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Contents



# Are we rolling?

"The Sam Peckinpah of rock'n'roll", Warren Zevon

A NUMBER OF THOUGHTFUL readers have written recently to remind me it will be the 10th anniversary in September of Warren Zevon's death, not that I was likely to forget. I came slowly to his music, but then fell hard for it, Warren quickly occupying a high-ranking place in my personal pantheon, up there with the more frequently acknowledged greats of American songwriting.

I actually have Peter Buck to thank for turning me on to him. In June 1985, I was in Athens to interview REM for a *Melody Maker* cover story, ahead of the release of *Fables Of The Reconstruction*. We were at a night shoot for a video the band were filming for "Can't Get There From Here". It was about 3am. Michael Stipe was asleep in a ditch. The film crew were packing up their gear. Mike Mills and Bill Berry had just split. Buck, meanwhile, was knocking back a beer and telling me, among other things, that in a couple of days, he, Bill and Mike would be on their way to Los Angeles to record an album with a singer-songwriter named Warren Zevon, who at the time was managed by an old college friend of Peter's, Andrew Slater.

Warren Zevon! I was frankly shocked. At the time, Zevon for me was part of a discredited West Coast culture of cocaine and excess, self-regarding balladry and narcissistic wimpery, the kind of bollocks punk was meant to have killed off. I had a vague memory of seeing him, perhaps 10 years earlier, supporting Jackson Browne at London's New Victoria Theatre. The only song I really knew of his was "Werewolves Of London", which I took to be a novelty number.

Anyway, Peter listened to me rant and listens some more when I start ranting again, getting a second wind after becoming momentarily breathless.

"Allan," Buck said then. "Just listen to the fucking records and get back to me."

I told him I would and eventually did. Back in London, I began to track down Zevon's back catalogue. There wasn't much of it – just six albums at the time since his 1969 debut, *Wanted Dead Or Alive*. It took a few weeks but I found copies of *Warren Zevon* (1976), *Excitable Boy* (1978), *Bad Luck Streak In Dancing School* (1980) and *The Envoy* (1982). There was no sign anywhere, however, of his 1980 live album, *Stand In The Fire*, which I eventually discover, years later, in a second-hand store on Polk Street in San Francisco.

What I heard fair blew my mind. I had been expecting the winsome warbling of some flaxen-haired minstrel, and here was this apparent cross between Randy Newman and Lee Marvin – a sardonic songwriting genius with a legendary taste for vodka, guns and drugs. His talent, I discovered, was matched only by a capacity for self-destruction that had provoked one critic to describe him as "the Sam Peckinpah of rock'n'roll", and it didn't take long to find out why. Spread across those four albums were some of the most amazing songs I'd ever heard – toxic epics about headless machine-gunners, mercenaries, murder, Mexican revolutionaries, rough sex, rape, necrophilia, Elvis, baseball, heroin, heartbreak, incestuous hillbillies and hard-drinking losers.

I was hooked on them, as I would be on the albums that followed – among them the record he'd made with REM, one of his best, *Sentimental Hygiene*. There was a period when he didn't record, but he was prolific towards the end, even making his masterpiece, *The Wind*, as he was dying.

The only time I met him was in September 1992, after a fantastic show at The Town & Country in Kentish Town. We made small talk in a dimly lit backstage corridor, Warren as well groomed as a Mafia don, politely listening to my fanboy blather. I mentioned that my wife, Stephanie, also a fan, had been looking forward to seeing him, but was ill at home. Would he sign something for her?

"Let's do it," he said. I gave him my ticket. He held it against the wall and started writing.

"Is it terminal?" he asked.

What?

"Your wife is ill," he reminded me. "Has she got anything terminal?"

Uh, no... Why?

"Because I was just about to write 'Get well soon', and I didn't want to sound facetious," he said, and with an unforgettable smile and a brisk handshake he was gone.

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# 'THE CLASH LIVE ON!'

**Story:** Allan Jones
**Photo:** Pennie Smith

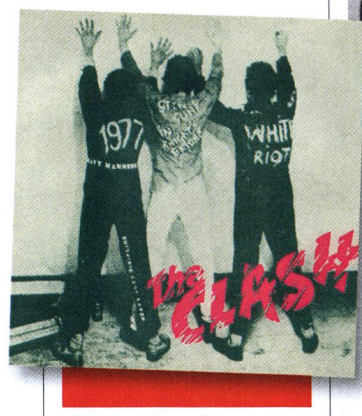
"Being in The Clash," says Mick Jones, "was a defining moment in our lives, and I'd be lying if I said I'd gotten over it." Now, though, Jones, Paul Simonon and Topper Headon have curated The Clash's music for a new boxset, and reunited to talk about their exhilarating and exhausting time in a group that changed the lives of millions. Nothing is off limits – not even the awkward business of Jones' sacking. Give 'em enough rope...

THE LAST TIME I was in a room smaller than Brixton Academy with The Clash, we were in an all-night diner in Washington DC, where at four in the morning Joe Strummer was trying to persuade the rest of the band to join us on a trip to the White House. It was February, 1979. The Clash were just over a week into their first American tour, newly arrived in DC after a harrowing overnight drive from Cleveland through one of the worst blizzards in local memory.

Punk with a passion: Joe Strummer, Royal College Of Art, November 5, 1976

More than 30 years later, Strummer dead since 2002, two of the surviving members of The Clash are grappling with menus not much smaller than a broadsheet newspaper in the plush restaurant of a private member's club near Marble Arch. The third is on his way to join us to talk about *Sound System*, a new boxset that collects the band's first five albums plus three discs of rare and unreleased material and houses them in a box designed to look like a vintage boom-box stereo. It's astonishing to think all this music was made in just five intense years of relentless creativity that produced 16 sides of long playing vinyl and 17 singles during a time the band toured virtually without a break.

"It's an incredible legacy – double albums, triples, tons of singles. We were out there on our own. No-one else was doing anything like it," Topper Headon tells *Uncut*, while Mick Jones scans his menu. Topper at 58 looks as fit as a butcher's dog. After the many unhappy years that followed his enforced departure from The Clash in 1982 – including a long period of heroin addiction and a spell in prison – he's trim enough to still fit the clothes he was wearing that night in Washington, which can't be said of the rest of us. "The boxset is an amazing thing. I'm so proud of it. I mean – what a legacy to leave behind. Some of this stuff is 30, 35 years old – which is unbelievable in itself – and still sound incredible. We had something that few bands have and that's why the music still stands up and still deserves to be heard. It's all as relevant today as it was when we made the original records."



