

Clash of the Titans

By Jim O'Donnell

On Monday night, The Clash gave UVM and Burlington its biggest and best rock show in years. It's as simple as that.

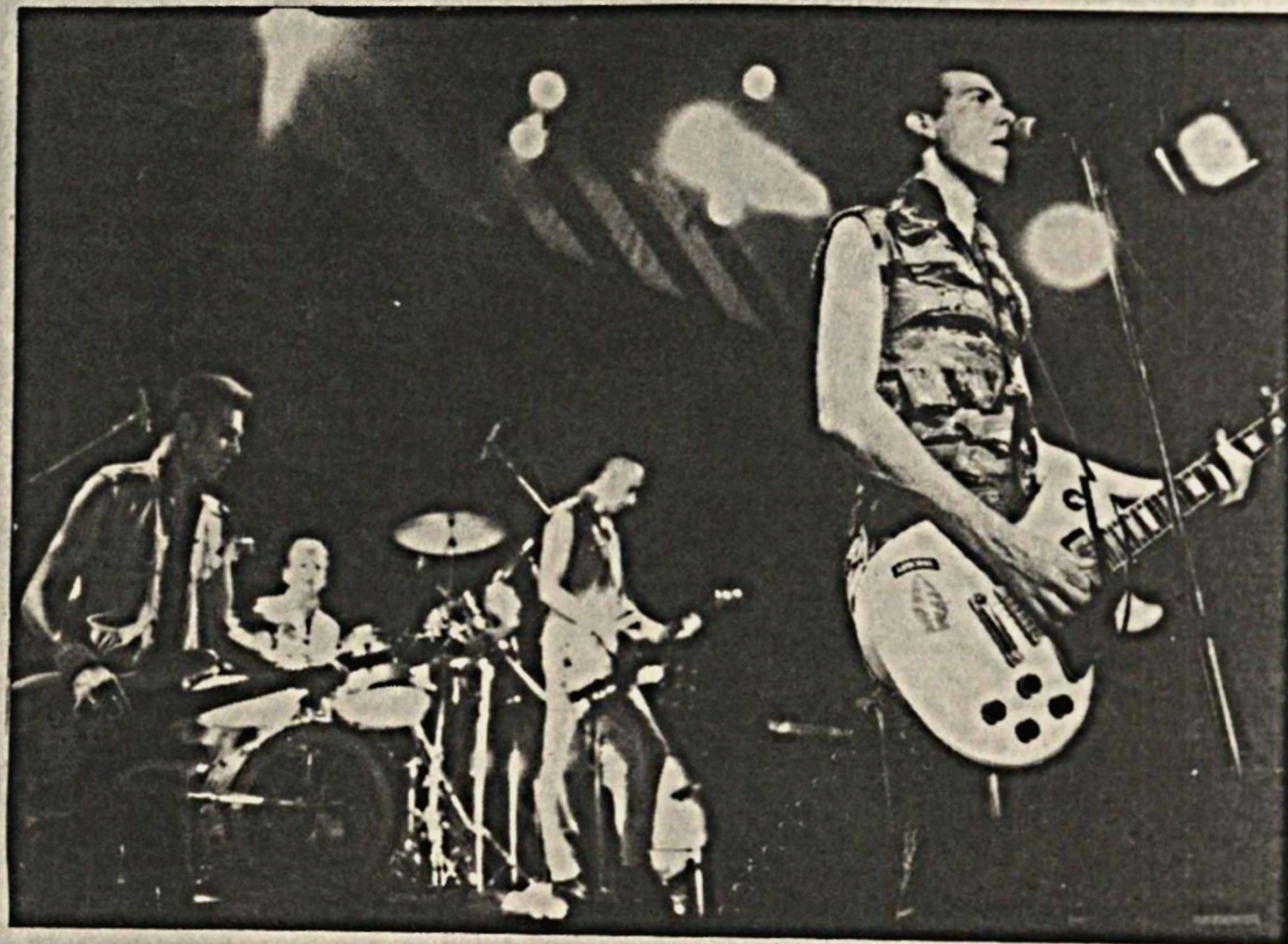
The group strode on stage like gunfighters, accompanied by flashing red police lights. They immediately slammed into "London Calling," the first song of what was to be an all-out furious aural assault.

The packed house at Patrick Gym went predictably crazy and stayed that way for the rest of the show, bobbing up and down and shaking their fists in the air.

The Clash rocked hard, doling out songs from all their albums in equal doses. Joe Strummer, "The Last of the Mohicans," is the focal point of the group, and he sang with his usual intensity while churning out chords ferociously. Strummer doesn't so much play guitar, he attacks it, which provided the appropriately angry sound for such songs as "Safe European Home" and "English Civil War."

The crowd's most enthusiastic reaction, however, came when lead guitarist Mick Jones stepped to the forefront to sing favorites like "Should I Stay or Should I Go," "Train in Vain" (which was perhaps the most popular song of the night), and "Police on my Back."

Dispensing with pointless redundancies like fawning stage patter and guitar or drum solos,



The Clash have always let their songs speak for themselves. They did, however, use a projection system which beamed pictures above the stage. This should have helped even the most thickheaded fan to realize that their songs mean *something*.

Music is the main point of any concert, and when The Clash are at their best their sound becomes a defiant rallying

point. Led by Terry Chimes' thundering drum work and Paul Simonon's booming bass, it was nearly impossible not to be overwhelmed by the force of such crashing rockers as "I Fought the Law" and "Clamp-down."

This was by no means a perfect show, though. The group is winding down its North American tour and they seemed

more tired and less intense than in previous shows. And Strummer, although in a talkative mood (for him, at least), was hoarse throughout the show.

But by far the biggest problem was the poor sound quality. The Clash are supposed to be loud, I know, but their extreme volume only magnified the Patrick Gym's lousy acoustics.

The biggest casualties of the messy sound mix were "The Call Up" and "Career Opportunities." These two are among the group's most meaningful songs, but unfortunately most of the meaning was lost as the lyrics were swallowed by the cavernous gym.

It was perhaps because of this poor sound that the concert's best moments were also its quietest. Right after the raucous combination of "Should I Stay or Should I Go?" and "Rock the Casbah," they swung into a lilting version of "Charlie Don't Surf" which was surprisingly and pleasantly effective.

"Straight to Hell," the opening song of the first encore, was another gem — a slow burn which was propelled by a spare beat and Strummer's intensified vocals.

The best song of the evening came during the second encore with the jaunty "Jimmy Jazz." The liveliness of Jones' guitar made this song stand out, and helped turn it into an enjoyable romp.

Before leaving the stage, Strummer told the crowd that they should "go back and study so you'll learn something." Drenched with sweat and drained from dancing, this crowd had already learned that even on a slightly subpar night, The Clash remain the most powerful and potent force in rock.

Chris Gee