

# Slane resounds to the real thing

By Joe Breen

AGAINST a backdrop of lavish praise and high expectations, Bruce Springsteen justified his reputation on Saturday with a performance that, while restricted in its emotional range, was never less than powerful and convincing. As this European tour progresses there is no doubt that the seven-member E-Street Band and its leader will get better, but certainly Slane's seemingly final show will go down in memory as the finest at the venue.

The setting could not have been better. The country where his grandmother was born reserved some beautiful weather for his first visit and the atmosphere among the huge crowd in the natural amphitheatre was a happy mixture of good humour and eager anticipation. As the time for the scheduled start of the concert approached the buzz of excitement grew and when he appeared with his superb band at a few minutes after five the audience found its full voice.

Looking fit and healthy, he launched into the track title of his most recent and biggest-selling album "Born in the USA". While the title may indicate a flag-waving anthem, the song is actually a bitter statement on behalf of those Vietnam veterans who are "10 years burning down the road, nowhere to run, ain't got nowhere to go." The song is typical of Springsteen's concern for those for whom the American dream is just that. Like the dirty realism of the new American writers, Springsteen attempts to paint the picture as it is, highlighting the simple dignity of ordinary people as they struggle through life. It is something he achieves remarkably well because he has maintained contact with his working-class roots.

That spirit of strength through adversity has found echoes in Europe, where recession has cut deep into the heart of idealised lifestyles. The jobless insecurity of "My Home Town" and the "The River" can apply to people all over the world not just in America.

Yet although "The River" was one of the most acclaimed songs of the three-hour plus show, it is the softer, more emotional material that is going to suffer in these huge concerts. Springsteen and his excellent band have built their reputation as a superb live outfit not just on the power of the material and their playing of it, but also on the sense of intimacy and community they can create in a concert. Four years ago I saw him twice in Britain and even before 20,000 fans in Birmingham he could bring an eerie silence to the hall with one of his more emotional songs.



Bruce Springsteen onstage.

In front of 65,000 people in the broad daylight of the open air this is just not possible. The added distractions of the sound delay and the video screens do not help either though the clever use of the video cameras and the excellence of the sound were essential to the overall success of the concert. Basically, by playing such huge venues, Springsteen has to sacrifice one of the most important elements of his live performance — total contact with and control of his audience.

