

The Clash go in for the kill



THE CLASH: 'Give 'Em Enough Rope' (CBS 82431)

THE FRONT sleeve depicts a flagged, wasted corpse being eaten by vultures: the rock biz personified.

And if this represents the 'biz', then The Clash aptly personify the crisis. After that first album, anything they did — be it in the studio or on the boards — would be subject to such nit-pick high standard scrutiny, the very thought of actually recording again must've been a truly nerve-jangling proposition. But there comes a time . . .

Nineteen months on, 'kids' and 'critics' alike are openly salivating at the prospect of Album Number Two: the bum Roxy gigs (which — hell — weren't necessary) and, in true fashion, it's Press-poised-for-kill. The angle — You made us wait two bloody years for this so it better be LETHAL . . .

And potentially, this album is crucial, a vital link. Theoretically, it's become the most 'important' album of the late seventies, way before anyone's even heard it, and it could provide either a lifesblood-spark or a final, decisive kiss-off to a jaded genre.

Things were almost reaching the stage where The Clash's next move determined the worth of a wave's frantic, grappling, tantrum-grasp for survival, which, simply, is why the New Roxy gigs should never have happened in the first place: the group's only real mistake was succumbing to Joe Public's glutton-hungry demand for live action when they were obviously straight-jacketed in, amongst other things, the management and legal hassles . . . they should have realised they were no way equipped to haul 100 per cent into a live situation, even after that loooong wait.

So, simply, the future of The Clash virtually hinges on 'Give 'Em Enough Rope' . . . which is a damn frightening prospect, if you really think about it. Frightening, that is, until the reviewer actually confronts said article, spends a weekend with it, and is forced to the conclusion that, yeah, the wily little sods have pulled one outta the bag . . . and have done so under such extreme pressure, with such bare-faced prowess, that even a monotonous wait of this longevity was just about worthwhile.

Terms like: jaded, routine (which I, myself, used last week), superficial, hackneyed . . . are all terms which are ass-kicked to

the nearest slag heap by this album.

Also made redundant are fears that the Sandy Pearlman / USA connection would throw up a sanitised, sterile, 'product'. In fact, and despite his BOC links, Pearlman has harnessed a killer sound, which is knife-sharp, upfront, insistent. The guitar sound leaves third-degree burns, and the sensation lingers.

'Give 'Em Enough Rope' mirrors what The Clash have become: it is a biting, cards-on-the-table assessment of the past year. The expectations, the altercations, the mounting (here comes that word again) PRESSURES. Above all else, it proves that the band still has razor-edged perception, that they can still pull out moments of sheer rock and roll glory, that — yes, folks — that they still MATTER.

With 'Cheapskates', for example, Strummer side-swipes the pointless negativity of fans and Press alike: "The people come waltzing up to me / Saying what are you doing here? / You're supposed to be a star / Not a cheapskate bleedin' queer . . ."

"And how 'Rats from the sinking ship / Slag us down to save your hip' / But don't give me the benefit of your doubt / 'Cos I'll bite it off and spit it out . . ."

From the moment the opener, 'Safe European Home', blunderbusses in, one is made aware of the absolute synchronization of the four band members to the same cause. The internal, tight-gutted, channeled energy becomes a dangerous escape of unearthened, machine-gun external energy, sweeping on through the whole 38 minutes, bruising, coaxing addiction.

'Stay Free', though, impresses as a gorgeously restrained, tempered piece, with a compulsive guitar phrase leading the way and refuses to go away.

With 'Give 'Em Enough Rope', The Clash demonstrate exactly why we should never underestimate them, why we should never write 'em off.

But, after all that, I ask myself the question . . . uh, where do they go from here?

And the answer comes swirling back through the subconscious . . . Dunno. + + + + + CHRIS WESTWOOD.