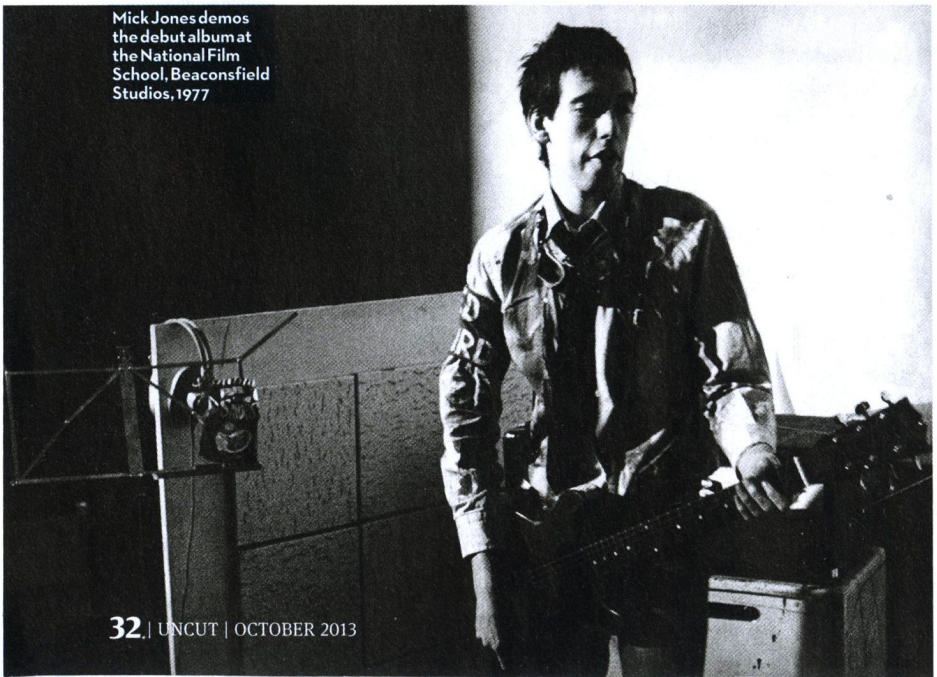

"The Clash stood for personal politics not party politics..." *Paul Simonon*

Mick Jones, meanwhile, is wondering whether to have the watercress velouté, whatever that is, for lunch. At 58, Mick is not quite the snake-hipped rock god of yore, cutting a somewhat jollier figure these days and as disarmingly charming as ever, what's left of his hair swept back from the top of his head. He's often to be seen crisply turned out in pin-stripe suits and matching accessories. Today's he rather more casually dressed and has the slightly crumpled look of someone who's fallen asleep on a couch watching the Landscape Channel. He has the raffish air of a venerable actor, popular on TV chat shows for his hilariously indiscreet yarns of thespian wassailing, lost weekends spent quaffing and carousing with legendary hell-raisers from another time, Burton, O'Toole or Richard Harris. In another light, while we're at it, he might remind you of an old-school football manager from the days of sheepskin coats, un-tipped cigarettes and car-park bungs.

Mick seems about to make a decision about the watercress when there's a bit of a commotion and he and Topper are suddenly on their feet. Paul Simonon's belated arrival is a cause for much hugging, back-slapping and good-to-see-you laughter. The same age as Mick and Topper, Paul, like Mick, is no longer the lanky leather-clad colt of the band's charismatic heyday when he would often smoulder in photographs in the manner of a particularly moody young method actor, someone posing with a cigarette dangling from pouting lips. This afternoon, he's dressed in black jacket, shirt, trousers and boots, a small straw hat quickly removed to reveal thinning hair cut brutally short. He looks like he's stomped across a field to get here.

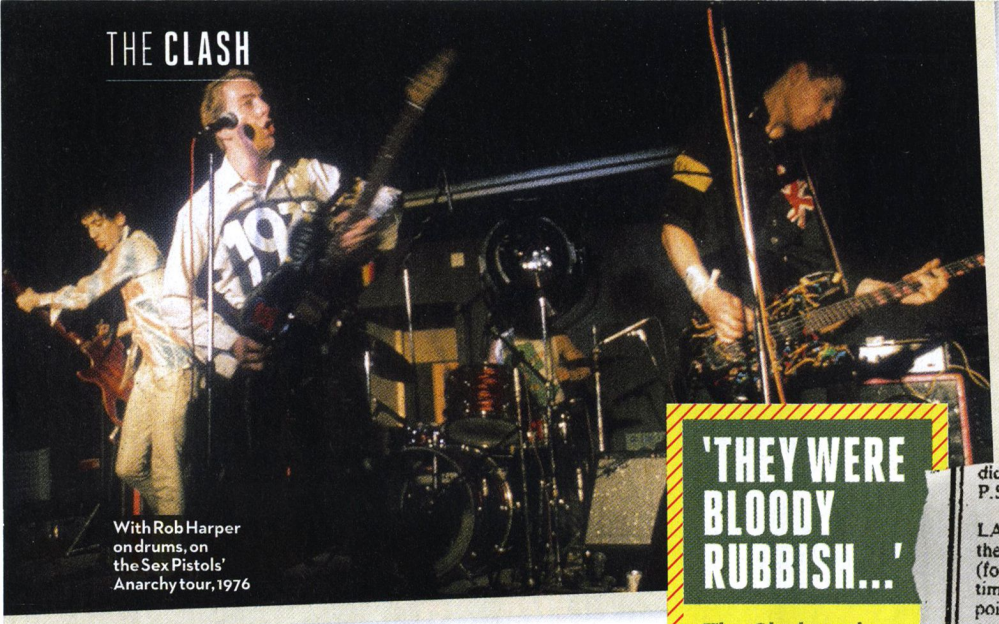
THE THREE OF them settle down, Paul looking at the menu and wondering if they've got egg and chips, which makes Mick laugh. I'm given to wonder if the three of them are often in touch. "We are now," Mick says, which suggests that previously they weren't.

"What Mick means is that we always were in contact," Paul says. "It was just that over the years things between us became disjointed. The communication hasn't always been there. More recently, it's been quite good with me and Mick because we've been working together with Damon [Albarn] and did that whole Gorillaz tour. But it's only recently, since we started work on the boxset, that Topper's got a lot more involved. I don't know why," he says, looking at Topper.


Mick Jones demos the debut album at the National Film School, Beaconsfield Studios, 1977

PETER M COOK; PENNIE SMITH; SHEILA ROCK

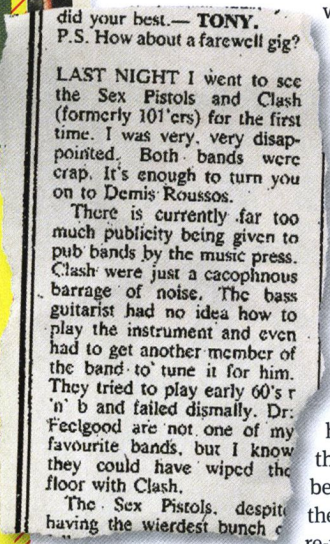

At Rehearsals Rehearsals, Camden, 1976



With Rob Harper on drums, on the Sex Pistols' Anarchy tour, 1976

## 'THEY WERE BLOODY RUBBISH...'

**The Clash made their debut on July 4, 1976, opening for the Sex Pistols at the Black Swan in Sheffield**



did your best.— TONY.
P.S. How about a farewell gig?

LAST NIGHT I went to see the Sex Pistols and Clash (formerly 101'ers) for the first time. I was very, very disappointed. Both bands were crap. It's enough to turn you on to Demis Roussos.

There is currently far too much publicity being given to pub bands by the music press. Clash were just a cacophnous barrage of noise. The bass guitarist had no idea how to play the instrument and even had to get another member of the band to tune it for him. They tried to play early 60's r 'n' b and failed dismally. Dr: Feelgood are not one of my favourite bands, but I know they could have wiped the floor with Clash.

