drunks glugging tubes of Fosters and beating up anything that doesn't look exactly like they do. I'm not ready for this sophisticated metropolis. Sydney is like Beverly Hills, I'm not ready for it.

Culture shock?

Well, 'culture' is right at the back of things; remember we're talking to a 17-year-old youth who can't even get one square meal a day and culture is very low on his list of priorities. Anyway, culture is what you make it and places are what you make of them. I'm only saying "You don't have to rot to death on a wet, black day if you don't want to". I'm saying there is room to move out here, it don't feel like a desert full of kangaroos, at all. You know, they're keeping Australia a very good secret. . .

Let's put it another way, would you tell people to emigrate to South Africa?

I don't know about that. I mean, I've never been to South Africa but I have been to Rhodesia and experienced segregation. And if that's like that here with the aboriginals, then they're doing an even better cover-up job.

It's especially bad in Queensland for aboriginals.

Well, I'm only just hearing about Bjekle Peterson, (the premier of Queensland) saying that if any aboriginals show up for the Commonwealth Games in October, he's going to jail them. If that kind of guy is elected in charge of a State, then I don't know. . .

What I was talking about is a scenic paradise. Same as in New Zealand. The skinheads there are bored stiff, they think London is wonderful and when I told them that I was a miserable bastard in London, it shattered their dream. And I'm glad I shattered them, because they're living through us. I feel like a twit, I've been to Tokyo, New Zealand, and Australia but I feel like a twit. Every time we come to a town, they go, "Oh we've been waiting for five years for you". I'd rather come as an extra, a bonus to the local scene, not like the staple diet was in town for 20 minutes and left. They're trying to live through us and they're not living themselves, which is horrifying.

What was Japan like?

They don't need us Westerners there. Mick said, 'I feel like a part-time Western God', because it was like being in The Beatles, the way you get mobbed by the girls there. I ran through Osaka station, like a replay from A Hard Day's Night and I've never done that before. We're supposed to be building it different style; in 'London Calling' I sing it every night: "Phoney Beatlemania has bitten the dust." But not in Japan it hasn't.

My message to them is, 'To hell with us'. They're all soaked in Americana and they worship anything American and Western in tight trousers. To hell with that, they've got to look to themselves.

You only like it when they hate you?

I know, that's just another of life's charming paradoxes. But what's the purpose of going to Japan and being fondled? The message of punk was "Do it yourself". The bands were home-made, the fanzines were home-made, even sometimes the guitars and the instruments. You did it yourself and somehow it's been distorted along the line.

Now you just get carbon copies of skinheads and punks in far flung corners of the globe. They're not dealing with their own town,

they're just wishing they could be somewhere else. It's a screw-up and I have to ponce through and they shout "Rock star" at me, and I'm thinking, "Too damn right — rock star". I'm not really snivelling, I'm just saying that it's a screw-up.

Why do you keep referring to punk when punk is finished?

I keep going on about punk because I always think about it. Because when the Chinese/Jap journalist from Pravda, asks me, "Are you a punk?" I say, "Yes", because I like all the afro that comes with that. It's something to knock against because, this is really important, they follow the punk party line when there was no party line. But then, I was nothing to do with the start of punk anyway. You say punk is finished but maybe you don't have to deal with it as much as I do, I have to deal with it all the time. But I think that's a very rash thing you just said.

OK but you've changed musically since then.

Yeah, but it's not like we could run away and become Eng or Robert Fripp. What was 'Sandinista' about then?

We were only trying to wind up the punks to be quite honest, only trying to destroy the party line. On 'Sandinista' we were deliberately playing the most unacceptable music to a punk that we could.

I thought punks liked reggae.

Yeah, but there you are. There's two opposites that came together; a peace loving, stoned Jah Rastafari, compared to a drunk, anarchic boot boy. I can't think of more polarity than that. Paradoxes exist and live and breathe. I mean, I am one.

