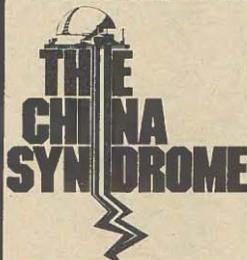


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tightens the screw on his youthful hero with some galvanizing guitar playing, while Crazy Horse cuts loose with everything they've got. The tension is traumatizing, our empathy and fascination unbearable. And Young refuses to let us look away.

"When the first shot hit the dock I saw it comin'," the boy says. We hang with him. And underneath the lyrics (in critic Greil Marcus' classic description), there's "that string of ascending [guitar] notes cut off by a deadly descending chord—fatalism in a phrase." The hero acts: "Raised my rifle to my eye/ Never stopped to wonder why." Young pulls the trigger. The narrator says: "Then I saw black and my face splashed against the sky."

The song doesn't even end there. Instead, the dead boy adds another verse:

*Shelter me from the powder
and the finger
Cover me with the thought
that pulled the trigger
Just think of me as one you
never figured
Would fade away so young
With so much left undone
Remember me to my love, I
know I'll miss her*

The king is gone but he's not forgotten. This, too, could be the story of a Johnny Rotten. Hey hey, my my. Rock & roll can never die.

Neil Young should have the final word on his music, his future and *Rust Never Sleeps*. These lines from "Thrasher" make a magnificent credo:

*But me, I'm not stopping
there, got my own row left to hoe
Just another line in the field
of time
When the thrasher comes I'll
be stuck in the sun like the
dinosaurs in shrines
But I'll know the time has
come to give what's mine.*

Madonna Who Is Trying to Write Some Book

in a house with
plaster falling
and the bills making
a necklache too tight
to wear divorce
smashes into her
glass a huge bird
stunned by
a window the characters
are on
some paper that
was burned in the
other house you
know its cold but
she will change all
this and make you
want it

—LYN LIFSHIN

Sad Zep



[Cont. from 72] Robert Plant meets someone who doesn't dump on him, he should avoid calling her "the apple of my eye" or she will probably reject him, just as I am rejecting "I'm Gonna Crawl," in which he sings that cliché almost as if it meant something. Any band portraying itself as mystical romantic poets ought to go to the minimal trouble of being obscure enough to cover up its lack of anything to say.

As you might suspect, *In through the Out Door's* best number is the one in which you can understand the least words. This is "In the Evening," a classic Zeppelin orchestral guitar rumble halfway between "When the Levee Breaks" and "In the Light." The only line I was able to understand was "Oh oh I need zoo love." Judging by Plant's convincing orgasmic moans on the rest of it, I would rather guess at the remaining lyrics.

Back when Led Zeppelin was setting the heavy-metal standard (LPs I through IV) for all time, Jimmy Page was coming up with two or three great guitar riffs on damn near every tune. A lot of them were copped from Mississippi Delta blues masters like Robert Johnson, but knowing where to steal is every great artist's dirty little secret. Page now appears to have fallen victim to the law of diminishing returns, because "In the Evening" has the only great guitar riff on the entire album. The rest of the songs are based on John Paul Jones' keyboard work. Though an excellent musician, Jones functions best behind Page, not in front of him.

Side two consists of three of the least effective songs the band has ever recorded. "Carousellambra," the opener, is built on an extremely lame keyboard riff and clocks in at an absurd 10:28. Repetition to weave a hypnotic effect has always been part of the Zeppelin sound, but what they are repeating here is not worth the effort. "All My Love" and "I'm Gonna Crawl," both slow and incorporating synthesized violins, let the record peter out instead of climax. Side one qualifies as occasionally interesting—particularly the heavy-metal square dance, "Hot Dog," and Bonham

driving a locomotive through the mariachi (I think) beat in the middle of "Fool in the Rain"—but the only cut I'll return to with any enthusiasm is "In the Evening."

I thought Van Halen was going to be the next Led Zeppelin until they succumbed to the law of diminishing returns on their second album. Now—with Page's creativity apparently failing and no one able to compensate—even Led Zeppelin is not Led Zeppelin. I wonder who wants the throne bad enough to take it.

