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"I'VE NEVER EVEN HEARD THE CLASH!"

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Issue 112

LONDON & MEMPHIS & FOLSOM STREET

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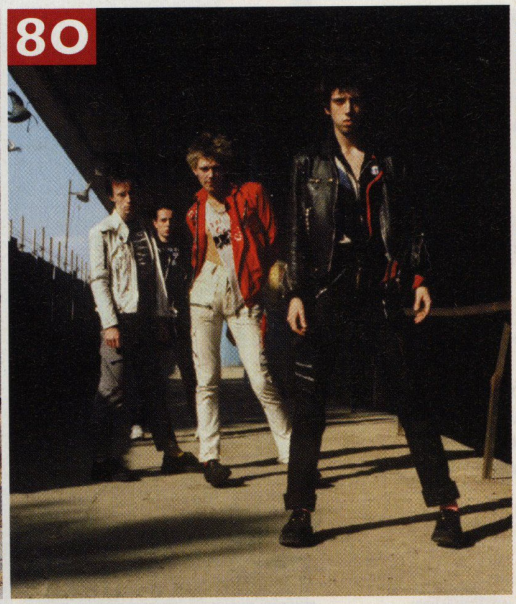

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The Damned Creepy, kooky, and quite possibly insane, punk's eccentric pioneers tell all about their early years. By Andrew Perry.

The Clash Kidnap, bust-ups and heaps of guitars – the Westway rockers on their epic struggle to transcend punk. By Pat Gilbert. Plus: Charles Shaar Murray remembers Joe Strummer.

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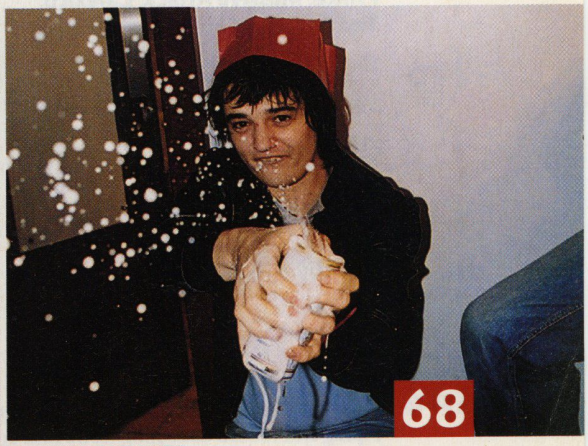

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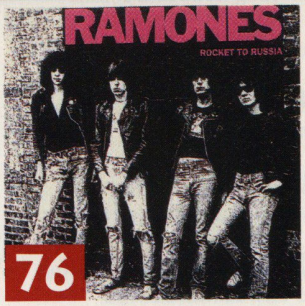

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Top 50 Punk LPs Wot, no Chron Gen? Our count-down of the best albums to make yer nose bleed tells you why.

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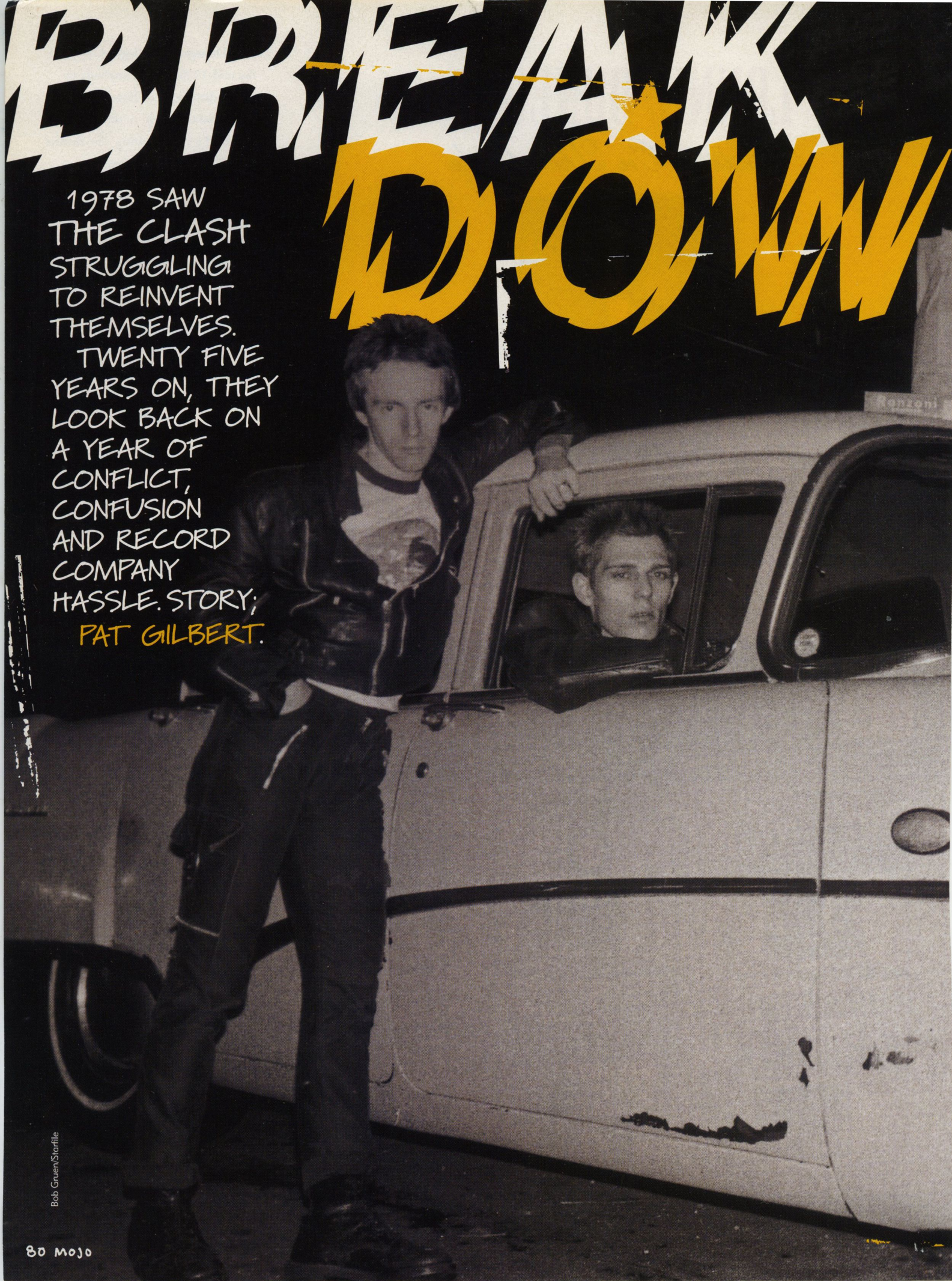
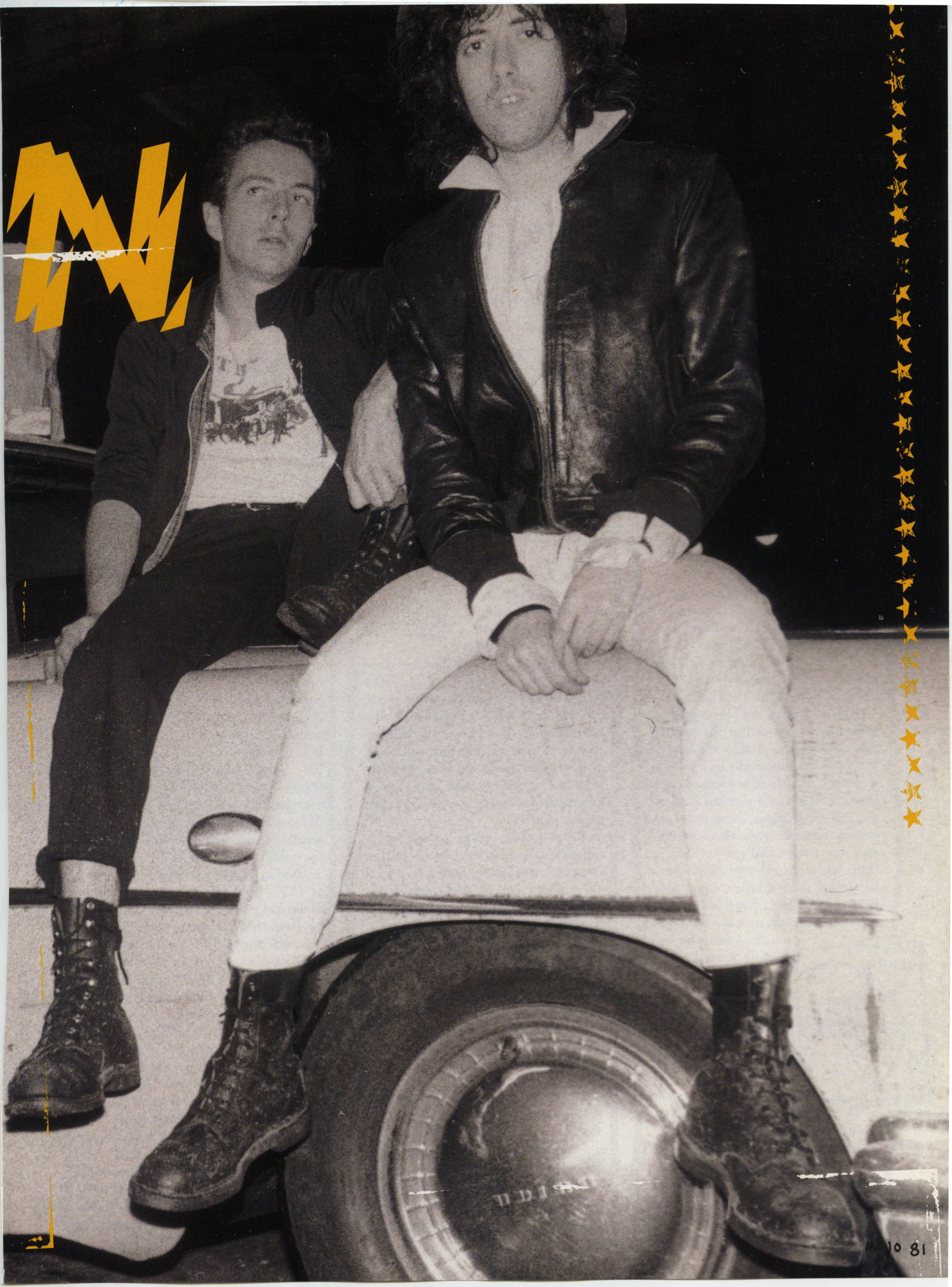
BREAK DOWN

