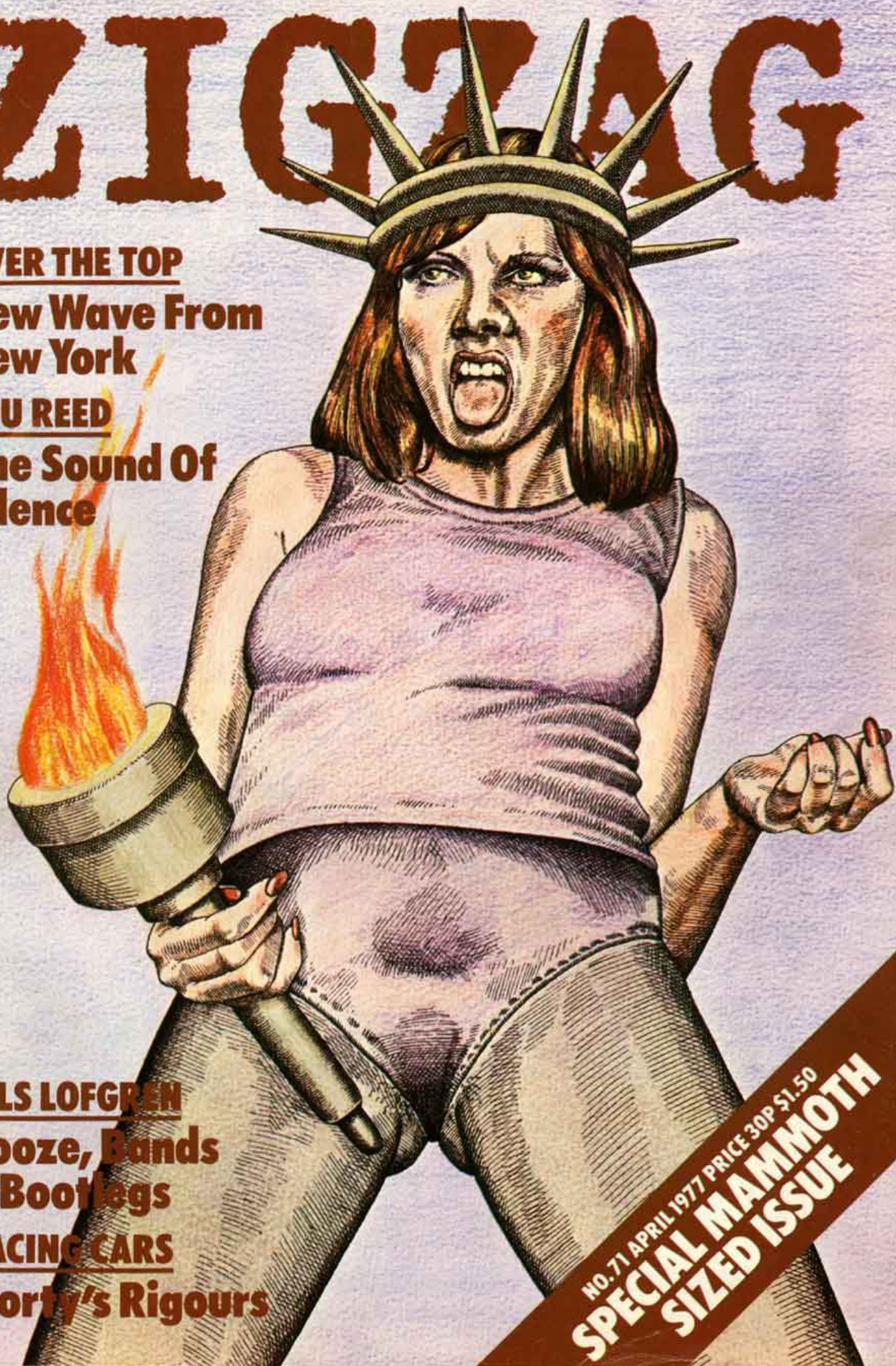


# ZIGZAG

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# KONKRETE KLOCKWORK

At the moment there isn't a group in the New Wave that comes within spitting distance of The Clash, live or on record. Within a year they have become the most exciting live band in the country, and shortly they will release an album which is the most stunning debut for years... I believe it'll be as important as the first Rolling Stones album in shaping a new direction for rock'n'roll.

