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Talking Heads to tour

TALKING HEADS, one of New York's leading art-rock new wave bands, arrive in Britain in January for their first headlining tour, which takes them on a series of 20 concerts.

The band first toured in May supporting the Ramones, and have recently released their critically-acclaimed debut album, "Talking Heads '77".

They play ten dates in Europe early next month supported by XTC, then start their British shows at Sheffield University on January 20, with Dire Straits as support.

The tour continues: Manchester University (January 21), Liverpool Eric's (22), Doncaster Outlook Club (23), Aylesbury Friars (24), Leicester University (26), Newcastle Polytechnic (27), Huddersfield Polytechnic (28), Leeds Polytechnic (29), Brighton Top Rank (February 1), Swansea University (2), St Albans Civic Hall (3), Swindon Oasis (4), Groydon Grayhound (5), Plymouth Fiesta (6), Birmingham Barbarellas (7), Bournemouth Village Bowl (8), Southampton University (10), Folkestone Leascliff Hall (11), London Roundhouse (12).



● Graham Lewis, a 30-year-old local government officer from Middlesbrough, is the first prize-winner in the £5,000 Melody Maker / Fender instrument competition. He is pictured here with his prizes — a Telecaster de luxe guitar and a Fender twin standard amplifier.

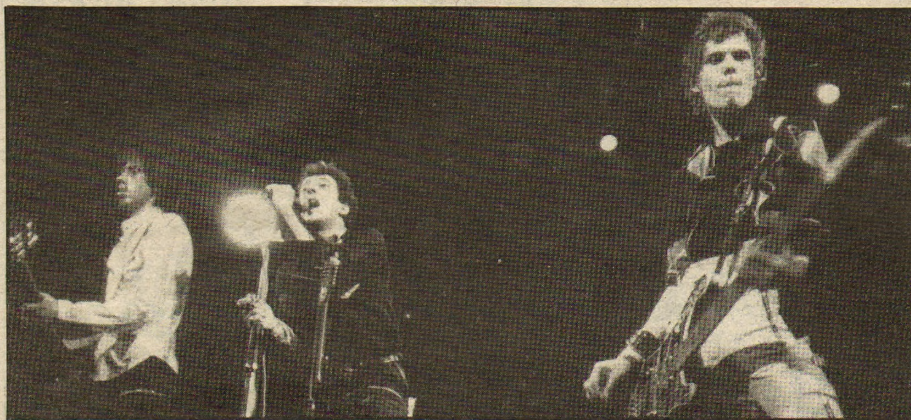
● Graham's winning line was chosen from more than 6,000 entrants. They had to decide the most important qualities a young musician would need to set up a successful group.

● Other winners and results: page 12.

Chris Welch on the Pistols: p8



Caught in the Act



THE CLASH onstage in London last week: heroes or villains?

Clash of opinion

Two differing views of the Clash at London's Rainbow last week

THE CLASH had just launched into their first encore on the Tuesday night, "London's Burning," when the security, which the band had promised would be "low-key," spilled over into viciousness as a kid who was trying to get up on stage was smashed.

The group stopped playing immediately, horrified, and Mick Jones pulled the fan up on stage. Then, for both that song and for "White Riot," they let the kid chip in on vocals.

And I don't mean they just tolerated him — the dream-come-true bloke probably sang more of both numbers than Joe Strummer. How many other bands can you imagine allowing that to happen?

But that's what Clash are all about, speaking for, with, and from working-class youth, instead of talking down to them; it's what made their album such a complete work of art, so burning, passionately true; it's what made the synthesis of a mythic harmonica-note and the lines "I don't wanna hear about what the rich are doing / I don't wanna go to where the rich are going/They think they're so clever, they think they're so right/ But the truth is only known by guttersnipes" so

moving when I first heard them in "Garageland."

But listen. Why the hell are the Clash playing the Rainbow anyway? Everybody knows the place's appalling heavy security record.

But quite apart from that, the place is far too big — the punk revolt was necessary because of just this kind of enforced performer-audience distance.

Another thing — frenzy-music is meant to be danced to, which means it's positively wrong for the Clash to play in a seated hall.

And if they're going to remain true, they should stop singing "Garageland" now. It's precisely because I love the Clash that I have to say all this — they mustn't sell out (yes, that phrase again, but it does mean something).

As for the gig, maybe the situation and my being up in the Circle away from the tumult had something to do with it, but they didn't get to me as I know they can.

The worst thing about any Clash performance is their vocals — Joe Strummer's voice is so rough and fragmented (great on record) that not only is it impossible to hear the words unless you know them already, but it's even difficult some of the time to discern the tunes.

One reason why the Clash didn't seem as impressive as usual was that they were following Sham 69, who gave another magnificent performance. Everything about their powerfully emotional work is genuine, heartfelt and I'd trust Jimmy Pursey with my life.

— CHRIS BRAZIER.

