

No-nonsense political punk



By HENRY FINKE

It's happening and it was inevitable. Like every other important musical movement, Punk has become the prime candidate for the hype of big business. They're packing them in every weekend at CBGB's with this or that new group from London or Manchester, and Fiorucci has gone full fledged New-Wave. Picking up on the stir created by the Sex Pistols, more and more bands are popping up with all the proper trappings—they spit, eat glass, and wear safety pins and tight black pants. However, there's not much behind it—they can't capture that anger and disgust the Pistols' music was so permeated with.

Don't despair. There's still at least one band that stands by what they say, and they'll be damned before selling out. They're The Clash, and look to them for some of the most bitter, emotional, and political sounds to come out of the Isles in ages. Getting information on them is a

difficult proposition—they've not toured here and are just now being picked up by Epic, so it will be a while before the promise starts to flow. What one does read of them in British Industry magazines such as *Melody Maker* and *New Music Express* is astounding—notoriously cynical critics write as though they've seen God when reporting on Clash concerts. Apparently, the group is sincere in all aspects of their career—something very rare today—and their support for an audience approaches love—one of the members was jailed over the summer for trying to intervene in a fight between violent bouncers and fans.

Musically, The Clash are a talented but undistinguished quartet. Undistinguished technically, which is irrelevant, because what they have to say is so important. These boys are genuinely politically and socially conscious and very effectively voice their dissatisfaction with the world we live in. Mick Jones and Joe Strummer,

the primary writers, attack many traditional British values and establishments, and worse, they really hate the dear old U.S.A.

Their first album *The Clash* is a superb work. The production is intentionally rough, the guitars sound as if they're about to explode, and the vocals are sung—shouted with an intensity unrivaled since early Dylan. The songs are short, hard, and to the point. "Remote Control" asks the simple terrifying question, "Who owns the Parliament?", and the Clash probably knows the answer. "I'm So Bored with the U.S.A." shows disgust with our way of life, although they

*Salute the New Wave,
and hope nobody escapes."*

"Police and Thieves," a reggae-punk fusion anthem co-authored by Lee "The Harder They Come" Perry, is a real standout.

*Police and thieves in the street,
fighting the nation with their guns and*

*ammunition
And all the crap comes in
day by day
and nobody stops it
in any way.*

The new album, *Give Em Enough Rope*, carries on the style of the first opus. It's a bit less rough and the songs are more fully developed, but there isn't one iota less guts to it—perhaps more, considering the variety of experiences the band had while touring. The political message is clearer than the first album: pro-Red Brigade sentiments are shown right on the cover (Mao and a Red Army). The songs are also straightforward. "Safe European Home" repeats the anti-American themes voiced on the first album as does "Guns On The Roof." The message to British youth in "That's No Way To Spend Your Life" is self evident in the title, and other greats, such as "Drug Stabbing Time" are potent

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and full of pleas to their fellow man. It's a great album, perhaps one of the best of the year.

Put simply, The Clash voice the anger and frustration felt by thousands of British young people and do it with sincerity, simplicity, and a strong musical base. A great many Americans will not like The Clash. It takes weeks to cut through the heavy accents and understand the lyrics, and even

then, many of the euphemisms are alien to our culture. The music is equally inaccessable—it's hard, hard, hard rock, with nothing pretty or catchy about it, meaning a commercial potential of zip, although I doubt The Clash really cares. Personally, it's so powerful at times that this listener is overwhelmed by the sheer intensity at times. If you thought Tom Robinson was political punk, check these boys out—they make Tom sound like Danny Kaye complaining about those nasty ment in Whitehall. The Clash come out and say that the system sucks raw eggs, and it's time to take some action against it. The Clash are a phenomenon, and the music will alienate a lot of people on both sides of the Atlantic—it's too intense for those brought up on James Taylor, The Dead, or Abba, and too topical for those who see no relevance in mediocre musicians bitching about the British government. However, for those looking for some electrifying, hard-core, marginally "fun" (great to pogo to), and very thought-provoking rock and roll, The Clash is The Group for you. All we need now is a tour—that would really shake some folks up, if The Clash don't get shot first.



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