

ROCK



The Clash's Joe Strummer (left), Paul Simonon, Mick Jones: "We're not fulfilled yet. But there will be a time when our work is done."

Strummer wins out in Clash of personalities

By Peter Hall

Joe Strummer is on the spot. Hunched at the base of an old boardwalk game in Asbury Park, N.J., the Clash's 29-year-old lead singer is surrounded by photographers and reporters who seek his opinion on topics ranging from the talents of hometown hero Bruce Springsteen to the dubious election tallies in El Salvador.

But what they really want to know is why he went AWOL from the Clash in April, forcing the postponement of a British tour and very nearly scotching the first part of the group's two-stage United States trek. After all, this was to have been the Year of the Clash, the one that put Britain's rock rebels over the top. Perhaps it still is; "Combat Rock," the group's latest LP, has already outsold its predecessor, "Sandinista!" But a string of internal crises—including Strummer's mysterious disappearance and drummer Topper Headon's abrupt departure from the group only two days after Strummer's return—suggests the Clash is suffering from a case of cold feet, a profound ambivalence about success.

Earlier that evening, during the second show of the group's U.S. tour, Strummer dazzled a large audience at Asbury Park's Convention Hall. Apparently out to prove that his self-imposed exile in Paris had not detracted from his commitment to the Clash, Strummer handled the fans with more than his usual degree of assurance and passion.

His colleagues were with him all the way. Although Terry Chimes, the drummer who played on the Clash's first LP and who replaced Headon for the tour, pounded the skins a bit too quickly now and then, guitarist Mick Jones turned in an extraordinary vocal performance on "Train in Vain." By the time the group roared through a stunning coda to close "The Magnificent Seven," the crowd was transfixed. The Clash seemed back on track. Their odyssey toward stardom on their own terms was taking on a fresh air of inevitability. But can these rash, contentious young men maintain their edge without toppling over it?

Strummer harbors some doubts. Asked if he thought of quitting while hiding in Paris, he tells his knot of listeners: "Yeah, I thought about it. I thought it would be good just to go back to Spain and bum around like I did in the early days. I was a bum in Paris a bit. And I felt that freedom." But he came

back. "Yeah, I came back."

In the beginning, the Clash members were hungry, bored and obsessed with the social inequalities that made them that way. So they sang about cops, unemployment and Britain's decline. As their horizons broadened, the Clash turned to American and Third World topics. But their complaints about the system retained a positive, even sentimental touch, hence the decision to name their fourth LP in celebration of the Nicaraguan revolution. Yet Strummer and Jones have scarcely been cheerleaders for any political line. Their lyrics scorn governmental power brokers in Washington, London and Moscow alike.

The Clash members were hungry, bored and obsessed with the social inequalities that made them that way. So they sang about cops, unemployment and Britain's decline. As their horizons broadened, the Clash turned to American and Third World topics. But their complaints about the system retained a positive, even sentimental touch, hence the decision to name their fourth LP in celebration of the Nicaraguan revolution. Yet Strummer and Jones have scarcely been cheerleaders for any political line. Their lyrics scorn governmental power brokers in Washington, London and Moscow alike.

Not surprisingly, given their wits and hard work, the band members themselves have acquired certain comforts. Despite sparse radio play, squabbles with CBS Records and their insistence on selling records, T-shirts and tickets at budget prices, they lead modest, well-traveled lives in dreary, familiar West London.

How much wealth, then, does Joe Strummer want? "There's something I haven't achieved yet, and that's to feel like I'm earning money, putting it somewhere to set up things that couldn't happen otherwise," he replies. "Money is power; it can make things possible."

"The trouble with this interview," he says, "is that you're interviewing me as though I'm a success, and I feel I'm a failure. We're angry because everything we do turns to ash. We're not fulfilled yet. But there will be a time when our work is done."

The Clash was brimming with frustration and tension last fall when it wrapped up a European tour and set out to become big-time stars.

"We feel we're underachievers," Jones confesses in London after their return. "I

suppose it's because we care so much. We're all so kind of intense about it that we mess it up. You say, 'Hey, these guys are big successes,' but we want to be the success that Van Halen is. We'd like to have those people's ears. We want more, and I do and don't think we'll get it."