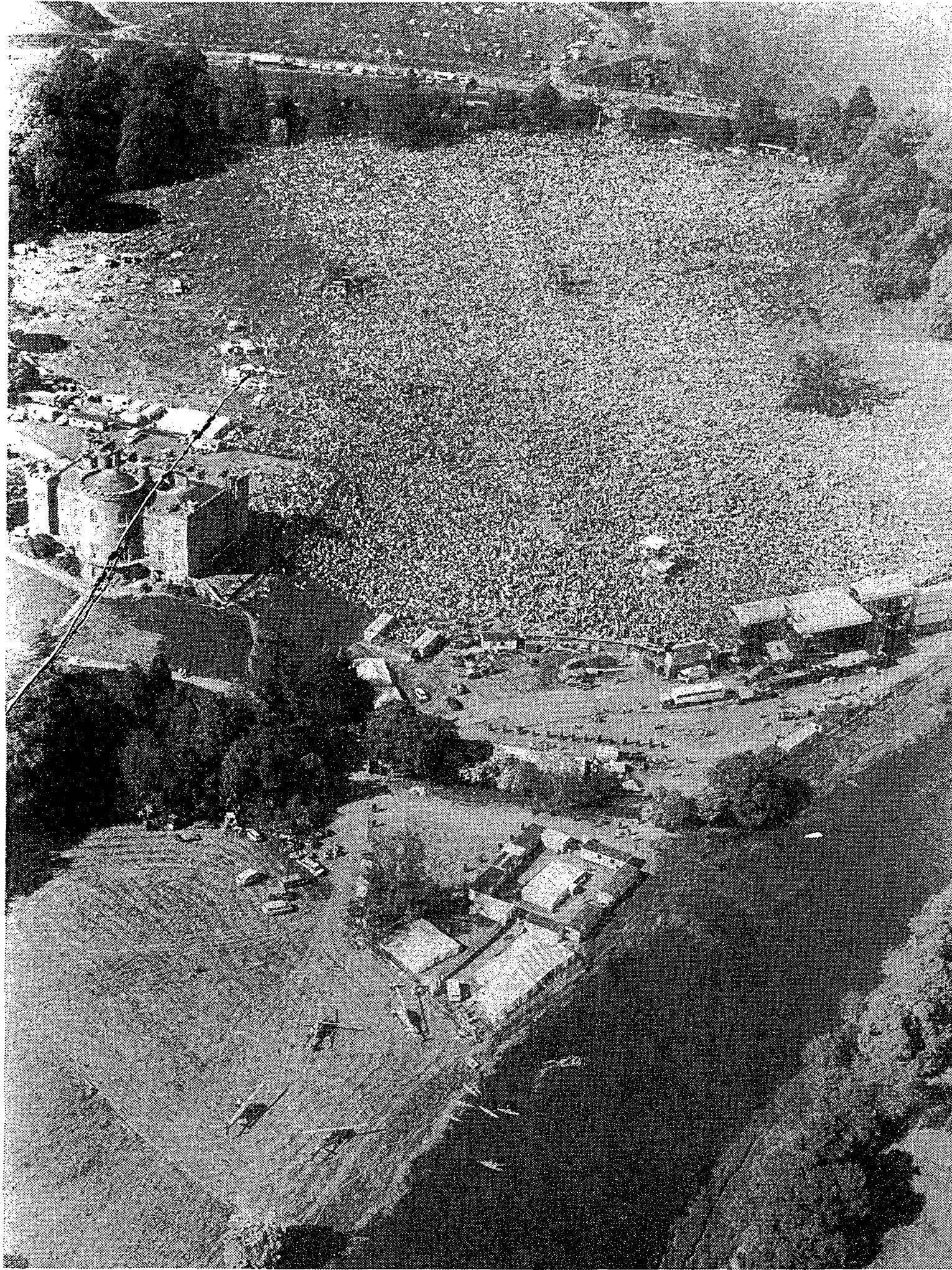
In compensation he rocks a lot harder and the show adopts a

much more "up" profile. Invariably the crowd relates more easily to the pop songs like "Hungry Heart" and "Dancing in the Dark" than to his more difficult songs. The subtleties of his onstage personality have also been curbed and his legendary long and involved song introductions have been shortened and in some cases discarded altogether.

It is impossible not to regret this, but all things change, and not always for the better. Certainly the demands of his own popularity now seriously threaten the unique nature of his art. It is an old story, but one feels that old Bruce has

been through too much to let it slip away now.

Certainly watching him and his excellent E-Streeters — in particular the "big man" saxman Clarence Clemons — tear through songs "Badlands" and wonderful pair, "Cadillac Ranch" and "Pink Cadillac", the rock 'n' roll medleys, "Thunder Road" and, of course, "Rosalita", it was clear that this was a band that loves to play, that loves to perform. Anybody who still believes Bruce Springsteen and the E-Street Band are a rock 'n' roll hype should think again. They are the real thing.



An aerial view of the concert on Saturday. — (Photograph: Jack McManus)

## Concert held without incident

By Michael Foley

THE peacefulness and good nature of the crowd which attended Saturday's Bruce Springsteen concert at Slane Castle, Co. Meath, has mellowed slightly local opposition to concerts being held at the venue.

Residents of the little village opposed the concert because of the violence before last year's Bob Dylan concert. Thousands of pounds worth of damage was caused and many gardai injured. This year due to strict security and attention to detail the weekend's concert went ahead virtually without incident. Over 65,000 people attended the event for which the American rock singer was paid a reported £600,000. Yesterday the spokesman for the residents' association, Mr Gerald Breen, said that while the committee had not discussed the concert he believed the way it had gone ahead would "have a significant effect on our approach to further concerts. We still believe the village is a little bit on the small side, but with the magnificent security that was evident on Saturday it shows a concert can be held without serious incident."

