



BIOGRAPHY

THE CLASH

In May 1976 a drummerless group began rehearsing in a small squat near Shepherds Bush Green in London. Paul Simonon was the bass player and he'd been playing for only six weeks. He was from the wilds of Brixton; his parents had split up and he'd lived mostly with his father before landing a free scholarship to a posh art school. Then a friend had said "Why don't you join my group?" The guy who said this was Mick Jones, the lead guitarist, also from Brixton. Mick's dad was a cab driver, and Mick lived with his parents until they divorced when he was 8. His mum went to America and his dad left home so Mick went to live with his gran. When the Clash formed he was occasionally showing up at Hammersmith Art School. These two guys asked Joe Strummer to be the singer. At the same time Joe was singing with a London bar band which he had formed in order to pass the time and pay the rent. Upon being asked, he quit his group immediately and joined the prototype Clash. Keith Levine, guitarist was also a founder member but he left the group early on saying he had some urgent business to take care of in North London.

In August 76 this group was refurbishing an abandoned warehouse in Camden Town. When it was finished the rock began. Terry Chimes, a drummer, was enlisted and everyday the warehouse shook with the sound of hard practice. At this time there was nowhere to play. For example, the Marquee Club, supposedly the home of rock & roll told the Clash: "Sorry mate. No punk rock in here". So gigs were created by Bernie Rhodes the manager. One day during a particularly nasty gig when the bottles and cans were coming down like rain Terry Chimes quit after watching a wine bottle come flying over and smash into a million pieces on his high hat. Oh well. A drummerless group is a no-good group. So auditions were held every afternoon in Camden Town. 206 tried, and 205 failed. Nicky "Topper" Headon outdrummed all candidates and won the hot seat. By this time, although the group were unaware, they had caused a sizeable reaction in the outside world.

For example CBS coughed up a load of money and signed the group. They got to use CBS number 3 Studios in London, and they made an LP in three weekend sessions using their sound man as producer. They went out as bottom of the bill opening act on the ill fated "Anarchy" tour of December '76.

They put together and headlined their own "White Riot" tour in early 77 taking along the Buzzcocks, the Slits, and the Subway Sect. No one had seen anything like it as the tour bus rolled further away from London. Journalists from "The Sunday Times" wrote detailed accounts as Rodent the roadie carved his arm up with Coke cans and cigarette ends.

The LP shocked the group by entering the chart at number 12. But luckily their singles, with a guaranteed lack of airplay, could not get past number 28.

Thus they were saved from Bay City Rollerdom on any scale, and just to make sure they refused to appear on "Top of the Pops", considering it an old pop TV show left over from the 1960's, which requires performers to mime along as their record is played at a low volume somewhere in the distance.

For a long time now the new "dub" and "reggae" from Kingston, Jamaica had been making itself felt to those prepared to listen in London. "Police & Thieves" was a summer reggae hit in the clubs but not on the radio. The Clash recorded a six minute punk rock translation of this song and included it on their LP, although at the time most white musicians believed that attempting to play such music showed a lack of respect and an attitude of condescension. But luckily when they heard this they KNEW it was a good idea.

Lee Perry, or "Scratch the Upsetter", was the co author and producer of the original Junior Murvin tune, and when he heard their version added a picture of the Clash to his "Wall of Fame" at the Black Ark Studios in Jamaica. Theirs are the only white faces on this wall.

Scratch visited London in mid 77 and found himself producing a new Clash song "Complete Control". Mid way through the session the Upsetter was moved to tell Mick Jones that he played guitar "with an iron fist". The song also dinged the number 28 spot, but even this was not enough to stop the tour, which played in every major town and city where the group were not banned (with Richard Hell from America and the Lous from France completing the bill). After the smoke cleared there was nothing but a big pile of bills all addressed to the Clash. Since this time the group have found it a financial necessity to play unseated venues, the replacement rate for seats pegging around £20 a seat. This was also the heyday of spitting or "gobbing" and I would like to thank Richard Hell and his Voidoids on behalf of the Clash for drawing more than his fair share of the fire.

The Clash rode aeroplanes all round Europe. Ceaselessly for more than a month they struggled with police and hoteliers in Munich, irate TV producers in Bremen, bomb threats and attacks from the Rageri in Sweden, beer and short change from the Rhineland bar keepers, threats on the Reperbahn. And when they got back home they found that everything was different. Many of their contemporary groups had splintered, their daily movements had become a subject of interest in the music press, some of the clubs were shut and generally a depression had settled on the town.

Withstanding scathing and sneering attacks in the press the Clash learned that you got to take the rough with the smooth and decided not to break up.

During this time various members of the group were continually being arrested and fined for petty theft and vandalism culminating in an incident that took place on the top of the group's warehouse in Camden Town. A helicopter and armed police arrested two members of the group and they were charged with various gun offences and the shooting of some valuable racing pigeons. While the case was on remand the Clash released "White Man In Hammersmith Palais" b/w "I Don't Wanna Be The Prisoner" and took on a "Clash Out on Parole Tour" with Suicide from New York and the Specials from Coventry.

To get back to the music, it was time to make a second LP. In order to prevent arguments producer Sandy Pearlman was hired for the job. He seemed keen to do it. The schedule was interrupted by the usual disasters. However no one quits easily around here.....

The new LP was recorded in London before going out on tour. The tour was the best ever with Suicide taking and handling a violent assault from the rougher British Clash audience. After the tour the guitar solos were added at the Automat in San Francisco. Final mixing was done at the Record Plant NYC. The title of the LP is Give 'em Enough Rope..... Time will tell.

Clash story by Joe Strummer, September 1978, New York City.

DISCOGRAPHY

CBS 82000	THE CLASH	8/4/77
CBS 82431	GIVE 'EM ENOUGH ROPE	10/11/78