

# Clash LP has roots of punk deep in the heart of '50s rock

By ROBERT HILBURN  
THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

HOLLYWOOD — I've been surprised ever since the Sex Pistols' arrival three years ago at how slow American rock fans are in recognizing the link between punk and the Presley-to-Stones tradition. But it looks like the British, who first embraced rebellious punk, also need to brush up on their rock 'n' roll roots.

Reviewing the new Clash album, a Melody Maker critic described the LP cover design this way: "(It) carries a monochrome picture of (Clash bassist Paul) Simon on stage, framed by the album's title and backed by a nicely executed replica of a 1960s fanzine layout. Innocence regained."

How embarrassing. The cover of the new Clash album is a replica, but it has nothing to do with the 1960s. The design was patterned after Elvis Presley's debut LP in 1956. The cover, however, isn't the Clash's only link with the past in the new *London Calling*.

The two-record set is a glorious survey of rock's most affecting early strains, from Presley-era rockabilly to the New Orleans R&B that helped shape reggae.

But don't get the wrong idea. *London Calling* isn't just a look back. As current as its 1980 copyright, the LP is a triumphant step forward for a band that already has been hailed by some critics as rock's greatest.

Where the Clash's first two albums were stark, black-and-white exercises, this one — thanks in part to outstanding production work by Guy Stevens — is in color. Horns, humor and melodic variation combine to give the Clash's music an accessibility and range that lift it out of the powerful but narrow punk genre.

That move won't be applauded by all Clash fans, but it was an essential one. The Clash was exhilarating but one-dimensional on stage when using its punk-only material. To fulfill its potential, it needed the variety of emotions provided by groups like the Beatles, Rolling Stones and Who.

*London Calling* gives the Clash that variety. That doesn't mean it will be everyone's favorite. Given today's conservative bent, many rock fans will still reject the Clash as too aggressive. And it's true: Joe Strummer's singing, even by liberal rock standards, is awfully ragged. He sounds at times like a man who pries bottle caps loose with his teeth — and then swallows the caps.

But the Clash is a marvelous rock 'n' roll band. The group's first two albums suggested it. This one confirms it.

*London Calling* is not the first evidence of the Clash's fondness for early rock. On its first U.S. tour last year, the band used '50s rocker Bo Diddley to open its show and exhibited '50s influences in its appearance.

Lead singer-rhythm guitarist Joe Strummer wore his

shirt collar up just like the early Presley and greased his hair back in '50s ducktail fashion. Strummer, who is joined in the Clash by singer-guitarist Mick Jones, bassist Paul Simonon and drummer Trevor Horn, also mentioned that Presley's *Sun Sessions* is his all-time favorite album. At the time, he said, "Great production... nothing's ever beat it."

But this association with rock tradition was lost on the American rock audience. Confused by the safety-pin-through-the-cheek symbolism of punk and the aggressiveness of the music, most fans dismissed the Clash as alien. Radio programmers ignored the band's records. Neither of the Clash's first two LPs reached even the Top 100.

Still, the group attracted a following. Inspired by the Sex Pistols, the Clash delighted U.S. critics when it rode the first British punk wave here. Through tunes like "London's Burning" and "I'm So Bored With the U.S.A.," the group lashed out at oppressive social and economic conditions in England. On stage, the group played with as much intensity as anyone ever in rock.

One disappointment in *London Calling* is that the Clash spends so much time demonstrating its versatility, especially melodically, that the band gives us frustratingly little of the full-speed abandon associated with its first two LPs.

A few songs, notably "Working for the Clampdown" and the title track, do, however, exhibit the aggression that made the Clash such an influential attraction on the punk-new wave circuit.

By opening the LP with the title tune, the band makes it clear it has not abandoned its own roots. The song is a sirenlike look at the results of social apathy, set at a chaotic point in the future when "all that phony Beatlemania has bitten the dust."

The Clash then moves quickly into various American rock strains, from the sensual rockabilly tone of "Brand New Cadillac" to the lazy blues shuffle of "Jimmy Jazz" to the New Orleans R&B of "Wrong 'Em Boy."

The band, however, doesn't ignore British influences. Echoes of both the Kinks and Mott the Hoople surface in such lifting, satiric pieces as "Lost in the Supermarket" and in such lush sentimental glimpses as "The Right People."

Throughout, the Clash maintains its provocative lyric slant, even slipping in subtle observations on rock stereotypes and life style. Against the overt romanticism of "Lovers Rock," the band takes a wry jab at the macho inclinations of rock music.

*London Calling* is a hallmark album that invites adjectives, like thoughtful and sophisticated, that once seemed inconsistent with the emerging punk tradition. Without violating that movement's original intent, the Clash brings punk of age.



## Grease for all ages

Jocko, Bowzer, Danny and Donny (clockwise from top left) are four of the 10 greasers of Sha Na Na who will bring their renditions of the music of the '50s to the Coliseum at 8 p.m. Feb. 2.

Continued from Page 9

**BOGIE'S SHERATON INN, U.S. 49** — Tonight Country Vibrations play a country hoe-down. The band also performs Tuesday through Thursday from 9 p.m. until 1 a.m. and Friday and next Saturday from 9 p.m. until 3 a.m. Cleco Ford and the Westerners perform Sunday and Monday from 8:30 p.m. until 12:30 a.m.

**CUM-BI-YA, 711 Tegarden Road** — Tonight Billy Colston, Rose Wallace and Johnny Quave are featured starting at 9:45 p.m.

**HOLIDAY INN SHIPWRECK LOUNGE, U.S. 90** — Guitar-vocalist Michael Steel performs Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday from 8 p.m. until midnight and Friday and Saturday from 9 p.m. until 1 a.m.

**SHY-ANNE SOCIAL CLUB, U.S. 90, formerly 90 EAST** — Tonight and Sunday Fragile is featured beginning at 10 p.m. Pokallus, featuring vocalist Debbie Stanbro, perform Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday from 9:30 p.m. until 1:30 a.m. and Friday and next Saturday starting at 10 p.m.

**STEVEN'S HOT GROCERIES, 802 E. Beach Blvd.** — Eddie McDaniels and Bobby Canady perform Wednesday through Sunday from 8:30 p.m. until 1 a.m.

**SUGAR MILL LOUNGE, Mill Road** — Musical entertainment is provided with Art, Glenda, Joe, Jim, Kenny and Al Wednesday through Saturday beginning at 8:30 p.m. The band plays for a Sunday jam from 4 p.m. until 7:30 p.m. Steve and Jan and the Velvet Rain play Sunday from 8 p.m. until 1 a.m. and Tuesday from 8:30 p.m. until 2 a.m.

**WILDFIRE LOUNGE, U.S. 90** — Country and Western music with Cash Cotton's Boll Weevils is featured Tuesday through Sunday. The band begins playing at 9 p.m.

## LONG BEACH

**THE HEADQUARTERS LOUNGE, 114 W. Railroad St.** — Tonight Coast is featured from 9 until 1. Friday and

See GOING OUT, Page 11

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