Sim racing? Experience Forte™
Inspired by real-life racing standard and thoroughly tested by racers and sim racers alike
Asetek
Open

WHEN THE CLASH FINALLY PLAYED THEIR FIRST U.S. SHOW

Bryan Wawzenek | Published: February 7, 2019

Hulton Archive, Getty Images

SHARE
TWEET
Play Clash
on Amazon Music Unlimited (ad)

The **Clash** were about two and a half years into their career before they played a gig on U.S. soil. The band's first American show wasn't at a grimy punk club: They were already too popular in the States. Besides, *Give 'Em Enough Rope* had already shown the Clash was moving beyond the rudimentary constraints of punk.

They played their first U.S. gig on Feb. 7, 1979 at the Berkeley Community Theatre in Berkeley, Calif. The 3,500-capacity venue on the campus of Berkeley High School had a rock pedigree, with past gigs by **Bob Dylan**, the **Who** and **Jimi Hendrix**.

Revolutionary Website Builder
WordPress Websites for Bands
Simple Editor. No Coding Required. 12 months support & advice from music industry experts.
bandtheme.com
OPEN

But Joe Strummer was still dismayed that his band's American debut would be in a college town. "We shouldn't have played here," Strummer told ***Time*** magazine backstage. "It's a university town. They're boring snobs."

It wasn't how Strummer pictured this would go. But then, not much in recent months had gone that way for the Clash. The band had been forced by CBS Records to use **Blue Oyster Cult** producer Sandy Pearlman on their sophomore LP, ***Give 'Em Enough Rope***, an album that – for its glossier, more radio-friendly sound – hadn't broken the Clash in the U.S. the way the record company had hoped. Meanwhile, the band was in debt to CBS, it had just fired manager Bernie Rhodes, and Strummer and guitarist Mick Jones were in the midst of a bout of writer's block.

Things started to get better after the Clash picked a new manager, Caroline Coon. Sure, she was bassist Paul Simonon's girlfriend, but she also listened to what the band members actually wanted to do.

Do a tour in America? With the Clash in debt, CBS didn't want to fund an overseas trek, but Coon was able to get the band's Stateside label, Epic, to pony up the cash. (This was somewhat remarkable, given that Epic had refused to release the Clash's raw debut album in 1977.) When Simonon and Strummer wanted rock 'n' roll pioneer Bo Diddley to open the band's U.S. tour, Coon found the singer-guitarist in Australia and agreed to pay him upfront.

The guys in the Clash met their tourmate in Vancouver, where the string of dates began on Jan. 31, before heading down to the States. Diddley was somewhat bewildered by his role in what the Clash termed the Pearl Harbor '79 Tour (and didn't particularly enjoy the volume at which the band played). Strummer was in shock the rock icon agreed to the job.

"In the flesh, he was more awe-inspiring than we could possibly imagine," Strummer recalled, according to ***Q***. "He dressed like he was ready to fight. He always had his huge sheriff's hat on and a giant belt buckle, and you were unmistakably in the presence of someone who gave no quarter."

But Diddley and the group soon warmed up to one another, which helped since they all traveled on the same tour bus, which had been leased from another American music icon: Dolly Parton. Even though Strummer and friends didn't enjoy sleeping on the bus too much, they took to the on-board TV and videocassette machine, which allowed them (or at least drummer Topper Headon) to watch ***Star Wars*** over and over.

They were on their way from Canada to Northern California when they heard some awful news: **Sid Vicious** – former **Sex Pistol** and a member of the same London punk scene that had birthed the Clash – had died in New York, on the other side of the country the group was so eager to explore.

"I wake up and as I'm searching for some breakfast, Ace Penna, our U.S. tour manager, tells me 'Hey, didja know Sid is dead?'" Strummer wrote in the **tour diary** he penned for *NME*. "I grab him by the throat. 'What do you mean?' I snarl. Then, as it sinks in, I don't want no breakfast. Our first morning in America."

Watch the Clash Perform 'I'm So Bored With the U.S.A.'

Subscribe to **Ultimate Classic Rock** on YouTube

It might have been the Clash's first morning on tour America, but it wasn't actually their first trip to the country. The previous year, the band spent a little time while recording portions of *Give 'Em Enough Rope* in San Francisco. But that had given the Clash but a taste of the U.S. and the members were excited to see more.