They said "You're playing American MOR rock," never mind the reggae, that's another right?; but when we recorded 'London Calling' in a garage in Pimlico, we spent five shitty months in that place and I never thought about beefburgers once, or Mickey Mouse or the Statue of Liberty. Then, when they said, "You deliberately designed that album to go on American radio", I thought, well, as these people are so way back, let's build on it. I could see all that bullshit, right, Jimmy Pursey and all that. I knew that the bubble was going to burst right, because there was nothing to back up those people who were all mouth and no trousers. They've proved that now but at the time they were being taken very seriously by those journalists who couldn't tell the difference between butter and margarine. So you've still got a grudge against the NME? Right. If it's one thing I've felt off the NME over the last five years, it's an overdose of negative energy. Maybe it's because they've been on my case, OK, but even so when I'm reading about

CLASH



PHOTOGRAPHS BY
PENNIE SMITH

lose touch and start believing things. **Maybe you should have been more in touch, two years is a long time to stay away.** True yeah. I'm over the top. All right, take it back, I know the mistake I made, I assumed because they were reporters and journalists, that they were into their job as much as I'm into mine. I assumed that they were into it up to the hilt and that they would accurately reflect the mood of the country. And you must admit, at NME, it was "Clash thumbs down". I thought that must come from somewhere, which was my big mistake.

You say you're trying to wipe out heavy metal. What have you got to replace it with? Something that means something. There's an old song called, 'Do The Signifying Monkey' and it means something akin to 'testifying'; to 'be significant', 'be specific', 'signify something', 'be something', you know — 'stand up for something', 'make your point clear'.

One good thing that Penman said was, "No-one is trying to raise the level of any discussion here," talking about England, I presume. I jumped up in the air and went "Goal, man" when I read that, because if only we could raise the level of the discussion perhaps we'd get some truth. If we raise the level of the discussion, then perhaps we'll get to know ourselves and we'll be able to cure whatever is wrong with the world, which is the problem of the haves and the have nots.

This is an important point, I'm saying because the old people are inhabiting the world, they're too bloody greedy to leave any room for young people. This is why there is unemployment — because the old people are so greedy for their material possessions, they're squashing young people trying to breathe. I believe in democracy, I'm not into communist totalitarianism. I hate the Russian way of doing things, those blasted tanks everywhere, they just show themselves right up. But that doesn't mean to say that I have to run to be a capitalist. Because that's what capitalism is, shut the door on everybody and everything.

So it's up the working classes? Right — I come from middle class, I come from, not a silver spoon in my mouth but at least a metal one. And that's why I'm different from someone like Johnny Rotten, because he's had a fist in his mush all his life. That's why Rotten is the real McCoy. I'm not saying that he's better than I am, mind you; it's a long way to the finishing line and when you crash through that line, that's when you've done what you're here to do. Rotten is lagging behind now, by running around New York, all fat and drunk.

All right, well, that's another thing OK. That's the difference between me and Rotten. He's had the experience of 'Fuck Off', which is what the capitalist world is saying to its young.

And they can't even see what's wrong with it. They moan about vandalism — you could feed half the bloody world on what they're spending to keep the New York graffiti artists out of the railway, you wouldn't believe the figure — 20 million dollars in six years. But the only reason that the vandals spray the trains is because they want to prove they exist. As Futura said, "It's a way of saying Hi to the city, because you've got to prove that you're living when you're shut out in the cold." That's why anarchy never freaked me out, because I realised that we had to go through anarchy as a purifying process to get something decent worth supporting.

Are you still in favour of rioting? Yeah, let's smash the place up, because it's so slow, I can't see how else to do it. They're so dim, they don't understand: Margaret Thatcher is on another planet and we've elected her as our leader. We should be taken out and shot. **What do you know about rioting? You weren't there.**

Yeah, but we've been using that word 'paradox' several times today, don't be afraid of the word 'paradox'. Who was the real beatnik — Jack Kerouac or Neal Cassidy? Neal Cassidy was the real McCoy, the real beatnik, the one that everyone is trying to copy, but Cassidy would never have written *On The Road* because he was the road. It takes some bookish twerp to come along afterwards and be so into the road to record it. Well 'They, I, Me and We', are the people who can put it down and as such we should not be taken out and hung.

So the message is — 'Get Fit and Keep Rioting'? Emigrate or something, don't just bloody sit there and take it. It's down to each individual person. Fuck it — emigrate. Let's have some positive hope here, we've got to have something to look forward to. I'm saying, it's got to get set up better, we can't just throw all those 'Johnny Too Bads' into jail and expect them to sit there — 17 to a cell.

other people, with nothing to do with me, I still feel that negative energy. **They think you sold out to America?** Yeah, but our record sales in America are nowhere near the sales of the heavy metal groups. If Boston and Styx are in the first division, we ain't even in the Southern Amateurs Sunday Granddad's Football League. We're not even joshing them, (angrily), but someone's got to go out there and take those 8

million record sales away from those boys, because they're just wasting their chance to say something to people. I'd rather that they hated us in Britain as long as they hear what we have to say in America. I don't think that the English need *The Clash* too much because they're too smart . . .

