

R

ECORDS



*Brash Clash
bash smash*

THE CLASH: COMING TO TERMS WITH GREATNESS

London Calling
The Clash
Epic

By Tom Carson

BY NOW, OUR EXPECTATIONS of the Clash might seem to have become inflated beyond any possibility of fulfillment. It's not simply that they're the greatest rock & roll band in the world—indeed, after years of watching too many superstars compromise, blow chances and sell out, being the greatest is just about synonymous with being the music's last hope. While the group itself resists such labels, they do tell you exactly how high the stakes are, and how urgent the need. The Clash got their start on the crest of what looked like a revolution, only to see the punk movement either smash up on its own violent momentum or be absorbed into the same corporate-rock machinery it had meant to destroy. Now, almost against their will, they're the only ones left.

Give 'Em Enough Rope, the band's last recording, railed against the notion that being rock & roll heroes meant martyrdom. Yet the album also presented itself so flamboyantly as a last stand that it created a near-insoluble problem: after you've already brought the apocalypse crashing down on

your head, how can you possibly go on? On the Clash's new LP, *London Calling*, there's a composition called "Death or Glory" that seems to disavow the struggle completely. Over a harsh and stormy guitar riff, lead singer Joe Strummer offers a grim litany of failure. Then his cohort, Mick Jones, steps forward to drive what appears to be the final nail into the coffin. "Death or glory," he bitterly announces, "become just another story."

But "Death or Glory" — in many ways, the pivotal song on *London Calling* — reverses itself midway. After Jones' last, anguished cry drops off into silence, the music seems to scatter from the echo of his words. Strummer reenters, quiet and undramatic, talking almost to himself at first and not much caring if anyone else is listening. "We're gonna march a long way," he whispers. "Gonna fight—a long time." The guitars, distant as bugles on some faraway plain, begin to rally. The drums collect into a beat, and Strummer slowly picks up strength and authority as he sings:

We've gotta travel — over mountains

We've gotta travel—over seas

We're gonna fight — you, brother

We're gonna fight — till you lose

We're gonna raise —

TROUBLE!

The band races back to the firing line, and when the singers go surging into the final chorus of "Death or glory...just another story," you know what they're really saying: *like hell it is!*

MERRY AND TOUGH, passionate and large-spirited, *London Calling* celebrates the romance of rock & roll rebellion in grand, epic terms. It doesn't merely reaffirm the Clash's own commitment to rock-as-revolution. Instead, the record ranges across the whole of rock & roll's past for its sound, and digs deeply into rock legend, history, politics and myth for its images and themes. Everything has been brought together into a single, vast, stirring story — one that, as the Clash tell it, seems not only theirs but ours. For all its first-take scrappiness and guerrilla production, this two-LP set—which, at the group's insistence, sells for not much more than the price of one—is music that means to endure. It's so rich and far-reaching that it leaves you not just exhilarated but exalted and triumphantly alive.

From the start, however, you know how tough a fight it's going to be. "London Calling" opens the album on an ominous note. When Strummer comes in on the downbeat, he sounds weary, used up, desperate: "The Ice Age is com-

ing/The sun is zooming in/Melt-down expected/The wheat is growing thin."

The rest of the record never turns its back on that vision of dread. Rather, it pulls you through the horror and out the other side. The Clash's brand of heroism may be supremely romantic, even naive, but their utter refusal to sentimentalize their own myth—and their determination to live up to an actual code of honor in the real world, without ever minimizing the odds — makes such romanticism seem not only brave but absolutely necessary. *London Calling* sounds like a series of insistent messages sent to the scattered armies of the night, proffering warnings and comfort, good cheer and exhortations to keep moving. If we begin amid the desolation of the title track, we end, four sides later, with Mick Jones spitting out heroic defiance in "I'm Not Down" and finding a majestic metaphor at the pit of his depression that lifts him — and us — right off the ground. "Like skyscrapers rising up," Jones screams, "Floor by floor—I'm not giving up." Then Joe Strummer invites the audience, with a wink and a grin, to "smash up your seats and rock to this brand new beat" in the merry-go-round invocation of "Revolution Rock."

