

Clash Up the Ante

The Clash
London's Calling
Epic

By Karl Neice

A little over a year ago, the Clash made their first scratch on the charts when *Give 'Em Enough Rope* entered at #89. Two weeks later they were obscure again, at least to the monied listeners of America.

The Clash seemed at a familiar crossroads: the corner of vanguard and enigma. The people laughed but the press went mad. The fans were insecure, waiting for a communique. Here it is.

My copy of *London's Calling* came January 6 by plane from England (just to demonstrate my own anticipation). I put on side two "Spanish Bombs," and prepared for the record snowfall to hit the streets outside.

What I heard I wasn't prepared for. *London's Calling* is a rich two-disk undertaking, almost academic in its dedication and research. Producer Guy Stevens provides a clean semblance of continuity while the "four horsemen" go side for side over the entire quarter-century of rock 'n' roll history.

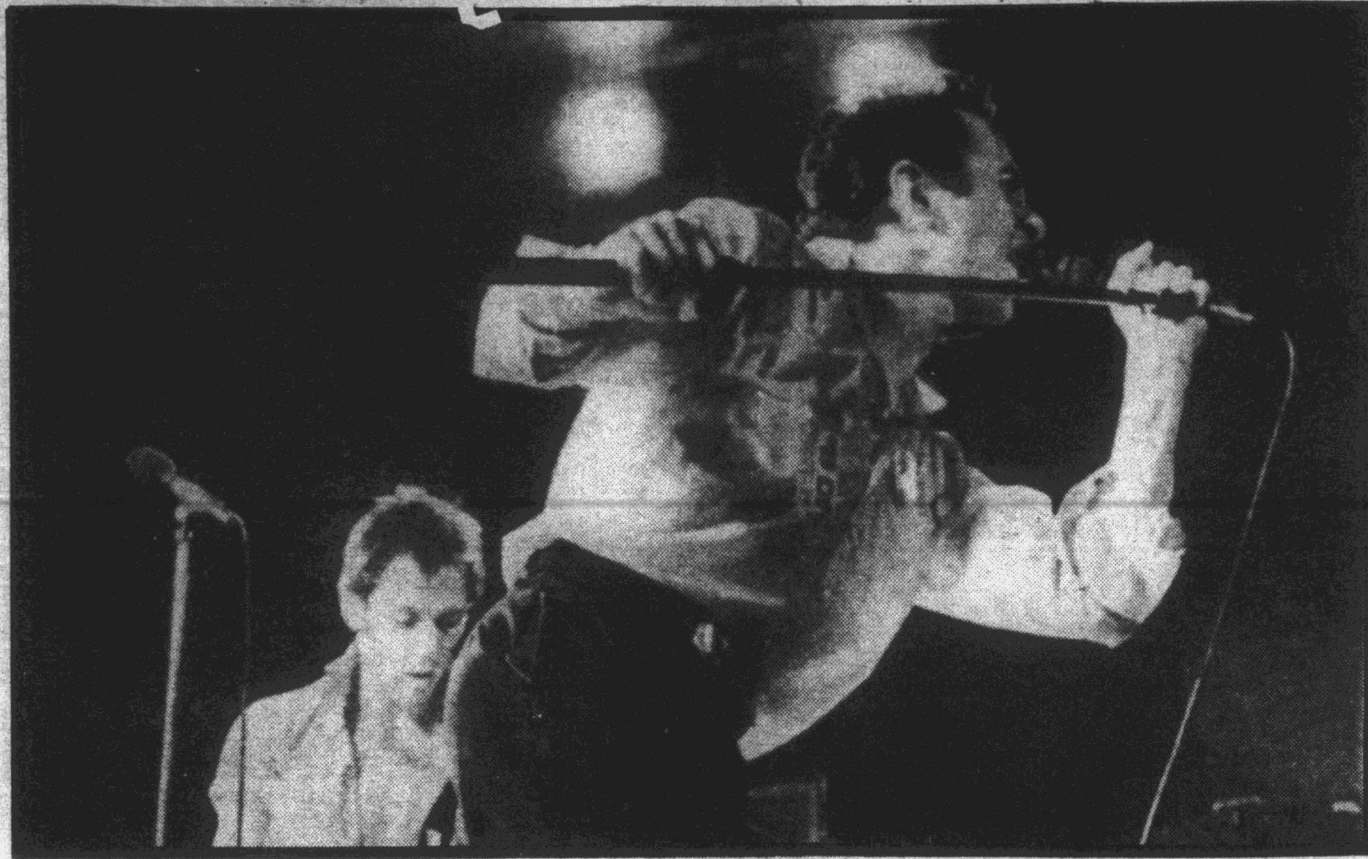
THE AMAZING EMERGENCE of this studied rock experience is the third large step for Clashkind. The first record was screaming over the punk masses. *Enough Rope* made obsolete anything passing for "clean, hard rock," and was so digestible I was afraid it would pass away too quickly. It did, as far as chart-ranking goes.

