

bilities, its emotional resonance and often dormant social consciousness.

The following survey of the 100 Best Albums of the Eighties, as selected by the editors of ROLLING STONE, shows that the music and the values it stands for have been richer for the struggle. Punks got older and more articulate in their frustration and rage, while many veteran artists responded to that movement's challenge with their most vital work in years. And rap transformed the face—and voice—of popular music.

The first ten entries here span the Clash's polyglot punk, Prince's crossover funkadelica, Afro-bop from Talking Heads and Paul Simon and hymns of innocence and experience by U2 and Tracy Chapman. Further down the list, old-timers like Dylan, the Stones and Lou Reed hit new highs; Public Enemy and Run-D.M.C. kicked out some serious streetwise jams; Metallica and Guns n' Roses established new hard-rock beachheads; and Hüsker Dü, Sonic Youth and the Replacements offered definitive statements of postpunk angst. The embarrassment of riches on this list is all the more remarkable, since arthritic radio programming, corporate sponsorship and outbursts of racism and sexism in rap and metal have complicated rock's present and raised fears for its future.

Best-of lists such as this one are by nature subjective. But rock in the Eighties was like that—lively, varied, contentious and, to some degree, inconclusive. Looking at the best rock has had to offer in the Eighties, it's clear that there's plenty of life left in the old beast yet. The next revolution may be just around the corner.