1978 SAW THE CLASH STRUGGLING TO REINVENT THEMSELVES. TWENTY FIVE YEARS ON, THEY LOOK BACK ON A YEAR OF CONFLICT, CONFUSION AND RECORD COMPANY HASSLE. STORY; PAT GILBERT.



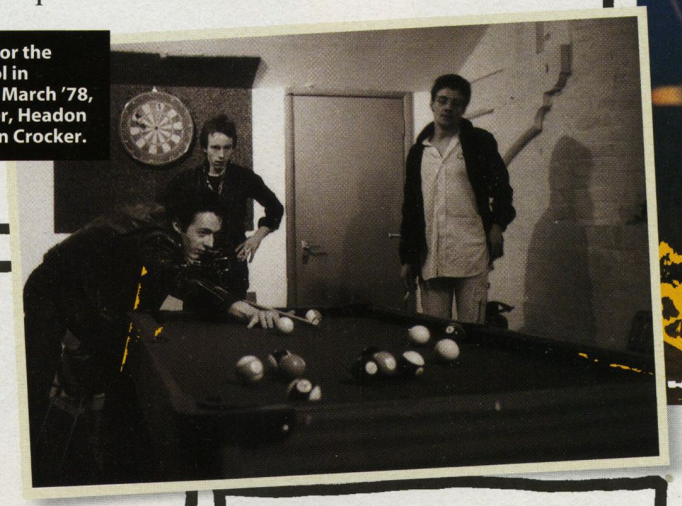
Bob Gruen/Starfile



It was around 7pm when the Manchester crowd smashed in the doors to the city's Elizabethan Hall, covering the foyer carpet with broken glass. The stewards, unable to contain the mob, dialled 999. Britain was in the midst of a firemen's strike, however, and instead of the customary red engines, a fleet of army Green Goddess tenders was dispatched to hose down the rioters. A dozen or so squad cars also raced to the scene, blue lights strafing the wet streets.

It was a damp night in November 1977 and it was beginning to dawn on The Clash just how important and powerful a force punk had become throughout the country.

Taking the stage, The Clash did little to assuage the bellicose mood of the crowd. The gig was being filmed by Granada TV, and after a few numbers Joe Strummer – the consummate punk showman and rebel rouser – asked the audience for quiet. "See those cameras?" he croaked. "You paid for those fucking cameras!" He turned and snarled at a cameraman, at which point the crowd surged forward and covered the stage in a hail of phlegm.



Waiting for the man: pool in Camden, March '78, Strummer, Headon and Robin Crocker.

For at least one individual this experience of British punk rock was proving overwhelmingly exciting. "I thought, Wow, this is so cool!" recalls Sandy Pearlman, Blue Öyster Cult's producer who had travelled over from New York to see the group. The Clash were expecting him. On Pearlman's arrival at the hall, their soundman signalled to Joe. "We'd like to dedicate this next song to Ted Nugent... Aerosmith... Journey..." spat Strummer. "And – most of all – to Blue Öyster Cult!" The Clash then tore into a scorching version of I'm So Bored With The USA.

Unsurprisingly, loud jeers greeted Strummer's roll-call of the leading lights of American AOR – the kind of acts punk was supposedly on a mission to destroy and which, in received punk wisdom, represented everything excessive and self-indulgent about the mainstream music industry. But the audience was unaware that Joe was having a little fun at everybody's expense – including The Clash's own. For Pearlman had been flown over to the gig – on Concorde, no less – for a specific reason: he was in the frame for producing the band's next album. "After seeing that, I was ready to do the project," he enthuses. "I thought such *venom* deserved my personal touch on it. I went backstage and said, I'm up for it. Let's start right away!"

Pearlman would indeed get to produce The Clash's second album, the polished rock monolith that was *Give 'Em Enough Rope*. But it's doubtful he could have predicted just what a momentous struggle the next 12 months would be. *Give 'Em Enough Rope* was the "difficult second album" blown up to epic proportions, an album written from a standing start that never would or could replicate the Zeitgeisty thrill and naïve brilliance of its legendary predecessor, *The Clash*. It was an experience that would see the band wrestling to keep control of their art, and their self-belief, as they found themselves important participants – albeit reluctant ones – in an international industry, as opposed to just a street movement.

In 1978, these pressures from outside and within would see the band's mentor dismissed, Pearlman assaulted by one of the group's entourage, the group almost implode – and Strummer's "metamorphosis into Paul Newman".

But, at the end, they'd become a better, stronger unit for it. "We made a point of always taking the difficult route," says bassist Paul Simonon. "We knew it was easy to use the same formula and be happy. But The Clash was never like that. We were always about pushing forward and doing something interesting."