The Sex Pistols, despite having the wierdest bunch c

**"WE GOT OUR first mention on the letters page of *NME* after that," Mick Jones recalls. "I was thrilled! Someone [Reg Cliff] wrote in saying, 'I've just seen this group, The Clash, in Sheffield and they were bloody rubbish.' I was still thrilled."**

**"The letter said Dr Feelgood could have wiped the floor with them," Paul Simonon says, "and then it said the bass player even had to get the guitarist to tune his bass onstage, during the show. That was true enough. I barely had a clue."**

"Where the hell have you *been*?"

"I have to put my hands up," Topper says. "It was mainly my own fault that I hadn't been involved in whatever was happening. In fact, it was *all* my own fault. I fucked up and had to leave the band. It was no-one else's fault that I got into cocaine and heroin. But working on this with Mick and Paul has been brilliant and now we talk a lot. When we signed to Eleven Management [*Damon's management company*] a few years ago, I met up with them and we talked about the boxset and what we wanted to include and what we didn't."

How long have they been working on this?

"Three bloody years," Paul sighs, as if he hasn't had a day off since the idea came up, although it was Mick who put in the studio hours.

"I listened to everything we ever did." Mick looks wan with weariness at the memory. "I got all the CDs and listened to them, and all the tapes, to see what we had and what we could do with them. Did we want to put out everything we ever did, find a place for everything, all the odds and sods, bits and pieces? Just pile it all on? That didn't seem to me like the way to do it. There's been a trend over recent years especially with boxsets and legacy editions to pile on so many extras they become overdone. And they're usually not much cop, to be honest. I mean, how many alternative versions do you need of one song? Who needs like 27 takes? This is much more about the recorded works of The Clash, our musical legacy, rather than a collection of off-cuts, outtakes, rehearsal tapes, things we never put out, and usually for a good reason. You're missing the point of this boxset if you moan about the fact it isn't full of stuff like that.

"The main thing for me," continues Mick, with the concern of a conservationist, "was to save the music. All the re-mastering was done off the original tapes. Some of them were close to rotting – the older ones, the ones that hadn't been stored properly. If we hadn't gone back to them now, they would have deteriorated to the point where if we'd left it much longer there would have been nothing to work with at all.

"It seemed important to me that what we did should be preserved," he adds. "The music, especially, which is the point of it all. What this boxset does in a way is carry the name of The Clash forward, you know? So The Clash and what we did lives on, you know? It was also a way of bringing Joe with us as well, as his words are so strong, so powerful. They live on. We never thought when we started out that what we'd do would end up having such significance, but that's what happened, and that's something else the boxset celebrates.

"The main thing was to be able to hear the music in the best form it's ever been heard. And this is as close to the original tapes as we've been able to come, because of the incredible advances in re-mastering technology. I compare it to watching in HD. Clarity is everything. Once you've seen something in HD you don't really want to see it in any other format, unless you're perverse. Have you seen *Casino* in HD? It's incredible. It's like standing on the set, watching the action take place around you – it's just so detailed and the colour is amazing. I wanted to do a similar thing with these re-masters, make them as clear as I could and change the way you listen to them."

What was it like listening to, say, the first album again?

"Pretty cool, actually," Mick reveals. "At the same time, I felt a bit removed from it to be honest with you. It's all so long ago now and I kind of look back on it in retrospect as a fan as much as anything. And I followed the band's story through the music, rather than the mythology that sometimes surrounds the history of The Clash."

How large does the legend of The Clash continue to loom in your lives? It's been 30 years since you split, but has there been a defining experience in your lives since to match it?

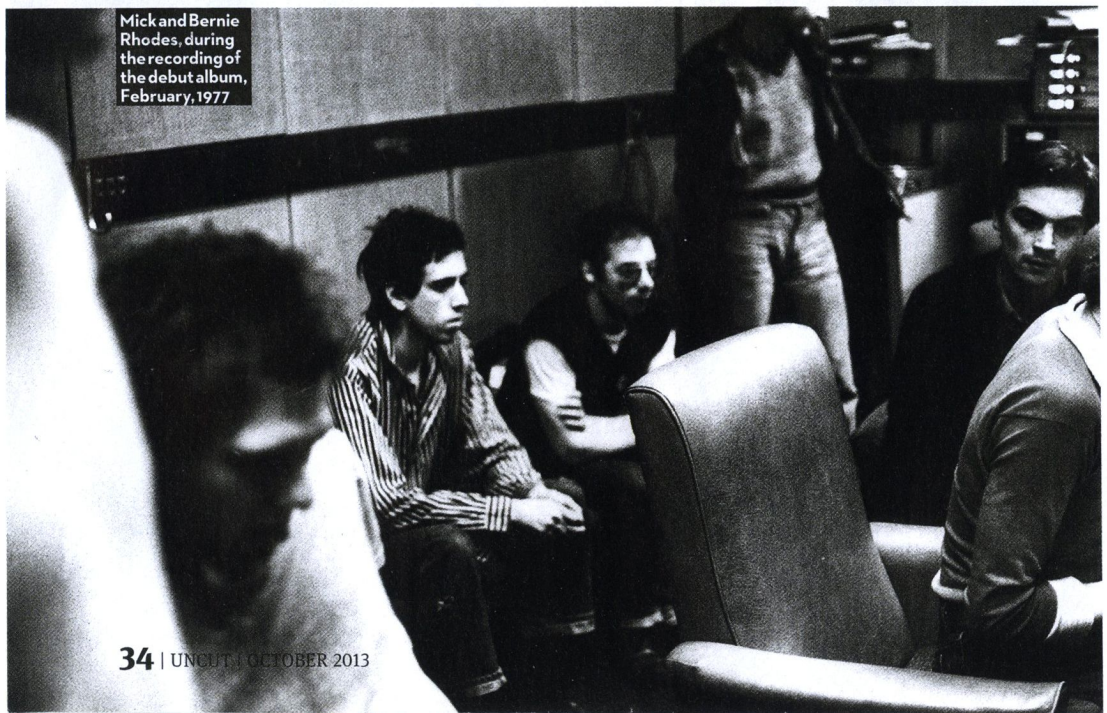
"None," says Mick. "There's been nothing like it. Being in The Clash was obviously a defining moment in our lives and I'd be lying if I said I'd gotten over it."

"Personally, I find it easy to put something behind me and move on. I can shake off sentimental attachments," Paul says. "I'm only reminded of The Clash when things like this boxset come up or someone puts in a request to use one of the songs for a commercial or whatever. Other than that, it's behind me, really."

"The Clash was a fantastic thing to have been part of, but it was 30 years ago," Topper says.

Are your feelings about The Clash coloured by the way it ended for you?

"Not really, no," he says. "It was my fault it ended the way it did, there's no blame attached to anyone else. I'm just grateful for the fantastic memories I have. At the same time, the experience was so intense it



Mick and Bernie Rhodes, during the recording of the debut album, February, 1977

RAYSTEVENSON/REX FEATURES; CAROLINE COON/CAMERA PRESS

ALTERNATIVE ULSTER

# 'IT WAS A WAR ZONE...'

## Paul Simonon on an ill-fated trip to Belfast

IN OCTOBER 1977, The Clash were photographed on the streets of Belfast, posing moodily in a ton of leather with British troops and the Ulster Constabulary lurking nearby. The band were duly castigated for turning a bitter conflict into a photoshoot.

