

 **SHARE**

 **TWEET**

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**.

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

This Article Continues Below

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."



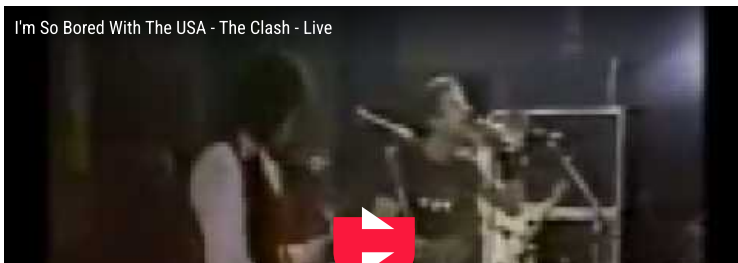
But Diddley and the group soon warmed up to one another, which helped since they all traveled on the same tour bus, which had been leased from another American music icon: Dolly Parton. Even though Strummer and friends didn't enjoy sleeping on the bus too much, they took to the on-board TV and videocassette 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.

ADVERTISEMENT



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."

ADVERTISEMENT



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."

ADVERTISEMENT



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.

---

## TOP 10 PUNK ALBUMS

You'll find some familiar names, but also bands that didn't sell as many records while having just as much impact.



Red Star Records

### 10. Suicide, 'Suicide' (1977)

Suicide came out of the same New York punk scene that spawned other innovators of the genre, but the music on their self-titled debut album was one of a kind. Stripped to a duo of singer Alan Vega and keyboardist Martin Rev, Suicide's minimalist and primal form of electronic music sounded like it originated in the darkest, dankest corners of the scene. Even other punks were scared of them. Entire subsets of music owe a debt to this harrowing record, including whatever it is Bruce Springsteen's 'Nebraska' falls under.



Warner Bros.

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

They looked weird. They sounded even weirder. And they pretty much pissed off every rock 'n' roll fan with their deconstructed take on the Rolling Stones' "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction." Devo approached punk from a different direction, and their debut album remains a cornerstone work of the genre, as well as one of punk's first bridges to

New Wave. Nothing on 'Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!' comes together like you expect it to – not the songs' structures, not the traditional rock instruments, not even the way the synths are played. More than any of their peers, Devo sounded like the future.

---

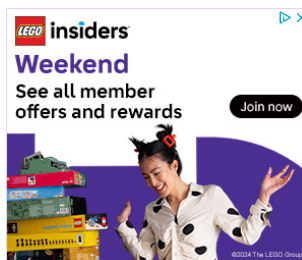


Harvest

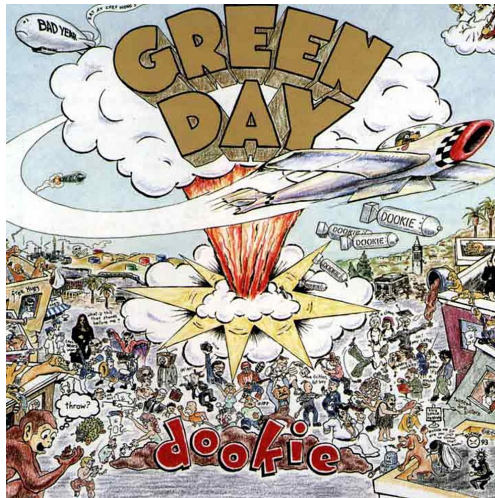
### 8. Wire, 'Pink Flag' (1977)

Wire seemed exactly like what you'd expect from a band formed by London art-school students: artier and more structured than the other bands they're often lumped in with. Their debut album tossed aside punk's nascent conventions and built songs from the ground up, often running out of time for things like verses and choruses. The songs on 'Pink Flag' are short, jagged and to the point: Little is wasted. Though nobody knew it at the time, punk's immediate descendant post-punk starts right here.

