

RECORD EXEC'S LETTER TO A PUNK FAN ABOUT WHY HE **PASSED ON THE CLASH** Last year Paul Dougherty posted this treasure on his blog When p**k was a work in progress, where it then went unaccountably ignored. The setup is that in 1977, as a punk fan annoyed that the Clash's first (and, at that point, only) album hadn't yet found

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The Clash

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> distribution in the United States, Dougherty wrote Epic Records a letter to express his annoyance. Remarkably, Epic wrote back—and the letter Dougherty received is a fascinating document of a tumultuous moment in the history of rock music. Bruce Harris was the name of the thoughtful A&R representative from Epic Records, and his letter is a nearly perfect blend of punk idolatry and corporate wariness. Harris has appeared on DM before—he was the executive who signed the Nails in 1984, and

as it happens, that band's lead singer and main songwriter, Marc Campbell, has been one of the most stimulating Dangerous Minds contributors for many years. In 2011 Campbell wrote about the perils for musicians of getting involved in the music business, noting in a postscript that "My experience at RCA would have been far worse had it not been for the comradeship of two people who did love rock and roll: Bruce Harris (R.I.P.)



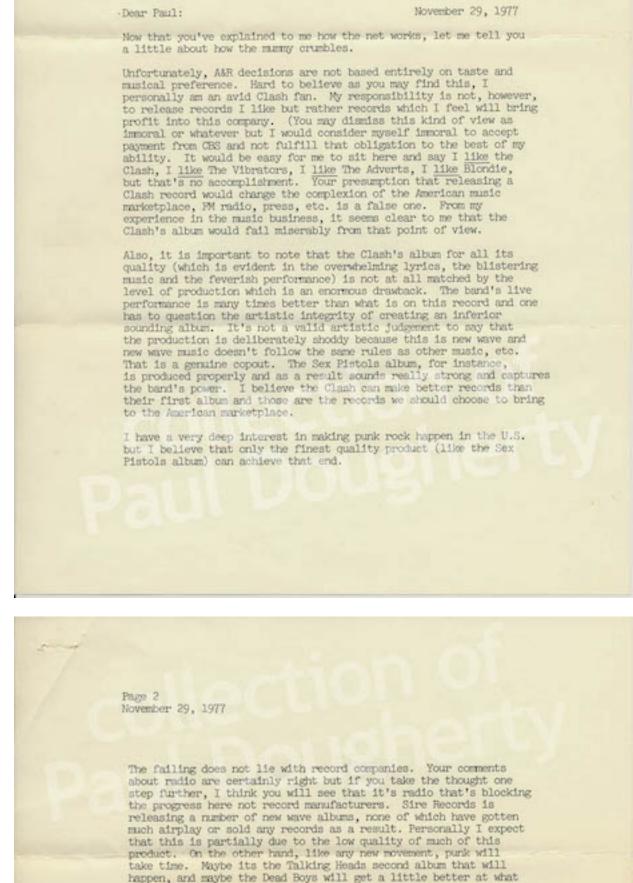
of calling the album his new favorite punk LP from the U.K., noted at the time that it was "apparently tuneless and notoriously underproduced." One gainsays Harris' expertise in handicapping the likely future success of bands in the American marketplace at one's peril, but what's hilarious about his missive is the extent to which he may have gotten it wrong. When he lists a bunch of bands that he loves but can't sell in the U.S., consisting entirely of Blondie, the Clash, the Adverts, and the Vibrators, that list (and the mindset willing to back it) would instantly have made Harris the greatest A&R man of the era. Harris wasn't in the business of distributing records that would still be viable assets in the year 2000, although ... he kind of was.