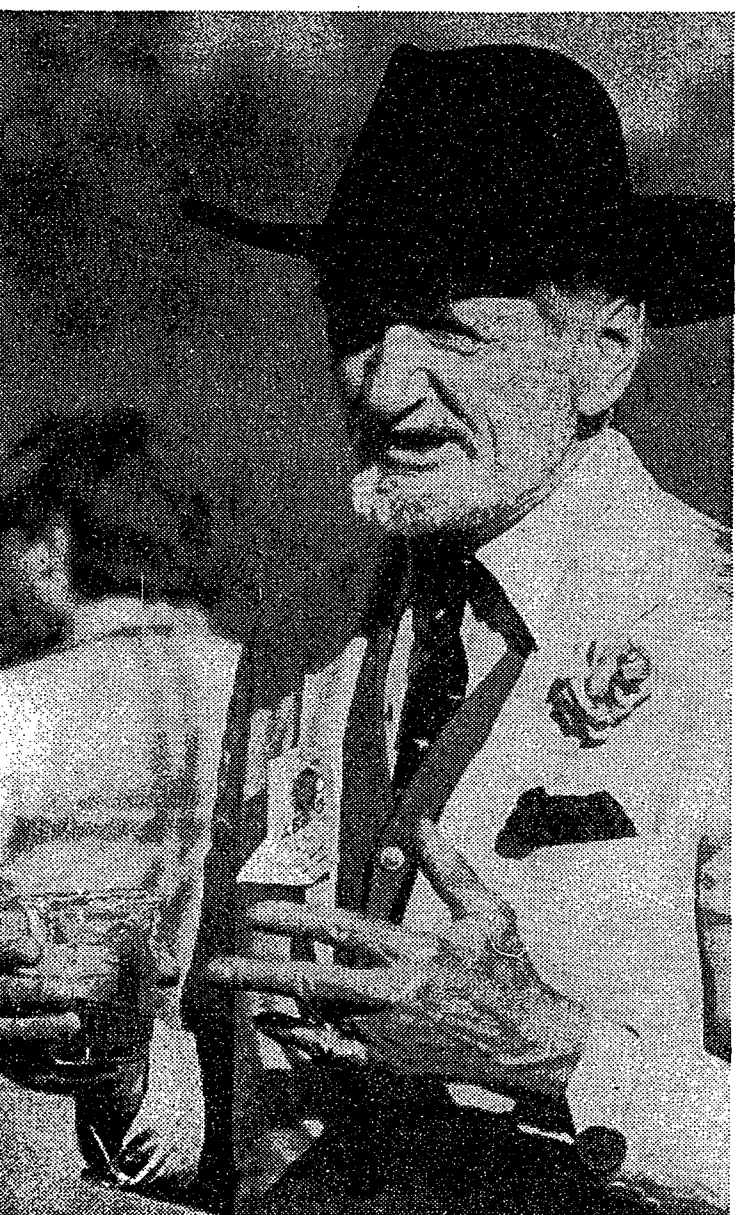
The factors which made the concert a success, according to Mr Breen, were the Garda operation, the lack of overnight camping and the adherence to the 16 conditions made by the residents. Furthermore, "sunshine and Springsteen go together". Chief Superintendent Michael Bohan said the good behaviour of the crowd "showed to the world that the Irish can organise a rock concert which can accommodate thousands of fans without incident". "There were few arrests and the crowd were 'exceptionally' well behaved. There were only two cases of malicious damage, both to cars and some minor thefts. Only three people were arrested for drunkenness. One man was taken in for questioning after gardai seized forged tickets and another was held for possession of heroin."

However, despite warnings from both the concert organisers, Mr Jim Aiken and Lord Henry Mountcharles, and the gardai, that no one was to turn up without tickets, a number were sold outside the gates. A spokesman for the organisers said this had been done as a precaution so as to stop trouble if people did turn up. Touts were also selling tickets — at only a little above the face value of £15. There were reports of fans gaining admittance on forged tickets.