The Clash: street-fighting men



The Clash Epic

By Tom Carson

AS A DOCUMENTARY of rock & roll teenagers battling first for good times and then for survival in a blasted urban landscape, the Clash's debut album, released in England in 1977 but never made available here, had an astonishing immediacy. You got the feeling that it was recorded virtually in the street, while the National Front marched and the threat of riots flickered all around. And yet the story the LP told—with rage and humor—was as complex, as varied and finally as universal as the American tale of the eternal outsider that critic Greil Marcus found in the music of the Band. Perhaps more than any album ever made, *The Clash* dramatized rock & roll as a last, defiantly cheerful grab for life, something scrawled on the run on subway walls. Here was a record that defined rock's risks and its pleasures, and told us, once again, that this music was worth fighting for.

That it was a fight was never in question. The British punk scene was a battleground from its birth, and the Sex Pistols' violent end left the Clash as the lone survivors on

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the field. The Pistols, apocalyptic in everything, had wanted to be the last rock & roll band in the world—the Clash, heroes by necessity, had to be the greatest. Ever since *The Clash* staked out their initial turf, their music has been an excruciating, extravagant, brave attempt to live up to that role even as they rail against the impossibility of succeeding at it—i.e., a public debate on what the brass ring might be worth.

By patching together tracks from the first LP along with the later, obsessively self-referential singles made before last year's *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, the American version of *The Clash* tries to tell two stories at once: a gritty journalistic account of one nameless punk's 1977 journey through England side by side with the tale of the not-so-nameless, self-consciously embattled punk stars the Clash later became. It doesn't quite work. Because the Clash is a band that redefines itself with each new release, hearing the songs out of chronological order is maddeningly disconcerting—especially to American audiences unfamiliar with the original context.

Though the tunes omitted here were the lesser ones on the British edition of *The Clash*, they added a lot to that record's vivid sense of wholeness, to the feeling of a single dramatic moment caught in all its shifting facets. The new version, by contrast, is scattershot and marooned—full of worthwhile nuggets but lacking a center. Its double focus is confusing in more ways than one: you hear the band wrestling with its legend without ever quite being allowed to hear the music that created the legend in the first place.

And yet, after all that, what we are left with is still extraordinary. This music has a barbed urgency that no one else has ever matched: sparse, coarse, lunging and extreme, it's always—barely, almost desperately—held under control. The later material grafted onto the U.S. *Clash* is richer and fuller, exchanging the flinty, humorous lower-depths eye of the earlier numbers for a flailing melodrama that's layered with doubt and ambiguity (a change most obvious in the switch from Tory Crimes' spare, flexible drumming to Topper Headon's more epic style). There's absolutely no loss of tension, however. In the chilling "White Man in Hammersmith Palais," the corruption of rock & roll mirrors the disintegration of a whole society—destruction accumulates by bits and pieces, voices shout and whisper distress signals in the background. Then the horror crystallizes and hits you full in the face: "If Adolf Hitler flew in today," Joe Strummer accuses, his voice a corrosive welt of rage and terror, "they'd send a limousine anyway."

If the centerpiece of the original album was "Janie Jones" (a terse, comic, rousing account of one young man's breakneck plunge into the rock & roll world), the thematic core of the new edition is the Clash's cover version of Bobby Fuller's "I Fought the Law." Though its lyrics admit defeat, this song's greatness has always been that it explodes with a triumphant, transcendent pride. Here, Headon's drums build like distant thunderheads, the guitars wheel and crash, and Strummer digs into the vainglorious words with a

This music takes chances as a matter of course. It never deals in anything but ultimates.

meaty gusto that makes it sound as if he wouldn't have it any other way. "I Fought the Law" is flamboyantly self-aggrandizing in a manner that the group's older material would never have allowed. And yet the performance is terrific, savagely exuberant in the face of doom.

"Complete Control" goes even further. Like so many Clash tunes, it escalates a minor incident into a full-scale war: a protest against the Clash's record company becomes a life-or-death battle for rock & roll itself. Mick Jones' guitar sounds a final clarion call. Riffs stutter, stumble and catch fire in the trough. Joe Strummer's singing roars up from the depths with a message of no surrender even as the music threatens to flatten him for good. "Complete Control" may be the most desperately heroic call to arms ever put to vinyl.