BY AUTUMN 1977, THE CLASH had become the most important new rock group in Britain. The enforced inactivity of the Sex Pistols, banned from playing most UK venues, had transformed The Clash into punk's chief ambassadors. Under the tutelage of manager Bernie Rhodes, The Clash had brought a strong political dimension to punk that chimed with the mood of unrest in mid-'70s Britain. Asked their position on issues such as racism, housing problems, Northern Ireland and terrorism, Joe, guitarist Mick Jones and Paul Simonon would often exasperate journalists with their hardline punk rhetoric. But the music press loved them – or more accurately loved to spar with them – as did the public. White Riot, their first single, released in March, was a defining anthem of 1977, while their self-titled debut album had peaked at Number 12 and was now being heavily imported into the US.

It was against this backdrop that the band were approached by their label, the American giant CBS, about recording a second album. For the first time, the band had to confront the sticky prospect of a career stretching beyond the self-destructive, revolutionary charge of punk. "Our response was, What do you mean a second album?!" said Strummer. "We weren't ready to make a second album. It took so much out of us to make the first one."

Just how Pearlman came to be chosen to record the follow-up has never fully been explained. With his shoulder-length hair, baseball cap and fascination with technology, the sometime rock journalist

Bruno Blum/Starfile, thanks to Barry Myers, Bob Gruen/Starfile

The Clash on the Get Out Of Control tour, October 1977. Joe with Mick Jones, Paul Simonon and Topper Headon.

STRUMMER: "Our response was, What do you mean second album? It took so much out of us making the first."

and Svengali figure behind Blue Öyster Cult – potentates of hi-tech conceptual rock, notorious for their preoccupation with the occult, sci-fi and Nazism – ostensibly inhabited a universe far from The Clash's world of squats, petty vandalism and amphetamine sulphate. At the time, the idea was as bewildering as having Gus Dudgeon produce *Never Mind The Bollocks*.

It has been widely assumed that CBS wanted to get in a producer who'd make a record that would sell in America – *The Clash* having been denied a US release because of its raw production. Pearlman vehemently denies this was ever part of his brief. Strummer recalled that Bernie Rhodes had merely "selected Sandy Pearlman off a list of producers presented to him by CBS". Mick Jones contends that "we weren't concerned about who did it, because it was going to be great whatever. Producers make a great contribution, but it wasn't Number 1 on our list of things to think about."

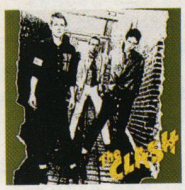
Pearlman: "After Manchester, I met them at CBS in Soho Square. They told me they wanted to record with me and the reason was that they loved the sound of Godzilla and (Don't Fear) The Reaper. I thought it would have been because of The Dictators [San Franciscan new wavers he also produced], but it wasn't."

The Dictators happened to be in town that night. The Clash decided to check them out and set off to the Roundhouse. "After the show they went to see The Dictators privately to make sure they were, you know, certified revolutionaries," recalls Sandy. "It wasn't CBS that hired me, it was The Clash. It wasn't to create an American sound, it was to create an *extreme* sound. And I did. I resent the idea that I lamed them out."

BY THE TIME THE BAND MADE its first public appearance of 1978, at the Anti-Nazi League concert in Victoria Park at the end of April, most of the songs for their new record had been written and rehearsed. The period had not been without its hiccups. In December, CBS had paid for Strummer and guitarist Mick Jones to go on a 10-day "writing trip" to Jamaica. This incurred the wrath of the reggae-obsessed Simonon, who retaliated by going to Moscow and Leningrad with his then girlfriend – and premier punk journalist – Caroline Coon. "I felt really pissed off with the whole situation," says Paul. "When I found out that Joe and Mick had spent most of the time in their hotel, I felt a lot better. I remember saying, Why didn't you get in contact with Lee Perry? [the reggae magus had recorded their third single, Complete Control.] Culturally, they weren't quite there but at least they came back with a great song, Safe European Home, among others." ➢

THE CLASH

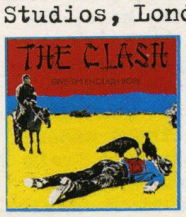
Recorded: CBS, London, February 1977
Released: April 1977 (CBS)
UK: 12 **US:** 100



For all the talk about *Never Mind The Bollocks* being the quintessential punk album, *The Clash* has an arguably greater claim, both in terms of its lo-fi, buzz-saw ambience and its over-arching sense of place: for an instant portrait of pre-Thatcher England, listen to the fury of Career Opportunities, Hate And War and Janie Jones. Best of all is their rockified take on Junior Murvin's Police And Thieves – an apocalyptic view of Kingston, Jamaica, refracted on to '70s London. Mick Jones thinks it's their best album.

GIVE 'EM ENOUGH ROPE

Recorded: Basing Street Studios, London; Automatt, San Francisco
Released: November 1978 (CBS)
UK: 2 **US:** 128



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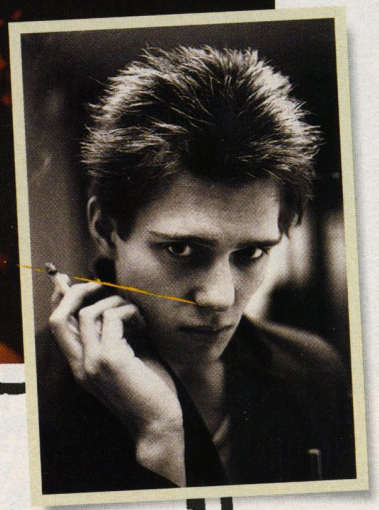


The Chaos Twins: Human Drum Machine Topper Headon and, inset, "mischievous" Simonon.

LONDON CALLING

Recorded: Wessex, London, summer 1979
Released: December 1979 (CBS)
UK: 9 **US:** 27

On which The Clash shred any lingering notion that they are a punk group, and – *à la* the Stones circa *Exile On Main Street* – map out a creditably vast universe. A few examples prove the point: among *London Calling*'s hubbub lurk the spectres of UK rock'n'roller Vince Taylor and Montgomery Clift; the aftershocks of the Conservative victory of 1979; Spanish terrorists and south London outlaws. The fact that Mick Jones can casually drop in a line like "from the Hundred Years War to the Crimea" (on the Spectoresque The Card Cheat) probably says it all. The music is equally diverse, all of it suffused with the passions that were catalysed by producer-cum-guru Guy Stevens. His historic links with Mott The Hoople give some clue as to *London Calling*'s abiding spirit. But if Mott's love of rock myth was couched in terms of fond nostalgia, here, The Clash sound like they're soaking up the past in the manner of revolutionary cadets, aware that you can't alter history without understanding it. Note also Train In Vain: a rare love song that gave The Clash a first US hit.

➤ Back in England, the band began rehearsing intensely throughout January at their Camden Town HQ. The new material – including the tough, four-square rockers Tommy Gun, Safe European Home, Last Gang In Town – quickly took shape. "They were moving with real purpose at this point," remembers their road manager Johnny Green. "Because he'd been away, Paul was upstairs with the headphones on, trying to learn the bass lines." Topper Headon, meanwhile, the drumming whizz who'd been with the band for only nine months, "was working hard and beginning to contribute ideas. The energy levels were right up."

Pearlman flew back to the UK to hear the new songs at specially arranged 'secret' gigs in the Midlands. What happened after one show at Lanchester Poly, near Coventry has become part of Clash mythology. Johnny Green: "Someone had the bright idea of putting Robin Crocker [Mick's old school mate who'd spent time in jail for his part in a stick-up] on the door of the dressing room. Pearlman was trying to get backstage but Robin wouldn't open the door to anyone. So Pearlman pushes the door open and Robin whacks him, and he goes down... blood everywhere..."