THE TOP 100

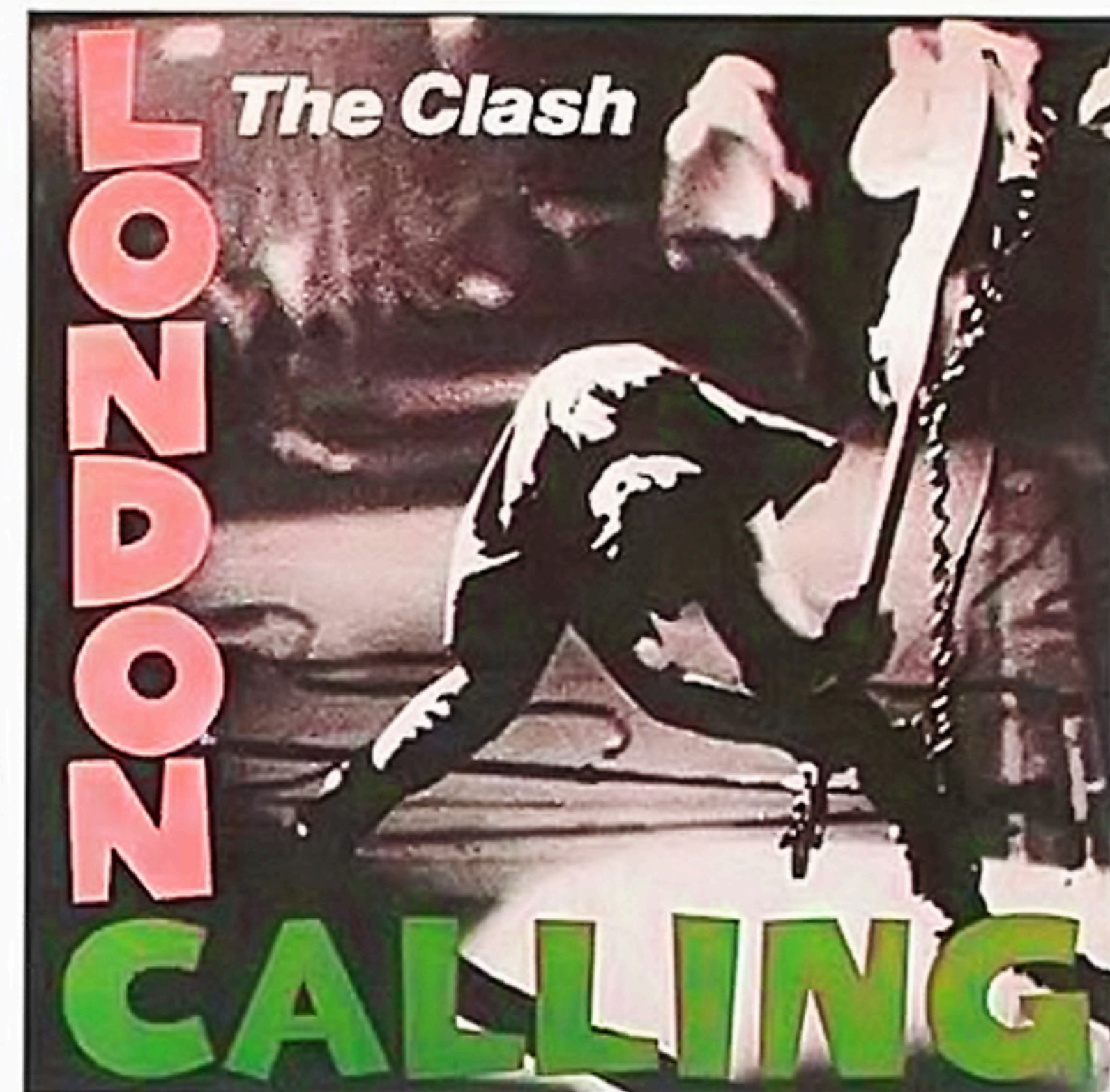
1 LONDON CALLING The Clash Epic

THIS ALBUM COULD NOT HAVE COME AT A more perfect time or from a more appropriate band than the Clash. Released stateside in January 1980, with the decade but a pup and the new year in gear, *London Calling* was an emergency broadcast from rock's Last Angry Band, serving notice that Armageddon was nigh, Western society was rotten at the core, and rock & roll needed a good boot in the rear. Kicking and screaming across a nineteen-song double album, skidding between ska, reggae, R&B, third-world music, power pop and full-tilt punk, the Clash stormed the gates of rock convention and single-handedly set the agenda—musically, politically and emotionally—for the decade to come.

The band had already chalked up two masterpieces of petulant punk fury with *The Clash* (its 1977 debut) and *Give 'Em Enough Rope*. But this time singer-guitarist-songwriters Joe Strummer and Mick Jones fine-tuned the Clash worldview with a deeper sensitivity, addressing issues by zooming in on individuals and hard realities. While the LP's cosmopolitan sound anticipated the world-music fad, its message—revolution begins at home—triggered the reemergence of pop's social consciousness in the Eighties.

For Strummer, Jones, bassist Paul Simonon and drummer Nicky "Topper" Headon, home was London, where they rehearsed and recorded the bulk of the LP

during the late spring and summer of 1979 and where there was ample evidence of impending apocalypse (racial tension, rising unemployment, rampant drug addiction). Strummer's catalog of disasters in the title track, scored with Jones's guitar firepower, sets the tone for the record. But that fear and urgency was also very real to the band,



which had just split with manager Bernie Rhodes, was heavily in debt and had declared open warfare on the music business.

"I remember that things were so up in the air, and there was quite a good feeling of us against the world," says Strummer. "We felt that we were struggling, about to slide down a slope or something, grasping with our fingernails. And that there was nobody to help us."

Isolation and desperation are recurring themes on *London Calling*. The Phil Spector-like glow of "The Card Cheat" belies its lyric pathos, while "Hateful" looks at drug addiction from an addict's point of view ("I'm so grateful to be nowhere"). "There was a sense that life really is a succession of heavy blows," says Jones, "that this is what we have to take day to day." Indeed, "Lost in the Supermarket," a dark slice of peppy Euro-pop, is based on Jones's personal life at the time. "I was living in a council flat with my grandmother," he says. "I couldn't get settled. I was supposed to be this rock star, but I was living with my grandmother." Jones and Strummer wrote a lot of songs in his grandmother's flat before Jones eventually moved out.

The album also has fighting spirit to spare in the likes of "Clampdown" ("Let fury have the hour, anger can be power") and "The Guns of Brixton," a Paul Simonon song that combines images of the racially tense Brixton area of London with the outlaw ethic of *The Harder They Come*. "Spanish Bombs," initially inspired by a radio news report of a terrorist bombing in the Mediterranean, evokes the rebellious spirit of the Spanish Civil War.

London Calling became a double album simply because of the energetic rate at which Strummer and Jones were writing songs. "Joe, once he learned how to type, would bang the lyrics out at a high rate of good stuff," says Jones. "Then I'd be able to bang out some music while he was hitting the typewriter." The members of the Clash devoted nearly three months to arranging and demoing the material at their rehearsal space, a garage in London's Pimlico section, before going into the studio. They added a few choice covers that reflected their widening field of

