

Mysterex

New Zealand Music and Culture

monday, 25 february 2008

Rat Patrol From Fort Bragg - The Clash in New Zealand - February 1982



The Punk revolution was already won in New Zealand by the time the Clash breached our shores in February 1982. The means of production had been seized. The Auckland, Dunedin, Wellington and Christchurch music scenes were alive with punk's fire. The national scene glutted with venues and fans. Quality independent groups such as Blam Blam Blam, The Penknife Glides, Danse Macabre, The Instigators, The Newmatics, The Androidss, and The Screaming Mee Mees had stepped up to touring the main cities and the provinces. At your local rock dive you could catch The Prime Movers, The Chills, The Stones, Sneaky Feelings, The Clean, Mainly Spaniards, Bill Direen, Ballon D'essai, The Gordons, Ritchie Venus and The Blue Beetles, This Sporting Life, Naked Spots Dance, Beat Rhythm Fashion, Desperate Measures, Nocturnal Projections, and The Dabs stepping out at the Reverb Room, Rumba Bar, Gladstone, Station Hotel, Mainstreet, Bellblock, DB Onerahi, Sweetwaters Festival,

andrew schmidt



Hamilton, New Zealand

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the Hillcrest, the Captain Cook, the Windsor Castle, and others. Punk the ideal predominated – the restless intelligence and icon busting zeal - taking old things, pumping them full of youth and arrogance and energy, making them smart and street again.

The throbbing live scene was reflected by an unprecedented Kiwi chart presence. In 1981, 24 singles infused with the energy and ideals of punk made the New Zealand Top Fifty.

By 1982, New Zealand record companies were responding quickly. The month the Clash arrived Joy Division, The Fall, Dead Kennedys, The Associates, Orange Juice, Depeche Mode, Kid Creole and the Coconuts, The Go Gos, UB40, Simple Minds, the Jam, Spandau Ballet, XTC, Japan, Cure, Madness, Soft Cell, Bow Wow Wow, Haircut 100, Fun Boy Three, DAF, Bad Manners, New Order, Killing Joke and the Go Betweens all had records released.

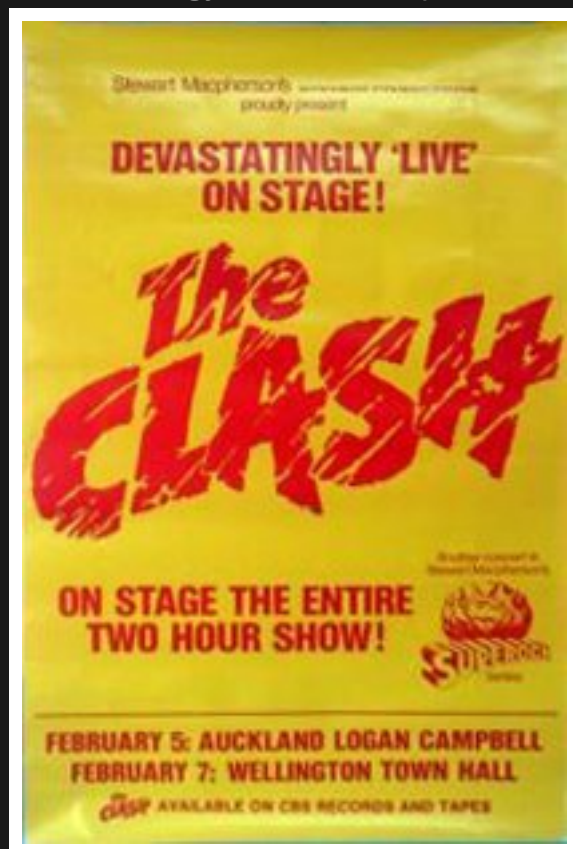
Punk was secure by 1982, but the same couldn't be said of The Clash's prime position in it. Opinion on the group's worth was deeply divided following the release of the reggae, dub and black dance inspired Sandinista, their sprawling triple album released in April 1981. Now considered a major work, Sandinista was largely dismissed on release as self indulgent and excessive, and was soon languishing in the cheapie bins. The Call Up, the album's masterful single, spent a scant week at number 42 in the New Zealand charts as far back as mid-December 1980, and despite being voted top group, and second best album for London Calling, in the 1980 Rip It Up readers poll, the Clash failed to make the 1981 poll at all.

But those doubts and arguments were quickly pushed aside when the tour was announced. We're talking first icons of punk here. The Clash shows with their oldies embedded sets would please punk purist and freethinker alike.