One hundred members of the St John's Ambulance Brigade dealt with 400 cases. Mr Sean McGrath, of the brigade, said most of these had been minor accidents, fainting, sun burn and cuts and bruises; 35 people were taken to hospital.

Many people had to be lifted from the area just in front of the giant stage, because the crowds were pushing forward. At one stage, Springsteen appealed to people to move back.

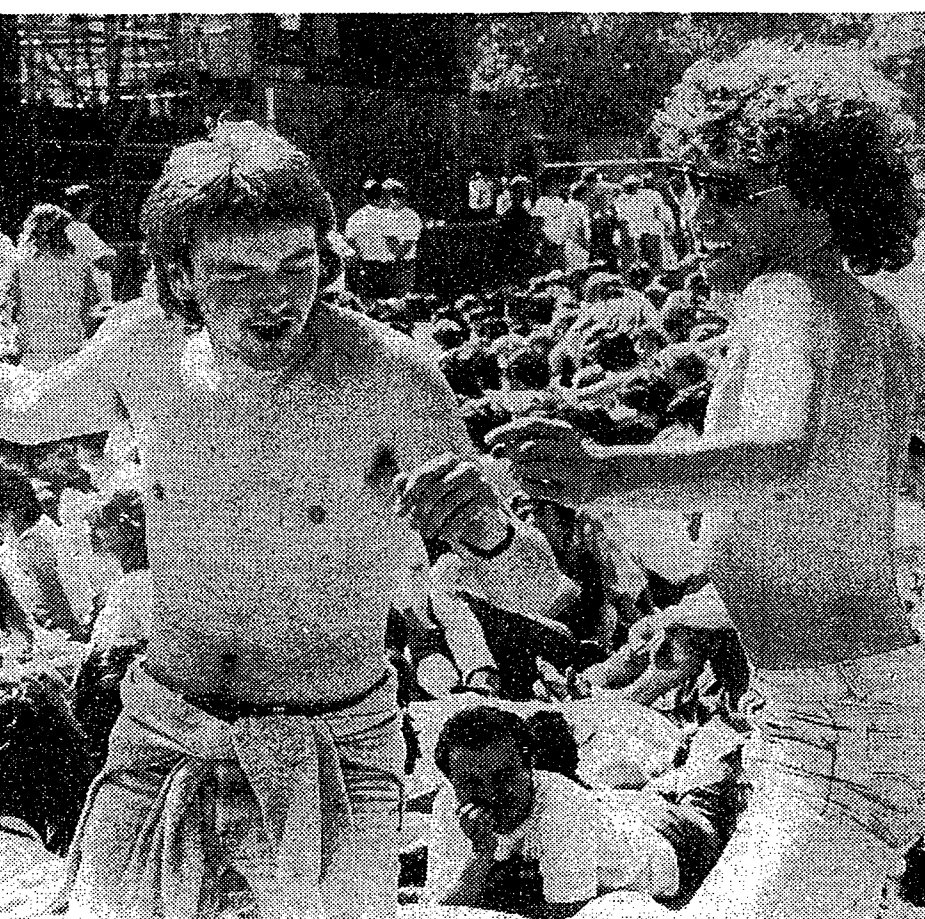
Some difficulties were experienced getting out. Fans also found the walk from the Slane road, along a path in the woods, a little frightening with so many people crammed into such a small area. This route was chosen so as to bypass the village, so reducing the risk of any damage being done. The lack of serious incidents was due, in large measure, to the detailed Garda operation.