Too smart? Yeah, and that's another bum steer that the NME gave me. I believed them when they said

that we weren't liked there but it took us to go back and play before I realised that this wasn't quite right. In fact, the guy on the street was digging us. But I believed them and they lied to me. And that's another reason for my recent anti-NME anger.

You're not exactly passive — you can see what's going on.

Yeah, but this was over a period of two years when we didn't play in the UK. That's when you

CLASH

CONTINUED

Is all this on the new album?

Album schmalbum — you want to talk about the music, right? Well, all we're trying to do with the new record is to find the bones of our style, or get back to that simple drums and guitar thing. But we had to drop it: when they started worshipping everything that shouted, I was never going to shout again.

I'm talking about journalists, specifically Morley and Penman. Those guys are just working out their frustrations. At least I'm getting my rocks off and I'm doing what I want to do — I don't think they are. There's nothing wrong with being a writer, look at Charles Bukowski, what a tradition to follow, but why do these people want to be rock stars? What do they think, it's good fun or something?

I thought when you stopped screeching, you were just trying another tactic, like Bob Marley's strong words with sweet melodies? Sure, it's more mature. It's something that you don't know when you're all young and idealistic — that there is another way — float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.

But they thought we were just trying to get on American radio. Because it was 'Spanish Bombs' instead of 'White Ric'. But it had to get smoother and more subtle. As for American radio — I tell you, not even the massed balalaikas of Mantovani can get on American radio, it's an airwaves funeral.

Right — the music reflects the time and the times change.

I worry about that too: with all this travelling, I wonder what the music is going to reflect. That first Clash album is really great and you couldn't have a better soundtrack for the time, right? And the modern day version of it is always waiting to be made. Perhaps I don't check other groups' records enough. But I haven't got room for them.

And yet you know a dozen or so obscure reggae discs.

True, but I mean I watched the Christmas Top Of The Pops and I couldn't believe band after band of identical bands. It's just horrible, but I've made this mistake before, using valuable newspaper time to slag people.

Sometimes it looks like sour grapes.

Yeah, it does. In Japan, if you slag someone off in public, they don't think the bloke you're slagging is an idiot, they think you are. That's why I decided last year never to mention another group in an interview. I've blown it so



many times since then but I have to attack those heavy metal bands. And then there's the British heavy brigade, who are in the charts in New Zealand — 10,000 miles from 'PX' or 'World's End'.

Mixing an album?

You won't get much out of me on that score. Don't forget you're talking to a man deliberately trying to forget all about it — to give me some perspective, right? In the last two weeks I haven't thought about the tracks once or listened to them. I haven't even looked at a sheet of 17 titles. I'm going to be hearing them in the next few days in that studio in Sydney and I'm semi-scared.

What do the songs deal with?

Well, the things that we've been discussing in this interview are the things that are driving my mind along and the lyrics that fall out are like shoots off this train of thought.

Can you be more specific?

There is one number called 'Death Is The Star' which is about the way we all queue up at the cinema to see someone get killed. These days, the public execution is the celluloid execution. I was examining why I want to go and see these movies, because deep in my heart I wanted to see a man pull out a machine gun and go

"blam, blam, blam," into someone's body. There's another track called 'Sean Flynn' after the war photographer who was 'lost' in Cambodia in '70.

Is there any reggae on 'Rat Patrol'?

Well not like 'Sandinista' where there was one track reggae, one track jazz, one something else. Now we're seeing if we can play music with guitar and drums that means jackshit any more. I remember when we were playing rock during the time that everyone said it was 'filthy' and I relished telling someone that we were a rock band with guitars and drums and shouting. On this album it's R.O.C.K. and there's no getting away from it. Put it another way, I'm just trying to be honest and admit that we're not avant-garde, like PIL are.

You're R.O.C.K.?

Yes. We're just trying to boil it down to one music. Not trying to ignore anything that we've heard before but we want to make it our own and all at once in every track.

Did you feel after 'Sandinista' that you might not go on?

