

Half-speed Clash go through the motions at Orpheum

REVIEW | MUSIC

THE CLASH - In concert at the Orpheum Theater, Tuesday night.

Tickets were being scalped outside the Orpheum for as much as \$75 each. Inside, the atmosphere was charged with anticipation. Although the Clash, one of England's seminal punk rock bands, played three recent dates at Cape Cod and one at Providence, this was their first Boston appearance in two years.

Last time they tore down the house, making good on the oft stated claim that they were the rock 'n' roll band that mattered most. But at their second Cape Cod show they seemed tired, lacking both the aggression and the passion

that drove them in the beginning.

Tuesday night at the Orpheum was Cape Cod redux. It was a better set than the Cape show - better sound, better choice of material ("Clash City Rockers," "Clampdown"), better use of video slides - but the intensity level wavered throughout. By the time they got to "Should I Stay or Should I Go?," a virtual rewrite of their first American hit single "Train in Vain," the feeling was that something had gone, sadly, awry. The band that once ripped into every song as if the weight of the world rested on

the result, went through the motions.

Although it was satisfying to hear early ravers such as "Janie Jones," "Career Opportunities" and "Garageland," it was disturbing to hear their energy dissipated. The most charged moment came during the final pre-encore song,

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The Clash at half speed

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"Clampdown," as Springa, singer with the Boston hardcore punk band SS Decontrol, attempted to jump on stage and knocked singer-guitarist Joe Strummer's microphone stand into his chest. A security man jumped into the crowd and Strummer quickly followed, looking for the culprit. The other three Clashmen - guitarist Mick Jones, bassist Paul Simonon and drummer Terry Chimes - hung back, found a groove and waited for Strummer to make it back on stage. However dubious or ironic Strummer's motivation, it made the song's climax - "You grow up and and you calm down!/And you're working for the Clampdown!" - extra strong.

Tuesday's show was the next-

to-last gig on the Clash's present North American tour, and, to be fair, some reports on what appears to be an erratic tour have been glowing. But this was my second night of the Clash at half speed and, to borrow a line from the Clash's "Safe European Home," "Don't want to go back there again."

The Clash are back on the road next month. They'll be playing at least four stadium dates (including New York's Shea Oct. 13 and 14) with the Who. "It should be quite interesting," said Kosmo Vinyl, Clash aide-de-camp. "The last group we supported was the Sex Pistols. I don't think it'll be quite the same."

- JIM SULLIVAN