Against all the brutality, injustice and large and small betrayals delineated in song after song here — the assembly-line Fascists in "Clampdown," the advertising executives of "Koka Kola," the drug dealer who turns out to be the singer's one friend in the jittery, hypnotic "Hateful" — the Clash can only offer their sense of historic purpose and the faith, innocence, humor and camaraderie embodied in the band itself. This shines through everywhere, balancing out the terrors that the LP faces again and again. It can take forms as simple as letting bassist Paul Simonon sing his own "The Guns of Brixton," or as relatively subtle as the way Strummer modestly moves in to support Jones' fragile lead vocal on the forlorn "Lost in the Supermarket." It can be as intimate and hilarious as the moment when Joe Strummer deflates any hint of portentousness in the sexual-equality polemics of "Lover's Rock" by squawking "I'm so nervous!" to close the tune. In "Four Horsemen," which sounds like the movie soundtrack to a rock & roll version of *The Seven Samurai*, the Clash's martial pride turns openly exultant. The guitars and drums start at a thundering gallop, and when Strummer sings, "Four horsemen . . ." the other members of the group charge into line to shout joyously: "...and it's gonna be us!"

London Calling is spacious and extravagant. It's as packed with characters and incidents as a great novel, and the band's new stylistic

LEARN THE ART OF RECORDING

in the professional recording studio



- "Hands-on" music recording/mixing in studio
- Learn RECORDING ENGINEERING, the BUSINESS OF MUSIC and creative RECORD PRODUCTION (how to produce) and SOUND REINFORCEMENT
- Seminars taught by top music professionals
- Ideal experience in a relaxed country setting
- 4 Recording Studios • Placement Program • Co-educational

THE RECORDING WORKSHOP

- The first and foremost Recording Workshop in the USA and Canada since 1971
- Recognized nationally in the music/recording industry
- Offers "the Recording Engineer Apprentice" certificate and curriculum
- Summer, Fall, Winter & Spring sessions
- Licensed by the State of Ohio - State Board of School and College Registration.

"The Recording Workshop is an exciting month-long course of instruction in professional recording engineering in the studio. An ideal first step for anyone (whether you are experienced or a beginner) who is interested in the music recording profession."

CHOOSE WORKSHOP DATES

Late Spring Session-April 14-May 9
 Early Summer Session-June 23-July 18
 Late Summer Session-August 4-August 29
 Fall Session-October 6-October 31

NO PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE NECESSARY
Limited Enrollment - Write or Call Immediately

THE RECORDING WORKSHOP

455 MASSIEVILLE RD. — CHILLICOTHE, OHIO 45601

For Brochure:

Name _____

Address _____

*CALL TOLL FREE: Ohio & Outside USA
(800) 848-9900 (614) 663-2544

expansions — brass, organ, occasional piano, blues grind, pop airiness and the reggae-dub influence that percolates subversively through nearly every number — add density and richness to the sound. The riotous rockabilly-meets-the-Ventures quality of "Brand New Cadillac" ("Jesus Christ!") Strummer yells to his ex-girlfriend, having so much fun he almost forgets to be angry, "Whereja get that Cadillac?" slips without pause into the strung-out shuffle of "Jimmy Jazz," a Nelson Algren-like street scene that limps along as slowly as its hero, just one step ahead of the cops. If "Rudie Can't Fail" (the "She's Leaving Home" of our generation) celebrates an initiation into bohemian lowlife with affection and panache, "The Card Cheat" picks up on what might be the same character twenty years later, shot down in a last grab for "more time away from the darkest door." An awesome orchestral backing track gives this low-depths anecdote a somber weight far beyond its scope. At the end of "The Card Cheat," the song suddenly explodes into a magnificent panoramic overview — "from the Hundred Year War to the Crimea" — that turns ephemeral pathos into permanent tragedy.

Other tracks tackle history head-on, and claim it as the Clash's own. "Wrong 'Em Boyo" updates the story of Stagger Lee in bumptious reggae terms, forging links between rock & roll legend and the group's own politicized roots-rock rebel. "The Right Profile," which is about Montgomery Clift, accomplishes a different kind of transformation. Over braying and sarcastic horns, Joe Strummer gags, mugs, mocks and snickers his way through a comic-horrible account of the actor's collapse on booze and pills, only to close with a grudging admiration that becomes unexpectedly and astonishingly moving. It's as if the singer is saying, no matter how ugly and pathetic Clift's life was, he was still—in spite of everything — one of us.