The New Wave groups who have so far made albums - The Hot Rods and The Damned - have been OK for party music, but The Clash are something far more important and vital. Not only is their music original and lethally energised, but it encompasses a whole new attitude of positive creativity which, if it rubs off on their audience, can only be a good thing. They are trying to wake people up to reality as well as plumbing the fine essence of ultimate rock'n'roll.

First time I saw The Clash was at their first out-of-London gig at Leighton Buzzard's Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre, about an hour's drive out of London. The hall was like a large hotel lounge, which encouraged the crowd to drape itself over the seating.

The Clash taking the stage was like an injection of electricity into the smoky air. They charged headlong into 'White Riot' with shattering energy, strutting and leaping like clockwork robots out of control. They never let up for half an hour. Despite sound problems they were astounding, almost overpowering in their attack and conviction.

The Clash are: Mick Jones (lead guitar, vocals); Joe Strummer (vocals, guitar); Paul Simonon (bass, vocals). They haven't got a permanent drummer, although Terry Chimes has done most gigs with them and plays on the album.

They are managed by one Bernard Rhodes and rehearse/hang out in this huge ex-warehouse he found in Camden Town between Dingwalls and The Roundhouse. They converted it to a rehearsal room downstairs, with pink drapes and old barber's chairs for added home comforts; and upstairs is where the group create their outfits, revamping jumble sale purchases with acrylic paint splatters and slogans...cheap and striking.

Mick: "We encourage the kids to paint their clothes. That way they get involved, feel part of it. Now they come along and show us ideas we like".

Back to the music. They write all their own songs, no Clash number is longer than three minutes, and not many exceed two. Each is fast, razor-sharp and rocking, with insanely catchy choruses. The songs are viciously topical and directly inspired by the group's London environment.

'White Riot', for example, was written after Joe and Mick got caught in the Notting Hill riots last year.

'Janie Jones' concerns the bloke with a boring job who gets off by being in love with Janie Jones (the imprisoned vice queen). 'London's Burning' ('with boredom') is "A celebration of the Westway under a yellow light" - Joe Strummer.

'1977' is a cold look at the future/present: "No Elvis, Beatles or The Rolling Stones in 1977", and "Ain't so lucky to be rich; sten guns in Knightsbridge". There's loads...all vital, power-packed SONGS.

The Clash are very much a London band. They couldn't live anywhere else or their music would suffer.

"We love the place - blocks of flats, concrete", says Joe. "I hate the country. The minute I see cows I feel sick", says Mick, who says he has never lived at ground level.

The Clash formed a year ago this month. Originally Mick, who like Paul comes from Brixton, was a member of the London S.S., arguably the first New Wave group. The line-up also included Brian James (now with The Damned) and Tony James (bassist with Generation X). They were rehearsing in 1975, and Paul came down to a rehearsal one day and met Mick, who got him singing. "I'd never sung or played bass before in my life".

The S.S. "didn't work out" and split before they'd done a gig. Mick got together with Paul and formed The Heartdrops, which later became The Clash. Paul learned bass by sticking white dots on the fret board of the machine he'd acquired.

There was another guitarist too... Keith Levine, who left mysteriously last autumn and is getting his own band together.

They needed a singer, and one day when Mick and Paul were walking down a street in Shepherd's Bush they bumped into Joe, who was still with the 101ers. Mick told him that he was great but his band stunk, and asked him to join The Clash. Joe was bored with singing pub rock standards, and despite that fact that the 101ers were rising fast, he broke them up and joined The Clash (on April 1st, to be precise).