Getting into the spirit of the day. — (Photograph: Terry Thorp)

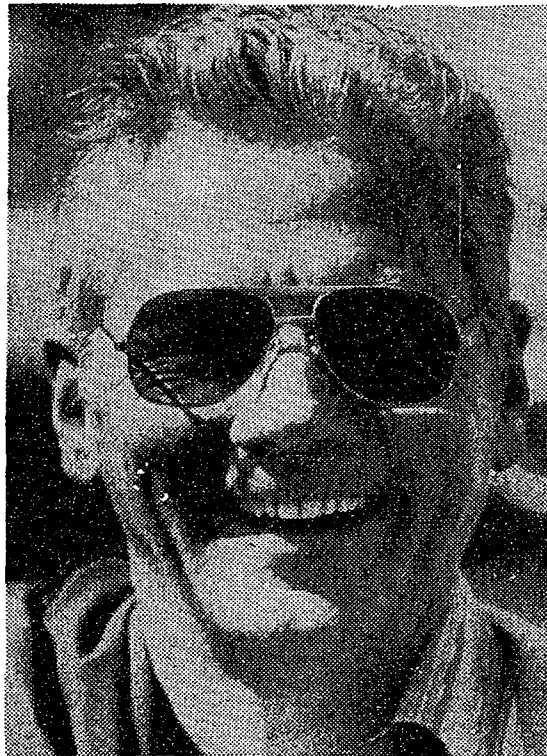
Fine Gael TDs Mr Michael Keating, Mr Liam Skelly and Ms Monica Barnes enjoying the music.

Photographs, except where stated, by MATT KAVANAGH.

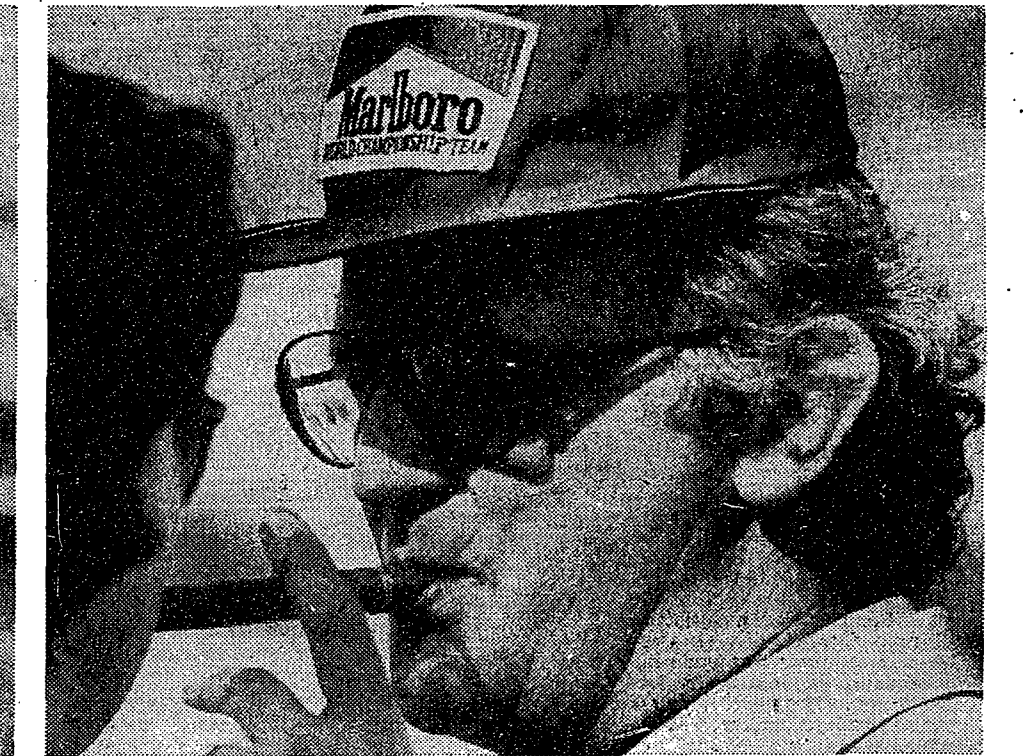


Dancing in the light.

The British rock star, Elvis Costello, and the RTE personality, B. P. Fallon.



Gay Byrne and the Fianna Fail press secretary, Mr P. J. Mara, at the concert.



One of the fans in distress is helped away from the front of the stage.