"The whole thing about us going to Northern Ireland is a good example of our intentions being misconstrued," Paul Simonon insists. "The reason we went there wasn't for a photo session with some soldiers on the Falls Road with us going, 'Oh, look at us! We're in this tough place.' We were there because we were trying to encourage more bands to go over and do some bloody shows. It was more like, 'We're here, come over and do some shows.' No bands had gone over there for ages because some Irish show bands had actually been assassinated. But we wanted to go there because we'd play anywhere anyone wanted us and we hoped other bands would follow. We didn't set out to romanticise what was going on there. It was a war zone. We were bloody scared to be there. Standing on the Falls Road or standing outside Long Kesh, it was scary shit. What was amazing was that when we did do a show there, there were Catholics and Protestants in the same hall, enjoying the same band. That's not a bad thing, is it?"

couldn't have lasted much longer anyway. The Clash had to explode or implode or whatever. I'm totally surprised it lasted as long as it did.

"It was always, 'Bloody hell! We've made it through another week.' And then we'd make it through."

What was the extent of your ambition then?

"From the beginning," says Paul, "it was like there was no point in being in a band if we were going to be ordinary because that's just being in a band for the sake of being in a band. There has to be more to it than that. In our case it was to match and go beyond the bands who'd come before us, reach the same heights but on our own terms."

Topper: "There was a great naïvety about The Clash. We wanted to be the biggest band in the world, but there were conditions. We weren't going to play seated stadiums. We weren't going to do this and we weren't going to do that. We're going to do a double album. We're going to do a *triple* album. We're going to be the biggest band in the world but we won't do anything that will make that easy. In fact, we're going to make ourselves a pain in the arse. You had all these other groups who also wanted to be the biggest band in the world and they'd do anything the record company told them if they thought it would bring them the success they were so desperate for. We'd go on these fantastic tours with fantastic support acts and we'd still find a way to piss off the record company. We couldn't do it like all those other bands."

"That's why we were The Clash," says Paul.

And what were Mick's ambitions?

"I just wanted to be in a band," he says. "I grew up in a time when that's what *everybody* wanted. But I was a lot more serious about it than a lot of people. I studied every band I went to see. I studied every band that came before us. I studied their songs, how they were arranged. I analysed everything about them. What they sounded like. What they wore. I'd check out all their moves. Whatever looked or sounded great, I'd nick."


"I followed the story of The Clash through the music, not the mythology" *Mick Jones*


"Pete Townshend and Wilko from Dr Feelgood were the ones who were really great onstage," admits Paul. "That's what I wanted to be like. That was a bit difficult though because you're supposed to have a guitar to do all that stuff. That's why I didn't really want the job of being the bass player. Because if you were the bass player you were the one who stands in the back like John Entwistle or Bill Wyman. I didn't want the job of standing in the back, so I pretended I was playing Mick's parts."

When you went into the studio to record the first album, how ready were you?

Paul: "We were as absolutely ready as we would ever have been."

Mick: "We were just desperate to get on with it. We'd been waiting long enough for the chance."

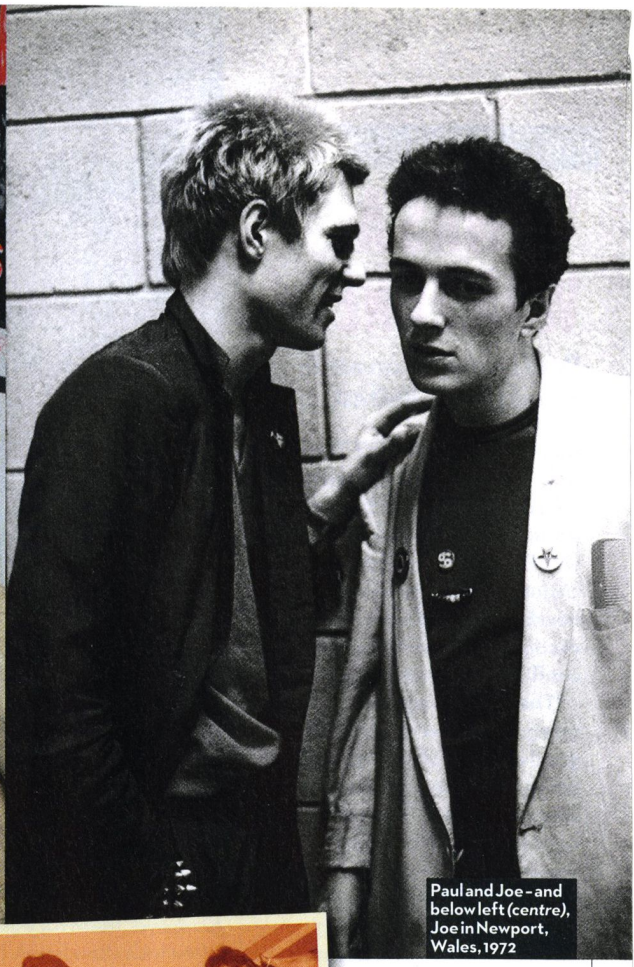
Paul: "It didn't seem a problem that we weren't at some kind of musical pinnacle in terms of our professionalism or ability. That didn't seem the point. Being able to play at some elevated level of competence or our musical ability generally wasn't important. We didn't need to be super-proficient at playing. We were an expression of the times and our age and experience. We weren't polished. We weren't slick. I think it gave a certain sincerity to what we were doing."

What did you think of punk, Topper? Joe, Mick and Paul were obviously already central to what was happening, but you'd had your own scene going.

"When I joined the group, I loved the way they looked," Topper recalls. "The three of them were very charismatic and seemed wonderful. The only thing that worried me was whether it would last. The punk thing seemed destined to be short-lived, but in The Clash we had a scene of our own. We were living our own lives. We were just The Clash and nothing else mattered. Nothing else was as important. Being in The Clash meant everything to us.

"The longer we were together the better and better the music got. By the time we came to record *Sandinista!*, it


In Bernie Rhodes' office, Camden, 1978. And below right, in the newsagents opposite Camden Market



Paul and Joe – and below left (*centre*), Joe in Newport, Wales, 1972

was like free form rock'n'roll. Nothing was written or rehearsed. Someone would grab an instrument and start playing and we'd run with that. Whoever was first into the studio would start working on something and that would become a song with input from all four of us. As Joe always used to say, the chemistry between the four of us was incredible. It was. If I have any regrets I think it would be not appreciating at the time what we had between us. The pity is I took it for granted. Maybe we all did, unfortunately. I mean, for Mick to write those songs and Joe to come up with those lyrics, what a team. The quality of their songwriting was phenomenal. There were so many great songs. Mick and Joe were an amazing songwriting team and, you know, Joe in so many ways has been with us through this whole thing."

"You knew Joe before any of us," says Mick to me. "In Newport, you were at the art school when Joe was there. What was he like?"