Simonon: "Then to make it more dramatic, Mick shouts, 'Oh no! You've hit the producer!'"

Mick: "Bernie was very much the one mopping him up, with a big handkerchief. It was really just par for the course. There was nothing malicious in it and I think [Pearlman] understood that."

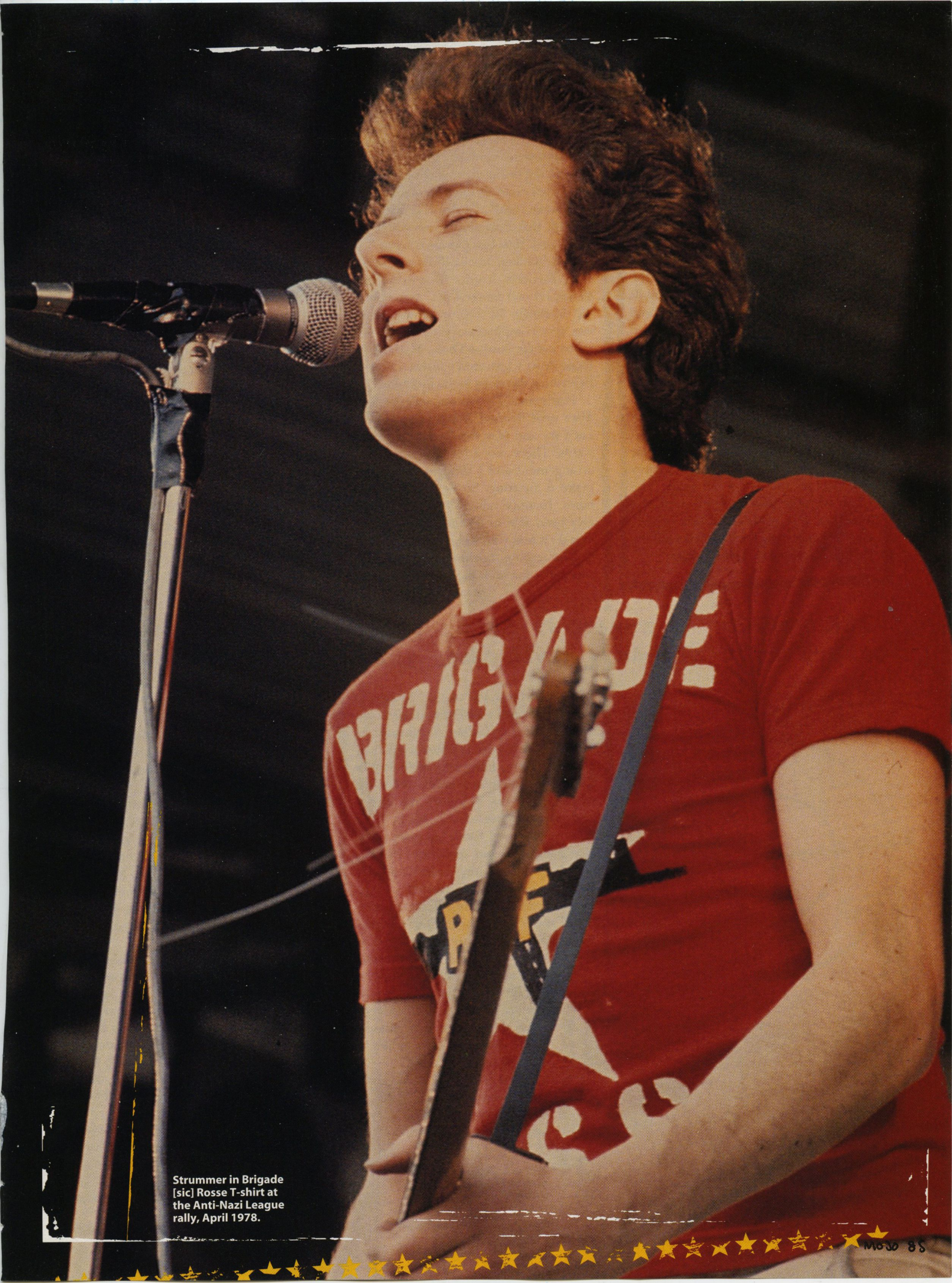
To this day, the misreporting of this incident still riles the producer. "He took a swing at me and I took a swing at him. He cut my cheek. Jones and Strummer were appalled – so was Bernard Rhodes, who thought they'd really fucked up. He thought CBS would think they were all a bunch of idiots. But my nose was not broken and I was not beaten up by The Clash. They were incredibly apologetic."

But the incident was an early indicator that the working relationship between Pearlman and the Clash camp over the next few months was not going to be an easy one...

PROBABLY AS A result of the spitting that was *de rigueur* at punk gigs in 1977 and 1978, Strummer succumbed to hepatitis shortly after the late January dates. As a result, demo sessions for the album at CBS's studio at Whitfield Street in London's West End, where the first album had been recorded, were postponed. While Strummer was treated, Paul, Mick and Topper continued to practise daily at their Camden warehouse. A frustrated Pearlman returned to the States. Sessions didn't start until May, by which time the group had already recorded several tracks on their own: these showed their continuing interest in hybridising reggae, soul and punk, and included (White Man) In Hammersmith Palais and cover versions of Booker T. & The MG's' Time Is Tight and Pressure Drop by Toots & The Maytals. When Pearlman arrived in London he encountered a problem: Paul and Topper were having to report daily to Kentish Town police station, following their arrest for downing some valuable racing pigeons with an air rifle (the notorious Guns On The Roof incident; see MOJO 71). Pearlman booked the band into Utopia studios in nearby Camden, but even then the curse of the rhythm section struck again and they were forced to move on after only hours of recording.

Pearlman: "The engineer I worked with, Corky Stasiak, was a kinda surfer dude, and he introduced the band to American-grade ganga, which they weren't used to. So anyway, on the first night I heard a strange noise coming from outside the studio. I opened the door ➤

Caroline Coon/Camera Press, Repfoto



Strummer in Brigade [sic] Rosse T-shirt at the Anti-Nazi League rally, April 1978.

Mojo 85

and saw that Simonon had upturned an old plant pot and that he and Topper had created a track for his trials bike in the lobby. We knew we wouldn't be welcome there again so we literally recorded the whole set that night and left."

The operation moved on to Basing Street studios (now Sarm West), off the Portobello Road, where that the *Give 'Em Enough Rope* experience began in earnest – a gruelling series of sessions that would continue in various locations until the end of September, and which none of the band to this day recall with enthusiasm. It was a stark contrast to the three weekend sessions at Whitfield Street that spawned *The Clash*.It was clear from the outset that the producer wanted to make a 'sonically perfect' record, and took a meticulous approach. Pearlman insisted that songs were played again and again until they got the perfect take. For a group used to leaping around on-stage and playing their instruments with an overload of energy and passion, this was a tall order. The Clash member who suffered most was Simonon, who, with no musical experience before joining the band, was still the least technically proficient musician.

"It was really laboured," he recalls. Simonon was provided with an expensive, hi-tech WAL bass to play his parts on. "We'd do each song about 50 times." It has long been rumoured that Simonon's bass lines were overdubbed later by Jones – a fact borne out by claims by the road crew that, "one of the jobs was to take Paul home early". Pearlman is adamant, though, that Paul played everything on the record. "His bass playing was fine."

The quickest tracks to be put down were Topper's drums. "It was the first album I'd ever worked on," remembers the drummer. "It was a real buzz. Sandy was very complimentary about me. He called me the Human Drum Machine. In those days, I just didn't make mistakes. Everything was done in the first take."

