

Clash kicks off U.S. tour with new lineup, sounds

By PATTI DOMM
Home News staff writer

ASBURY PARK — Joe Strummer's much-publicized disappearance and the 11th-hour resignation of drummer Topper Headon could be construed as ill omens for the Clash's first full-scale American tour.

But based on the band's second show in Convention Hall Sunday, the English group, once touted as "the only band that matters" might just be able to pull all its loose ends back together.

Strummer re-emerged, literally, in combat regalia to begin the tour in Asbury Park after several weeks of alleged "soul searching," during which time he reportedly weighed his role as a socially aware artist against his position as a money-making rock musician.

And Headon was conveniently replaced at the last minute by the Clash's first drummer, Terry Chimes. Despite short notice, Chimes, at times, more than adequately maintained the balance of the band's most rhythmic songs, but unfortunately without the percussive flare of Headon.

Strummer's recent pilgrimage to Paris and other unknown retreats was a useful tool in the world of promotional gimmickry, but it may also have served to arouse audiences dismayed by the Clash's departure from its punk-rock roots.

Unlike some of the Clash classics, the new songs are easier to appreciate onstage than on vinyl.

Their transition from a hard-core rock 'n' roll band to one that experiments heavily with Third World rhythmic influences was apparent onstage Sunday. However, those fans, craving the four-four rhythms over more mesmerizing beats could not complain Sunday night. Nor could their counterparts.

It could be that Strummer discovered that his fans deserve 100 percent, as well as the lessons in human rights he weaves into most of the songs he's written lately.

Onstage at Convention Hall Sunday, the band's repertoire was a successful merger of its better-known durable rockers and a series of rhythmic experiments. The Clash opened with "London's Calling," and ripped through "Train in Vain," "Clash City Rockers," "Clampdown," "Career Opportunities," and "Spanish Bombs," as well as the newer songs from the "Sandinista" album, the EP, "Radio Clash," and "Ghet-

to Defendant." "Sean Flynn," and "Know Your Rights" from the new LP, "Combat Rock."

Material from the new album, excluding the rocker, "Should I Stay or Should I Go," is a logical transition from the interesting, but sobering pieces on Sandinista.

Unlike some of the Clash classics, the new songs are easier to appreciate onstage than on vinyl. For instance, the song "Ghetto Defendant" minus the talking overdubbed on the album, is much more listenable in concert, as is "Rock the Casbah."

The band, which has long mingled political allegory with good rock 'n' roll, also managed to squeeze political inference into its stage show with a backdrop of slides depicting everything from street fights, burning buildings, and a tearful soldier to starving children. Nihilistic, yes, but not out of place.

Compared with an overly loud show given two years ago at the Capitol Theater in Passaic, the Clash's sound was toned down to a point that did not deafen the audience. Although the acoustical mix was imbalanced in favor of the drums and bass end for those sitting in the stands (but one could blame that on the concrete construction of Convention Hall), the sound directly in front of the stage was flattering both to the vocals and guitars.



LONDON CALLING — The British rock group The Clash performed three nights at Asbury Park's Convention Hall last weekend.