By the time the 101ers single 'Keys To Your Heart' came out, Joe was firmly involved with The Clash. Goodbye rhythm & blues, hello 1976! When they were ready The Clash unveiled themselves to a rehearsal room full of press and friends. The date was Friday 13th. Reaction was immediate and they got rave reviews.

There followed a select series of London dates at places like the 100 Club (they did the p'nk rock festival last summer), the Sex Pistols all-nighter at the Screen On The Green, and two at the Institute Of Contemporary Arts (the last one being the time when Patti Smith leapt on stage during 'I'm So Bored With The U.S.A.').

The Clash have always taken gigs seriously, never being content to just trundle round the circuits night after night. They've only done The Roxy once (January) and they often organise their own gigs...that way everything's right and it becomes a complete event. They might lose money, but it's made for some great gigs. There've been the ICA gigs, one at the Royal College of Art, where hippy art students threw glasses at the stage, and the last one, which was on March 11th

at Harlesden Colosseum (more later).

The Clash were also part of the Sex Pistols ill-fated "Anarchy" tour last December, along with The Damned and The Heartbreakers. As you must know, most of the gigs were blown out by timid moral guardians after the Pistols said naughty things to the baiting Bill Grundy.

Mick: "That was soul-destroying. We thought we were the greatest rock'n'roll bands, conquering the world. Everyone was really excited...but the day before it started, the Grundy thing went down and gigs started being cancelled".

Paul: "It was really bad it was cancelled. The tour turned into a cause, in a way...us kids just wanted to play. We were stuck in hotel rooms for a couple of days waiting to play, then we'd be told the gig was cancelled, and we'd wait for another three days in the hotel room. It was good fun to read about it in the papers, though".

Mick again: "The Pistols suffered quite terribly. It was really tragic, but we learnt so much from it. You knew the time had to come".

The bureaucratic petty opposition The Clash encountered on that tour solidified one of the things they are against - oppression.

"There's a lot of oppression around today", says Mick. "We're making people aware of it and opposing it".

One of the best gigs I've been to recently was The Clash's self-organised one at Harlesden Colosseum. It was a lesson in organisation (only a ten minute gap between bands!).

It was an important gig for each group on the bill. The Slits, the first all-girl p'nk band, were making their world debut; The Subway Sect hadn't played since November; The Buzzcocks were making their first appearance since re-organising the line-up after singer Howard Devoto's departure; and The Clash were playing their first gig in three months since signing with CBS.

Harlesden Colosseum usually serves as a Pakistani porn pit, attracting vast crowds of up to three a night. The Clash noticed the place when they were rehearsing for the "Anarchy" tour at the Roxy theatre up the road. They liked the look of it and thought it would be a great place for rock gigs. Bernard decided to have a go and see how it worked out.

Inside, the Colosseum is the classic definition of a flea pit, all peeling paint and stained seats. The owners seemed rather bemused by the sudden invasion of p'nks.

When I got to the Colosseum at about 2.30, all the bands were there apart from The Clash, although Mick has come down early 'cos he's so excited about the gig.

While the roadies build the stage and groups wheel in their gear, Mick and I adjourn to the balcony and look down on the bustle of activity going on below.

"It's great isn't it", enthuses Mick, "our own gig...I'm really excited. This is more than a gig, it's an important event!"

Mick is also bubbling over about the forthcoming album. It only took two weeks to do and CBS, who signed The Clash for a six figure sum, gave them complete control.

As soon as the group made their marks on the CBS contract they knew they'd be accused of selling out - "I've been numbed wherever I go", says Mick.

But the deal hasn't turned them into big-spending superstars. They got some new equipment, Joe got a place to live, Mick got a stereo, but they're the same



**PHOTOGRAPHS  
DO NOT BEND**



group, except with a means and outlet for their music. CBS is one of the biggest record companies in the world, so it follows that more people will get to know and hear about The Clash album than if they'd signed to a small label, or done a private pressing job.

