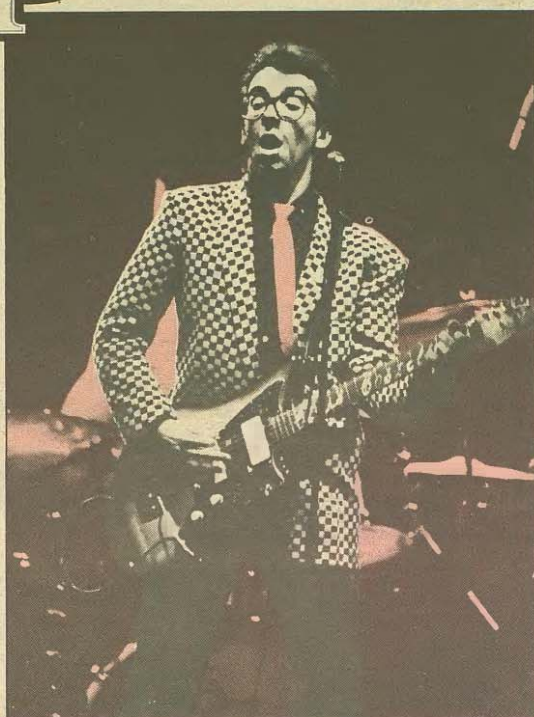


PERFORMANCE



Two sides of Elvis Costello

The Long Beach Arena
Elvis Costello and
the Attractions
Long Beach, California
February 14th, 1979

The Palomino
North Hollywood,
California
February 16th, 1979

By Mikal Gilmore

THE ONLY CONCESSIONS Elvis Costello makes are ones that help mystify his designs: artful, ingratiating moves—like *Armed Forces*—that breeze into our lives, then eat steadily at our sense of serenity. But, as Costello made plain in a series of diverse concerts in the Los Angeles area, they remain concessions nonetheless, and sometimes they can undermine even his own dread intentions.

From the moment Elvis scuffled onstage at the spiffy, cavernous Long Beach Arena (curtained in half so he could play to a smaller crowd), he seemed like some leering, jerking marionette being

strung along through its scenes. He never missed an inch or risked a step: every possible turn, from the order and arrangements of songs to the switching of mikes and guitars, had been plotted painstakingly, and flowed effortlessly. In other words, the performance lacked the impetuosity that usually marks Elvis' best shows.

Largely, that stemmed from Costello's dependence on *Armed Forces* material. The new songs (particularly "Accidents Will Happen," "Green Shirt" and "Two Little Hitlers") have tricky, classic pop structures—like a New Wave *Between the Buttons*—that make for Elvis' riskiest music to date. They also make for fussy performances that are hard to pull off onstage. At Long Beach, Elvis delivered them with a rigorous yet stiff, almost hurried slant, amounting to little more than an exercise in perfunctory power.

Which isn't to say the show lacked punch. Costello and his gangling Attractions railed through taut versions of "Big Tears," "I Don't Want to Go to Chelsea," "Lipstick Vogue," Nick Lowe's "What's So Funny 'bout Peace, Love and Understanding" and "Sad about Girls," a new bal-

Elvis (at left) in Long Beach and the Clash (at right) in New York: Paul Simonon (from left), drummer Nicky Headon, Joe Strummer and Mick Jones

ad by Attractions keyboardist Steve Nave. In addition, Elvis' singing has never sounded more self-possessed, recalling, alternately, a wily McCartney and an impassioned Springsteen. Oddly enough, though, I was reminded even more of another pop artisan: Jackson Browne. Like Browne, Costello sings of intimate matters impersonally. Both artists' songs seem to be subterfuge: communiques that create the illusion of disclosure while masking the artists' true passions and disillusion.

Elvis' two shows at the Palomino were much more venturesome. Following rampageous readings of songs from *This Year's Model* and *Armed Forces* (the go-for-the-throat versions of "Goon Squad" and "Green Shirt" made the album tracks seem callow in comparison), Elvis and the Attractions, with the aid of lead guitarist John McFee from Clover (the support band on *My Aim Is True*), launched into a lengthy set of—what could be more mystifying?—country music.