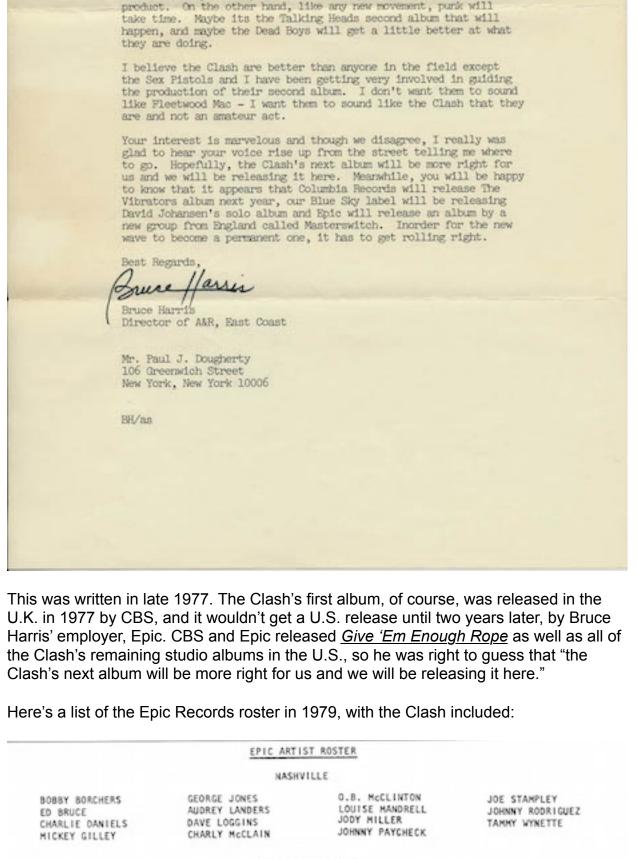
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profound ironies. OK—enough of my yakkin'. Here's the letter, transcription is below. EPIC 51 West 52 Street New York, New York 10019 (212) 765-4321

would have faced in selling the Clash to lowa, but it does generate some pretty





gives a flying fuck about Masterswitch. (Okay, okay: According to Discogs, Epic did put out one single solitary 7-inch in 1978.) He was also astute in surmising that Talking Heads would be arguably new wave's greatest crossover success. November 29, 1977

The Vibrators' first album, *Pure Mania*, received a U.S. release by Columbia in 1977, but given the date of this letter, it's not likely that a vague reference to "next year" refers

to that; either the album was already out or he knew its release date perfectly well. Meanwhile, neither Epic nor CBS had anything to do with the U.S. release of the

Harris was quite right about Blue Sky releasing Johansen's first album, and nobody

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Vibrators' second album, V2.

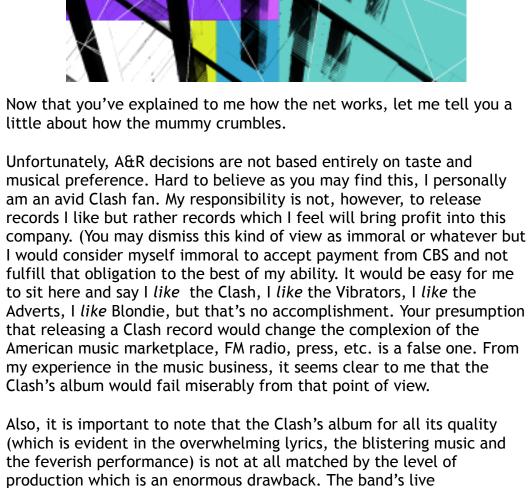
Dear Paul:

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the Clash can make better records than their first album and those are the records we should choose to bring to the American marketplace. I have a very deep interest in making punk rock happen in the U.S. but I believe that only the finest quality product (like the Sex Pistols album) can achieve that end. The failing does not lie with record companies. Your comments about radio are certainly right but if you take the thought one step further, I think you will see that it's radio that's blocking the progress here not record manufacturers. Sire Records is releasing a number of new wave albums, none of which have gotten much airplay or sold any records as a result. Personally I expect that this is partially due to the low quality of much of this product. On the other hand, like any new movement, punk will take time. Maybe its the Talking Heads second album that

will happen, and maybe the Dead Boys will get a little better at what

I believe the Clash are better than anyone in the field except the Sex Pistols and I have been very involved in guiding the production of their second album. I don't want them to sound like Fleetwood Mac—I want them to sound like the Clash that they are and not an amateur act.

