

Clash packs auditorium

By Gary Reese
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Not very often does a rock band in its heyday make a concert stop in Wichita Falls.

And the Clash certainly is that. No band today plays harder, takes as many chances and links its music to events in the world at large.

The Clash's Wichita Falls date was the second in a five-city tour before they play the U.S. Festival in California. The band has bypassed the metro areas in the state on its swing, and quite a few in the audience had driven in from Dallas and Fort Worth for the show.

Rock fans either love or hate the Clash. But there were enough fans in Memorial Auditorium Thursday night to pack the floor. And few of them were sitting down.

Even before leader singer Joe Strummer bounced downstage, whipped off his sunglasses and launched guitarists Paul Simonon and Mick Jones into "Radio Clash," the audience was on its feet, cheering and clapping.

The 90-minute set the band played was rough, raw and tight. They sprinkled a few cuts from

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their recent gold album, "Combat Rock," throughout the lineup. Most, though, were lifted from earlier albums: tough, straightforward rock numbers.

Decked out in a Puerto Rico tank top, dog tags and camouflage pants, Strummer left no question as to the band's political leanings. Between numbers, he admonished the audience for requests and took a few jibes at other rock bands.

"This is a song that Van Halen asked to cover," he sneered at one point. "But it takes three real men to play it." Then Strummer and company, assisted by new drummer Michael Howard, knocked out a murderous version of "Clampdown." Strummer gave Duran Duran similar treatment.

Strummer also dedicated the group's song, "Spanish Bombs," to "all the illegal aliens out there." It seemed a strange thing to do for the predominantly white audience.

Throughout the show, a three-screen slide show augmented the

songs with photos of Third World misery, maps of Central America, scenes from the Middle East for "Rock the Casbah," and — specially for the Texas crowd — encircled lone stars.

The Clash closed their set with a rather lame version of "London Calling" — strange considering the amazing energy of everything that preceded it. Two encore sets lasting almost half an hour followed, beginning with "Know Your Rights" and the apolitical, rollicking "Should I Stay Or Should I Go."

Strummer and Simonon thumped out an eerie bass jam to begin "Straight to Hell," a searing indictment of the abandonment of Amerasian children in Vietnam. Strummer also adapted the lyrics for the Lone Star State, twisting "Amerasian blues" into "Rio Grande blues" and making the song an indictment of America's treatment of illegal aliens.

The only short-coming of the concert was the imbalance in the amplication, which made Simonon completely inaudible for the two songs he sang and Strummer, an incredibly strong singer, at times barely distinguishable.