"Spanish Bombs" is probably *London Calling's* best and most ambitious song. A soaring, chiming intro pulls you in, and before you can get your bearings, Strummer's already halfway into his tale. Lost and lonely in his "disco casino," he's unable to tell whether the gunfire he hears is out on the streets or inside his head. Bits of Spanish doggerel, fragments of combat scenes, jangling flamenco guitars and the lilting vocals of a children's tune mesh in a swirling kaleidoscope of courage and disillusionment, old wars and new corruption. The evocation of the Spanish Civil War is sumptuously romantic: "With trenches full of poets, the ragged army, fixin' bayonets to fight the other line,"

Strummer sings, as Jones throws in some lovely, softly stinging notes behind him. Here as elsewhere, the heroic past isn't simply resurrected for nostalgia's sake. Instead, the Clash state that the lessons of the past must be earned before we can apply them to the present.

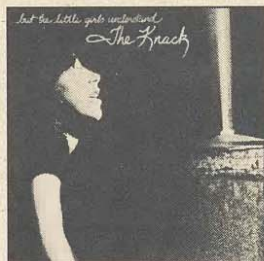
London Calling certainly lives up to that challenge. With its grainy cover photo, its immediate, on-the-run sound, and songs that bristle with names and phrases from today's headlines, it's as topical as a broadside. But the album also claims to be no more than the latest battlefield in a war of rock & roll, culture and politics that'll undoubtedly go on forever. "Revolution Rock," the LP's formal coda, celebrates the joys of this struggle as an eternal carnival. A spiraling organ weaves circles around Joe Strummer's voice, while the horn section totters, sways and recovers like a drunken mariachi band. "This must be the way out," Strummer calls over his shoulder, so full of glee at his own good luck that he can hardly believe it. "El

Clash Combo," he draws like a proud father, coasting now, sure he's made it home. "Weddings, parties, anything.../And bongo jazz a specialty."

But it's Mick Jones who has the last word. "Train in Vain" arrives like an orphan in the wake of "Revolution Rock." It's not even listed on the label, and it sounds faint, almost overheard. Longing, tenderness and regret mingle in Jones' voice as he tries to get across to his girl that losing her meant losing everything, yet he's going to manage somehow. Though his sorrow is complete, his pride is that he can sing about it. A wistful, simple number about love and loss and perseverance, "Train in Vain" seems like an odd ending to the anthemic tumult of *London Calling*. But it's absolutely appropriate, because if this record has told us anything, it's that a love affair and a revolution—small battles as well as large ones—are not that different. They're all part of the same long, bloody march.

Leave it to Fieger

Nixing the Knack



...but the little girls understand
The Knack
Capitol

By Dave Marsh

OF COURSE, THERE'S no way to win with a record like this. Like the Eddie Haskell-type kid down the block, who was always spotless and mannerly but innately a creep (remember *Leave It to Beaver?*), there's no way to convince Mom—or the fans—that it's all a fraud. Who'd believe you?

There was once a pernicious rumor to the effect that Alice Cooper was Eddie Haskell. What Alice ever did to deserve that is beyond me—he was really a nice guy. On the other hand, the Knack's rhythm-guitar mouthpiece, Doug Fieger, is the perfect Haskell stereotype: in every photo I've ever seen of him, he's either smirking or about to, and his sing-

ing is just an aural smirk. It's not that Fieger or the Knack are bullies exactly — there's nothing that forceful about them—but there's a sense they'd like to have it both ways. Doug Fieger claims in his rare interviews that he's little more than a "craftsman," then turns around and utters philosophical pronouncements that reveal his profound ignorance of rock & roll history and make him sound like a poor man's Pete Townshend. Where does this terminally (I hope) cute joker get off?

Don't ask. The most salient characteristic of both Knack albums is their repulsive misogyny. Sexism pervades every song these guys have written, so much so that looking at that fresh, innocent young woman's face on the cover of...but the little girls understand is enough to make you nauseous. I'm not talking about the usual heavy-metal, my-cock-is-harder-than-yours posturing either. In Fieger's lyrics, women are literally commodities whose chief purpose is to be brutalized. The kid in "Baby Talks Dirty" is a foul-mouthed windup doll, and in "Mr. Handelman," the tame calypso that's the new LP's catchiest number, the protagonist is pimping for his wife—a situation the group views with dispassion, if not outright approbation.

