



Why it's time The Clash's second album Give 'Em Enough Rope is given the credit it deserves

Posted On 12th November 2019 By Gary Welford

Give 'Em Enough Rope is the second album by The Clash, but isn't held in anything like the same sort of esteem as the records which preceded and followed it.



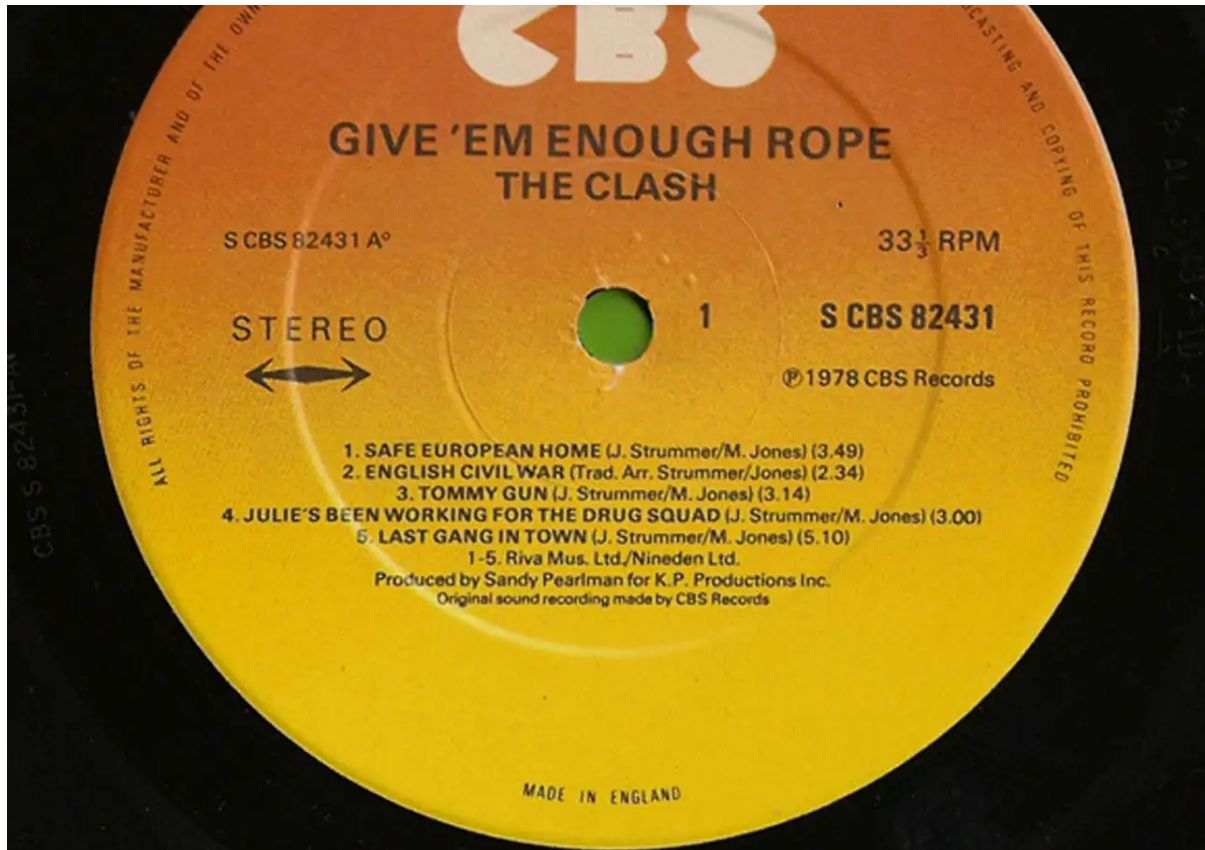
USA would have to wait until early 1980).

At the time the album was well-received by fans, and sold so well that it made No. 2 in the UK Album Charts. I was just short of my 12th birthday when it came out, and saved up to buy it after devouring lead single **Tommy Gun** and the follow-up **English Civil War**, which were released either side of Christmas 1978.