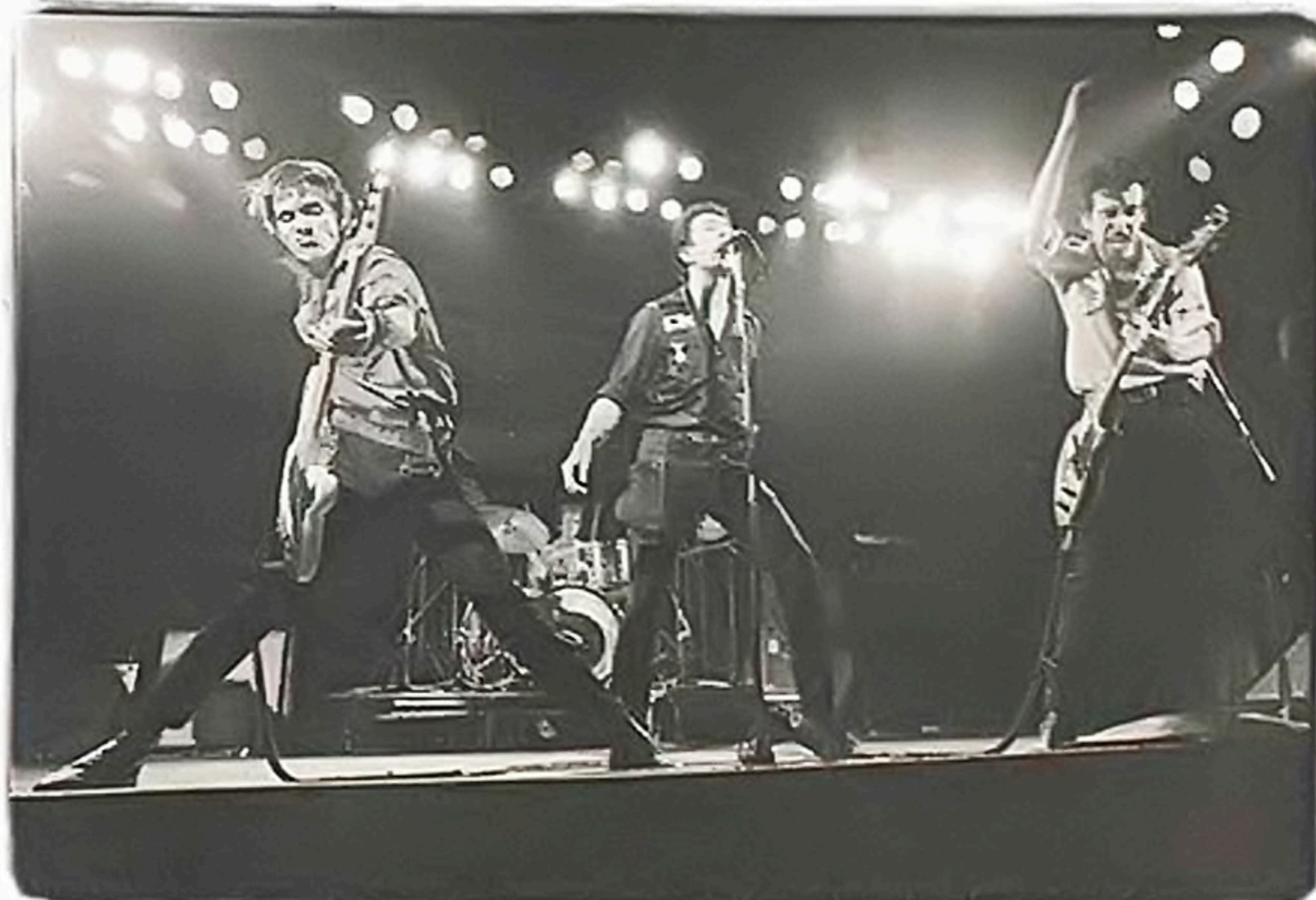
musical vision, such as "Brand New Cadillac," by the British rockabilly legend Vince Taylor, and "Wrong 'Em Boyo," a "Stagger Lee" takeoff by a Jamaican ska group, the Rulers.

The Clash found the perfect producer in Guy Stevens, a kindred renegade spirit with impeccable credentials (he ran the U.K. branch of Sue Records in the Sixties) and an intuitive, if lunatic, genius for getting the essence of rock & roll on record. His protégés included Free and Mott the Hoople, and he'd produced the Clash's first demos in 1976. He'd fallen from grace in the industry, but the Clash felt he was just the madman to do the job.

"We sensed it was a good way to keep it on the beam, keep our feet on the ground," Strummer says. "I think something dies in the music when everything is so strait-laced, with accountants monitoring every move."

There was nothing strait-laced about Stevens's methods, which included pouring beer into a piano when the band wanted to use it on a song over his objections and slinging chairs around "if he thought a track needed zapping up," according to Strummer. Stevens nearly hit Jones with a ladder during one take.

But Jones says Stevens—who has since died—was a "real vibe merchant" and was always "exhorting us to make it more, to increase the intensity, to lay the energy on." Stevens had good musical instincts, too. The version



Above: The mighty Clash in concert. Right: Band members Nicky "Topper" Headon, Mick Jones, Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon (from left).

of "Brand New Cadillac" on the LP is actually a warm-up take. "We said, 'Okay, now we'll do it proper,'" says Topper Headon. "And he said, 'No, it's great, let's keep it.' But we said, 'Hang on a minute, it speeds up.' And he said, 'All rock & roll speeds up.' And that was it."

The Clash quickly got into the spirit of things. The crackling at the beginning of "The Guns of Brixton" is not fire but the sound of the band members tearing Velcro strips off of leather swivel chairs swiped from the control room. "Train in Vain," the album's surprise hit, was recorded so late in the sessions that there wasn't time to include it on the cover or label copy. And there is no train in the song, either. "The track was like a train rhythm," says Jones, who wrote most of it, "and it was, once again, that feeling of being lost. So there it was."

Strangely, the Clash was slagged at home for softening up and selling out to mainstream American tastes. "When I read that, the notion was so new to me I just laughed," Strummer says. "In that dirty room in Pimlico, with one light and filthy carpet on the walls for soundproofing, that had been the furthest thought from our minds." He also remembers the distress of one German skinhead, who cried, "My grandmother likes 'Wrong 'Em



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BOB GRIEN (LEFT) AND MARK JANALIS