Pearlman: "Topper was unbelievable. After we'd finished Tommy Gun, I said, Let's try and play the drum part backwards. There was a lot of space in the arrangement and I thought this would make it amazing. So he did it in two takes. Inconceivable! Nobody else has ever been able to do that since. I could only do it now with technology."

The regime, however, soon became wearing – for both parties. Rituals were invented to break the routine. Sandy and Corky developed a fondness for the take-aways from the Indian restaurants in Notting Hill. Topper and Paul would play pool upstairs, hang out with Robin Crocker – soon to be immortalised as the real life Rude Boy in Jones's Stay Free – and generally misbehave. Mick: "The other guys played Sandy up quite a lot. Personally, I can just remember him sitting there all day eating cashew nuts. He said they guarded against cancer."

Johnny Green paints a bleaker picture. "Paul wasn't welcome after a while. Pearlman pretended to have a sense of humour, because all producers want to get on with their subjects and be one of the boys. But he wasn't. The more Paul twigged on to this, the more relentlessly he directed his humour at him."

Even though Joe and Mick were perfectly civil towards the producer, The Clash as a whole treated him with an impish antagonism befitting their anti-authority stance. At one point, they failed to show up for days, having "forgot" to tell Sandy that they were travelling to Paris to play a benefit gig. Pearlman was understandably miffed. Mick won't comment on the subject of their relationship with the producer, other than to say, "He was a nice bloke. He tried to get to us, but at that time we were impenetrable."

Paul observes that Mick was exploiting the experience of being in a top studio to learn the finer points of producing. "Mick was there every minute, looking over Pearlman's shoulder. It was a good learning curve for him to be working with someone so professional. It helped us enormously after that."

Johnny Green: "If there's one thing that sticks in my mind, it's Mick intently watching what they were doing. He was learning what to do, so next time he could do it himself."

JUST HOW "IMPENETRABLE" The Clash were in the early summer of 1978 is a matter of debate. Behind the scenes, the chaos and friction that the group seemed to thrive on was beginning to take its toll. Rhodes, the man who had put together the group in the first place, encouraging them to write about social issues and politics, seemed to be losing his grip. Communication between him and the band was now conducted via go-betweens, and what he had to say to them was getting bizarre.

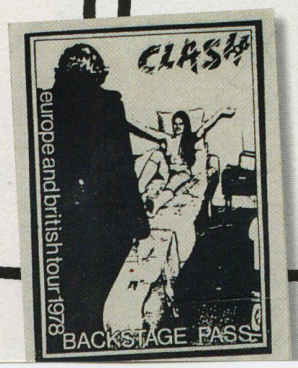
Simonon: "You can't overestimate Bernie's importance in those early days. He didn't write the songs but he set up the agenda. He set up the whole punk scene, basically. He was always pushing; he always seemed antagonistic. But I liked that about him."

Topper: "It got to the point where he never paid me. I said to him one day, Bernie I'm skint. I haven't been paid for three weeks. He said, 'If I was your bank manager would you expect me to live in your wardrobe?' He never made any sense. I would go away, without any cash, totally bemused with what he said.

"Paul was a good artist and Bernie had a bent nose, so Paul did this huge mural [at Clash HQ] where

MICK JONES: "I remember Sandy Pearlman sitting eating cashew nuts all day. Said they guarded against cancer."

Mick enjoys a cuppa with road manager Johnny Green, March 1978.



Barry Myers, Tracks Ltd, Bruno Blum/Starfile, Bob Gruen/Starfile (2)

"Lot of guitars, aren't there?": at the Record Plant, with producer Sandy Pearlman.

Bernie was naked with a similarly bent knob. We put some candles on the mantelpiece below it and kneeled down on the floor, saying, Praise him! Praise him! It was bullying, really. But Paul and I didn't have to do as much as Mick and Joe, so we had loads of time on our hands. And we messed around. If you put two 22-year-olds together with a few bob in their pockets and nothing to do, they'll do silly things."

But Bernie's unorthodox management techniques were having potentially serious repercussions. It is well documented that, around this time, Mick had got into cocaine and was unashamedly living out his teenage rock star fantasies, cutting a dash around town in his long black curly hair and living it up off the Portobello Road in a supposedly 'flash pad'. Jack Hazan, one of the Rude Boy directors and cameramen, remembers Mick turning up at Basing Street wearing a Bruce Springsteen T-shirt, somewhat at odds with Joe's shirts advertising the H-Blocks and Italian terrorists the Brigate Rosse. The band's punk ideology was seemingly in danger of being undermined from within. Paul sums up the problem thus: "Mick's hair was getting longer, Joe's and mine was getting shorter."

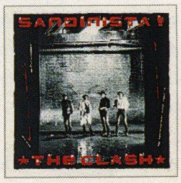
Pearlman: "I turned up to see them rehearse at a place near the 100 Club on Oxford Street and they're all mad at Mick. All of a sudden he's out of the band for a few days. I don't know if that was official or unofficial. Steve Jones from the Sex Pistols was playing guitar. Why is Mick out the band? Maybe it's because he wanted to be Mott The Hoople and the others didn't."

According to Johnny Green, Bernie may deliberately have been trying to undermine Mick's position in the group. Certainly, Steve Jones – at a loose end after the Pistols' split three months earlier – had been turning up at venues on the band's On Parole tour that June to join in the encores of White Riot and Garageland. Mick was apparently "very curious" as to why he was there, though Green surmises there was "no confrontation in the dressing room because the five-piece Clash sounded so powerful".

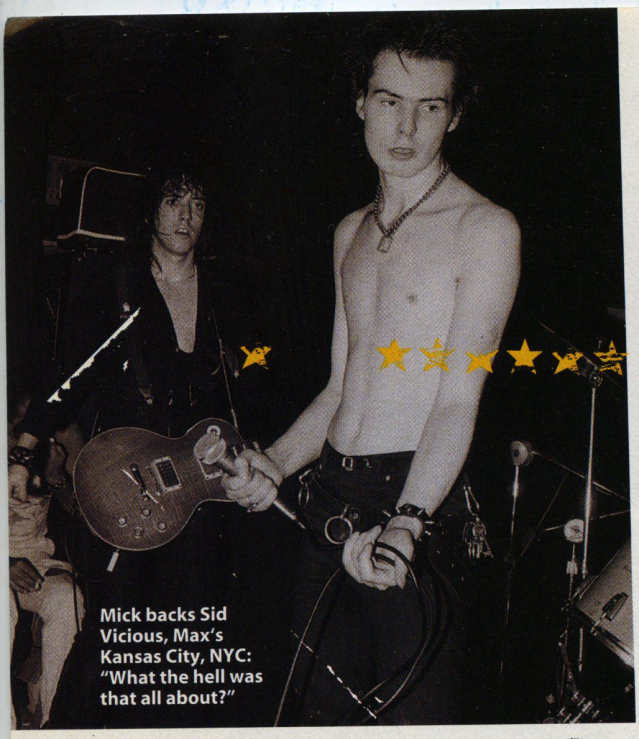
Johnny Green: "Was Mick out the band for a time? You have to be very careful of how you interpret these things. Bernie was always stirring things up, and it is quite likely Steve Jones rehearsed with Joe and Paul, and they *made out* to Pearlman that Mick was out. There were a lot of games ➢

SANDINISTA!