I wouldn't have been surprised 'hat after all this "decade" hoopla, the Clash had timed themselves right off the charts with this effort. Surprisingly, new radio formats and plenty of good press have placed *London's Calling* at #42. And it is an even more vitriolic capsule of sound, harder to swallow than their first two records. That's good for the band, who desperately want to break out of the elite critic's ghetto.

London's Calling is a lot of record to chew on. Even the band itself can't get away from comparisons to Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde*, the Beatles' *White Album*, and the Stone's *Exile on Main Street*. On the picture-sleeve single of "London's Calling" the ruling teenaged listener sits, flanked by the early album covers of Elvis, the Beatles, Stones, Dylan and the Sex Pistols. It seems the Clash have really upped the ante, but still maintain their stance in the title tune:

London calling, now don't look to us

The Rocket



The Clash calling London

All that phony Beatlemania has bitten the dust

The four horsemen scatter on *London's Calling*, but promise to meet up again before they ride into town. Everything from the roots of Stagger Lee, through reggae, to the outrage of Three-Mile Island is expressed.

THE LATEST, FRESHEST feeling is pounded out indelicately in "Working for the Clampdown" and "Guns of Brixton." The message is clear:

The men at the factory are old and cunning.

You don't owe nothing so boy get running.

It's the best years of your life they want to steal.

You grow up and you calm down

You're working for the clampdown.

If "Clampdown" concerns the

ultimate rock 'n' roll decision between freedom and unknown consequences, then "Guns of Brixton" deals with those consequences in no uncertain terms:

When they kick in your front door
How you gonna come?
With your hands on your head
Or on the trigger of your gun.

LONDON'S CALLING can be compared to a spaghetti western in its rage, spoof and heroes dying at the end of a gun. Even low budgets and high expectations fit in.

But it's gutsy as hell just watching these English wimps riding hard on what passes for popular music in these United States. Like a good settler I'll wait, but not too long, before I take up arms with the Clash. Meanwhile, I'll furnish aid and comfort. Besides, it's one of the cheapest records in the store. □

The Jitters Gyrate

By Scott McCaughey

THE JITTERS AREN'T New Wave, but open-minded New Wavers should like them (sez me). They're not country (well, there's some mixed in there), and they don't sound anything like an acoustic folk duo gone electric. P.K. Dwyer is not Bob Dylan, though he has sort of a

strange voice and writes edgy lyrics to fairly basic music. Donna Beck is not Grace Slick — there's no comparison (sorry, Grace). The Jitters are a rock 'n' roll band with guts and a sense of humor; they play tight but not so damn "professional" that each upcoming note is a foregone conclusion.

THE NINE SONGS on *The Jitters* are all brimming with this type of healthy attitude. The opening number, "Don't You Remember That You Are The One That Burned Down The Bridges That I Built Over Rivers Of Tears That I Cried Over You," features a great title as well as Dwyer's alternately croaking, growling, and clipped vocal delivery. Lead guitarist Pete Pendas' solo on "The Great Love Affair" twists and teeters, up for grabs until the last moment — and that's a compliment. Bassist Dave Hutchison and drummer Rick Tassin excel throughout, especially on "Irreconcilable Differences," where they give a tune punctuated by stops and starts a miraculously flowing feel. Donna Beck sings a soulful lead on "Alms," and her trade-off lead and harmony with P.K. on "You Say You Want Me But You Won't Do Anything About It" is possibly the highpoint of the LP. The production is simple and clean, the only kind suitable to this music.