To boost their odds of cracking America's metal-bound airwaves, the Clash seemed ready to play the music industry's games more by the rules, or at least to avoid unnecessary penalties. Chaotic decision-making and nose-thumbing at CBS and its American branch, Epic, had proved unsatisfactory to both sides. The Clash's insistence on selling "Sandinista!," a three-record set, at rock-bottom prices left the group with virtually no royalties for a year.

Members of Clash got the point. They put Rhodes back in control after a three-year feud. He promptly talked CBS into upgrading the band's contract. Kosmo Vinyl, the group's shrewd aide-de-camp for the last few years, settled into the public-relations slot. Tough, scheming and dedicated to their clients, Rhodes and Vinyl are indispensable, but their slickness has tarnished the band's image as embattled working-class lads out to save themselves and the world. For Rhodes, who considers the system capable of any evil, the ends justify the means: "The Clash represents hope," he explains, "but we feel it's like trench warfare."

The need for opportunistic management in a corporate culture is not the band's only political problem. The Clash has long wondered whether its fans truly comprehend the group's anarchistic politics, which Strummer succinctly defines as "Death to the bosses! Equality in everything!" And the group members are puzzled by the apparent devotion of some of their American fans to politically conservative mainstream bands. "We do it better than Styx or Foreigner!" Strummer cried as he launched into "This Is Radio Clash" in Asbury Park.

Finally, the Clash doesn't want people to forget that it's a band. "It's music first and political thought next," Strummer says vehemently.

"We wouldn't be here if we didn't like to play those guitars. Obviously we have a political bent, but the sound of music infects us. Then, when we're playing guitars, we've got to know what to say, and so we try to make good use of our space."

Rolling Stone

SCHOOL GUIDE

SCHOOL GUIDE

Two minutes and a pencil can build you a bright future in Electronics.

Electronics keeps growing! And we offer you the career education to grow with it.

A choice of "hands-on" training programs, keyed to industry needs. ■ Assistance in obtaining financial aid, part-time jobs and housing. ■ A graduate placement program that last year, within 60 days of graduation, placed over 95% of the grads who actively pursued placement assistance.

Take two minutes now. Write or call for Free information.

DAVRY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

CHICAGO CAMPUS LOMBARD CAMPUS
929-6550 953-2000
3300 N. Campbell Chicago, IL 60618 2000 S. Finley Rd. Lombard, IL 60148

Name _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip _____
Phone _____ Age _____

DAY AND EVENING CLASSES NOW FORMING
BELL & HOWELL EDUCATION GROUP, INC.

College Graduates:

DISCOVER YOUR POTENTIAL AS A LAWYER'S ASSISTANT . . . at Roosevelt!

More and more law firms and corporations are hiring lawyer's assistants for challenging and rewarding careers. Salaries at all levels have increased with the extraordinary growth of this profession, and top lawyer's assistants earn as much as \$32,000.

Attend A Free Question & Answer Session To Find Out If This Is The Career For You

Special Question and Answer sessions for interested students will be held at the Roosevelt downtown campus on Wednesdays, August 11 and September 1 at 5:30 PM., and Saturdays, August 21 and September 11 at 10:00 AM.

The Lawyer's Assistant Program at Roosevelt University is the largest ABA approved program of its kind in Illinois, with more than 2,000 graduates.

At Roosevelt, it takes just three months of concentrated day-time study (or six months in the evening) to prepare for a career as a lawyer's assistant. Courses offered in: CHICAGO and ARLINGTON HEIGHTS.

Come To The Q & A Session and Learn:

- ...Why over 85% of our graduates who seek paralegal employment have found it
- ...Why hundreds of lawyers and other employers send us their requests for our graduates
- ...Why Roosevelt graduates work in 21 of the 22 largest law firms in Chicago

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY!

Or, telephone right now: (312) 341-3882
In cooperation with the National Center for Paralegal Training

The Lawyer's Assistant Program Please send me a copy of the Roosevelt University Lawyer's Assistant Program catalog for 1982.
Roosevelt University
430 South Michigan Ave
Chicago, IL 60605

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Home Phone _____ Business Phone _____

Roosevelt Admits Students On The Basis Of Individual Merit And Without Regard To Race, Color, Creed, Sex Or Age