WELL, it may well be Christmas and a time of good cheer, but there could have been few places more likely to set a bleak mood for the festive season than the wretched Rainbow Theatre, London, last Thursday.

This was the final in a series of three "presentations" by the Clash, generally acknowledged as being in the top half of the new wave punk bands to emerge in the past 18 months.

If this is a fact, and if this indeed is where 21 years of rock 'n' roll have led us, then let us pray: rather than a well-ordered concert, my ticket forecast a 7.45 start. The first of three support bands went on at 8.25 and the Clash eventually appeared at 10.20 — yes, that's two hours, 35 minutes after the advertised start. No explanation was given, even accepting that rock musicians often display fashionable contempt for the audience, this was a gross insult to their fans. Bad manners and a lack of professionalism aren't clever.

And let's not hear any claims that they were busy "getting the sound right" — scarcely a word could be heard of their songs throughout their "performance," and the instrumental mix was atrocious. Question: — is it really hip to be late on stage, so that fans without transport have the show spoiled because they must watch their watches to avoid missing the last tube or bus home?

Such bad organisation or tacit disregard for those who paid for tickets is unforgivable.

Anyone expecting a warm, stimulating experience at this gig should be branded as an interloper. The atmosphere among the unsmiling audience of punky headbangers was grim and menacing. And during a full evening's study of facial expressions, I wasn't able to witness one smile. Okay, so the posture of the New Rock Revolution is supposedly serious — but should not part of any rock show be a celebration, a coming together of heroes and believers, resulting in a happily unified buzz?

But no, this crowd of drably attired drongos merely reflected the fire sounds they were there to see. Of course, a few leapt up and down in their seats, emitting the right noises off and registering the right sort of vacuous expressions that said they'd paid to appreciate a night out. For the most part, though, the relationship between the Clash and the crowd never sparked until the end, when the band received the now-mandatory and thus-meaningless applause and demand for an encore. Generally the lack of rapport between stage and aisle was astonishing.

If the crowd was depressing, the Clash were thoroughly distressing. Touted as something special, the subject of Rolling Stone's controversy as "The Band That Can't Get A Gig Because Of A Rough Following," and signed by a major record company, the band emerged as musically threadbare, relying on repeating the same tired, speedy riffs to generate a bogus excitement, song after song.

Word has it that their lyrics are meaningful and full of the correct kind of 1977 protest. But all was lost in this direction on new ears, because the sound was wicked, the messages inaudible. For all I knew they could have been singing the innocuous Status Quo songs, but you could be sure Quo would have done it infinitely better.

And while we're comparing old and new wave, for all their status as part of the "tired old brigade" of old established rockers, they pay no heed to what we have lost in this direction. The Clash come across as nothing. Empty posturing with no memorable music to back them up.

Musically, they pay no heed to what we have in the Clash — a trumped-up band devoid of style. Their stage magic is nil. A backdrop of pictures of police activity and street scenes is no compensation for an irredeemably awful, monotonous sledgehammer attack in which every tune appears alike and in which an atmosphere of miserable agony is transmitted from the stage to the stalls.

The bad vibes had been established during the set by one of the "warm-up" bands, when a security man on stage went to the mike and threatened "a good kicking" to an idiot who had been throwing things at the pianist. Chucking things at the stage is dangerous, but the kind of fierce reaction dished out to that stupid person in the stalls was enough to fan the flame into something more serious. Lunatic fringes need careful handling, not the insensibility of head-on collision.

While the appalling Clash were enough to depress anyone with an ounce of appreciation of a rock occasion, their immediate predecessors on stage were by contrast electrifying and utterly convincing. Sham 69 came on like demented street urchins, no posing, most of their incisive lyrics audible, and their whirling dervish of a singer, Jimmy Pursey, flailing around the mike with a cocky sureness of touch that reminded me of early Jagger.

For all their rawness and instrumental basics, they worked well, especially bellowing the shrieking insistency of "George Davis Is Innocent" and "Ulster," both of which were preceded by impassioned and patently sincere little speeches by leader Pursey. "This is the best year of my life," he croaked when the crowd accorded him applause.

Great! Communication! A young rocker who realises that the music is centred on emotion! Sham 69 brought a touch of class, a sense of The Main Event, to the evening, with their endearing, arrogant charm born so honestly out of inarticulate conviction.

Before them we endured a band composed of Rat Scabies/Richard Sohl/Keith Levine, and before them the Lou. Both were unspeakable, and if I say that the least competent entrants in the annual Melody Maker Rock/Folk Contest could probably have blown them off the stage, with the wind in their favour, you may get some idea of what was going on up there.

But then, the Clash scarcely equalled the standards of the winners of an MM Contest. Ah, I hear you say in the spirit of '78 — at least they and the others are keeping the roar of street rock alive. Maybe. It's certainly alive, but all's obviously not well. Believe me, the Searchers were better.

— RAY "SCROGGE" COLEMAN.

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