Recorded: Pluto, Manchester; Electric Lady, New York; Channel One, Kingston; Wessex, London, February – September 1980
Released: December 1980 (CBS)
UK: 19 **US:** 24



If *London Calling* was expansive, its successor had the dimensions of a planet. The Clash threw themselves into the tumult of early '80s New York – in particular, the first stirrings of hip hop. Ergo The Magnificent Seven and Ivan Meets GI Joe, whose black American inspirations are melded to The Clash's Jamaican tastes via the likes of One More Time and The Crooked Beat. Given its six sides, 36 tracks and the group's prodigious weed intake, the album got a reputation for being dazed and unfocused. It is, but its borderline lunatic breadth is actually part of is appeal. Think of it as their *White Album*: both flawed and inspired, and testament to minds so supercharged that they didn't know when to stop. On the Westway To The World documentary, Strummer said that he stood by every last note.



Mick backs Sid Vicious, Max's Kansas City, NYC: "What the hell was that all about?"

being played back then. It was a funny time.To my mind, The Clash were still pretty solid at that point."

WEARY OF THE SLOW PROgress at Basing Street, and keen to leave behind the intrusive Rude Boy filming and the distractions created by Bernie, Pearlman arranged to relocate to the Automatt in San Francisco to finish the record. In August 1978, Joe and Mick were flown to California for three weeks of overdubbing. Despite Jones's assertion they were "kidnapped", it was clear that visiting the States for them was not so much entering the lion's den as reaching the Promised Land.

Mick: "We'd always dreamed of going there. We never wanted to be a parochial band. I was lucky because my mum married an American and she used to send me copies of [US rock mags] Rock Scene and Creem. That was my inspiration. It was great to get there."

Once again, Paul and Topper were left behind in London.

Simonon: "Was I bothered? I'd have rather have gone to Jamaica. Anyway, I would have only argued with Mick about the level of the bass."

"We missed the others, definitely," explains Mick. "We were based in Chinatown, and we were having a party. It was like a hangover from the '60s, Country Joe And The Fish were playing... Very early on we made friends with people like Mo Armstrong, the singer of Daddy Long Legs who was a Vietnam Vet. We had a lovely time. The Automatt had a great jukebox with [The Bobby Fuller Four's] I Fought The Law on it and stuff like (Sittin' On) The Dock Of The Bay."

Pearlman: "I arrived from New York to see they'd discovered [the film] National Lampoon's Animal House. They'd already seen it five times and claimed to believe it was a documentary and that John Belushi, aka Bluto Blutarki, was the greatest living American. Mike Bloomfield was playing round the corner and they wanted to meet him. He pretended he knew who they were... so they became visiting dignitaries, ambassadors to the SF punk scene. It was happening there, they'd come to the right place."

For three weeks, Mick and Joe knuckled down to an intense period of guitar overdubs and backing vocals. Mick's guitaring flourished under the hothouse conditions. Sandy would later boast that there are "more guitars per square inch on this record than in anything in the rest of Western civilisation". The critic Greil Marcus, writing a piece for New West, interviewed them at the studio and heard a version of Safe European Home with a guitar riff borrowed from the live version of Sammy Hagar's I've Done Everything For You, all over West Cost radio at the time. Strummer told him: "[Pearlman] has being trying to turn us into Fleetwood Mac for the past six months. I think he gave up last night."

Their exposure to American culture was also having a very distinct sartorial impact on the band.

Pearlman: "Joe had become fascinated with this area called Hayward, which was very blue-collar at that time. He kind of evolved into Hud, the Paul Newman character [from the eponymous film 1963 film about the contemporary West]. He cut his hair. Corky Stasiak was the first one who caught it. He came in and said, 'Dude, you look like Hud!' "

After three weeks, Mick and Joe – exhausted and missing the others – decided to "go on strike". It was agreed that they'd both take off for a week and reconvene in New York, where the final mixing of *Give 'Em Enough Rope* was due to take place at the Record Plant on 321 W44th Street. While Joe headed off on a Kerouac-style road trip across the States with a couple of his new friends, Mick flew down to LA with Sandy to see The Blue Öyster Cult at the Coliseum.

Mick: "We checked in at this airport hotel, and I thought, This is no good! I didn't come to Hollywood to stay in an airport hotel. So I got my bag and checked into the Tropicana. I went to the gig and had a fantastic time. The scene in LA was just starting. We met The Go-Go's, they had a flat in an apartment block where all the punks lived called the Canterbury. It was great."

THE FOLLOWING SATURDAY night, Mick and Joe both arrived in New York – Mick on a plane, Joe in a Ford pick-up. Strummer was enthusing about all the different places he'd seen – including Memphis, the spiritual home of rock'n'roll – and all the colourful characters he met. The next week work began in the small mixing room on the tenth floor of the Record Plant, where Lennon had mixed *Sometime In New York City*. With the air thick with the fug from potent "polio-pot", sourced from local East Coast surfers, the final touches on the album were recorded in a glass-walled vocal booth with panoramic views of Manhattan.

Though Pearlman begged to differ, Joe and Mick were adamant that certain overdubs were required that didn't involve six strings and a cranked up Mesa Boogie amp. These included the honky-tonk piano on Julie's Been Working For The Drug Squad, which was initially laid down by "wild" NY lounge pianist Al Field but later, to Joe and Mick's resigned bemusement, re-recorded by Blue Öyster Cult's Al Lanier. Saxophone on Drug Stabbing Time was provided by Elephant's Memory and Lennon session veteran Stan Bronstein. Jones would later deadpan, "We had a lot of fun watching our album being recorded by session musicians." It was clear by now, though – with thousands of dollars spent in three expensive studios – that there was no going back. *Give 'Em Enough Rope* was a Sandy Pearlman production; and that meant no one was getting out of there until the guitar tracks glistened and the performances were as damn near perfect as they could be.

A brief respite came from a strange corner. One evening at the Warwick hotel, Mick got a call from Sid Vicious's girlfriend Nancy Spungen, asking the guitarist to back Sid – then recently relocated to New York – at a welcoming gig at Max's Kansas City. The other band members for the two shows included various New York Dolls, Heartbreakers and Idols. Mick was reticent but eventually Joe persuaded him."

Mick: "We just about managed five songs. Five songs for five bucks. It was a nightmare between shows, it was full on. Me and Joe kept looking at each other, because we couldn't believe it. The people there were as out of it as you can be without actually being dead. We weren't heavyweight drug guys, we had more than that to share."

Bob Gruen/Starfile, Barry Myers

"They barely got through a verse," remembers photographer Bob Gruen. "Sid was stoned and pathetic. They played for about 20 minutes and Mick looked a bit lost – the band were so lame. There weren't many people there. I remember Mick being mystified and asking, 'What the hell was all that about?'"

It would be a sad premonition of what was to become of many of the people involved in punk who, unlike The Clash, didn't move on.

IN LATE SEPTEMBER, PAUL AND Topper were flown over to New York to hear the final mixes of *Give 'Em Enough Rope*. Mick and Joe, having been separated from their bandmates for nearly two months, excitedly picked them up at the airport. Customs had initially refused to let Paul through, since all he had with him was the cardboard suitcase he kept his records in, but had finally acquiesced.

The record they heard together the next day at the Record Plant was tough, big and loud, a slick but powerful rock album that took in everything from the cauterising blasts of Tommy Gun and Safe European Home to the New Orleansy jive of Julie's Been Working, the rock'n'rolling Last Gang In Town and the nostalgic teen reminiscences of Mick's Stay Free. Those who wanted a reprise of *The Clash* were shocked by the scope and freight of the record, which cranked up Joe's parochial Westway vignettes on the first album to a prophetic vision of international terrorism, Third World poverty and the trials and tribulations of being reluctant rock'n'roll heroes. All with guitar overdubs as thick and sweet as treacle and memorable Strummer ad libs ("Come on, come on! Kentucky Fried Chicken!" etc).