Musically, Elvis sounded a lot like Graham Parker storming through *Heat Treatment*; spiritually, like Gram Parsons baiting his demons before they became friends. In short, transfixing. Without a trace of mockery, Elvis weaved his way deftly around McFee's steel-guitar fills in Jim Reeves' "He'll Have to Go" and George Jones' "(If I Put Them All Together) I'd Have You," then brought the rowdy house to a stunned hush with an eerie rendition of his own "Stranger in the House." At the end, in quick succession, he tossed out "Alison," "(The Angels Wanna Wear My) Red Shoes" and "Mystery Dance," then calmly, almost indifferently, took his leave. For the first time, I came away from an Elvis Costello concert with the feeling that something, after all, had been revealed.



The Clash conquer America

The Clash
The Palladium
New York City
February 17th, 1979

By Tom Carson

IN THE TWO YEARS since the release of their first album, the Clash have earned a following unlike almost any other in rock & roll. To their fans, they're not just the greatest rock & roll band in the world—they're the last hope, the only group that still seems to promise that rock & roll can make a difference. This is an almost impossible burden to put on anyone, but the crowd at the Palladium expected nothing less; they were on their feet before a single note was played.

Two hours later, they were still on their feet. Beginning with "I'm So Bored with the U.S.A."—half-challenge, half-joke, and a perfect opener for the debut American tour the band labeled Pearl Harbor '79—the Clash unleashed one of the most staggering performances I've seen. It was music of heroic grandeur, epic sweep and visceral force; each song was faster and meaner than on record and had twice as much impact.

The musicians' confidence was evident at every turn. Lead guitarist Mick Jones and bassist Paul

Simonon leaped around as if no stage could hold them; Nicky Headon's drums cracked through the music with the authority of machine-gun fire. The group's perfect ensemble timing—the two guitars locking horns above the percussion; the way Jones' ethereal, incantatory backup vocals filled the gaps in Joe Strummer's harsh leads—went beyond mere technical mastery; it was an audible symbol of the band's communal instinct.

As older songs like "White Riot" and "Complete Control" blended in faultlessly with newer material from *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, one had the sense that a whole world was being unfolded—in this case, a world in which war is the only condition and struggle the only escape. Strummer, his eyes alight and staring as he snarled and screamed his message, looked like a man who'd just seen everything he loved destroyed—unsure whether to explode with rage or run for his life. But his extraordinarily expressive face conveyed as much wit as passion; his anger often slipped over the line into a wonderfully comic dismay.

Jones, swaggering like a hussar, was hardly less impressive. He cheerfully introduced "Stay Free" as "the wimpoid ballad of the night," then belied those words with a howling, teeth-bared vocal, tossing off the final wish, "Stay free," into the maelstrom of his own soaring solo and Strummer's crunching, martial rhythm guitar. It was an inspiring moment, and there were many like it. Listening to them, one not only believed in the world at war they sang about, but also wanted to enlist, on their side, on the spot. That night, the Clash were victorious, and, if only for a short while, so were we.

CALENDAR

Eric Clapton/Muddy Waters: Tucson, AZ (3/28); Albuquerque, NM (3/29); El Paso, TX (3/31); Midland, TX (4/1); Norman, OK (4/3).
Elvis Costello: Cleveland, OH (3/20); Harrisburg, PA (3/21); Buffalo, NY (3/22); Syracuse, NY (3/23); Rochester, NY (3/24).
Dire Straits: Houston, TX (3/21); Austin, TX (3/22); Dallas, TX (3/23); Denver, CO (3/25); San Diego, CA (3/27); Los Angeles, CA (3/28,29); San

Francisco, CA (3/31,4/1).
Fabulous Poodles: San Francisco, CA (3/20); Los Angeles, CA (3/22-24).
Rosy Music: Blue Bell, PA (3/28); NYC (3/29); Philadelphia, PA (3/30); Boston, MA (3/31); Baltimore, MD (4/1); Toronto, CAN (4/2).
Thin Lizzy: Madison, WI (3/20); Waterloo, IA (3/21); Kalamazoo, MI (3/22); Detroit, MI (3/23).