Humorless fans in the Berkeley audience might not have realized how happy they were to be in America. As a poke in the ribs, the Clash began their set with "I'm So Bored With the U.S.A." It would become a tradition throughout the winter tour.

"We started the show with 'I'm So Bored with the U.S.A.' because we wanted to find out if they had a sense of humor in America," Strummer said, via *Q*. "And the answer was that they were double into that number. They loved it, because we were saying we were sick of the cheap rubbish on TV, all the substandard cultural imports that came out of America. The kids were as bored as we were with all that rubbish."

The rest of the set featured a mix of songs from the Clash's first album (which had yet to be officially released in the States, though tens of thousands of import copies had been purchased by American fans), second album and recent singles – including "Clash City Rockers," "White Man (In Hammersmith Palais)" and their ferocious cover of "I Fought the Law." All three songs would end up on the U.S. version of *The Clash*. "White Riot" served as a frenetic encore.

"The first show was a blast," photographer Bob Gruen recalled in ***Redemption Song: The Ballad of Joe Strummer***. "The place was full of happy, dancing people. The Clash was more than your average good-time band. You not only had a good time but you also thought about issues that bothered people. Things were serious and there was a lot to be angry about, but there was also a lot to have fun about. The force of the music made it sound like a battlefield, a clash. The lights were always flashing, like explosions."

Newspaper and music magazine reviews of the show were largely positive. Some acknowledged that the U.S. audiences were more subdued than British punk fans, and the Clash appreciated that no one tried to spit on them as they performed. Even though Strummer would acknowledge that the university crowd loved the Clash's first U.S. show (they were "tapping their biology textbooks in time with the tunes" he snarked in his diary), he hadn't come to America to connect solely with the student population.

And so, in defiance of promoter Bill Graham, the Clash hastily organized a second show in the San Francisco area for the next evening. This one would take place at Geary Temple (which had once been Graham's old Fillmore West), cost half as much as the first show and benefit a youth organization and the homeless. The band's second concert in America was a charity benefit – a fact the Clash wore proudly.

"The show is really great, the hall is really great, the audience is really great," Strummer wrote, "but we gotta leave straight after the set to drive the 400 miles to Los Angeles."

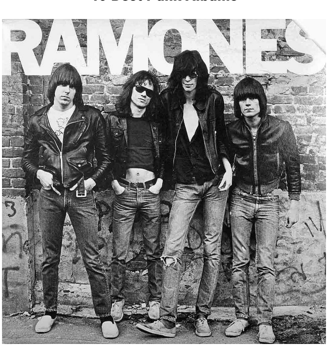
Having only toured Britain and Europe, the guys in the Clash were surprised at how spread out the cities in the U.S. could be. Four hundred miles was nothing. After leaving L.A. to drive across the Southwest, the band became shocked by the expanse of empty space. America was more normal, more boring, than Strummer had expected, but it was still the place that had given them so much of the music he loved.

"When you've been into American music as long as I have, to go there is a trip," Strummer said in the 2000 Clash documentary ***Westway to the World***. "To ride across the country, even better, on a bus is another trip. Fantastic. I got endless amounts of inspiration from it."

The Clash's primary songwriters – Strummer and Jones – were creatively rejuvenated not just by experiencing America for themselves but also by the reception they received from fans during the nine-date tour that took them from Vancouver to California, Cleveland to Washington D.C., New York and Toronto.

Later the band would write, record and release ***London Calling***, a magnum opus that featured more than a little American influence with its R&B and rockabilly sounds. They also returned to North America for a second, more extensive tour. And more inspiration.

40 Best Punk Albums



Sire

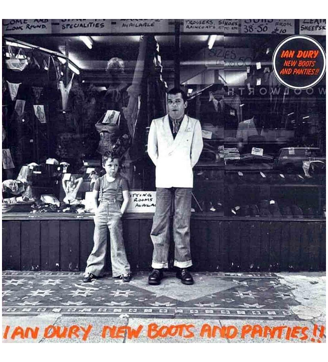
Ramones, 'Ramones' (1976)

You can argue that punk rock started in the late '60s and early '70s with bands like MC5 and the Stooges. You can even go back earlier to the Velvet Underground and the garage-rock scene of the mid-'60s. But punk rock as we know it today started right here with the Ramones' first album, which set the basic template: two minutes, three chords and a sense that the future is bleak as hell.