Like Francis Coppola's camera journeying upriver in *Apocalypse Now*, this LP roves over scenes of a struggle that seems as endless as it is brutal. At times the Clash's melodramatic impulse, their incessant need to fling themselves into the center of every storm and turn their experience into epic allegory, plays them wrong. Too many songs rehash the same ground: "Gates of the West," an account of the band's tour of America (included here as a bonus single), sounds condescending, in marked contrast to the bitterly truthful working-class resentment of "I'm So Bored with the U.S.A." But that same instinct allows the Clash to ram home lessons that no

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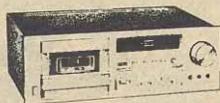
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one else has put so directly before—as in the album's autobiographical closer, "Garageland," where Strummer flings down what might be the group's credo. "The truth," he sings, "is only known by guttersnipes."

The Clash's militant politics struggle in a void: sometimes they're less the product of an actual battle than an attempt to get people to go out and fight on their own. In "White Riot" (unless my ears deceive me, a different take than the English version—other cuts appear to have been remixed), which is not about a riot but about wanting one, Strummer makes his plea as plain as possible:

*All the power is in the hands
Of people rich enough to
buy it
While we walk the street
Too chicken to even try it.*

The Clash are pulled into the fight almost against their will. "You have to deal with it," Mick Jones warns in "Hate & War." "It is the currency."

This music takes chances as a matter of course—it never deals in anything but ultimates. But the rhetoric is always charged and pointed with incisive, specific details. The hero of these tunes, whether he's Joe Strummer or just a punk, never becomes a liberal Everyman. Whether he's mocking the welfare state in "Career Opportunities," reaching out for solidarity in "Police & Thieves" (the Clash's tribute to reggae as punk politics) only to abandon all hope of it in the Hammersmith Palais, or finding his old mates all dead or in jail in the ringing "Jail Guitar Doors," the hero's anger, his rough, deflating wit and his defiant spirit remain uniquely his own. The force of character and the sense of the epic in the band's songs, for all their topical urgency, have a grandeur that's almost Shakespearean.

The British edition of *The Clash* was, triumphantly, about staying alive in a wasteland. The American version of *The Clash*—less certain, less fulfilled than its predecessor—is about chaos. The new packaging reveals the contradictions: the grainy photograph of a London riot that adorned the 1977 LP like a newspaper headline is now balanced by glossy liner photos and a helpful (though oddly incomplete) lyric sheet. It's an attempt to make the Clash look more like everyone else. But they aren't like anyone else. Despite the trimming and the compromises, their music remains a crackling live wire that can't be silenced. What it has to say is part of our currency, too. And anyone in America who still cares about rock & roll must listen.

Two from Rockpile



Labour of Lust
Nick Lowe
Columbia

Repeat When Necessary
Dave Edmunds
Swan Song

"Cruel to Be Kind"/"Endless Grey Ribbon"
Nick Lowe
Columbia single

"Cracking Up"/"Basing Street"
Nick Lowe
Radar import single

By Kit Rachlis

ROCK & ROLL offers no precedent for Nick Lowe. Which isn't to say that *Labour of Lust* sounds unfamiliar. Quite the opposite. The three-o'clock-in-the-morning strains of "Basing Street," the C&W mournfulness of "Endless Grey Ribbon," the good-natured lasciviousness of "Switch Board Susan," the romantic paradox of "Cruel to Be Kind"—in other words, everything that the *Labour of Lust* (or, for that matter, last year's *Pure Pop for Now People*) sessions produced—are as familiar and cozy as your grandmother's quilt. Still, you have to go outside rock & roll—to pop art, to the modern novel maybe—to find anybody who compares to Lowe. Oh, there are plenty of humane iron-

LEFT: How do directors overcome technical difficulties like photographing a dancer *Singin' in the Rain*?

RIGHT: Is merchandising of spinoffs more important to commercial success than the film itself?