History would show the Clash had got the timing just right. Punk had fractured in New Zealand. The Clash's delight in musical adventure and dance had already been taken on board by Kiwi groups. The politics of the Clash's words had echoed in New Zealand streets during the 1981 Springbok tour, and in 1982, the grey Kiwi air was still riven with frustration and left wing ideals chafing under an autocratic government whose reign it seemed would never end.

Out of punk's expectant gaze, the Clash was a deeply divided group. Its legendary punk gang empathy shattered by drugs, ego, record company friction and the burden of carrying punk's weighty banner.

Combat Rock, their fifth album, due to be finished by December 1981, was stalled, gummed up by the tension between Joe Strummer and Mick Jones. They had seventeen tracks recorded, but the Grimmer Twins were still holed up in separate studios recording new backing tracks. Strummer frustrated the



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The Axemen's Y2K Blog

album was under Mick's direction. Just prior to their New Zealand, Japan, South East Asia, and Australia tour Jones presented what he thought a final mix for a fifteen track double album. Strummer rejected it, dissatisfied with Mick's production.

Following a brief stopover for a press conference in Sydney, and six shows in Tokyo, the Clash arrived in Auckland on February 4th to a four hour customs search. The first major punk band to tour New Zealand. Musical, political and social visionaries whose powerful message had been heard and acted upon by a generation.

The Clash - Auckland - 5 & 6 February 1982 - Logan Campbell Centre.

Jeremy Chunn - journalist/Henchmen bassist - 2 January 2002

"The Ramones had come in 1980, and the Dead Kennedy's were to visit in 1983; it was long time between international punk acts in New Zealand.

"When they landed in Auckland in February, Joe, Mick, Topper and Paul were met by an irritating 17-year-old with a bunch of their records and singles under one arm. I didn't know Combat Rock would contain a disco hit. I had broken Bankrobber and The Call Up singles against a hammer in disgust. Of the "new" Clash I could dig the white reggae of Armageddon Time.

"At the airport, always filled with enormous Polynesians pulling taped-shut suitcases, Joe was the first to stroll into the strange scrum of arrivals. Paul and Topper followed soon afterwards.

"Joe was very patient and answered questions about guitar pick-ups from the please-accept-me kid with the records.

"Then Mick came out and was thrilled to be greeted thus: "Aw, Mick Jones, ya cunt, eh." He was wearing nice brothel creepers with metal-tipped laces. Two questions: Where are we now? and; Who is this dick kid?

"I got the records signed. Admired the band's cool clothes. Went home."

Joe Strummer - Clash guitarist and singer - quoted by Troy Ferguson - Real Groove - December 1999

"We got there (Auckland) and I decided to go walking, and I walked way down the waterfront, a long way. Then I realised I'd really fucked it, it was getting dark and we had to play. I put out my thumb, and a Maori stopped in a black sports car like a Porsche or Ferrari and I got in. He said: "So what are you doing here, are you a sailor are you? And I went. "No, I'm playing a rock concert. I'll give you a ticket, and your girlfriend if you want? He said. "Naaah, you're a fuckin' joker aren't ya? You just look like some tramp to me." And then he pulled up roughly near the hotel and ejected me and wouldn't accept tickets to the concert."

Paul Rose -Newmatics manager - 2001

"I had an argument with Stewart MacPherson because I rang him to get the support because I thought the Newmatics were the perfect choice of the bands that were around at the time, and he told me in no uncertain terms, he wasn't going to have a support band. It was the beginning of a battle which went on for some time. The Musicians Union then got involved. If you're going to touring bands you've got to have local support. We didn't want alot of money - in fact, we would have done it for nothing. We just

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2 weeks ago

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wanted the opportunity to play in front of the Clash, met the Clash and say; “We played with the Clash.”

Scene: A crowded concrete bunker venue in Auckland’s suburbs renowned for its poor sound, where the Clash perform two shows on Friday 5th and Saturday 6th of February, as part of the Superrock series promoted by Stewart MacPherson. The Saturday show added due to extra demand. Entry is \$13.90. The Clash is billed to perform the entire two hour show without a support band. They come on an hour late, and perform a ninety minute twenty five song set covering their entire career to a reverent and awe struck crowd.

Jeremy Chunn - 2002

“Outside, everyone was terribly excited and trying to out-punk each other. It was very punk. It was very Auckland punk.”

Phil Gifford - The Listener - 13 March 1982

“At Auckland’s LCC, a joyless concrete blockhouse in the middle of the Epsom Showgrounds, it was all black jeans, string vests and hair that had apparently been cut with a knife and fork.”