CBS

The Clash, 'The Clash' (1977)

The Clash made better albums (see 1979's 'London Calling') and more ambitious ones (1980's 'Sandinista!') but they never made a more pure punk record than their self-titled debut. The U.S. got a different version two years later. It's great, but stick to the U.K. original.



Stiff Records

Ian Dury, 'New Boots and Panties!!' (1977)

Like many artists from punk's earliest days, Ian Dury wasn't solely tied to the genre. His debut album also includes disco, New Wave and, most of all, pub rock. But Dury's attitude was pure punk, and 'New Boots and Panties!!' was one of the first on the burgeoning scene.

Sire

Richard Hell & the Voidoids, 'Blank Generation' (1977)

Richard Hell was a member of Television and the Heartbreakers (Johnny Thunders' band, not Tom Petty's) before forming the Voidoids. They made only two albums; their first is the keeper, all punk indifference sung by one of the genre's snottiest voices.

Sire

Ramones, 'Rocket to Russia' (1977)

The Ramones' first few albums pretty much all sound the same. 'Rocket to Russia,' their third, stands out a bit because they had some time to absorb the fallout from their debut (it basically influenced every single U.K. punk who heard it). The band rarely pushed itself outside of its comfort zone (even their later work with Phil Spector wasn't totally unexpected); they just do what they do best here, and with attitude to spare.

Virgin

Sex Pistols, 'Never Mind the Bollocks - Here's the Sex Pistols' (1977)

The Ramones got there first, but if it wasn't for the Sex Pistols' debut (and only) album, punk may never have grown and thrived over the decades. 'Never Mind the Bollocks ... ' is angry, hateful and brimming with middle-finger-flashing spite. Everything that followed has been influenced by it one way or another. Decades after its debut, it still sounds relevant.

Red Star

Suicide, 'Suicide' (1977)

Suicide were more than pioneering punks -- they're also instrumental in electronic, industrial and synth-rock (even Bruce Springsteen covered them). The duo paired minimalist electronic music (including early drum machines) to Alan Vega's echo-heavy voice, which usually recited strung-together words that didn't often fall together cohesively. Their recording career was scattered; their 1977 self-titled debut remains their most essential work.

Elektra

Television, 'Marquee Moon' (1977)

Television never got as much attention as some of the other bands from the New York City scene that spawned them, but they made its best album. They didn't have much in common with their contemporaries either; 'Marquee Moon' piles on guitar solos like Neil Young and Crazy Horse jams, and the album's title track clocks in at 10 minutes. This is punk rock that didn't need to tear down the past to build the future.

Sire

Talking Heads, 'Talking Heads: 77' (1977)

Talking Heads were a whole bunch of things -- New Wave, artsy, funky -- but during their first few years they were definitely a punk band. They approached the music, and the lyrics, a different way than most of their peers, but they shared a fundamental aesthetic with most of the New York City bands they came of age with.

Harvest

Wire, 'Pink Flag' (1977)

On the surface, Wire's debut album can seem like a reaction to prog-rock excess with its scaled-back minimalism and songs that barely reached two minutes. But much of 'Pink Flag' is also rooted in the same art-rock that's tied to prog, Krautrock and other outre genres. Still, the record had a massive impact on punk, hardcore and alternative bands over the next four decades.

United Artists

Buzzcocks, 'Another Music in a Different Kitchen' (1978)

Buzzcocks were one of punk's greatest singles bands, but they also made one of the genre's best albums with their debut, 'Another Music in a Different Kitchen.' It's snotty, to-the-point and part of punk's frayed fabric in 1978. Plus, they weren't afraid of throwing in some pop hooks once in a while.

Warner Bros.

Devo, 'Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!' (1978)

What the hell was floating in the air in Northeast Ohio in the mid-'70s? Pere Ubu's twitchy art-rock from Cleveland had nothing on Akron's Devo, whose debut album is all jerky robotic moves and super-caffeinated takes on what rock music of the future might sound like. Their deconstructed cover of the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction" remains a pivotal moment in the divide between rock and punk fans.