Yes. That's the dangerous part — when you're so fucked in the mind that you can't make the right decision. I'm not worried about having a nervous breakdown; to me, still, a nervous breakdown is something that they have in books, or in the films. But I worry about making decisions when I'm feeling my best. That's the danger.

Perhaps you'll turn towards politics?

No. I know that I'm no politician. I say, "know your limitations", perhaps I know mine and I'm acting them out. People think you can deal with politics like a loaf of bread, either you eat it or you don't, but you can't be that pure with it because every damn thing that's happening to you, millions of layered reasons, are all political.

Are you religious?

Yes, but only in the last year or two. I only believe one thing and that is that the spirit must continue after the body is dead. Everything else is conjecture. Anyway, with religion — it's not where you end up but the travelling you took to get there.

Religion and Rock don't seem to work that well — look at Bob Dylan.

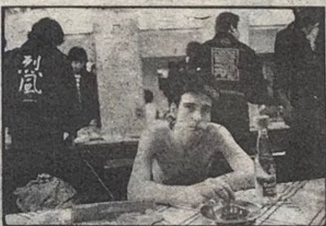
Bob Dylan blew it. If he really wanted to turn people onto Jesus, he should have realised how much that name stinks to young people. You say the word 'Jesus' and you no longer mean 'that Holy man' that 'Seer from Galilee' — you mean the Jesus industry.

Dylan is the King of words and he should have realised that words are doors. He put all his weight behind the word 'Jesus' but it didn't sound the way he wanted it to. It just meant the Jesus industry and that's why everybody gave it the thumbs down.

Why does it take the Clash so long to put out anything?

Because of our disorganisation. But in 1982 — The Clash disorganisation is organisation. That's why we're mixing the album here, instead of waiting until we get back to Blyth. We want to speed up any possible delay because you have someone like Blondie coming out with 'Rapture', a lot of people thought that 'Magnificent Seven' was copying 'Rapture', when in fact, we were copying the Sugar Hill Gang, you know. I'd rather they knew who we were ripping off, rather than just ripping off the rip-off artists. Let's rip off from Culture Central.

It's like, someone once asked Mikey Dread if he was going back to the hotel after a sound-check and Mickey said, "No — man always go forward — never back to anywhere." That's why I'm not going to worry about it — "Clash go forward — never back."



Mick Jones goes on Rat Patrol

JOE Strummer looks to his flesh for proof of his 'livity' but Mick Jones looks to his suitcases: "I really relate to my luggage," he admits, "it's the only proof of my existence on the road."

We're standing in the entrance of Jones's hotel room, staring at half-packed bags spewing forth their contents on the floor. He's sure bought some interesting things on this tour — Japanese haute-couture, kimonos, happy coats, kitsch, boomerang ash trays ...

Since arriving in Sydney, just over a week ago. Mick Jones has changed hotels three times. Now he's back where he began — at the Sebel Town House — after the Clash's "assault by Panasonic" in the hotel corridors precipitated their departure there.

Jones tells me that relations in the group aren't that great at the moment. In fact, he hasn't spoken to Strummer since they abandoned a mixing session in the studio at 4 am the previous night. "But it's OK," he assures me, "I know I'll see him again."

We go round the corner for a bite in a local cafe. This is the first overcast day since The Clash arrived and Jones is cheered to see those

grey skies — "I don't feel so home-sick when it looks like this," he confides.

Would you advise people in England to emigrate here?

No. The only thing is the sun and the extra space. The boat may be sinking fast but it's got to get better before I'll think of leaving.

Don't you like it here?

It's not that I don't like it — it's just that I can feel myself turning off. I can recognise that Sydney is not my style.

You haven't been out much.

True, it's been too hot and we've been working all the time but from what I've seen I'm not impressed. Take that opera house that everyone raves over — it looks like tortoiseshell mating to me. Whoever designed it must have had a good laugh to plant it there, as he downed his ninth Carlsberg. (They all drink too much here). That's not architecture, it's gimmickry. What this town needs is a few more old buildings ...

How was Japan?

I loved Japan, didn't want to leave, it's the way they treat each other there.

So the Clash say goodbye to Reggae

No, there's reggae in there but it sounds like us now, not like us playing reggae. All the ingredients of the music are in there — the beat, the danceability ...

There's one track called 'Red Angel Dragnet', where Paul does his version of a Jamaican Marlene Dietrich. He wrote it too, it's about the killing by the police of one of the Guardian Angels, the subway guards in New York.