---





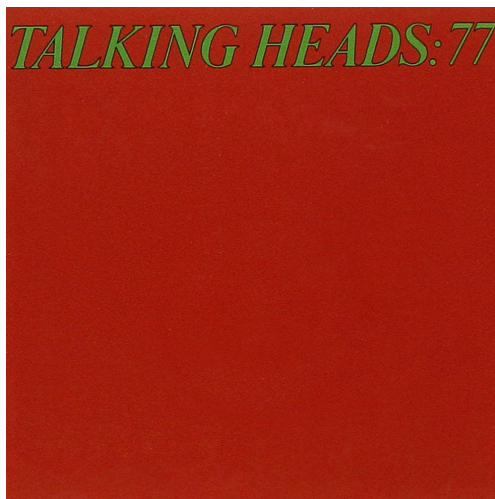


Reprise

### 7. Green Day, 'Dookie' (1994)

Punk never went away; it just went underground and took on different forms for much of the '80s. Green Day were the first band to bring the music back to the mainstream in the '90s with their first major-label outing. It arrived at just the right time, as alt-rock found some commercial footing thanks to breakout bands like Nirvana and Pearl Jam. 'Dookie' was the closest any of these big albums came to early punk's core sound: choppy guitars, frills-free songs and a snarling attitude that summed up the feelings of apathetic kids everywhere. 'Dookie' jump-started a genre that had pretty much lost interest in reaching anyone but the already converted. A whole new world opened after this record.

---



Sire

### 6. Talking Heads, 'Talking Heads: 77' (1977)

Like Wire, Talking Heads approached punk music with the eyes, ears and methods of art students. Unlike the London-bred Wire, Talking Heads injected it with some of the tricks they picked up from their New York contemporaries. They later expanded – in both terms of band size and the scope of their songs. (See the world rhythms and musicians employed on albums like 'Speaking in Tongues.')

But on their prickly, caffeinated debut they come off like punk was just a rest stop on their way to more global travels. But what a stop! An important record in punk's evolution.

---

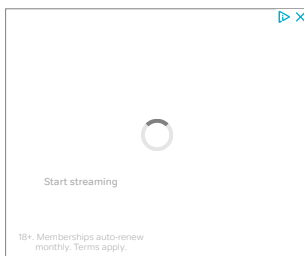


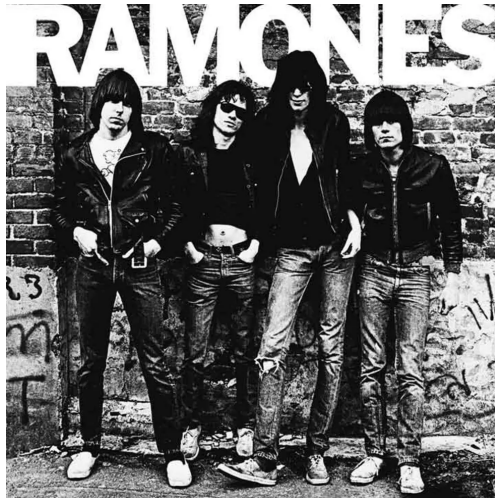
CBS Records

### 5. The Clash, "The Clash" (1977)

Punk's most restless band was all spit and fire on its debut album, bridging the social and political under a battalion of guitars. They'd steer outside of the genre on subsequent albums (see No. 1 on our list), but on 'The Clash' they truly sounded, as their record company once boasted, like the "only band that matters" – at least the only punk one. Other punk bands made better first albums (see Nos. 2, 3 and 4 on our list), but none captured the music's culture-shifting potential quite like the Clash.