Mick: "I think it's important that we don't change. What is happening right now is that at last we've got a chance to make records. It all comes down to records... that's why we had to do one. You've got to make records."

"You can do your own label and not many people will hear it. This way more people will hear our record... I don't care if they don't like it or don't buy it, as long as they hear it."

"We've got complete control. Everything is our own ideas. We knew what we wanted to do, so we went in the studio and learnt as we went along."

The Clash did some recording at Polydor studios, and at one time there was a running battle for their signatures between that label and CBS. Guy Stevens, the infamous loony who produced Mott's early albums, did those sessions.

"It was great recording with Guy Stevens... fantastic when we were doing it. He was really inciting us, but when it came down to the mixing, it was a bit untogether."

So the next sessions saw The Clash's sound mixer, Micky Foote, in the producer's chair. 'White Riot' and '1977' were recorded. Compared to the album, 'White Riot' has a very raw, chaotic sound and slightly buried vocals, but it's still a real scorcher.

Mick: "It's not as brave as the album production, but it's still a great rock 'n' roll song."

And the album?

"Well, we're really excited about it... I mean, AN ALBUM! It's destined to be a classic!"

Paul added later: "It sounds really good... so much better than the single. I think we've definitely captured the live sound."

Mick agrees, but says that the album has also succeeded in being a real studio product, rather than just a reproduction of the stage act. "We used the studio to make it sound good."

It's got 14 tracks, including stage faves like '48 Thrills', 'London's Burning', 'I'm So Bored With The USA', 'Protest Blue', 'Hate And War', and another "more wild" version of 'White Riot'. There's also a big surprise in the form of a six minute rock version of Junior Murvin's huge-selling reggae hit of last year, 'Police & Thieves', which is going to surprise a few people.

I can't mince words here. I've only heard it once, but I know this is the most exciting album I've heard in years. I can't think about it for more than a minute without feeling like I'm going to explode (let alone write about it!). You can hear all the words, there's the hardest guitar/drum sound ever, various studio tricks enhance the production and make some songs even more effective... but most important, it's captured the essence of The Clash. Their intense conviction is here in all its blazing glory. The whole thing's magnificent! If it don't sell, I'm Hughie Green. Even if you don't buy it, at least HEAR it... it's one of the most important records ever made.

I asked Mick about the daring inclusion of 'Police And Thieves'. He replied: "It's a logical progression. There's obviously a lot of links between us and what's happening with the Rastas. It

just seemed right to do it. We had lots of our own material, but we wanted to do one song by someone else. What would we do? Not a 60s rehash... let's do something which is '76, right? Let's try and turn people on. This is a rock'n'roll track in 4/4, but it's experimental. We've incorporated dub reggae techniques. We'll probably get slagged to bits for it, but we don't care. They can't understand that what we're trying to do is redefine the scene and like make it clear to people the way to move... You've got to take risks all the time. That's why we did it... as a risk". (And it works - you wait and hear it, you'll be amazed!)

Mick says his favourite track is a new song called 'Garage Land' - the last track - "where we're moving on next. The chorus is "We're a garage band and we come from garage land"... That's just what we are. It's also commenting on the current situation with all the groups being signed up".

How will The Clash move on?

"Well, it'll always be rock'n'roll, but we're hoping to improve the aura of the sound".

The Clash would like to do something about an alternative radio station as well. There are plans, but they need money.

Harking back to Mick's point about all the bands being signed up, I asked what he thought of this situation.

"It's a snowball. You form a group and the next week you've got a recording contract. That's great if they make great records, but so far they haven't made great records. No really good groups have come up just recently... just average groups. They don't move me to the point where it's rock'n'roll. The general quality of the music is a bit rough. They're like TV films... but I'd rather hear them than a shopping list. It's certainly growing".