There's another track called, 'Death Is The Star', which is a bit Raymond Chandlerish. It's actually about the movie where women are attacked on screen as an accepted part of the story. I do a classic rock and roll number, 'Should I Stay Or Should I Go', which shows we're not set in our ways. I always get the wimpy songs to do but I don't mind. Joe Ely and Joe sing the chorus on this one in Spanish.

Who else guests on the album?

Ellen (Foley) sings on one track, 'Car Jamming', Futura, does something-somewhere in the middle. Allen Ginsberg chants in Swahili on a number called 'Ghetto Defendant' — altogether, it's a great record.

What was Ginsberg like?

Very interesting. He and his friend would come to the studio every other day. Then he would sit down with Joe and work on the words while I looked on with 'keen admiration'.

So Ginsberg is the latest Clash adoption case. Well it's true, we do adopt causes or people — because no one else wants them. Why not use your group to do something worthwhile? It's important to hear what they have to say. We get our information from people, more than we do from newspapers and magazines.

Topper Headon talks about Heroin

TOPPER Headon is not an easy man to catch on tour; every night after the show, there's a long queue of people waiting outside his dressing room door, most of them musicians come to check a master — Topper has really been shining during the Sydney shows.

He's doing well for a man who came off heroin last Christmas. Not that Headon had much option — he was busted for possession on arrival at Heathrow airport on Boxing Day, caught red handed. Since then he's been learning to live without the drug.

He approached me, in Melbourne, on the last night of the Australian tour, saying he wanted NME readers to know the full story of his problems and to dissuade anyone who might feel inclined to try what he did.

"How I got onto smack, I don't know — I was bored, I guess. All my life I've gone over the top in one way or the other. I guess it's just a part of always searching for something."

"Two years ago I was clutching at straws and that's when I first started to mix heroin with cocaine to make 'snowballs'. A lot of people think if you only snort heroin but don't inject yourself that you're not addicted. But that's not true — sniffing has the same effect."

"At first no-one could tell. And I felt great — I had this giant buzz of energy — but it didn't last. After a while, all the effects reverse themselves. You find you're taking more and more, just to maintain some sort of equilibrium. In the end, I was spending £100 per day just to feel normal."

"One of the most important ways it affected me was that my drumming deteriorated. Since I quit it is now ten times better than it was two years ago, in fact, I can't believe how well I'm drumming."

"The other thing about smack is that you always feel that you're stronger than it. But no-one is stronger than heroin. Once you start taking it and you get addicted — it's like being an alcoholic. You're a drug addict for life. It's not something that you can go back to on the weekend. The best advice is not to start — a lot of people told me that before but I never listened. Now I know."

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He's doing well for a man who came off heroin last Christmas. Not that Headon had much option — he was busted for possession on arrival at Heathrow airport on Boxing Day, caught red handed. Since then he's been learning to live without the drug.

He approached me, in Melbourne, on the last night of the Australian tour, saying he wanted NME readers to know the full story of his problems and to dissuade anyone who might feel inclined to try what he did.

"How I got onto smack, I don't know — I was bored, I guess. All my life I've gone over the top in one way or the other. I guess it's just a part of always searching for something."

"Two years ago I was clutching at straws and that's when I first started to mix heroin with cocaine to make 'snowballs'. A lot of people think if you only snort heroin but don't inject yourself that you're not addicted. But that's not true — sniffing has the same effect."

"At first no-one could tell. And I felt great — I had this giant buzz of energy — but it didn't last. After a while, all the effects reverse themselves. You find you're taking more and more, just to maintain some sort of equilibrium. In the end, I was spending £100 per day just to feel normal."

"One of the most important ways it affected me was that my drumming deteriorated. Since I quit it is now ten times better than it was two years ago, in fact, I can't believe how well I'm drumming."

"The other thing about smack is that you always feel that you're stronger than it. But no-one is stronger than heroin. Once you start taking it and you get addicted — it's like being an alcoholic. You're a drug addict for life. It's not something that you can go back to on the weekend. The best advice is not to start — a lot of people told me that before but I never listened. Now I know."

Topper Headon talks about Heroin

TOPPER Headon is not an easy man to catch on tour; every night after the show, there's a long queue of people waiting outside his dressing room door, most of them musicians come to check a master — Topper has really been shining during the Sydney shows.

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