Adobe
Unleash your creative superpowers.
Go further, faster with new AI features in Creative Cloud.
Buy now
Colorize
SPECIAL FEATURES
YES SOLO ALBUMS RANKED
Request a Qoute
Aruba violin Book Now
SPONSORED LINKS
YOU MAY LIKE
Simple Trick Makes People Lose Weight Like Never Before
Support My Weight
Top 10 Most Beautiful Women In The world
Baseptic
by Taboola
GET OUR NEWSLETTER
Email Address

Fred Marcellino

Pere Ubu, The Modern Dance (1978)

Pere Ubu never stood a chance of breaking into the mainstream. Their complex and often difficult style of art-punk surpassed the nothing-wave that years were rising. Could Hendrickson Cleveland's industrial experiment be that. Their debut album still sounds ahead of its time. Required listening for anyone who cares about punk's development in the late '70s.

Talk

Talking Heads, 'More Songs About Buildings and Food' (1978)

Like the title says, Talking Heads second album ventures out for the first time. Fuzz-pop jumping up a band, though, pulsating their songs from punk's more prickly precincts. No matter - "More Songs About Buildings and Food" showed that quick, like-minded wit genius, current in various shades and tones.

Sandoz

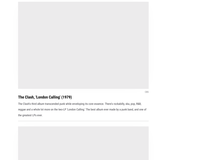
Wire, 'Chairs Missing' (1978)

Wire's second album is often cited as the culmination of their landmark debut. They're with Kosny, and a third of the songs on hand are just as tuneful and punk-rock. Colin Newman's tender, sly and punk-pop wrote-boy, mixing up rock and pop-rock-some punk-tender-sly and pop-like-its-genesis.

Talk

X-Ray Spex, 'Germfree Adolescents' (1978)

X-Ray Spex was the last-known punk-rock band. Poly. Their sax-playing singer Celia Shah, who's known as Poly, was the last-known punk-rock star. Poly's voice, a mix of Ella Fitzgerald and Joan Jett, was the greatest female singer-songwriter of the punk-rock scene. Germfree Adolescents, one of punk's best records. It's here only album more than a 1000 reasons (if our singles from the era support their hopes).



Talk

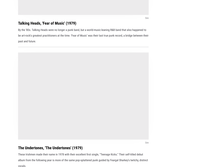
The Clash, 'London Calling' (1979)

The Clash's third album transcended punk while enveloping its core essence. There's rockabilly, ska, pop, R&B, reggae and a whole lot more on the band's 1st London Calling. The best album ever made by a punk band, and one of the greatest LPs ever.

Hugh Todd

Stiff Little Fingers, 'Inflammable Material' (1979)

Stiff Little Fingers don't get as much attention as their rock-punk contemporaries, but their debut holds up with the best of them. Strike many of their overseas contemporaries, Stiff Little Fingers never lost interest, which gave their political (and personal) songs a consistent different perspective. Plus, they sounded like they actually wanted to be played on the radio.



Talk

Talking Heads, 'Fear of Music' (1979)

By the 70s, Talking Heads were no longer a punk band, but a punk-house backing R&B band that also happened to be a kind of avant-garbanzo-pop-house-band. Fear of Music was their best-to-punk record, a bridge between their past and future.

Talk

The Undertones, 'The Undertones' (1979)

These Londoners made their name in 1978 with their excellent first single, "Teenage Kicks." Their self-titled debut followed the following year, a record of the same pop-spattered punk, perfect for Peel-and-Marshall-friendly, British ears.

Talk

The Clash, 'Sandinista' (1980)

Following the double-record-set-in-scope-of-a-country's-music Calling, the Clash aimed even bigger for Sandinista. Its triple LP "backbone" is messy, sprawling and mostly fascinating. A great band working at the peak of its career.

J.D. Beauvais

The Cramps, 'Songs the Lord Taught Us' (1980)

The Cramps play music with retro-aesthetic, so you have to factor in a lot of those pre-rock'n'roll-era sounds and ground-level '50s hot-and-sweaty-leering-pelvis. With the band's debut album it sounds garage-rock-retro-plugged-in-to-the-punk-generation.

