

Sounds: The Clash



By Robert Hilburn
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) Simonon 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 The 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.

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 lilting, satiric pieces as "Lost in the Supermarket" and in such lush sentimental glimpses as "The Right People."

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

Album reviews

By Chuck Graham
Citizen entertainment writer

A year ago DAVID BROMBERG released his album recorded entirely in an acoustic trio setting. A lot of people felt gypped because the rest of the band was missing. Bromberg is making it clear with his new release, "YOU SHOULD SEE THE REST OF THE BAND" (Fantasy Records F-9590) that he is still committed to the full group.

The album is six solid band productions, tightly played, moving on, genuine barn burners recorded live on tour last March, April and May. Hottest of the lot is the opening track, "Key to the Highway."

All the Bromberg show touches are here, too. The rambling "Sharon," in which Bromberg does his preaching/singing routine and talks to various instruments in the band, "Helpless Blues," done in the big band blues tradition, two other blues numbers, including one that's done Dixieland style, and a fiddle tune medley called "Yankee's Revenge."

"YOU SHOULD SEE THE REST OF THE BAND" is Bromberg's strongest album in years. Fans of the artist should consider it a necessary addition to their collections. Those who wonder why Bromberg's appearances in town are such social events need only hear this album once.

MINGUS DYNASTY: "CHAIR IN THE SKY" (Elektra Records 6E-248) — Heard in the hands of others, the compositions of Charles Mingus recall the symphonic scope of Duke Ellington. The selections here span the time from "Goodbye Porkpie Hat" to the recent collaboration album with Joni Mitchell, on which appeared "Sweet Sucker Dance," "The Dry Cleaner from Des Moines" and "A Chair in the Sky."

The other two cuts are "Boogie Stop Shuffle" and "My Jelly Roll Soul."

The appreciation for Mingus's work by this all-star collection of alumni from his many groups is mostly an intellectual expression. Artistic and appropriate, but lacking the fire of desire. Which leaves the listener free to appreciate the melodic richness, the clever chord changes.

Would have been better, though, to have also included a heartfelt thrill or two.

ROY CLARK: "MY MUSIC" (MCA Records MCA-3189) — Roy Clark is one of the few performers who knows how to put some bite into the sorghum that is contemporary country music. While Clark's guitar has always been lightning sharp, on this assortment of ballads and moderately fast numbers he works the magic purely with his voice.

All the songs are tuneful Top-40 material that will fall easy on the ears through many listenings. The first song that's breaking as a hit, "Chain Gang of Love," is typical of the entire collection.

Best-selling records

Top pop singles

This listing is compiled by KTKT, radio 990 AM. The rankings are based on phone requests, audience research, personal interviews and the judgment of the station's staff.

- This Last week week
- 3 99 — Toto.
 - 4 Crazy Little Thing Called Love — Queen.
 - 1 Longer — Dan Fogelberg.
 - 5 Yes, I'm Ready — Terry Desario and K.C.
 - 8 When I Wanted You — Barry Manilow.
 - 12 I Want to Be Your Lover — Prince.
 - 7 Him — Rupert Holmes.
 - 17 An American Dream — Dirt Band.
 - 14 Back on My Feet Again — The Babys.
 - 10 Romeo's Tune — Steve Forbert.
 - 6 Why Me — Styx.
 - 19 Working My Way Back to You — Spinners.
 - 13 Last Train to London — Electric Light Orchestra.
 - 7 You Know that I Love You — Santana.
 - 10 Coward of the County — Kenny Rogers.
 - 11 Sara — Fleetwood Mac.
 - 17 Too Hot — Kool and the Gang.
 - 18 Daydream Believer — Anne Murray.
 - 9 Wait for Me — Hall and Oates.
 - 20 N Desire — Andy Gibb.

Top country singles

This listing is compiled by KCUZ, radio 1290 AM. The rankings are based on phone requests and sales at three local record stores.

- This Last week week
- 2 Years — Barbara Mandrell.
 - 7 Baby, You're Something — John Conlee.
 - 1 Love Me Over Again — Don Williams.
 - 4 Ain't Living Long Like This — Waylon Jennings.
 - 5 Sugarfoot Rag — Jerry Reed.
 - 10 Nothing Sure Looked Good on You — Gene Watson.
 - 11 My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys — Willie Nelson.
 - 9 Numbers — Bobby Bare.
 - 12 Why Don't You Spend the Night? — Ronnie Milsap.
 - 14 Back to Back — Jeanne Pruett.
 - 11 Daydream Believer — Anne Murray.
 - 12 Chain Gang of Love — Roy Clark.
 - 3 Leaving Louisiana in the Broad Daylight — Oak Ridge Boys.
 - 19 I'll Be Coming Back for More — T.G. Sheppard.
 - 20 The Old Side of Town — Tom T. Hall.
 - 16 Better than I Did Then — Statler Brothers.
 - 17 Come to My Love — Crisy Lane.
 - 18 I Can't Get Enough of You — Razy Bailey.
 - 9 What Will I Tell Virginia? — Johnny Rodriguez.
 - 20 N Drinking and Driving — Johnny Paycheck.

Top albums

This listing is compiled by KWFM, radio 92.9 FM. These are the most frequently played albums on KWFM, based on requests, trade publications and the disc jockey's judgment.

- This Last week week
- 1 The Wall — Pink Floyd.
 - 8 Adventures in Utopia — Utopia.
 - 4 Deguello — ZZ Top.
 - 6 Down on the Farm — Little Feat.
 - 3 Damp the Torpedoes — Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.
 - 14 No Ballads — The Rockets.
 - 7 Phoenix — Dan Fogelberg.
 - 5 The Long Run — Eagles.
 - 9 Tusk — Fleetwood Mac.
 - 10 The Pretenders — The Pretenders.
 - 10 Harder — Faster — April Wine.
 - 12 N Make It Wonderful — Nazareth.
 - 3 Freedom at Point Zero — Jefferson Starship.
 - 16 Nowhere to Run — UFO.
 - 15 Gamma I — Gamma.
 - 16 The Fine Art of Surfacing — Boomtown Rats.
 - 17 Love Stinks — J. Geils Band.
 - 18 N Short Stories, Tall Tales — Horselips.
 - 19 N Union Jacks — The Babys.
 - 20 11 I'm the Man — Joe Jackson.