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The Clash: - We know our market value

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(interview originally published March 1984)

Oslo: When the punk wave rocked rock England in its foundations, there were two particular names that graced the headlines: Sex Pistols and The Clash. Sex Pistols accounted for most of the scandals and were quickly burnt out. The Clash, on the other hand, went from victory to victory. And even though it was noticeable that one of the most pronounced political punk bands signed for CBS in 1977, their first LP "The Clash" was at the same time so powerful and rebellious that everyone talked about having sold their say to the record industry quickly muted.

"The Clash" is considered a classic today, and while much else has changed since 1977, the band's front figure joins the striking content of Joe Strummer's record just as eagerly today; three LPs ("London Calling", "Sandinista! and" Combat Rock), lots of touring and fame later.

Rock in opposition

- Rock has power and is the most important means of expression for young people. That is why it is also important that rock stands in opposition, not least to the music industry, Joe Strummer stated a few hours before The Clash took the stage in Drammenshallen recently - the group's first visit to Norway since May 1980. Strummer continued his merciless criticism of the music industry:

- The record companies are afraid of rebellious rock. CBS will keep us because they make a lot of money on our popularity. But preferably, they prefer content-less pop groups that support the existing system. In England, the record companies are working on this and the result is a lot of "hollow" groups that work exclusively as baptisms. And baptism is the last thing we need today, in a world threatened by the all-consuming annihilation!

Will reach out



Facsimile of The Clash interview in Stavanger Aftenblad, 03.03.1984

Strummer talks about the music industry as part of the power structure, as a PR department for capitalism. He therefore understands those who in his days criticized The Clash for signing a bold Millon contract - without even agreeing to the criticism.

-We want to reach as many people as possible. We would like to become "the world's most popular rock band". But to reach out, one must enter into a kind of alliance with the record industry. The important thing, however, is not the connection with the record label, but that you manage to keep to your ideals. That you don't let yourself be manipulated and slowly but surely slip into a life-starring role. It's not easy to keep up. Mick Jones failed to do so, Strummer claims, commenting on last year's dismissal of the other "front figure" in Clash. According to himself, it was about "political discrepancies".

- It's sad, but it just didn't benefit from working with Mick anymore, comments Strummer.

- The big breakthrough in the United States gave him stardom, and he failed all that The Clash stood, stands and will always stand for.

Hard words from an old friend. The friendship between Strummer and Jones is probably over for a long time, but the quarrel between the two has not ended yet. Strummer could tell that Jones has gone to his lawyer and that a large legal settlement of money can stand at the door.

- Mick has "frozen" all revenues for The Clash, so we currently can't get any royalties or concert fees, Strummer claims.

Failing ideals

But it's not just because of this split that it's been blowing fresh around The Clash lately. The group's latest LP "Combat Rock" (1982) definitely established them as one of the 80's most popular rock names - not least in the United States. But their credibility was called into question at last year's giant US Festival outside Los Angeles. There, the band demanded \$ 500,000 in gas after first accepting a much lower fee. The high demand came after they learned that some other groups got far more. Prudence or ..?

- Knowing our market value, Strummer parries. - The only people who would benefit from being "kind" are organizers and record labels. And I see no reason why I should help to enrich them more than necessary, adds Strummer and shakes my head, which is adorned by a distinctive orange-colored mohican.

blowout

How does Strummer & Co live up to its stated ideals on stage? Sure, there's no reason to doubt the sincere commitment to The Clash. Strummer thinks what he says, but sometimes I even wonder if he doesn't mean it too much.

The Clash in the Drammenshallen radiated raw and uncompromising energy - from the first stanza in "London Calling" filled the hall, to the old classic "White Riot" faded out an hour and a half later. Strummer gave it all and the new band (only Paul Simonon on bass is back from earlier) played well Still, it turned into a little doubt.

Strummer's insistence on punk's musical ideals, on total blowout, is in the most beautiful order. It's just that the surroundings around The Clash have become completely different from the time they started. And it denies Strummer & Co. seemingly to accept. For Strummer's word-scarce energy performance works better in smaller places than in today's large concert halls.

In Drammenshallen, only the leading benches were allowed to experience proper close contact with The Clash. And the one visual eye-catcher outside of Strummer - the many video screens that encircled the scene - was far too small for many of the over 5,000 spectators to see what was going on in them.

No, it is not easy to be small, but it is difficult to be big too. We can only hope that The Clash finds its natural place in the big rock world without abandoning its ideals. For the rock, people like Joe Strummer need!

By Leif Gjerstad

(The interview was originally published in several newspapers in March 1984. This version is preferably taken from Stavanger Aftenblad, but supplemented by a section from Bergens Tidende)

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