Michael Stewart

Dead Kennedys, 'Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables' (1980)

Dead Kennedys' debut album was the crown in the Art Punk, but the Fast Times band never held the rank. Sunshiners Inquiry is hard to no. Jello Biafra sorts out songs like "Kill the Poor" and "Holiday in Cambodia" like no cold-cash-cow-to-out-of-their. A masterpiece of American punk.

Sean Kennedy

X, 'Los Angeles' (1980)

Which-band-is-X-is-the-best-band-in-the-world-of-punk-rock, the-other-side-of-the-country-was-anything-but-something-different. They-Los-Angeles-scene-was, for-the-most-part, Hoosier-and-rooted. . . at-least-until-hardcore-took-over. A-band-the-leading-band-of-the-early-days, and-their-debut-spoke-punk-attitude-into-a-history-lesson-of-decadence-and-waste.

Talk

Black Flag, 'Damaged' (1981)

Black Flag had already toured through as the original Nation Nerve Rollins joined in 1981, propelling them to a whole new level. They transmitted Banarsie-ness of the best and most popular punk band to the Los Angeles scene. Their first album, Damaged, is sandstone record that pretty much paved the Hardcore-singleton. Rollins' Wild-shouting vocals, coupled with Greg Ginn's equally-absence-genic, have influenced generations of quality.

Rob Rennie

The Gun Club, 'Fire of Love' (1981)

The Gun Club, Los Angeles-based, is the first-to-the-sound-that's-punk-with-drums, psychobilly-with-little-hints-of-American-music. Their first album is their band, filled with lots of pop-cover-moments and scintillating guitars. Or Fire. "Fire of Love" would be the more adventurous side of this garage-rock, but Kim's-playing-of-punk-attitude-here-too.

Fugazi

X, 'Wild Gift' (1981)

X's second LP is basically a-their-based-version-of-their-first, but that doesn't take away one of its magic. If anything, the songwriting and performances are deeper (yellow-rose-punk-band-tunes, X-journal-come-yellow-roadscape). A-big-album, and-band, from-the-Los-Angeles-punk-scene.

Fugazi

Violent Femmes, 'Violent Femmes' (1982)

Violent Femmes's eponym-titled-first-Wisconsin-punk-with-a-street-sounded-like-a-way-gotten-form-of-folk-music. Their debut-album-is-filled-with-tunes, something-singer-and-songwriter-Gordon-Gano-never-sheet-away-from. They-just-better-and-more-more-playful. Why-I-like-one-that-comes-with-no-expectations-as-first.

Talk

Husker Du, 'Zen Arcade' (1984)

Husker Du created an authentic-sounding-punk-sounding-punk-band, but by the time of their second album in 1984, they had evolved into one of the-rock-music-genius-bands-groups. Zen Arcade's 3-side-double-record-revolutions, a-concept-album-that-takes-the-form-of-following-an-insane-man-through-an-insane-world-that-looks-like-a-punk-rock-band-jamboree-movie.

Talk

Minutemen, Double Nickels on the Dime (1984)

Double Nickels on the Dime is the-band-at-the-peak-of-its-art. The-band-punk-rock-at-its-best. The-band-that-performs-the-combined-everything-Americana-and-folk-music-and-hardcore-in-their-music-about. Shortly after they released Double Nickels, Fugazi-up-in-1990, Ginger-and-company-in-their-new-band-Minutemen-in-a-year-and-half-long-tour-tours.

SST

Husker Du, 'New Day Rising' (1985)

Husker Du's scaled-back follow-up to the double-LP zenith 'Zen Arcade' is all one-, two- and three-minute songs about apologies, summer and UFOs. Guitarist Bob Mould and drummer Grant Hart never abandon punk's core, but they expand on that foundation with acoustic guitars, pop hooks and a songwriting polish that was miles away from most of their peers.

Homestead Records

Big Black, 'Atomizer' (1986)

Big Black's debut album set a template for bands moving into the '90s: a little bit of noise, some industrial touches and a whole lotta mid-90s punk attitude. Frontman Steve Albini went on to work with Pixies, Nirvana and other alt-rock bands that kicked back at the system. It all begins here.