---



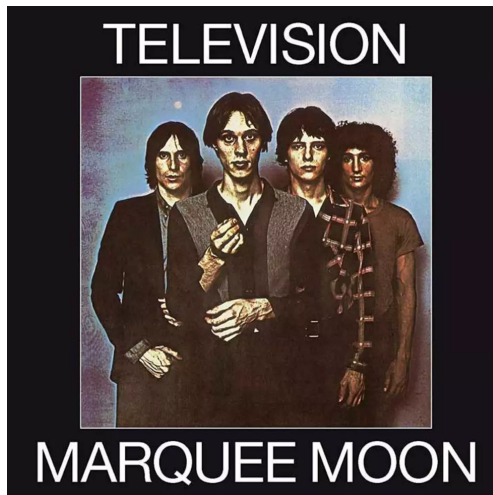


Sire

#### 4. Ramones, 'Ramones' (1976)

Punk music the way we know it starts here. For seeds, you can go back to earlier bands like the Stooges, or even earlier to '60s garage rockers, but the Ramones' self-titled debut album pretty much inspired every three-chord punk record that followed its release in the spring of 1976. Thing is, they weren't even trying to spearhead a movement; they were pretty much playing a faster, louder version of the '60s bubblegum and girl-group pop they loved. And it even clocks in at less than half an hour – a nod to both an earlier vinyl era and its no-nonsense approach to rock 'n' roll.

---



Elektra

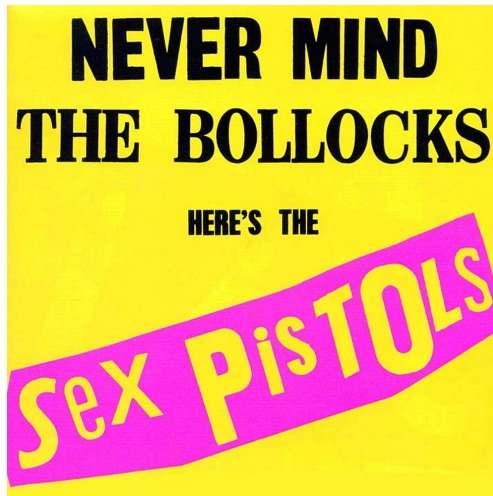
#### 3. Television, 'Marquee Moon' (1977)

Punk was supposed to be about wiping away '70s rock's bloated pretenses like long songs and even longer guitar solos. Television didn't get that memo. On their debut LP, the New York-based quartet tosses aside the genre's still-

---

being-written rule book to play punk music that sounded an awful lot like classic rock once you scraped away Tom Verlaine's sneering vocals. 'Marquee Moon's title track stretches to 10 minutes; another song clocks in at seven. The interplay between guitarists Verlaine and Richard Lloyd is as precise and as exciting as anything Jimmy Page and his disciples were doing at the time. A landmark record no matter where you want to file it.

---

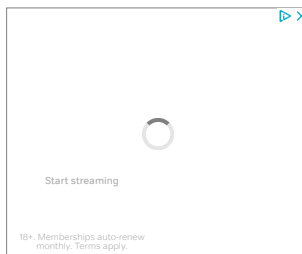


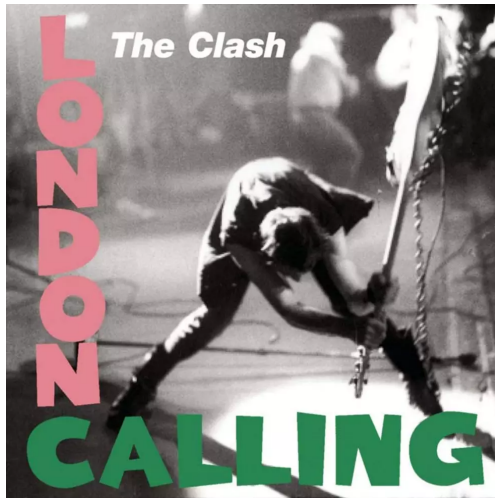
Warner Bros.

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

The album that launched the punk explosion in the late '70s remains one of the most important records ever made. Other punk records came out before it, but none had the impact of the Sex Pistols' only LP. It's a cornerstone work propped up by some of the era's best songs, including "Anarchy in the U.K." and "God Save the Queen." Everything associated with the genre – the middle-fingered attitude, the primitive attack of instruments, the sneer – are all wrapped up in 38 of the most ferocious minutes ever committed to vinyl.

