



Paul Godin, Calgary Herald

Mick Jones (left), Paul Simonon and Joe Strummer drive home their message

## The Clash British band transforms stage into socio-political battlefield

By Roman Cooney

(Herald staff writer)

There's ample room for debate on whether The Clash is as important as the popular press would have us believe, but any band determined to kick rock out of its lethargic complacency deserves unanimous vocal support.

Red police lights flashing and air-raid sirens wailing, Britain's The Clash took to the socio-political battlefield on which it fights best — the concert stage.

By bringing punk/new wave/new music (choose your label) into the realm of commercial interest with *London Calling* in 1980, The Clash captured the ear of the press and public alike with an aggressive, uncompromising lyric stance that covered (or uncovered, as the case may be) everything from pressing Third World issues to civil strife. Although consumers weren't ready to wholeheartedly embrace what amounted to pretentious punk music, lyric integrity mattered more than appearances.

The Clash were mercenaries rising above rock's disinterested and incapable rank and file. The

### A review

THE CLASH at Max Bell Arena Monday. Attendance: approximately 4,000.

band tackled an omnipresent enemy of political and social evils, using biting, incisive and at times even witty lyrics as ammunition.

The Clash hit fast, slapping commercial acceptance in the face with *Sandinista!* — an over-indulgent three-record set with scant mainstream fare and excessive experimentation. But the Clash were not in search or in need of credibility, as evidenced The Clash's latest album, *Combat Rock*, which is destined to broaden their commercial appeal and hopefully inspire more groups to tackle topics greater than rock.

Throughout last night's concert, photographs were flashed on a screen backing the stage of everything from Polish labor leader Lech Walesa to brick walls to the symbol for nuclear power. They appeared to be newspaper photos with the band simultaneously filing the stories

— reports from the Third World, commentary on social ills, correspondence from embattled peoples.

The Clash show is an experience in the commanding power of rock. Even if you can't hear most of the lyrics, you can feel the impact of what is being said. Guitarist/singer Joe Strummer maintains an exhausting intensity that drives home the messages. It's so aggressive the atmosphere becomes volatile, and under the right circumstances The Clash could wield a great deal of power.

For all that The Clash can be a boring band at length — not one of its members can sing. Accompanying marvellous percussion and lead guitar work are abominable vocals and dreary rhythms. The band's music often leans heavily on its punk roots. Considering that the percussion and guitar work can be far superior to contemporary fodder, those hackneyed rhythms indicate the band prefers to take the easy way out rather than write fresh material.

The Clash are not, as has been suggested, heirs to the rock and roll throne.