Touch and Go

Big Black, 'Songs About F---ing' (1987)

Big Black made only two albums. This was their second, then last and their best. Steve Albini built his career on abrasive music and an even more abrasive personality. Both are prominently on display here. Contrary to the album's title, the 13 tracks are about more than sex. There's death, self-loathing and getting high too.

Island

The Pogues, 'If I Should Fall From Grace With God' (1988)

The Pogues always walked the line among folk, Celtic and punk. With their third album, they let their punk inclinations mostly take over. It's harder, faster and at times more chaotic than anything else they ever did, even when Steve Lillywhite's production tries to soften the edge. 'Rum, Sodomy & the Lash' is the better album, but 'If I Should Fall from Grace With God' is more punk.

Dischord

Fugazi, 'Repeater' (1990)

Ian MacKaye formed Fugazi after Minor Threat fell apart. They were bigger and more ambitious than his '80s band, and on their debut album – released at the very start of the '90s – he sounded like he was ready to bring punk to arenas. He was a few years ahead of the curve here, but 'Repeater' stands as an influential record on '90s post-punk and beyond.

Reprise

Green Day, 'Dookie' (1994)

Green Day pretty much kept punk alive in the '90s and '00s by updating the music's basic sound – loud, fast guitars and snotty, spitting vocals – for more modern, and pop-conditioned, ears. Their breakthrough album 'Dookie' was a huge hit – something none of the bands Green Day worshiped could possibly even dream of – making them one of the brighter moments of the gloom-stuffed alt-rock movement of the era.

Kill Rock Stars

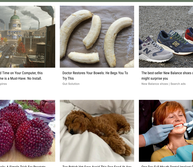
Sleater-Kinney, 'Dig Me Out' (1997)

Corin Tucker is punk's best female singer since Kim Gordon's Poly Styrene. And she has the band to back it all up. Sleater-Kinney really don't have a bad album, their third, 'Dig Me Out,' is the best place to start, though. The title track is all fierce guitar and even fiercer vocals – maybe punk's finest moment in the '90s. Punk has had a troubled history with feminism over the years. Sleater-Kinney kick it into shape like their lives depend on it here.

Fearless Records

At the Drive-In, 'Relationship of Command' (2000)

At the Drive-In broke up around the time of the release of their third, and best, album. A couple members went on to form the more prog-leaning Mars Volta, but 'Relationship of Command' is all acoustic guitar swipes, hooked verses and choruses, and battering post-punk rhythms. The band regrouped in 2017, but this remains their essential record.



Interscope

... And You Will Know Us by the Trail of Dead, 'Source Tags & Codes' (2002)

The Austin art-rockers' third album is their masterpiece, a complex blend of noise and math rock that nods to earlier bands like Big Black. ... And You Will Know Us by the Trail of Dead get more ambitious later, but the caustic, chaotic 'Source Tags & Codes' is their purest and best realized record.

Reprise

Green Day, 'American Idiot' (2004)

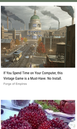
Green Day returned in a big way by taking a cue from rock 'n' roll's past. 'American Idiot' has power chords, heavily politicized lyrics and a concept that fit in so well with the '50s: disfranchised youth. It's punk rock filtered through the music's storied past and shot out through a classic-rock cannon.

NEXT: THE CLASH: ELBOWS RAISED

Filed Under: The Clash
Categories: Anniversaries, First Shows

Comments LEAVE A COMMENT

YOU MAY LIKE
SPONSORED LINKS BY TAGOLA



If You Spend Time on Your Computer, this Vintage Game is a Must-Have. No Install.
Forge of Empires

Doctor Restores Your Bowels. He Begs You To Try This
Gut Solution

The best selling New Balance shoes of the UK: might surprise you
New Balance shoes | Search ads

Doctor Reveals: A Simple Trick For Prostate Problems
Prostate Help

Top British Vet Says Avoid This Dog Food At Any Cost
Dog Nutrition

One Dog Cut Mouth Dental Implant Cost For Seniors Might Amaze You.
Dental Implants | Search

BACK TO TOP

© 2022 Ultimate Classic Rock, Townsquare Media, Inc. All rights reserved.

2 Unusually Gets British Under 60 of Age
£220,000 Worth of Life Insurance
Guardian Life - Get Quote >>
READ MORE