---





CBS Records

### 1. The Clash, 'London Calling' (1979)

To classify the Clash's epic third album a punk record misses its point and scope. 'London Calling' is the history of rock 'n' roll told over two LPs and spanning everything from pop, ska, R&B, '50s rock, reggae and, yes, punk. (They'd add disco and proto hip-hop to the mix on their next album.) No other album managed to both envelop and shoot down punk's intentions and limits like 'London Calling.' They even managed to get on U.S. radio with the tacked-on "Train in Vain," but the album's many riches go way, way deeper than that hit single. From the opening call to arms/title track to the rock 'n' roll kiss-off "Death or Glory" to the iconic cover art (borrowed from Elvis Presley's debut LP), 'London Calling' both buried punk's expectations and carried the music into the next decade with new hope.

NEXT: THE VERY BEST SONGS BY THE CLASH

Filed Under: The Clash

Categories: Anniversaries, First Shows

#### AROUND THE WEB



**Low-priced Fresh-built 2 Bed Senior Apartments in Manchester - Take a Look!**  
SENIOR LIVING



**What Full Mouth Dental Implants Should Cost You in 2024 (See Options)**  
DENTAL IMPLANTS | SEARCH ADS



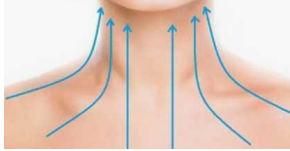
**Neuropathy is Linked to This Household Item (Stop Using It)**  
WELLNESSGAZE NEURO





These New Mobile Stair Lifts for Seniors Are Simply Impressive - Take a Look

STAIR LIFT



The Main Cause of Wrinkles on the Face! Attention: It's Not Age

DERILA



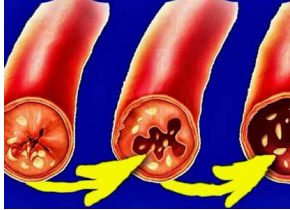
How Much Seniors Pay for Travel Insurance - Learn More!

TRAVEL INSURANCE | SEARCH ADS



Manchester Doctor: If You Have Nail Fungus, Do This Immediately

PURISAKI



Top US Pulmonologist: if You Have Trouble Breathing - Try This Tonight

WELLNESSGAZE LUNG HEALTH



One Teaspoon Kills All Parasites in Your Body!

PARASITERELIEF

Powered by RevContent

**GREAT FARES ON FLIGHTS WORLDWIDE**



**AIR CANADA**

**BOOK NOW**

MORE FROM ULTIMATE CLASSIC ROCK



Bon Jovi's 'Livin' on a Prayer' Originally Sounded Like the Clash



Public Image Ltd, Clash Guitarist Keith Levene Dead at 65



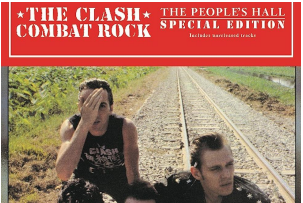
Clash, 'Combat Rock / The People's Hall': Album Review



40 Years Ago: The Clash Fire Topper Headon Amid Downward Spiral



40 Years Ago: Clash Tour Postponed After Joe Strummer Vanishes



Clash to Release 40th Anniversary Edition of 'Combat Rock'



See Dave Grohl and Dave Kurstin Cover the Clash's 'Train in Vain'



Bruce Springsteen, Bob Weir Lead Celebrity Joe Strummer Tribute



Why the Clash Ruffed Punk's Feathers on 'Give 'Em Enough Rope'



INFORMATION

- Advertise with Us
- Terms
- Contest Rules
- Privacy Policy
- Accessibility Statement
- Exercise My Data Rights
- Do Not Sell or Share My Personal Information
- Contact

FOLLOW US



© 2024 Ultimate Classic Rock, Townsquare Media, Inc. All rights reserved.

**GREAT FARES ON  
FLIGHTS WORLDWIDE**



AIR CANADA

**BOOK NOW**