

the arts & entertainment



MUSIC REVIEW/*The Clash throws a party*

The Clash. Rock band at Pier 84, 12th Avenue and 45th Street in Manhattan. Tonight at 8 PM, with Gregory Isaacs and Kurtis Blow.

By Wayne Robins

THE CLASH is, above all, a political party. Not like Democrats and Republicans, or Whigs and Tories, but political guys who like to have parties. And the Clash's show Tuesday night at Pier 84, where the band appears again tonight, was the best party this band has thrown.

That was especially heartening since in previous years, at other concerts and on recent albums, the Clash has stumbled on its rhetoric. Last year's debacle at the Midtown club, Bonds, which was so oversold that the Clash had to add an extra week of concerts to accommodate ticket holders, revealed dangerous naivete for a band so insistent on maintain-

ing complete control over its career decisions. And as the Clash became more successful at building a mass audience in America, the contradictions between the aloofness caused by stardom and the identification with the downtrodden became difficult to reconcile.

Perhaps that's why the band's drummer, Topper Headon, a magnificent basher, left a few months ago. His replacement: Terry Chimes, also known as Tory Crimes, who was the band's percussionist on the first Clash album. Chimes was with Mick Jones, Paul Simonon and Joe Strummer onstage at the pier Tuesday night, as the Clash's immovable message scraped against its unstoppable music. The result, rather than a standoff, was fireworks.

The romance of revolution is deeply imbedded in both the Clash persona and in the material. The band opened with "White Riot," a viciously uplifting paean to the joys of trashing, cultural identity,

and brotherhood. Politics was ubiquitous in the ensuing songs: "Spanish Bombs" (an ode to the Loyalists), "Guns of Brixton" (cheering on black-and-white might in the South London ghetto), "Police on My Back," "Somebody Got Murdered," and "I Fought The Law" (law enforcement personnel as representatives of colonial authority and class repression).

The key figure in putting across Clash consciousness is guitarist/vocalist Joe Strummer. Strummer pulls off the almost impossible task of being sexy while bearing a Mohawk hairdo. You have to wonder about the sanity of a guy who shaved most of his head (except for the center stripe) when he was already a star. It strikes me as self-mutilation, though to some it may underline his political commitment: rock star as fashion guerrilla.

Strummer made it clear that some blend of arrogance and paranoia inspired him. "If anybody's got any rocks

and bottles they'd like to throw at my head, you might as well get it over with now," he said early in the show, without provocation. Once again, Strummer showed he didn't quite understand the American audience, which came to toss hosannas, not molotov cocktails.

If there has been a tragic flaw to the Clash's approach, it has been this kind of wallowing in self-righteousness. In compensation, the band's sound Tuesday night was as richly varied, as cocky with triumph as four men with nothing but drums, a bass and two guitars for weapons can be. And once in a while, there were flashes of humor. "Rock the Casbah," arguably the band's best formalist pop song, is about how the Ayatollah banned rock and roll from Iran, but in the best comic-book fashion, the forces of rock eventually triumphed. Which, one can hope, may turn out to be a parable based on the career of the Clash itself. /II