Ben Staples - Newmatics’ drummer - now Auckland based DJ Benny Lee - on the first show - January 2001

“The first image I saw inside was the backdrop, the New York City skyline. The gear was set up and they had the police accident/emergency tape and road markers with Do Not Cross. They’d obviously been in New York a lot. We didn’t know this, but they’d already hooked up with Grandmaster Flash and people like that.

“They had reggae music on really quietly with white light so you could see all the gear. It wasn’t like the typical rock n roll start, where all the lights went out. I remember them just walking on from the side with their guitars, like you’d imagine they’d do it, and then it was just full on.”

Phil Gifford - The Listener - 13 March 1982

“The concert is a howl of electronic thunder and rage. Many of the band’s best songs, written with Jones and lead singer Joe Strummer, have powerful evocative lyrics, but in concert the words are mostly lost in distorted sound.

“There are two main reasons for the slightly painful sound quality. One is that the band don’t like the songs to sound in any way antiseptic, which they fear crystal clear treatments might do.

“The second reason is that Strummer’s voice often packs up an hour or so into the concert, and late in the show, during the few moments when he can be heard he is almost Johnny Rotten flat.”

Duncan Campbell - journalist/reggae fan in Rip It Up - February 1982

“The Clash were monstrous raw and robust. The sound is only just the right side of a shambles.

“Watching Joe Strummer, you wonder how he’s lived so long. He’s from the Keith Richard’s over-the-top school. Just when you think he’s going to pass out he bounces back. He stares at the audience, a face of fury, slashing out rudimentary chords on his battered guitar, talking to people, demanding more light so he can see them. At times he gets dangerously close to a

crowd, but then that's essential for a man so full of nervous tension.

"Mick Jones is a poseur, loving his stage role, as though he's always waiting to be photographed. But without him things would collapse. Strummer can wander off, get tangled up in the leads, throw his guitar away, blow his vocals, and Jones will be there to hold things together. The glamour and the control.

"Paul Simonon is the meanest, toughest looking guy alive. A long streak dressed in black, hair slicked and bass slung low. A gunslinger. A master of cool. Behind his traps, little Topper Headon is a working man. Always present never losing his place.

"A show touching all the bases? How could you fail to be won over?

"In the first few minutes they play London Calling. One More Time. Safe European Home. Train In Vain. Simonon swaps instruments with Strummer to take the lead on Guns of Brixton. A show stopper.

"Back projected slides enhance their political image for The Magnificent Seven. Ivan Meets GI Joe, and new single Radio Clash. The nearly 45 minutes more with the pace ever building through Janie Jones, Clampdown, Jimmy Jazz, Somebody Got Murdered, Tommy Gun, I'm So Bored With The USA, Clash City Rockers, I Fought The Law and a finale of White Riot."

Jeremy Chunn - 2002

"About halfway through the gig I felt a strange sensation on the back of my leg. I turned to see a skinhead was urinating on it. Such nice people."

Colin Hogg - The Auckland Star - 6 February 1982

"The Clash have retained their earlier rockier edge. And those songs, strung out on lead guitarist Mick Jones' ringing chords, contrast neatly with the moodier blacker songs that lope along on the elastic bass and drum patterns. Strummer dominates the stage with his angry unpredictable movements."

Jeremy Chunn - 2002

"Inside, over what may have been two hours, the band worked through as much material as required with a token emphasis on the first two albums. I really can't remember specifics. It just seemed mechanical is all; like a band that wanted to go home."

Mark Clare - Newmatics singer - now an Auckland based actor.

"A group of us went. Rena (Owen - actress - Ed) and her girlfriend Angela, who was Syd's (Newmatics' guitarist) partner at the time. They were right up the front and on the stage, basically gawking at these guys. We ended up back at the hotel with them in Anzac Avenue. A party until about two or three. It was interesting, they didn't know who we were. We all sat at a big table to start with, and they were all just carrying on. Strummer was holding court with Simonon and the others."

Ben Staples - 2001

"They were really approachable. I've met him since then and spoken to him about that concert. I really respect him."

Malcolm McSporran in (New Zealand) Rolling Stone quoting tour manager

the late Graeme Nesbitt.

“Joe calls all the shots. After a show everyone goes out and rages. Sometimes he does too, but invariably he’s up at 6am or even 5am wandering the streets writing notes.