There was, however, no sign of the more rootsy, punky-reggae direction that the glorious (White Man) In Hammersmith Palais had promised on its release as a single earlier that summer.

Give 'Em Enough Rope hit the racks in November 1978, with its artwork poached from a Chinese Communist postcard showing a dead cowboy being picked apart by vultures. The LP reached Number 2 in the UK and Number 128 in the States. Already, though, the group were moving on.

"After we got back from America our look changed," says Simonon. "Johnny Thunders always wore these cool boots and as soon as we got to New York we bought some, at this store called Hudson's. We started growing quiffs and getting that look. Then we started starting working up I Fought The Law into a Clash song..."

The group had made a fine album and the experience of *Give 'Em Enough Rope* had helped them realise where they really wanted to go – back to their pre-punk roots, into soul and jazz, reggae and ska, R&B and rock'n'roll. To the musical heart of America and Jamaica, via the buzzing streets of west London. Mick even took a trip to the barber's, his first in two years.

FOUR MONTHS LATER, ON February 2, 1979, The Clash began their first tour of the US. On board the bus was Caroline Coon, acting as caretaker manager, the band having got fed up with Bernie and sacked him on their return from the States. As they drifted off to sleep en route to San Francisco, the news came through from New York that Sid Vicious had died of an overdose. It was the end of an era. The end of punk. And the beginning of a whole new phase. The tribulations of the previous year, the interminable recording sessions, the fractious relationships between band members, Bernie's mind-games – all of these had somehow made the band stronger and better. The Clash had a new sense of purpose, and within a year they would have unleashed their next album – the genre-mixing double album and career highlight, *London Calling*.

Rejuvenated, rock'n'roll Clash prepare to cross the Canadian border into the USA, February 2, 1979.

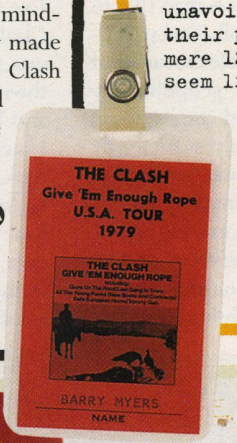
COMBAT ROCK

Recorded: Electric Lady, New York, October 1981 – January 1982
Released: May 1982 (CBS)
UK: 2 **US:** 7

The classic line-up's last hurrah, prepared for release during downtime on the Australasian tour that finished them off. Here, *Sandinista*'s abiding aesthetic – roughly, the notion of an international, urban rock music – is fine-honed to the extent that, on the back of the majestic Rock The Casbah, The Clash managed to break into the American Top 10. That song, along with Know Your Rights, Car Jamming and Straight To Hell proves that their talents remained intact, but a good third of *Combat Rock* rings hollow. In particular, Red Angel Dragnet's attempt to evoke Taxi Driver is emblematic of one of their Achilles heels: if you seek to capture the spirit of everywhere you visit, you'll occasionally come off sounding like a tourist.

One of its other drawbacks was unavoidable: in the wake of their previous two albums, a mere 12-tracker would always seem like short measure. But financially *Combat Rock* was their most successful album, the receipts belatedly swelled in 1991 by the Levi's-sponsored ubiquity of Should I Stay Or Should I Go.

Album summaries by John Harris



COMRADE, GOODBYE★

CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY PAYS TRIBUTE TO JOE STRUMMER.

SOMETIME IN 1979, I WAS interviewing Joe Strummer for the NME in the Worlds End pub on the King's Road. As well as giving me an update on all things Clashwise in the run-up to *London Calling*, Joe was getting, as was his wont, all geopolitical on my ass.

"There's only 10,000 days' worth of oil left," he declared in those distinctively gravelled tones. "What does that mean?" I asked. "Only 10,000 days to discover an alternative energy source?" "Nahhhhh," he grinned back. "Only 10,000 days to play rock'n'roll."

Do the maths: 10,000 days from 1979 breaks down into a little over 27 years. Joe ended up with a few years less than that to play the rest of his rock'n'roll. That particular remark was memorable because of what it revealed about Joe: geopolitically suss enough to be informed about the oil crisis, while simultaneously sufficiently committed to the Big Rock and the Big Roll to want to spend whatever time remains for our so-called civilisation on making music.

The contradiction at the heart of The Clash was, ultimately, the contradiction at the heart of Joe Strummer. He longed for his band to be the biggest, flashest, craziest, most powerful full-on rock'n'roll experience in the world; at the same time, he wanted The Clash to be the voice of the global underdog and a positive force for good in the world. The conflicting imperatives of flashy success and collective personal integrity have pulled apart many bands, but never a better one.

"When I think of The Clash, I think of Paul Simonon slamming the bass," Joe told me over armagnac with Guinness chasers and mondo weed one 1999 night in Dublin after an early Mescaleros gig. "I've seen 10,000 bass players using the same moves, and when all's said and done about the songs and the lyrics, I always think of Paul Simonon smashing that thing around. And that says it all. I'd like to think The Clash were revolutionaries, but we loved a bit of posing as well.

"We were revolutionaries on behalf of punk rock. It was pretty dark in '74, '75. It all seems grey when you look back: I think of it in black and white. There was no MTV, no radio – it was quite a hard job to break it in America, and we did it by playing every shithole between Kitchener, Ontario, and the Everglades. Now it's all fucking business. We may as well be in the business of making cheap plastic clips that they hang curtains off of. That's what rock'n'roll really is."

Except that once upon a time it wasn't. One of the greatest rock'n'roll experiences I've ever had in my life was attending a Clash show in New York in early 1980. I was at the side of the stage watching from the wings, standing between Joey Ramone and David Bowie, when The Clash played Hammersmith Palais and London Calling back-to-back, and I was so giddily caught up in the transcendent emotional and sensual power of the moment that I didn't even say hello to Bowie or Joey. The Clash – in their classic incarnation of Strummer, Mick Jones, Paul Simonon and Topper Headon – could do that to a person.

That night in Dublin, I asked Joe what was the worst mistake he ever made. He replied, "Could I have two for the price of one? Firstly, to fire Topper Headon, and secondly, to fire Mick Jones." What he'd realised, too late, was that The Clash was one of those Perfect Groups in which no-one could be replaced without ineradicably altering the nature of the beast.

