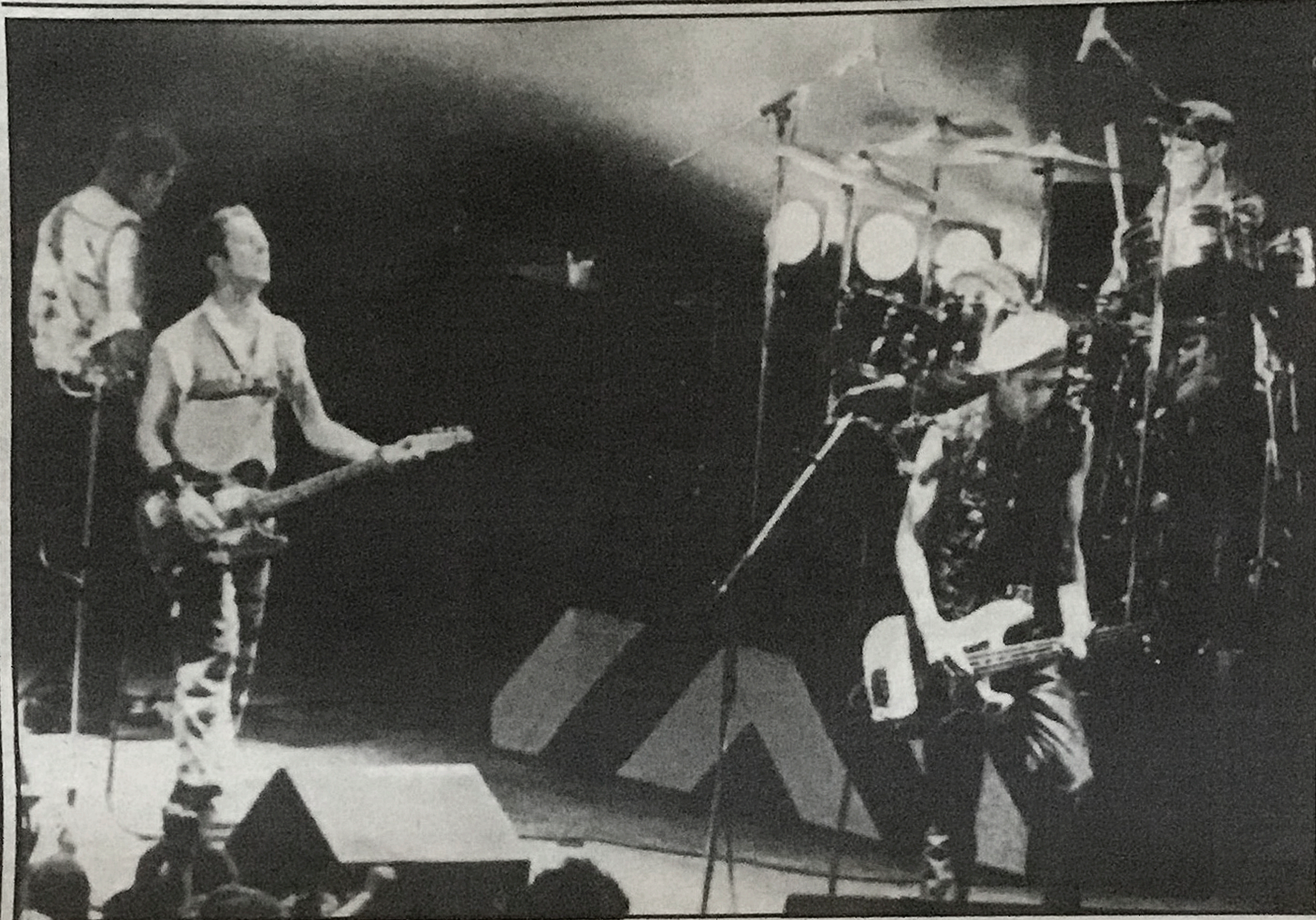


Combat city rockers



The Clash conquer New Jersey. Pic: Keith Bernstein.

THE CLASH

Convention Hall, Asbury Park, New Jersey

"How'd ya like the London fog outside?" Joe Strummer cackled playfully between numbers. The body heat generated by the maddening crowd inside was in stark contrast to the dark cool ocean mists that had settled over this sleepy beach resort town. "We imported 22,000 tons of fog just for you — we figured we'd show groups like Styx and Foreigner how to do it right."

On the second night of their 1982 American offensive, establishing their beach head in Bruce Springsteen's backyard. The Clash didn't just to it right. They did it *real*. In a sly bow to the rampant press speculation over Strummer's recent AWOL escapade and the sudden exit of Topper Headon, they

prefaced their appearance on stage with a prerecorded tape of Roy Orbison's "Runnin' Scared".

But if they were at all scared, it didn't show in the strident goose step and upper cut guitar punch of the opening serve "London Calling", or the hard metallic return of "Safe European Home".

With typically heroic Clash perversity, they were at their tightest, their most aggressive, their most committed when they were at their most desperate. And ironically, the heart and soul of the storm were its most unpredictable elements: the return of the rejuvenated Strummer and "pick up" drummer Terry Chimes kicking into the hard funk of "Radio Clash" one minute and the next anchoring the liquid mutant reggae of "Combat Rock".

Chimes played this show like he'd been rehearsing the set for a year instead of less than a week. He was the boot in the band's pants during "Clash City Rockers" and even the hall's trash-can acoustics couldn't deaden the crack of his machine gun drum fill in "I Fought The Law".

Then there was Strummer, rallying the troops on and off stage in his chic new combat fatigues. Whatever the cause and effect of his recent bug out, he still sang with spirit and bite. He spat out the poisonous satire of "Know Your Rights" and "Go Straight To Hell", then lead an angry romp

through "Garage land" to close the show, returning for a pained meditation on "Armageddon Time" with Mick Jones' guitar slicing the humid air over Chimes' and Paul Simonon's hard reggae thrust.

What Strummer and Chimes had was obviously contagious because Jones traded in his occasional guitar hero overkill for dramatic power chord and clipped riff punctuation, adding his own vocal muster to a stirring version of "Somebody Got Murdered" that, in one fell swoop, buried the accusations of diluted passion and commercial rock flab dogging the "maturing" Clash.

In fact, the longer they played, the clearer it became that The Clash were playing hard here not just for their reputation but for their very lives as a rock 'n' roll band. Pop fashion has left them eating clouds of its smug dust; the changes of the last month threatened to blow them apart.

Yet they responded with the best show I have ever seen them give and they did it in front of a crazed cross section of disenfranchised American rockers, from hippies in Grateful Dead tee-shirts to hard core punks in their Dead Kennedys regalia to stunned Jersey beach bums. The Clash fought the odds and we all won. It was only one battle, but the war is far from over. — DAVID FRICKE.