“Everybody wakes to find notes from Joe under their doors bearing legends like ‘The order of the songs tonight is...’ or ‘I don’t like that lighting bit...’ or ‘Raymond (roadie), you’re fucking up the backstage passes. Don’t do it again!’ His overview is complete right down to the last detail.”

Colin Hogg - The Awful Truth - 1998

“Up close, The Clash didn’t seem so tough. Weakened by bad diet and self-belief, they didn’t have a laugh in them at all. They had that pre-heroin chic heroin chic thing going, I realise now. They were ahead of the times in that way. But when I sat down for a yak with their guitar player Mick Jones, a little thin guy with greasy hair, he was like a Mormon on speed about the Jesus-like qualities of Joe Strummer, The Clash’s lead singer and songwriter. Talking to some of those guys almost stopped me liking their music.”

The Clash - Wellington Town Hall - Sunday, 7 February 1982.

The Clash arrived in New Zealand capital, Wellington, on Sunday 7 February to make a promotional film, and give a press conference on a barge in Wellington Harbour, where Joe Strummer showed off a bargain \$35 baritone ukulele he’d purchased in Auckland. They play Wellington Town Hall that evening, coming on stage at 8.45pm, 45 minutes late.

Irene Gardiner - The Dominion - February 1982

“Getting the crowd into the hall has been shambolic, a tangle of security guards, police, gatecrashers, and latecomers.

“They have good communication with the crowd - Joe Strummer introducing the songs and talking to the audience, holding his microphone out to singing front row fans, passing a drink bottle out to the audience, slinging his guitar over his back as he sings without it.

“They leave the stage at 9.55pm, play three encores, leave again at 10.35pm, an hour and 50 minutes since they took the stage. The crowd are still calling for more as the house lights go on.”

Redmer Yska - In Touch - 1982

“Here in Wellington, dozens of spiky tops swarmed backstage after the Clash’s rip snorting Sunday night show to rap and rage, and the hungry ones were shouted free kai in the shape of fish ‘n chips and pies.”

Redmer Yska - Journalist/ Author - 2000

“The Wellington gig was bloody loud with an eye-piercing lightshow. By 1982, they were a soft and flabby rock show like the Rolling Stones or Queen. I have strongest memories of sitting in sunshine on the barge Hikitia on Aotea wharf talking to Paul Simonon, blinking in the sunshine all slicked back with a motel tan. Simonon's line 'its all down to songs' is the profoundest and most memorable piece of rock and roll wisdom (tautology?) that I think I ever heard. Yeah, we thought they was cool.”

The Clash - Christchurch Town Hall - Monday, 8 February 1982.

An extra show is added after a successful petition to get the Clash to play Christchurch (organised by Mary Rose Wilkinson). The group appear on stage to a soundtrack of The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly; opening with a great extended instrumental from Headon and Jones.

David Swift - Christchurch Press - February 1982

“The Clash City Rockers nearly stopped their show during their second song at the Town Hall last evening. The singer Joe Strummer was furious at being subjected to a hail of gob.”

Eric Vanderhoven. Christchurch punk. Desperate Measures’ bass player.

“Some guys were really getting into it. And he just stopped and was going: “You guys.” Really angry, like spat the dummy. And everyone was like, I didn’t mean to do that. I’m sorry.”

David Swift - Christchurch Press - February 1982

“The Clash dressed, sounded and acted exactly like I expected it to do. Which did mean that the show was predictable. But a rebel stance is a rebel stance right down to the last Rising Sun armband. Three chord thrash? Not these days. Although the bassist, Paul Simonon had his instrument strapped mean ‘n low, just like the good old days. Topper Headon was the musician who impressed most. He seems to have a mastery of most styles, including rockabilly and reggae.

“Strummer pranced on wearing one of the worst looking guitars in history, but he played his heart out. Which rhythm guitarist works harder? Mick Jones also dressed in rebel chic (black boots, wristband) played his lead parts with more invention than the recorded versions. Simonon looked basic, but during reggaed numbers such as ‘Armageddon Time’ and ‘Bankrobber’ his looks defied his abilities.”

Rob White - Christchurch Star - February 1982.

“There is nothing tidy and gift wrapped at a Clash concert. There’s nothing neat about Joe Strummer stopping the show, screaming out he could die from hepatitis from the spitting of the bootboys. Strummer standing out front daring anybody to knock him down, but sounding like a little boy when someone kept trying to tie his bootlaces together.

“The middle part was the bad part with the Clash getting totally lost in their own reggae rhythms. There were plenty of troughs, but when they hit those peaks the British band had the same tacky grandeur as their opening spaghetti western theme. An old song like White Man In Hammersmith Palais got new verses added (Joe’s attack on the New Romantics).”

