

Regrouped Clash mobilizes its army of fans with N.J. concert

By STEVE LIBOWITZ
Courier-News Music Writer

ASBURY PARK — For a band whose leader was wracked with self-doubt and who didn't have a drummer as little as a week ago, the Clash opened their American tour here with surprising success.

Leader Joe Strummer had disappeared in April, forcing the postponement of the Clash tour of their native Britain. No sooner had he resurfaced than drummer Nick "Topper" Headon quit the band. Headon left only nine days before the Clash's U.S. tour opened this past weekend, appropriately at Convention Hall in this working-class town.

Terry Chimes, Headon's replacement and the Clash's original drummer, had only five days to practice, yet he proved the most de-

termined member Sunday night, refusing to leave the stage after the second encore and motioning the band back for more.

There had already been more than 100 minutes of the Clash's politicized rock, complete with rear-screen projections of illustrations and photographs pertaining to the songs. By the end of the night, much of the audience had spilled out of their seats and onto the dance-floor to press toward the stage, arms raised in the symbol of the Clash army.

Still, the band's triumphant return was marred even on the first night, when someone in the audience tossed a firecracker on the stage during the encores. It left Strummer "with a bit of a hole in my right leg," as he explained it at a party celebrating the tour after Sunday's show.

For someone who had mys-

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teriously disappeared ostensibly to re-examine his role in a socially-conscious rock band, Strummer proved receptive and enthusiastic to the press just as he had in concert hours earlier.

"I thought I'd bum around in Spain like in the early days," Strummer offered as a reason for his disappearance. "What I missed most was being a bum. I used to go on a bus gig tour just with a guitar and about a dollar and what I was wearing. If you play good, you eat. You know, just like the Hank Williams song, 'Long Lonesome Highway.'

"It was very real music, very elec-

tric."

Though he's no longer a "bum," now living, in his own words, "on easy street, comparatively," Sunday's concert was nearly as exciting as the early days, or at least the first American Clash concert at the Palladium in 1978.

Any band able to mobilize an audience faced with Convention Hall's atrocious acoustics that makes mud out of guitar notes deserves credit, and the Clash had the troops roaring. But it did take time.

A lone trumpeter and a tape of flamenco guitars heralded their arrival. Then the Clash laced into "London Calling," their call to action and the promise of a riveting evening. "Safe European Home," from their American debut "Give 'Em Enough Rope" (actually their

second LP), continued the charge, followed by "Guns of Brixton," their homage to their hometown which prophesized the riots of a year later.

But the hall then swallowed up "Train in Vain," the band's best-known song and it's only near-hit, and made mincemeat of "Car Jamming," the first selection from the new Clash album, "Combat Rock."

Things revved up again as Chimes' drum beat marched in "The Magnificent Seven" and continued into "Career Opportunities," the first of several selections from the second American release (actually their first record), "The Clash."

The intro to "Know Your Rights" was comprised of a picture of a gravestone: "Carol Anne Kelly — May 22, 1981...Murdered by the British Army" as Strummer intoned

"This is a public service announcement...with guitar!"

The images of the famous photograph showing a South Vietnamese policeman executing a suspected Viet Cong, followed by pictures of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and members of the Polish Solidarity union holding signs reading "Straik" seemed to unify and incite the crowd as the song turned into "Working for the Clampdown."

Energy now flowing and multiplying, the Clash played in rapid succession "Clash City Rockers," "Brand New Cadillac," "Spanish Bombs" and "This is Radio Clash." The band hardly stopped until they left the stage, an unrelenting and focused attack whose momentum just kept building. If prudence and stamina hadn't required otherwise, it could have gone on all night.