

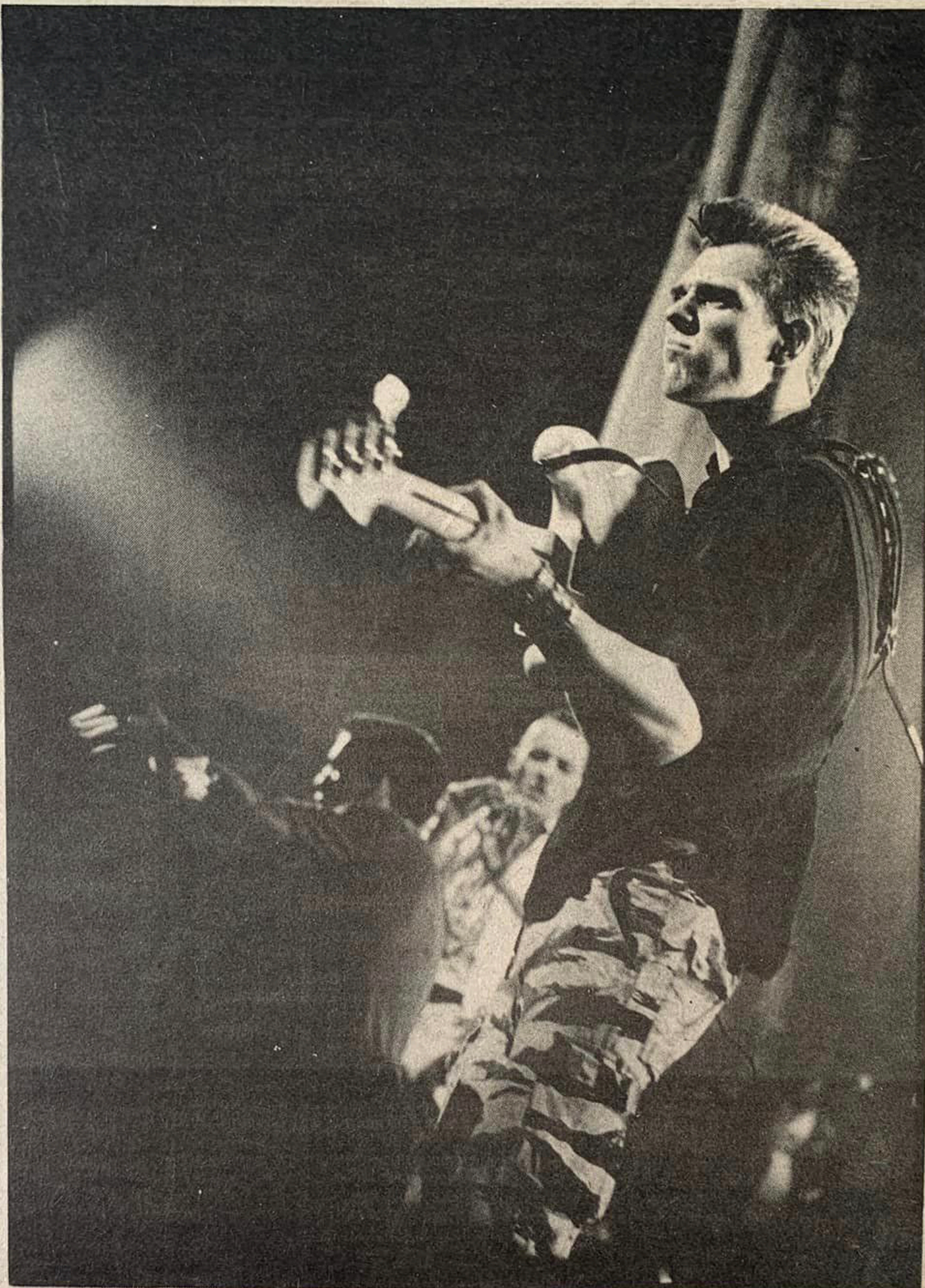
THE CLASH

Brixton Academy

SEVEN LONG years since I first ripped that T-shirt, scowled that scowl and danced that dance and suddenly, after a long catalogue of hypocrisy, phoney rebellion, phoney posing and phoney awareness, the idea of a born again, ranting and raving Joe Strummer, as tracked down by the intrepid Richard Cookenborough, struck me as a refreshing proposition. In a world of stiff shirts and sanity here was a man completely off his pancake, a veritable livewire. I was reminded of why I ever liked him and his group in the first place and set off for Brixton with an open mind.

But this new Clash are no big departure, they are still entangled with all the old faults. The new young bloods in the pack haven't brought fresh drive and commitment; they've merely grown into and expanded the bloated idea of The Clash as posed-perfect rebels. Neither was it easy to see where this return to the primal elements of real rock shock ("All my favourite records were made through one amp" too, Joe) was happening. With the massed light banks, three prong guitar chunder, and video screen backdrop this is the heaviest and most orthodox rock show I've ever seen The Clash play.

'London Calling'—their finest bridge between punk throttle and rock flash—is a good opener and a worthy tuning fork but its momentum isn't sustained. They degenerate into the old puerile ballistics, awkwardly structured dynamics, garbled lyrics etc. They play a lot of new songs—'Are You Ready For War', 'All Fighting In A Sex Mad World' and 'This Is England' being the most memorable titles. For these it's back to the straight attack and fingering of their debut, but the furious pacing that sets their songs off is never impaled or ignited, gung-ho guitar blocks off any impetus they may have. Roaming the stage with the microphone over his shoulder, one hand on his skull and an arm outstretched Strummer looks like an old punk Confucius interspersing the songs with harangues and stream of consciousness raps. He may not have turned into a bush but the dope (a.k.a. Allen Ginsberg) has left its mark. Strummer labours his points unnecessarily—a Clash audience (even though mostly white males) knows well the level of political import and intent without having it rammed down its throats. But perversely, for those who have followed the group "the whole damn way", the idea of The Clash, their essential romanticism must still be at the core of their appeal. The callisthenics, the heroic posturing, the riot scenes and war footage are all still there. For a group so against the machinations of violence they still



Paul spots a passing pigeon.

Pic: Lawrence Watson

JAIL GUITAR BORES

get an awful lot of mileage from its imagery.

They played one song I thought was almost brilliant—'Janie Jones'—but mostly they were terrible. Perhaps they never were that great as an actual musical unit but the rank stupidity and vacuity of 'White Man', 'Tommy Gun' and 'Bankrobber' irked more strongly than ever, while attempts to play white reggae with their club-footed rhythm section (what

has Simonon learned these last seven years?) were laughable on grey, stumbling versions of 'Armageddon Time' and 'Police And Thieves'. They are also still hung up on self-aggrandisement—another new song called 'We Are The Clash' featured videos of the lads themselves on their tour bus.

Until Strummer forgets all The Clash's hollow myth making, the need to make disparate declarations on anything and

everything from the White House, to welfare, to women's sorry lot, until he can really lay waste to all that Americanised foppery and come up with something as simple, direct and unfettered as, say, The Special Aka's 'Nelson Mandela', then this new Clash will be just as specious as the old Clash.

Ah well, at least he's stopped wearing an H-block T-shirt.

Gavin Martin