

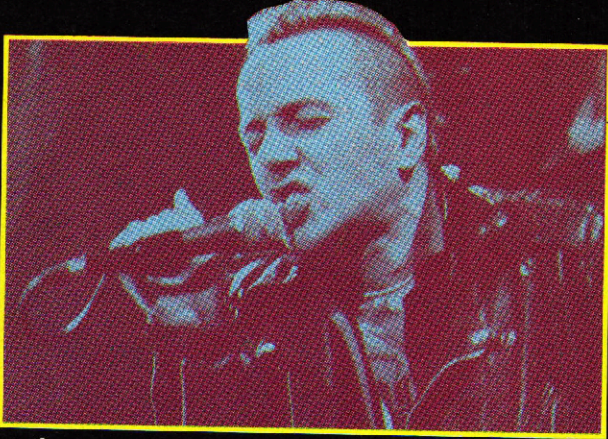
CLASH

Live at Leicester, De Montfort Hall

"I KNOW you wanna communicate, but I don't know about the gob," said politely spoken Joseph Strummer, leader of punk rock group The Clash, in Leicester last night. Mr Strummer's address (McLarenist/Leninist) was seized upon by the assembled young punk Trots as an indication that, well, the revolution had started. Within two hours Leicester was under punk rule; the ruling committee's first communique suggested that the town was to be placed in a permanent time warp.

"We're going back to 1977," said spokesman Harold Anarchy. "That was a good year, Leicester City were doing well, beer was cheap and The Clash released their first LP."

Indeed they did, and seven years later they're using it as the focus of a renewed spirit and the backdrop for a stultifying lack of imagination. The re-constituted Clash



Pics by Joe Shuffler

— three young blades, a Marlon Strummer and a Mean Boy Paul — are five punky curators with a travelling 'Museum Of '77'. Muscular, energetic, but ultimately pointless.

One can understand the motives — smash down the building and start again — make it raw, lean 'n' mean. Yet while such tactics might make for a cleansing of spirit (and the Clash show is nothing if not spirited) seven years after the real event it all looks a trifle hackneyed and contrived.

The issues the Clash deal with are important, it's just that the form they express them in has become meaningless. Useless by repetition, imitation and theft — so that it becomes a shopping list of myth and ritual.

So, when Joe Strummer screams out 'White Riot' it doesn't mean anything, it's just another (good) punk rock sound, something to slam to before you get pissed. The Clash have lost meaning . . .

. . . Yet they haven't lost any of the kinetic energy that has always made them such an exciting rock spectacle. Although the Clash are a little burlesque these days, a little irrelevant, they can still thrill. They still go in for the kill (albeit with blunter instruments). As a rock show, they're still pretty hot stuff.

Of course it's a bit more slam-a-lam, Vince White and Nik Sheppard do not the height of subtlety (or even Mick Jones) make, and new drummer Pete Howard is a touch heavy on the skins, but then, if this must be '77 you better do it in the proper fashion.

Strummer and Simonon play their 'White Riot' tour moves to a safety-pinned 't'. Joe, like a welterweight down the Thomas A'Beckett, Paul pumping the bass like he lifts dumb bells with his index finger. These boys are fit and sweaty.

So's the music. Great globs of punk noise, unrelentingly moulded round all the classics — 'Career Opportunities', 'Riot', 'Garageland', 'Complete Control', 'Janie Jones', 'Safe European Home', 'London Calling' — the gee-tar attack blitzing new songs like 'Three Card Trick' and 'This Is England' into the furious fuming 'n' fretting that marked the early, and best Clash.

All of this does lead to a rather one dimensional overdrive of punkalama, but then for spectacle and dynamism, the Clash still leave the likes of U2 and Big Country out there on guitar solo number nine.

As Strummer hams the stage — this bloke must watch 'On The Waterfront' and 'Carry On Cabbie' simultaneously — and all the new punks jump aboard rock's last great myth — stylised, but what style! — The Clash vainly try to conjure a present pertinence out of the past. It doesn't work, but as an exercise in nostalgia it sure dumps on The Alarm.

Jim '68 Puns' Reid