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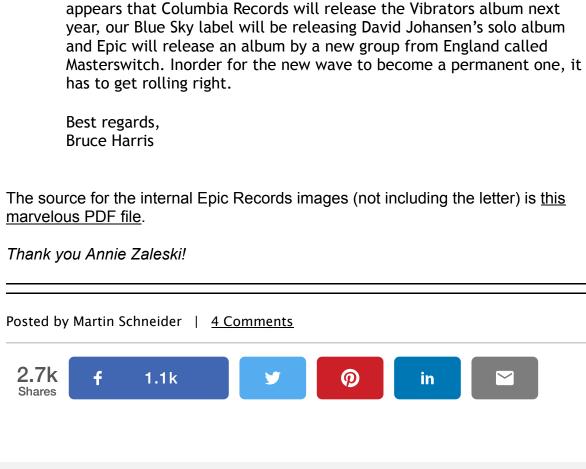
they are doing.

performance is many times better than what is on this record and one has to question the artistic integrity of creating an inferior sounding album. It's not a valid artistic judgement to say that the production is deliberately shoddy because this is new wave and new wave music doesn't follow the same rules as other music, etc. This is a genuine copout. The Sex Pistols album, for instance, is produced properly and as a result sounds really strong and captures the band's power. I believe

Your interest is marvelous and though we disagree, I really was glad to

Hopefully, the Clash's next album will be more right for us and we will be releasing it here. Meanwhile, you will be happy to know that it

hear your voice rise up from the street telling me where to go.



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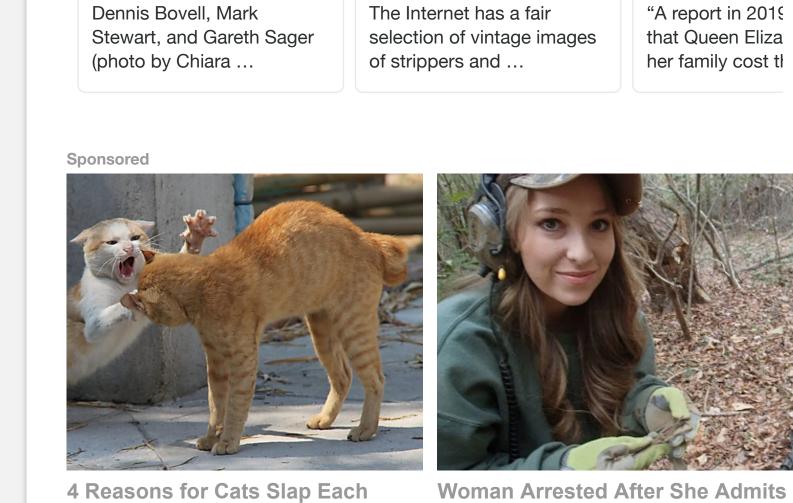
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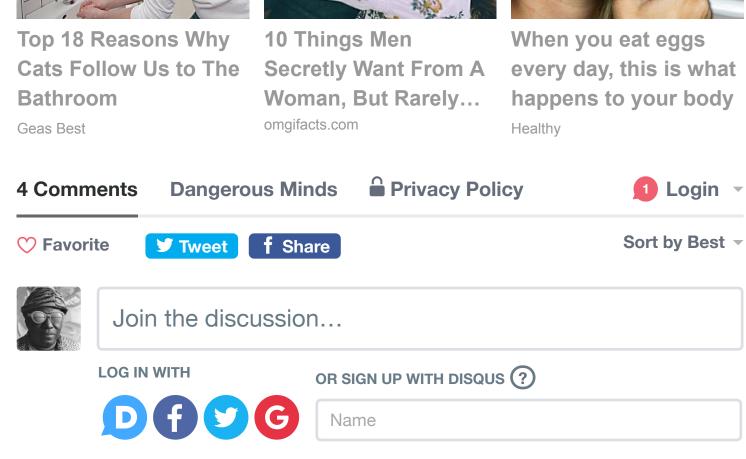
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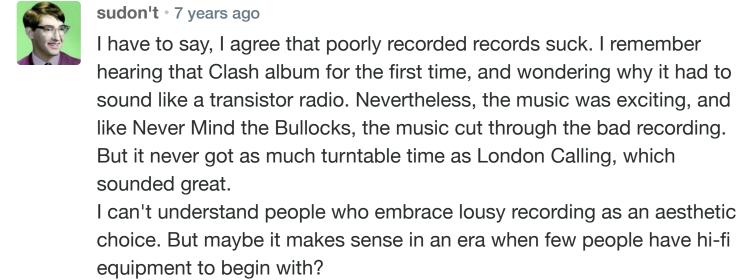