Like any self-respecting young punk who'd arrived at the show a bit late, I'd found my way back to **The Clash**, and **Never Mind The Bollocks Here's The Sex Pistols** (in mitigation, I was only 10 when they were released...). But this was one of the first punk albums I bought around the time it came out, which means I'll always think of it fondly.

Much of the criticism levelled at the album is that it's 'not punk enough', with the blame being laid chiefly at the door of producer **Sandy Pearlman**, best known for his work with American rock band **Blue Oyster Cult**.

Yes, the record he made with The Clash sounds much more 'produced' than their debut, whose lure was always about its raw energy and aggression. But was that a bad thing? Not to me.



The guitars sounded fuller, **Topper Headon**'s drumming was prominent in the mix (the first time I'd properly listened to a drummer, and what a drummer!), and there was no filler among the 10 tracks that made up the album.

What 'Rope' also did, with the benefit of hindsight, was act as a gateway to London Calling, the sprawling mix of musical styles which is widely considered The Clash's finest album.

It opens with the stunning **Safe European Home**, written by **Joe Strummer** and **Mick Jones** after they'd been despatched to Jamaica to write new songs for the record (much to the chagrin of reggae-loving bassist **Paul Simonon**).

go, 'wow!'



English Civil War, The Clash's reworking of the traditional American folk song When Johnny Comes Marching Home, has plenty of vigour, but is musically a step above anything on the first album, showing how the Clash were improving as a band.

If you think Topper's drumming is impressive on Tommy Gun, listen closely to **Julie's Been Working For The Drug Squad**, which isn't a punk song by any stretch of the imagination. His jazz training shines through, and some of his work on this track is outstanding.

Side one ends with **Last Gang In Town**, which had a coruscating guitar riff and a dirty bassline, and references the often-violent street conflicts between punks, teddy boys, soul boys, and other youth movements.



Flip over to side two, which kicks off with **Guns On The Roof**, which, so Clash legend has it, was inspired in part by the band's rhythm section being arrested for shooting racing pigeons with an air rifle from the roof of their Rehearsal Rehearsals studio in Camden.

Drug-Stabbing Time is an uptempo tune about being busted by the cops which starts with one of the best rock riffs on the record, but what's that? Saxophone? On a punk record? Who cares, it's a great song, if a little ironic, given Topper's later 'troubles'.

Stay Free is another of the classic songs on this album, and is Mick Jones' tribute to his old schoolmate Robin Crocker, who had done jail

get backstage to meet the band, thinking he was an over-enthusiastic fan, little realising he was slated to produce their next record.

Cheapskates, probably my least-favourite song here, is a thinly-veiled attack on the music press who (in a typical case of ‘build ’em up then knock ’em down’), were already accusing The Clash of selling out, acting like rock stars, and trying to make money from their music (how dare they!).

But amends are made with the final track, another Clash classic, **All The Young Punks (New Boots and Contracts)**, a commentary on the record label scramble for the new wave of bands who followed in the footsteps of punk pioneers like The Clash, Sex Pistols and The Damned.

The track also sees one of the earliest examples of Mick Jones living out his guitar hero fantasies, and if you have the remastered version of the album from 2013’s fabulous Sound System boxset, you’ll hear that the separation of the instruments sounds fantastic.

Even the album’s artwork, based on a postcard depicting a Chinese horseman looking down at an American cowboy’s body being picked at by vultures, is instantly recognisable, and has become iconic in its own right.

All in all, I think Give ‘Em Enough Rope has been unfairly maligned, both at the time and ever since, and without it, London Calling may not have been the masterpiece it’s recognised as.

#ALBUM REVIEW #PUNK

TAGGED: CBS JOE STRUMMER MICK JONES PAUL SIMONON
SANDY PEARLMAN THE CLASH TOPPER HEADON



GARY WELFORD

gary.ipamusic@gmail.com

ipamusic.co.uk owner

You May Also Like

The Other Ones show they're happy to be outsiders on slick debut album

POSTED ON : 30TH APRIL 2021

Scott Lavene is an Essex wordsmith in the Ian Dury mould

POSTED ON : 25TH JUNE 2019