I mention Joe turning up at my digs one night, eager to hear some of the music I'd been ranting about in the student union bar after we'd watched some hapless edition of *The Old Grey Whistle Test* with Bob Harris waxing lyrical about Camel or Wishbone Ash and how Joe had not been impressed by The Velvet Underground, David Bowie, Roxy Music or the MC5 and had hilariously described Lou Reed as a decadent slut.

"Joe said that about Lou Reed?" Mick asks, with a look that suggests if he'd known anything about this, Joe would have spent the rest of his career playing the Red Cow with The 101ers.

"It's a terrible thing to say, but I couldn't stand Bob Harris," Paul says. "When I heard Sid Vicious attacked him, I was really happy."

"That was at the Speakeasy, wasn't it?" Mick says, the Speakeasy a club made famous by the '60s rock aristocracy and still a place to be seen in the '70s. "It used to be really cool to go there. When I was really young and had long hair and that, I used go and wait outside with my mates to see who would turn up. We also used to hang round outside Tramps nightclub, if the Stones were playing. I'd go down there and wait for them and get in by joining the back of Billy Preston's entourage, as if we were part of it, just swan in. The Speakeasy was where all the bands hung out and that thing with Bob Harris happened just before it closed down, just after all the punks started going there. There was a brief crossover between the dinosaur groups and young punks coming in."

Did you really think of them as dinosaurs? As Robert Plant's reminded me more than once, he was only 29 when punk hove noisily into view. "Some of them, yes," Mick says. "The problem with those bands was they left you as they found you. They did nothing to change you. Some of them barely even acknowledged their fans. I think we did more than most to break down the barrier between the audience and the group. There were a lot of good groups before us – I'm not

> "The Clash just ran its course and couldn't have gone on... it was too intense"
> *Topper Headon*

SHEILA ROCK; PENNIE SMITH; CATHY COOPER

talking about some of the more severe cape-wearing progressive groups. I'm talking about the Big Five – the Stones, Who, Beatles, Kinks, Small Faces. They were great and some of the other groups from the same era. Everybody else got what they deserved."

Paul: "We did admire those bands, but it was time for a change. So you had to be brutal. You had to say, 'It's Year One, now. Everything starts again and we want you out of the way. Your time is over.' That said, we had a lot of respect for some people, like Pete Townshend. He was one of the few people who came to our shows. He showed his support by coming to see the band. It meant a lot. It was fantastic, in fact. I don't recall anyone else doing that. Bob Dylan came in the later stages, but Townshend was around a lot. I can't think of anyone else of his standing that came to see us when the shows were to put it mildly very rough and tough."

Topper: "Pete Townshend was wonderful to me after The Clash. He rescued me. He sent me for treatment in LA and paid for it himself. He'd had his own problems so he knew what I was going through. He was no stranger to any of it. I was working with Pete Farndon who'd just been sacked from The Pretenders. He died of a heroin overdose. Pete came up and said, 'You're next. Carry on like this and you'll be the next to go.' He'd just got clean at the time. He was brilliant."

"And of course, we toured with The Who," Mick says. "It was their last tour for a long time and it was almost like they were handing the mantle to us."

Disenchanted fans claimed you'd become what you set out to replace. "I think we did OK, given the contradictions we had to deal with," Mick says. "Whatever some fans thought, it was interesting to see if we could play places like Shea Stadium, environments like that. It was a challenge. That's what we were always looking for."

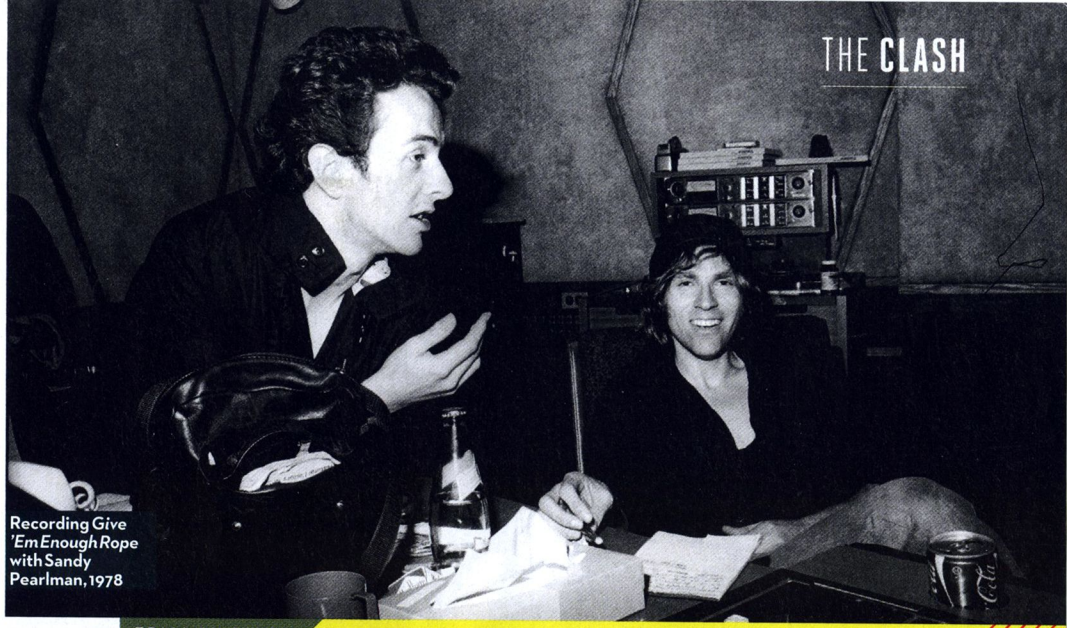
It was as if a *proper* punk band wouldn't play anywhere larger than The Roxy. "Or sign to CBS," Paul says, grinning.

"The day punk died!" Mick laughs, fanning himself with a napkin like a Southern belle with a touch of the vapours.

Punk fundamentalist were similarly outraged when they discovered Joe had gone to some minor private school and hadn't as they might have preferred been brought up in a workhouse on a diet of mouse droppings or as a child been forced up chimneys. Suddenly, he was inauthentic, a poseur playing at being a punk, not the real thing.

"That totally pissed me off," Paul says, angry. "I've never been to one of those schools and it doesn't matter anyway. I'm from a working-class background, right, but I was furious with that criticism of Joe. It was pathetic. When I first met Joe, he didn't have two pence to rub together. He was living in a squat. The most important thing was that I liked him and he liked me, we communicated well. That's what was important to me, his friendship. It's all I needed to know about him. What school he went to was totally unimportant. We just enjoyed a really good friendship and what I learned from it was that your background, that's irrelevant. It's who you are that counts. When I was younger, I felt differently. It was always, 'Look at them posh cunts, the stuck-up wankers.' I realised as I got older that not all rich people are worthless tossers. Some of them are nice people. They're not all wankers. There are as many poor people who are wankers as there are rich wankers."

Do you think Joe's often florid radical rhetoric was an over-compensation for his background? I'm thinking of his sometimes ill-judged tendency to romanticise revolutionary groups like the Red Brigades. "Yes, I think so," agrees Mick. "That's very possible."