The music can't redeem the lyrics—not only because such dehumanization is irredeemable, but also because the music is lame.

Indeed, the Knack are the most nefarious sort of hacks. They're terribly competent and they have a seemingly inexhaustible storehouse of clichés, drawn from everybody from Buddy Holly and the Beatles—check out "Tell Me You're Mine" and "(Havin' a) Rave Up" here—to early Fleetwood Mac ("End of the Game") and the Lettermen ("How Can Love Hurt So Much"). In a way, Fieger & Company manipulate their stockpile of banalities with as much finesse as any band since Foreigner—though that's a little unfair to Foreigner, who at least grind out their radio fodder with some verve. But the Knack's greatest achievement is to make hard-rock clichés sound completely gutless. Which comes as no surprise, since Fieger's original Detroit group, Sky, was mewling Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young harmonies at the same time the MC5 were inventing the punk-rock genre the Knack now dilutes and exploits.

To be entirely honest, I must admit that the Knack does have a message. All of Fieger's lyrics finally boil down to one sentiment: fuck me, honey. (When he's feeling ambitious, he writes something like "Can't Put a Price on Love," which translates: fuck me for free, babe.) How pleasant it'd be to lock this clown in a closet with a tape loop of Marianne Faithfull's "Why D'Ya Do It." Because, at their most wimpoid, Fieger's puling vocals suggest that, for him, the ultimate agony would be to imagine that somewhere in the world there exists a woman who might find him sexually unattractive. Compared to Doug Fieger, Rod Stewart is a paragon of sexual humility.

It might be argued that my analysis takes such a featherweight band far too seriously. But faced with an Eddie Haskell, there are only two choices: ignore him (which is what we used to do with Sky) or call his bluff and kick his ass. Take your pick. Me, I'm a man of action.

Our Relationship

Tonight we could discuss our relationship.
Or we could trick you out in your too-small Lily of Francy underpants;
watch you put on stockings sleek & black as mink (I'll move the mirror);
pell one off? bind you; violate the laws of man & nature.
But it's your choice; I have no preference.

—GARY MATSON



Love Stinks
The J. Geils Band
EMI-America

By Ed Levine

LIKE THE BEATLES and the Rolling Stones, the J. Geils Band got its start by churning out loving, frantic cover versions of R&B, blues and Fifties rock 'n' roll classics. While the Beatles and Stones moved on to find their own niches (mostly because of the compositional abilities of Lennon-McCartney and Jagger-Richards), the lack of a solid writer always held J. Geils back. However, on the group's last two albums, *Monkey Island* and *Sanctuary*, Peter Wolf and Seth Justman finally seemed to have developed a strong songwriting flair. "Surrender," "You're the Only One," "Sanctuary" and "One Last Kiss" were fine rock numbers, and the future looked bright. Unfortunately, the promise of those two LPs makes *Love Stinks* more than a little disappointing.

Things start out okay with "Just Can't Wait," an infectious up-tempo pop rocker that boasts an irresistible hook and a catchy, handclap-dominated chorus. Later, the Strangeloves' Sixties classic, "Night Time," gets treated with energy and conviction. "Till the Walls Come Tumblin' Down" is a typical Geils raveup, excitingly propelled by the band's airtight rhythm section.

But the rest of the record is plagued by indifferent material and Seth Justman's bloated, uneven, synthesizer-dominated production. "Come Back" spotlights a Eurodisco feel that simply sounds incongruous, while the title track is marred by banal lyrics and a mundane melody. "Tryin' Not to Think about It" carries a heavy-metal intro that seems unconnected to the body of the tune. "No Anchovies, Please" is an embarrassing talking song that could be a Firesign Theater reject.

Love Stinks is a step backward for J. Geils. One can only hope that whatever inspired the group on *Monkey Island* can be rediscovered and used again. Indeed, some inspiration would appear essential if the J. Geils Band is going to evolve toward a more distinct and original musical identity.