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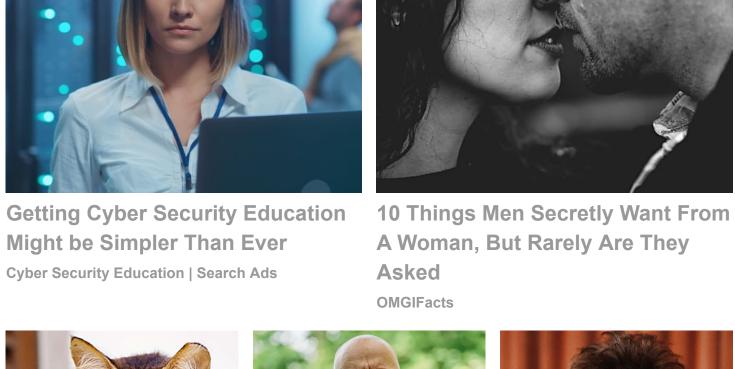
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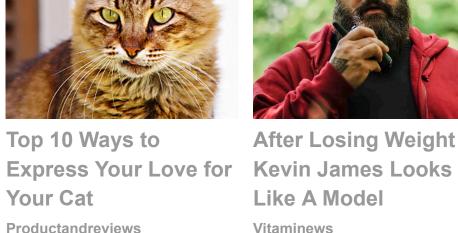




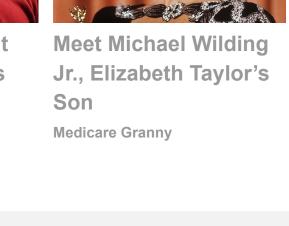
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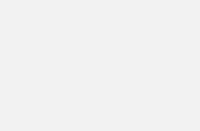


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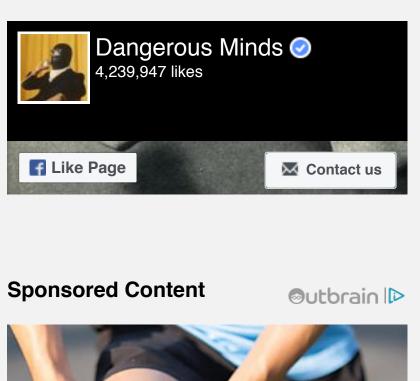


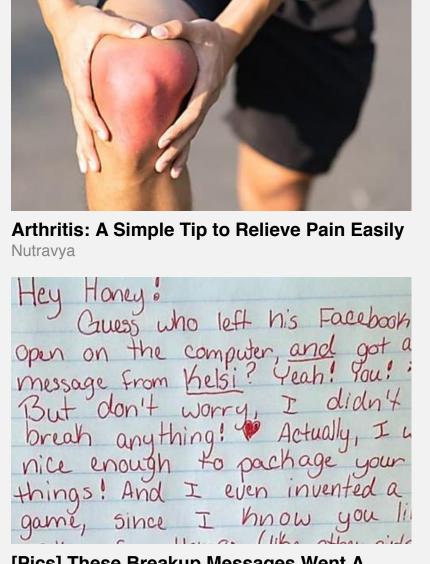
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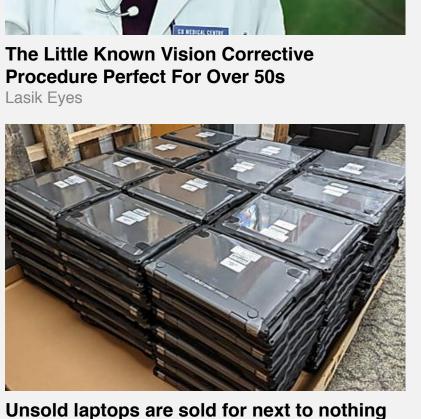
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