Recording *Give 'Em Enough Rope* with Sandy Pearlman, 1978

TRIAL BY CLASH

## 'HE WAS LIKE A SCIENTIST IN THE STUDIO...'

**Mick and Paul on working with Sandy Pearlman and Guy Stevens**

FOR THEIR SECOND album, *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, The Clash brought in hot-shot American producer Sandy Pearlman, which unsurprisingly didn't sit well with the group's more hardcore, volatile fans. Were they simply being provocative?

**MICK:** "That wasn't why Sandy got involved at all. He was just really into the band and wanted to work with us, simple as that."

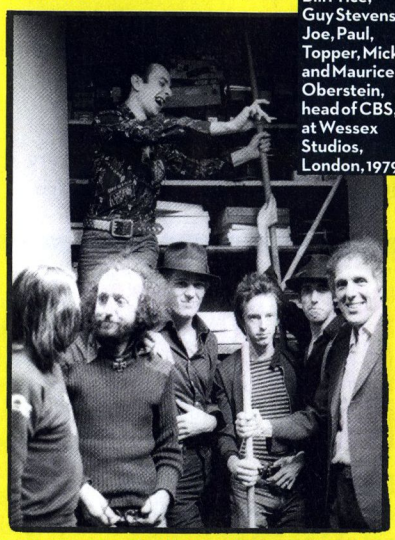
**PAUL:** "He even got punched out by one of our mates and he *still* wanted to produce the band. We thought, 'Well, if you've been punched out and still want to work with us you must really want to do it.' So sod the record company or what anyone else thinks, you're in, mate. You've gone through a trial by fire, you're in. Fuck everybody else and their opinions. You're the one."

**MICK:** "I have nothing but good memories of working with him. It was the first time we'd been in America together, it was very exciting."

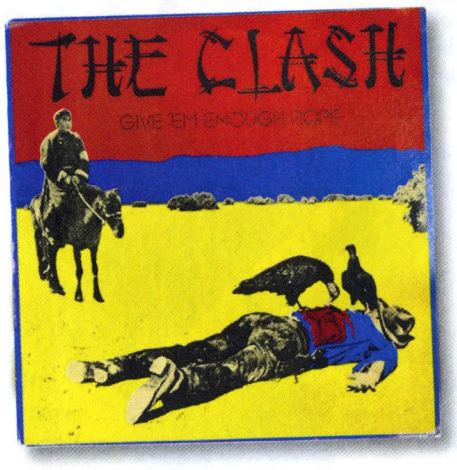
**PAUL:** "I have to say I did find it difficult working with him. To me he was like a scientist in the studio with his lab coat."

**MICK:** "He didn't have a *lab coat*!"

**PAUL:** "He might as well have had one. Mentally, he *definitely* had a lab coat. At the time, I was still trying to learn my craft and there were a lot of mistakes that he kept making me correct. Guy Stevens was the perfect producer for me. When we were doing *London Calling*, I'd say, 'Oh, I made a mistake on 'Brand New Cadillac'. And he'd say, 'It doesn't matter. It sounds like a car crash. It's great. Leave it.'"



Bill Price, Guy Stevens, Joe, Paul, Topper, Mick and Maurice Oberstein, head of CBS, at Wessex Studios, London, 1979



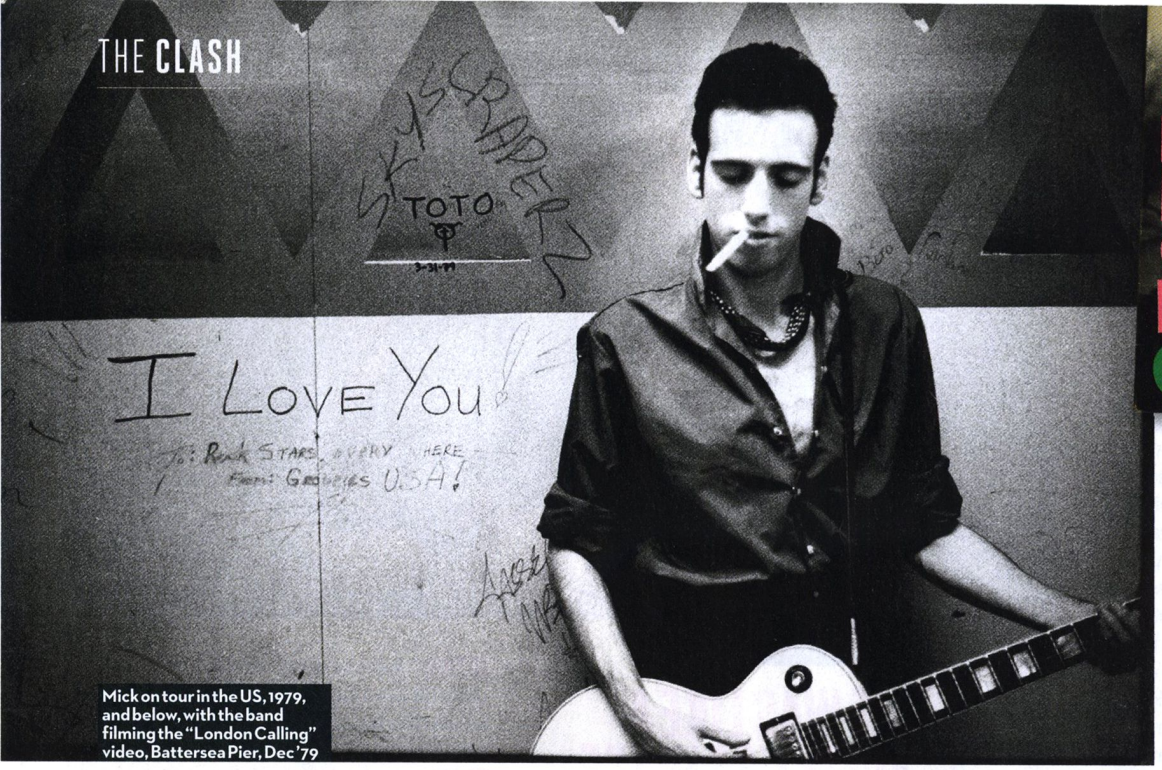

"I think that was Joe just trying to work things out. He was always looking for something to believe in," Paul says. "The Red Brigades, he realised that whole issue was a live grenade and didn't want to go near that when he thought things through. We never wanted to align ourselves to any political party, even though we were obviously very much of the left."

So what did The Clash stand for?

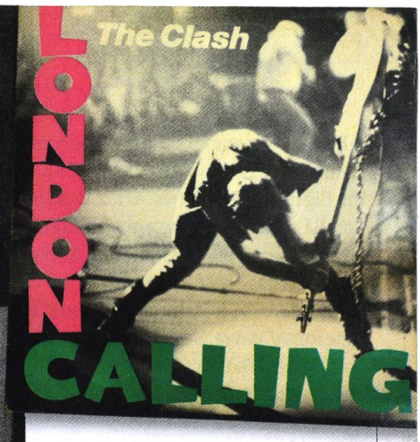
"Humanity and compassion," Paul says. "Personal politics, not party politics."