The Jitters is a remarkable first album in every artistic sense. Did I mention that it was independently produced? A major record label with some hired-out hotshot producer could only have submerged, or at least disrupted, the very qualities that make this record so good, though I doubt that even the most mismatched of arrangements could hide the basic strength of the songs themselves. And despite the fact that just about every song deals with the neurotic and unfulfilled aspects of love, I get a lift each time I hear this album. That's not sick; that's the way it's supposed to work. □

New Enemy Single Hits Home

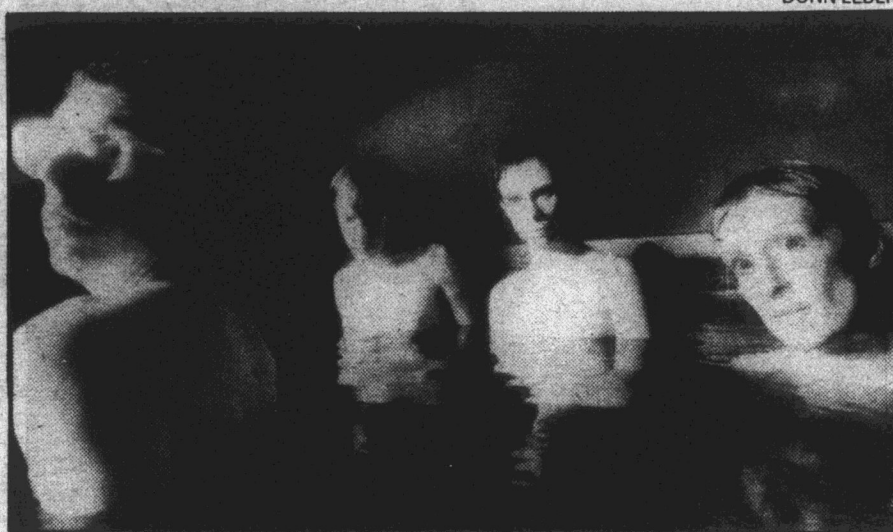
The Enemy

Trendy Violence/
Bang-Bang You're Dead
King Tut Records

By Robert Ferrigno

LEAVE PHILOSOPHY to Pink Floyd, and good-time music to Arlo Guthrie. Most of all leave love-sweet-love to Debbie Boone and Billy Joel. But that interplay of hate, sex and violence that drives the latest wave, leave that to the Enemy. Their most recent 45, "Trendy Violence/Bang-Bang You're Dead," crackles with nasty energy like pavement against your cheek.

"Trendy Violence," by lead singer Suzanne Grant, begins with overlapping voices, an actual recording of the Enemy being attacked by Seattle police atop



DONN LEBER

The Bird, an early punk club. Grant suffered a broken arm. The band got a great intro. "What are you doing? Are you police? Yes, we are. YAH! You hit my friend!" "Violence" overdubs Grant and the studio sound begins.

THE LYRICS START slow and build: "spitting, punching, ripping shirts." Grant's voice is alternately shrill and growling, sliding down the scale with smooth control. "Breaking, bruising, bloody lips." Then the final escalation from

physical violence to chic media violence: "strange attraction, love hate tension, physical contact, punk aggression, cheap entertainment, trendy violence." The pace moves from jumpy to frantic. Drummer Peter Barnes packs just the right punch and George Gleason's lead makes you want to bounce bodies in sweaty cramped spaces with your ears bleeding from the volume.

"Bang-Bang You're Dead" is lyrically less sophisticated but gets the point across with bassist Damon Titus's pounding rhythms. It also seems guilty of the same trendy glorification of violence that the other side sings about.

The Kaye-Smith Studio mix is sharp and clean. The only reason you should know that this record is locally produced is so you can go see the Enemy perform. And kiss Debbie and Billy goodnight first. □