Mick's really happy to see people making the effort to form groups. So's Paul: "What's great about this scene is the way kids are starting up bands. The only thing is, they have to do something original, and that's really hard. If you try and be like another band that can really slow you down".

What about the New Wavers who've got records out at the moment and enjoyed some success with 'em? (Rods, Stranglers and Danned in particular.)

Mick: "They're obviously going to clean up, but they've got nothing to do with us. That's all there is to it. I don't consider them important groups. They're cleaning up at the moment because there isn't any great alternative, recording especially".

We turn off the tape to check out what's happening down below. Mick takes the stage and plugs in his new plexiglass guitar. Paul, who is sporting newly-bleached yellow hair, and I have a chat in the ladies loo... well, it was the only quiet place (apart from when ladies came in!).

It was soon time for The Clash's soundcheck. They ironed out the sound problems with 'London's Burning' (twice), 'Garage Land' (which on first hearing sounded like a corker), and... I recognise those chords!... Jonathan Richman's 'Roadrunner', with the chorus changed to "Radio One"! Sounds fantastic Clashified. Mick says they may do it as an encore, but it doesn't happen. "We couldn't get it together". Paul says he hates the song anyway.

As The Clash retire to their dressing room - the place where they do the pro-

jecting from! - the people start to come in. Considering the place is in deepest Harlesden and it's raining there is a good turnout. The atmosphere builds up all evening... it's electric by Clash time!

First on were The Slits, who were great, making up for their sound problems with pure energy. 14 year old singer Arianna, who was alluringly decked out in black leather mini-skirt and fishnet tights, stamped and screamed like a little girl throwing a tantrum at a party... she reckoned we couldn't hear her, but we could! It was great when she came on in a big mac and flashed her legs like an old tosser before throwing it off.

The Slits careered through half an hour of their songs, propelled with astounding force by a drummer called Palmolive, who kept flattening her floor tom-tom. I'm looking forward to seeing The Slits again.

Next were Subway Sect, who are now managed by The Clash's Bernard. They'd changed from the rambling, two-chord outfit I'd seen in November. They've been rehearsing a lot at The Clash's studio and have a whole stock of unusual new numbers, which are complicated and a bit weird. The singer, Vic, ended the set by stumbling backwards and falling over - he'd been motionless for the whole set.

The reorganised Buzzcocks went down well. Pete Shelley, the bloke with only half a guitar, is centre stage front man now. He wore black, while the rest of the group sported hand-painted Mondrian shirts (i.e. they had squares on them, if you're not arty). With Pete loosening up (he played some weird guitar solos) the 'Cocks have got a lot of potential.

It was The Clash's night, though, and they played a blinder - despite little obstacles like one of the hired hippy sound men accidentally pulling out a lead.

It was great seeing them back on stage, in new zip-festooned outfits to boot. The crowd in front of the stage went potty, pogoing right up into the air, screaming the words, shaking themselves to death and falling into twitching heaps. They couldn't have been able to see what was going on though, which is a show in itself!

There were some great announcements from Joe. Someone yelled something about the CBS contract. "Yeah, I've been to the South of France to buy heroin", he said. Another time: "I'm Bruce Lee's son", he declared, before slamming the band into another devastating two minute burn-up. It was a great set.

Next day I saw a video recording of the gig. A bloke called Julian is making a video film of The Clash. He's a student at the London Film School, and, using their equipment, has been filming gigs and interviews since the "Anarchy" tour. It's not certain that the film will be shown, but I hope we get to see it somehow, 'cos it's dynamite!

Watching the recording of Friday's gig showed just how impressive The Clash are onstage. In the excitement you're bound to miss some things, like Mick's guitar strap breaking, and him holding up the guitar like a machine gun to finish the number; Joe jerking across the stage like an electrocuted piranha fish; or Paul ripping a giant chord from his bass with a violence so intense that his arm is nearly torn from its socket.

That's The Clash... pushing themselves to the limits. The least you can do is give them a listen... you'll never be the same again!

KRIS NEEDS