"The politics of the band were straightforward," Topper confirms. "We said we wouldn't play seated venues. We wanted to give value for money and release as much material as we could as often as we could. That was our politics – giving fans value ➔

PENNIE SMITH




Mick on tour in the US, 1979, and below, with the band filming the "London Calling" video, Battersea Pier, Dec '79




for money and meeting them after the gig and being available to them."

"We treated fans as human beings," says Paul. "That was quite new."

Were there times, though, when Joe was on his soap box that you wished he'd maybe for once just shut the fuck up?

"Well, not *shut up* exactly," says Mick. "But you could tell sometimes that we were tired and confused."

In my experience of him, Joe was well-practised in the art of the impassioned rant. But how concerned were you that he might come over as just a mouthpiece for [*manager*] Bernie Rhodes' more extreme views?

"I don't think Joe was *ever* Bernie's mouthpiece," Paul weighs in, quite vehemently. "Bernie's influence was very important for the band, but his approach would be that he'd ask you what your opinion was and when you told him, he'd let you know what *he* was thinking and that was always interesting because what he said would often act as a trigger. You'd go away and think about what he'd told you and suddenly you'd come to a conclusion on your own that was maybe different to what you'd originally thought. It was his input that'd spark that. It was always a very interesting process, but he never told us what to say. It wasn't like we were brainwashed by Bernie. He just made you consider angles you hadn't previously thought of."

PENNIE SMITH; VINNIE ZUFANTE/STARFILE

NOW THAT THEY are so sainted and their reputation hallowed, it's perhaps easy to forget what a rough ride The Clash even in their heyday were given, often by their own fans. Their so-called punk credentials seemed to be under constant scrutiny by punk's Taliban. Critics were frequently harsh, even mocking. Their idealism made them an easy target for ridicule. Strummer's rebel posturing was a particular target. "You just got used to it," Paul says. "We got all kinds of criticism. Everybody had something they wanted to take issue with. In the end, we just thought, if people are going to knock us anyway, why

## HEAVY MANNERS MAKETH THE MAN...

**Paul Simonon on the look of *Sound System* and the art of The Clash**

"WITH THE LOOK of *Sound System*, cassette machines were what we carried around the whole time when we were on tour, in a hotel, or in an airport, or in the bar, even. It's your own music – there wasn't much on the radio, and everywhere you went, you could share it with people. These days, everyone's got their iPods and headphones. It seemed like the ideal representation of each one of us, really. As for what's in it... I still wear the dog tags.

"In the beginning I spent quite a lot of time trying to play the bass, so the music was pretty much left to Mick and Joe – and the art stuff was more down to me. When we signed to CBS, this guy said to me, 'Right I'll show you the art department.' He took me in and said, 'I thought I'd show you your album cover.' It was a picture of a pair of old boots – not even DM boots – on a cobbled street in a Yorkshire town. I said, 'It's a nice picture, but it's not our album cover.' He seemed a bit put out. But we had full control. We set about working on something else.

"A lot of our references were down to the music I was listening to... Big Youth, a lot of inspiration came from there. It was the only sort of music that seemed to fit: I don't live in Kingston and I'm not black, but it did speak to me, and a lot of music in that time didn't. Those musicians wanted to find their own voice – and so did we.

"The clothes, a lot of it was about cost. The thing was to get something no-one else wanted, like straight-leg trousers. There were loads in the second-hand shops because everyone wanted flares. It's true! It was a look to toughen up. You had to dress tough, which was something I picked up as a kid. With the punk thing that became very important, because after Bill Grundy and the Pistols anyone who looked like a punk was threatened on the streets. That wasn't from any tribal faction – that was from the general public. So you dressed accordingly. Heavy manners.

"I suppose in the early days, the aggressiveness of punk made us rally round each other and made us stronger as a collective. That does resonate: if people are aggressive to you when you come onstage, you learn something. Maybe stagecraft. For every action there has to be a reaction."

*INTERVIEW: JOHN ROBINSON*

The Clash near Bangkok, Thailand, taking time out from the *Combat Rock* cover shoot, 1982

bother to explain ourselves. It was like, 'It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks. This is our band. These are our lives. We'll play the music we want to, and just get on with it. If you don't like us, form your own band.'"

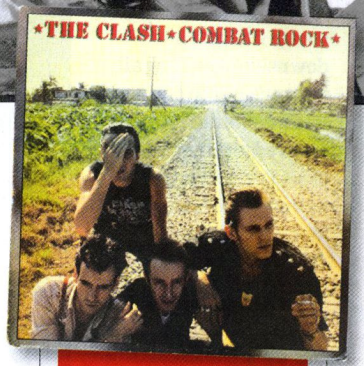
"*London Calling* was the point, I think, when we started doing things for ourselves and not worrying what anyone thought," says Mick. "By then we were just determined to do only what we wanted to do. From then on, we did what we wanted and just played the music we liked. That was the most important thing for us."

"When we recorded *London Calling*, we loved each other's company and we were pretty inseparable," Topper recalls. "The camaraderie was amazing. We were just great friends. Being in a band can be a fabulous feeling, but being in The Clash was even more special, particularly at that time."

"People used to look at you when you came through the airport," Mick remembers, sounding rather wistful. "We really made an impression as a group. You couldn't miss us. We really stood out. We looked great. We *were* great."

These were halcyon days for The Clash. *London Calling* had spectacularly revived a faltering career and having tested punk orthodoxies with a double album, they delivered in December 1980 a triple album, *Sandinista!*. Fans and critics were largely baffled, often hostile, the album's spectacular stylistic diversity evidence to them less of the band's broadening musical horizons than gross self-indulgence. In the face of virtually unanimous disparagement, they remained defiantly single-minded.

"There was just no stopping us," Mick recalls. "We were fanatical about what we were doing because it really does take fanaticism to work at that level. I can't imagine now trying to maintain that level of energy and intensity. It would be impossible at our age," he laughs. "But at the time, we pushed everything as hard as we could. The Clash was our life and we were dedicated to it. We lived every moment to the full."




"We lived it, simple as that," Paul says. "Twenty-four hours a day. What you wore onstage, you wore offstage. There was no difference. We went from playing the shows straight into the studio. There was no stopping us. We couldn't even stop ourselves."

"We paid a price for it all, though," Mick says. "None of it was without its cost, as Topper unfortunately knows."