Following their usual three encores the Clash depart, turning up later at an after show party in their honour at nightclub PJs.

Eric: “We played the After Clash party .”

Eugene: “We were the only punk band.”

Eric: “There was all this simmering potential violence there. They had this crazy guy on the door.”

Eugene: “He’d sort of taken over the nightclub. He’d gone from being bouncer and taken it over.”

Eric: "And they were scared of him, and he wasn't gonna let us play. And there are guys outside getting metal blasts."

Eugene: "He nun-chucked somebody this guy."

Eric: "We finally stuck our gear on the stage."

Eugene: "After waiting to three o'clock in the morning, to the last band. He said I've decided I'm not going to let you play."

Eugene: "We took all our gear down a steep steep staircase and we were fucked off. And the next thing this mini-van pulls up. It's the Clash. Mick Jones and Joe Strummer and the like. I said: "These guys won't let us play." Within five minutes we were on stage, mate."

Eric: "I used to really like Paul Simonon. I used to try and smoke like him, play like he used to play. Bass really low and everything. We were playing and he came late. He walked in with two blonde girls - one on each arm. He sauntered in, looked around and walked out again."

Eric: "I remember talking to Joe Strummer saying I want to go to England. I want to go to England. And he was going I wouldn't be in such a rush to go to England. It's not all rosy, it's grey and depressing, there's another side to it. You should stop for moment and look around, you're actually living in paradise. A beautiful country. Nah. I wanna go to England. I want to go to the 100 Club. I saw in the NME about six months later, he had this interview and he was going I met these skinhead guys in Christchurch, New Zealand and they all wanted to go to England. That was me."

Mick Jones - Duncan Campbell - Rip It Up - March 1982

"I was surprised to see you had riots here. I think that's an indication of New Zealanders sense of fair play."

"People seem to have some kind of harmony, they're able to co-exist. That seemed to have been the good thing about the anti-apartheid demonstrations here. It shows people care about peaceful co-existence, and were prepared to use love, backed by force."

Joe Strummer - Roz Reines - NME - 27 March 1982

"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..."

"But then I got to New Zealand and it's like they'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're ever seen. A lush tropical paradise."

"The skinheads there are bored stiff. They think London is wonderful, and when I told them I was a miserable bastard in London, it shattered their dreams."

Set - 5 February 1982

London Calling

One More Time

Safe European Home


Train In Vain

The Leader - Bankrobber
Magnificent Seven
Guns of Brixton
White Man in Hammersmith Palais
Ivan Meets GI Joe
Brand New Cadillac
Janie Jones
Koka Kola
I Fought the Law
Somebody Got Murdered
Clampdown
Radio Clash
Clash City Rockers
I'm So Bored With The USA
Career Opportunities
Jimmy Jazz
Tommy Gun
Armageddon Time
Complete Control
Police On My Back
White Riot

Jeremy Chunn - Journalist - Henchmen bassist - 2 January 2002

"The Clash has always confused me. I have seldom broken other bands' records with a hammer (maybe only two others). For moments they are so good, at others so bad. And all the time there are the clothes and the bass player's cheekbones, things that shouldn't count. But they counted too much. There is/was nothing dangerous about The Clash. But maybe perceived danger is a whole other pretense. One fact is indisputable: in February 1982 The Clash had nothing left in them.

"Who could understand Sandinista? Who cared? By the time The Clash landed in New Zealand in 1982, the band had severed connections with whatever had energised its first two albums. For teens like me who wanted Safe European Home levity and Complete Control attack, the two-hour-plus show."

posted by andrew schmidt at 10:32 


labels: fellow travellers, new zealand 1980s independent music, punk

3 comments:

 jonathang said...


That first Auckland show was fantastic in spite of the awful venue. The crowd was baying for White Riot. Seem to recall Strummer was reluctant, claiming they hadn't played it for years. Anyway, great post and a great site.

25 February 2008 20:05

 anonymous said...

I hitched over from the West Coast to see this. I kinda knew Maryrose and Mary who organised the extra gig in ChCh. The most amusing thing I heard about that was from Maryrose who said Jim Wilson, local promoter and disliked because he seemed to be the only person making money out of music in ChCH in the 80's, came over and sneered "I can't believe TWO GIRLS got the Clash!"

5 April 2008 20:56

 **anonymous said...**

Oh and the gig was absolutely bloody marvellous.

raz

5 April 2008 20:58

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