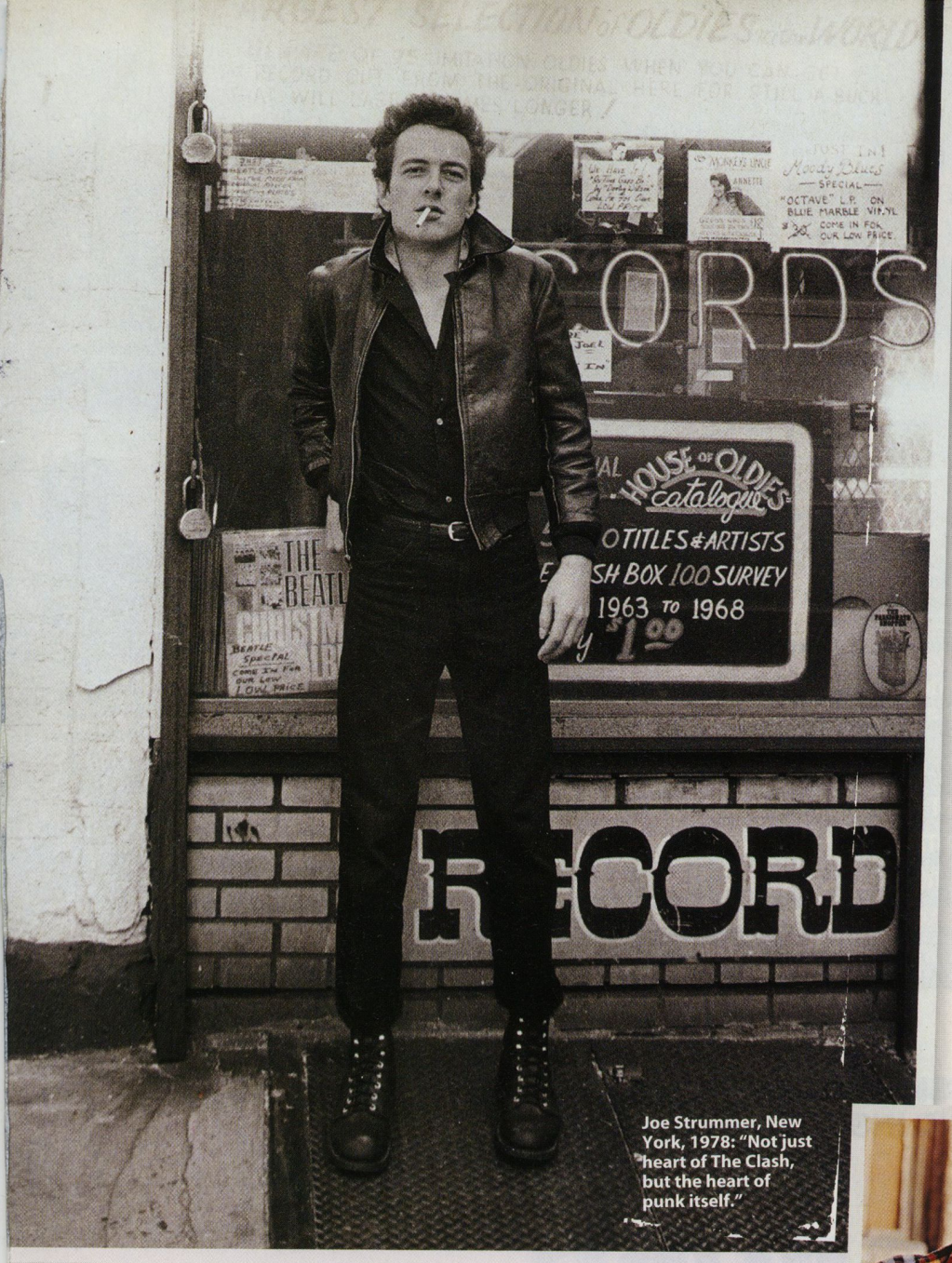
It was a massive loss to rock that the Perfect Clash ended up clashing: Mick had gone into diva mode and Joe, meanwhile, was turning, under the influence of manager Bernard Rhodes, into Joe Stalin.

"The five years, from '77 to '82," said Joe, "were very intense. Yak-yak-yak, nonstop yak. I didn't have any more to say, because we'd done eight slabs of long-playing vinyl inside a five-year period, and that's a lot of yakking for one man to do in terms of lyric-writing, as opposed to gassing on generally. So I think it was pretty cool of me to shut up for a bit. I was exhausted: mentally, physically, every which way, you know?"

THE CLASH'S IDEALISM, THEIR passion and the extraordinary response they elicited from audiences made them a tasty morsel for left groups to try to snap up. Fortunately, an acute sense of rock'n'roll maverickosity kept The Clash and the left from getting too closely intertwined. "When they saw that we were making hay, the SWP tried to jump on the bandwagon. We didn't rebuff their overtures: we just didn't respond to them. We were just going, Fuck off, man! Smoke a bloody joint! We were into getting the Rizlas out and playing Chuck Berry riffs! I'm more of a Merry Prankster type than a committed – anything."

And simultaneously, Joe's left-anarchist politics meant that The Clash would, eventually, have to step off the rock'n'roller-coaster. "The other thing was supporting The Who for eight shows on the *Combat Rock* tour, and it was like seeing us in 20 years' time. I didn't want to be the new boss, same as the old boss, and I couldn't see any way around it because no matter what you think you are or how well you think you think, once you're on that huge circuit, your whole life is like 'come and do that phone interview' or 'do a video standing on that building' or 'do a gig' – you're not living any life that can relate to anyone else's life. I've never envied U2. I often thought, Thank God we didn't have to do that, because I wanted to be a person." Needless to say, he succeeded brilliantly.

What do I remember most strongly about Joe Strummer the person? His 'Joe Public' humanity. His warmth. His sense of humour. His speaking voice, slurred and phlegmy even when entirely sober. His infectious smile, particularly before he got his spectacularly speed-rotted teeth fixed.



Joe Strummer, New York, 1978: "Not just heart of The Clash, but the heart of punk itself."

Joe Stevens

His intensity and utter conviction, even (sometimes especially!) when totally wrong. His ability to be both eminently reasonable and completely unreasonable while remaining totally true to himself in either mode. Tony Parsons referred, in one of his early Clash pieces for the NME, to the "savage warmth at the heart of the New Wave", and there was no better exemplar of that "savage warmth" than Joe Strummer, not simply the heart of The Clash, but the heart of punk itself. The older, wiser, mellower Joe who returned with The Mescaleros in 1999 demonstrated that that heart was still beating. Until, one day, it stopped.

On the day of his funeral, the skies opened over the Westway. It seemed only appropriate as the sound of White Man In Hammersmith Palais (Joe's own favourite of his Clash songbook) fought the weather head-on while former bandmates, family members, contemporaries like Chrissie Hynde, Glen Matlock, Patti Palladin and Nicky Tesco turned up to pay their respects. The Fire Brigade Union, for whom Joe and Mick Jones had played together at a recent benefit concert, provided a guard of honour, the flags of many nations flew above the doors of the West London crematorium, Keith Allen read the lyrics from Joe's last song, Joe Ely and Jim Jarmusch flew in from the US and Courtney Love provided a moment of pure farce by throwing herself on the sticker-bedecked coffin as if someone entirely different was inside it.

So farewell then, Comrade Strumski. Go straight to heaven, boy. Your name's on the door. Walk right in.

STRAIGHT TO HEAVEN

"He was like an older brother or father figure to me. I painted a picture of Joe on my bedroom wall so, from the ages of 14 to 19 until I moved out, Joe watched over me as I slept. When my dad redecorated he tore that piece off the wallpaper and I still have it. I listened to that first Clash album more than any other. I can't imagine what things would have been like without it."
JOHN SQUIRE

"He was my first hero. I was 15 and starting to write songs with Nick (Wire). We saw The Clash on TV playing What's My Name and Garageland and they seemed so vital, brutal and intelligent. He didn't seem to have a switch off button when he was on stage, it was like a religious fervour. I admired him for that."
JAMES DEAN BRADFIELD, THE MANIC STREET PREACHERS

"I remember seeing him in 1977 and he changed my outlook on the world. While that whole rebel rock stance could be a pose, he was bringing it back to a genuinely radical idea. Right to the end he held on to his ideals, playing a fire fighters benefit just before he died. We really need people like Joe in the world."
BILLY BRAGG

"I'll never forget seeing him on-stage for the first time. This explosion of energy singing these great songs. He had a vision. He wasn't afraid to speak out against racism, poverty and unemployment. He had the courage to listen to those around him. He was warm, passionate and committed in everything he did. I am so happy I got to spend time with a man with such a big heart."
JOE ELY

"Joe was one of the most gracious men I have ever met, a romantic, a rebel and a really great storyteller – pure charisma. Listening to The Clash made me feel invincible. Good music can do that! Joe was a musical innovator and he will be sadly missed. I am seriously gutted."
TIM BURGESS