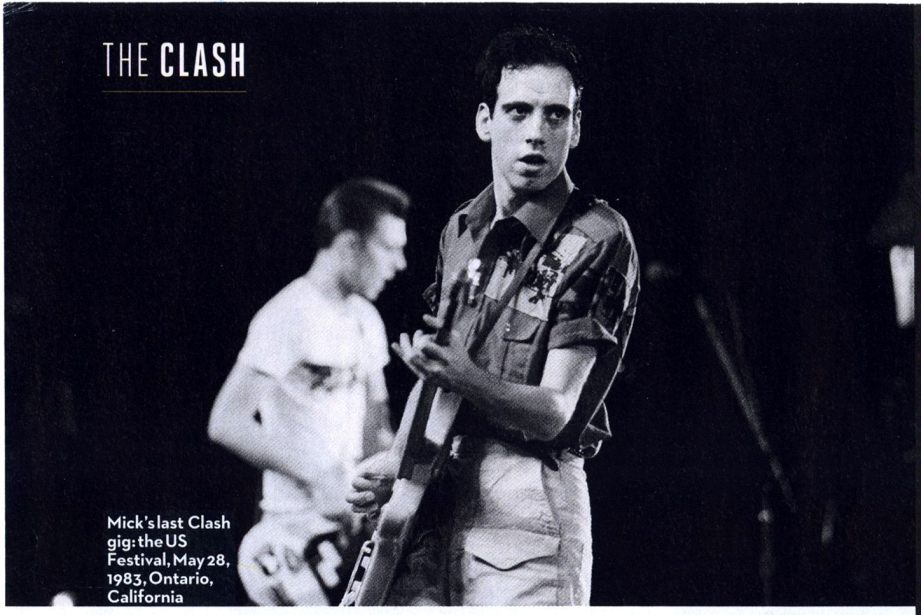
By 1982 and the band's Far East tour at the beginning of the year, Topper's drug addiction had spiralled out of control. He made it through the sessions for *Combat Rock*, but before its release was asked to leave the band. Terry Chimes, who played on *The Clash*, replaced Topper for a American tour with The Who, before he quit the band in early '83, the rancour between Joe and Paul on one side and Mick on the other too much for him. Pete Howard was drafted in for the US Festival in California, which The Clash co-headlined with David Bowie and Van Halen. The Clash played on May 22. It was Mick Jones' last appearance with them. In September, 1983 in a putsch organised by Joe and Paul, he was sacked from his own band.

"I knew realistically that groups split up," Mick says now. "I mean, I was heartbroken when Bowie split the Spiders. When you've got your own band, though, you don't think that's going to happen to you. When Topper went, something of me went with him. I didn't want him to go, but there didn't seem like an alternative at the time. That's just the way things were. ●

> "It might have seemed to Paul and Joe that I was acting too much like a rock star"
> *Mick Jones*


In New York, 1983, with the reinstated Terry Chimes (*second left*)

PENNIE SMITH; DAVE HOGAN/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES



Mick's last Clash gig: the US Festival, May 28, 1983, Ontario, California

He'd become a problem and had to go.

As I was about to find out, I was next."

Joe said that you'd become as difficult to work with as Elizabeth Taylor in a full-on diva strop. "Well, my mum was a bit like Elizabeth Taylor, maybe I got it from her," Mick says, his humour for the first time faltering at these unhappy memories. "It might have seemed to Paul and Joe that I was acting too much like a rock star, but I didn't see it that way. I do admit I'd maybe become a bit too possessive of the music. I was much too precious with what essentially and for the best, really, was a group thing. I got too much into myself. That could have caused problems."

Paul, how *much* of a problem had Mick's behaviour become?

"Quite a major problem, really," Paul says, sombre now, too. "For me and Joe, it was like there was so much to do, we needed to get on and do it. We'd been putting up with Mick for about six years. Mick is Mick and he gets up at a certain time and at first that was OK. But you get to a point where you're not a teenager, you're a man of 27 and it's still, 'Where is he? Why isn't he out of bed? We've got shows to do.' After a while, it wears you down. In the end, we got bloody-minded. You think, 'Sod it. He's got to go. We can't go on like this.'"

"In my defence," Mick says, "I was being pushed into an uncomfortable place with the return of Bernie [*after being sacked as manager in 1978, Rhodes was reinstated in 1981*]. "Yeah, but Bernie was unaware what was going to take place," Paul says. "When we said we wanted you out of the band, he didn't know anything about that when he came back. Bernie was shocked. He said he knew something was going to happen. But he didn't know me and Joe were going to sack you."

"I felt I'd been stitched up," Mick says.

"You were," Paul says. "But not by him."

"I was amazed when I read Mick had left the band, as well," Topper says. "But that was so typical of The Clash and the way we did things. The downside of making all that music and touring as much as we did was that we lived together for five or six years. Every morning I'd wake up and know I was going to see Paul, Mick and Joe. And like in any relationship, things when they're so intense are going to sour. You get fed up with each other. I think The Clash just ran its course and couldn't have gone on much longer. It was just too intense."

> "We lived it, simple as that: 24 hours a day. There was no stopping us" *Paul Simonon*

The table's been cleared. A car is waiting. One more question. What would the young Clash have said if someone had walked into an early rehearsal or their first recording sessions at Beaconsfield, and told them that in 30 years they'd be sitting in a private members club and talking about the music they hadn't yet made in the context of a career-spanning, multi-disc boxset, designed for posterity?

"Laughed, probably," says Paul.

"I would have wondered which one of us was going to end up a member of somewhere like this," Mick says, giving the room a last look before heading for the door.

***The Clash: Sound System*** *and* ***The Clash Hits Back*** *compilation are released by Sony Music on September 9*

Paul, Mick, Topper and Joe – the Ivor Novello Awards, 2000

PAUL NATKIN/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES; LFI; PENNIE SMITH

HEADONISM

## 'IT LOOKED INCREDIBLY INNOCUOUS, THIS TINY LINE OF POWDER...'

### Topper on the addictions that cost him his place in The Clash

**UNCUT: Given what you went through after being forced out of The Clash, your lack of bitterness is surprising.**

**TOPPER HEADON:** "When I got into recovery, I had to work on my resentments and my biggest one was with The Clash for sacking me. This was like 10 years ago and that's how I felt, until it was pointed out to me that you had this brilliant band that was conquering the world and making double albums and triple albums and going to America and Japan and there's one guy in the band who's like a flat tyre. So the band is like a car that's going really fast and it's got a flat tyre and that's what I became. I don't think it affected my drumming. Someone sent me a recording of my last gig with The Clash recently and the drumming's still good. But now after being nine years sober, I know being around someone who's drunk all the time is not a pleasant thing."

**When did you realise you had a problem?** "It just happened, like the band just happened. When I first joined, I used to go to the gym and didn't drink much. But gradually I tried a bit of cocaine and a bit of this and that, and it just happened. From then on, I just wanted more, of everything. I suffer from the disease of wanting more. However much I'd taken, I wanted more. Drumming was my first addiction – I used to drum eight hours a day to the exclusion of everything else.

"I've got an obsessive addictive nature. Bernie used to tell me to stop hanging out with the road crew – I'd party with Mick on a Monday, party with Joe on the Tuesday, party with Paul on the Wednesday and couldn't see a problem, but the rest of the time I was out with the road crew, so I was partying every night of the week."

**Can you remember the first time you took heroin?** "Yes. And it looked so innocuous, this tiny line of powder – by then I was taking long lines of cocaine as you will do as your addiction escalates. And the band warned me about heroin, they knew my nature, but I thought I'll try it and I won't get addicted – the same mistake so many people have made. The first time I tried it I was addicted immediately. I loved it. This was in Fulham. The funny thing was, I ended up in Sid Vicious' old flat in Maida Vale, Pindock Mews, with some other people – I came down one morning and saw them in the kitchen injecting heroin and I thought, 'Oh no. I'm off.' And I moved to Fulham and there was some lying around and I started and that was it.

"Obviously, I wouldn't wish being a heroin addict or going to prison on anyone. But I don't know if I'd want to change anything. I was so proud to be in The Clash. I was a great drummer in a great band. I don't regret any of it."