

Pop beat

The Clash scores with varied approaches

By ERIC SIEGEL

During the Clash's first North American tour last winter, Joe Strummer, singer-guitarist-songwriter-spokesman for the angry young band from Britain, issued a few words of caution to those who would stereotype the group's sound.

"Punk is not a limitation," Strummer said backstage after a show at Washington's Ontario Theatre. "It's merely a convenient word. When we go in the studio, anything goes, even if it comes from 30 trumpets."

The Clash doesn't employ 30 trumpets on its new two-record album, "London Calling." But the group does employ a brass section, the Irish Horns, and keyboards to supplement its basic lineup of lead and rhythm guitars, bass and drums.

The result is the best of the three American albums the group has released to date.

On the basis of its first two American LPs—"Give 'Em Enough Rope," released in the fall of 1978, and "The Clash," released here last year but actually recorded and released in England three years ago—the Clash was hailed by many critics as not only the best band in rock, but also the savior of the entire genre.

Symbols

Such accolades seemed to be inspired at least as much by what the Clash symbolized as what it sang. The Clash came across as the quintessential political rock group. The very titles of many of the group's songs—"White Riot," "Tommy Gun," "London's Burning"—were a reaffirmation of the notion of rock and roll as a call to arms, the notion was reinforced by the clatter of guitars that punctuated nearly every song, like bursts of gunfire from a machine gun nest.

It was high voltage material, so much so that it tended to overwhelm some of the Clash's subtler compositions, notably "Julie's in the Drug Squad," an uptempo cut about betrayal off the "Give 'Em Enough Rope" LP.

But the principal problem with the group's lyrical and musical bombast was that it was too often unrecognizable. A listener knew something was happening but couldn't be sure just what it was, during last year's tour, mimeographed lyric sheets were handed out so the audience could follow the songs.

That fact, and not, as the Clash and many of its admirers implied, any intrinsic message in the group's music, was probably most responsible for the group's limited popular appeal in the United States.

But that problem has been solved, or done away with, on "London Calling." From the opening title cut to "Train in Vain," a last-minute addition that closes the two-record set, the production is clean, crisp—and clear.

Class conscious

Even more important is the fact that the Clash manages to keep from being hemmed in by the bounds of its image on the LP. Instead of nothing but frontal assaults, the group tries, and succeeds, at a number of end runs, without ever straying too far from the political and class-consciousness that gives it a sense of purpose.

Take, for example, the title cut, which portends a doomed civilization. Amid bleak images of a coming nuclear holocaust



The Clash—"quintessential political rock group"—does best on "London Calling."

caustic is a warning that there will be no easy out: "London calling, now don't look to us/All that phoney Beatlemania has bitten the dust."

The song is immediately followed by two that represent significant departures for the group: "Brand New Cadillac," a remake of a 1958 classic featuring a soaring, Ventures-style guitar opening, and "Jimmy Jazz," a jazz-style mock-up featuring the aforementioned horn section that evokes images of a sleazy, off-hours club.

As different as it is, the Clash's us-against-them mentality prevails on the latter number: "The police walked in for Jimmy Jazz/ I said, He ain't here but he sure went past."

"Spanish Bombs," which opens the second side, is a highly lyrical song that recalls a bit of Dire Straite's best work. The song neatly cuts across a generation of revolution, beginning with the Spanish Civil War and moving to references to the IRA.

Something different

"Wrong 'Em Boys," which opens side three of the two-record set, is as different from "Spanish Bombs" as it is from any-

thing else the Clash has done. Set to a Fifties-style beat, punctuated by horns and highlighted with harmonies, the song reveals an innocence that borders on naive, asking at one point, "Why do you try

to cheat?/And trample people under your feet/Don't you know it is wrong?"

The Clash even manages to have some fun along the way, while still scoring points. Typical here is the mockingly derisive "Koka Kola," in which the group takes aim—with a barb, not a bludgeon—at corporate America, declaring, "It's the pause that refreshes in the corridors of power/When top men need a top up long before the happy hour."

For all the diversity displayed throughout the album, elements of the Clash's publicized raw style exist in abundance—but with a subtlety only suggested, but never completely fulfilled, on the group's previous albums.

"Waiting for the Clampdown," for example, lashes out at the drudgery of working-class life against the backdrop of a furious guitar-and-drum attack. "Hateful" is a bitter lament against a drug pusher; the scorn is most obvious in the couplet, "Oh, anything I want he gives it to me/Anything I want he gives it but not free."

Two levels

"The Guns of Brixton," a reggae number written by bassist Paul Simonon, is a song of life and terror in London's Jamaican community. But it works on a less obvious level as well: as a statement about the choice of standing up or giving up.

Similarly, "Death Or Glory," another furious rocker, is about choices, too, ones that are not so much overtly political as they are personal: "Every cheap hood strikes a bargain with the world/And ends up making payments on a Sofa or a girl."

The last song listed on the album jacket—"Train in Vain" was added too late to be listed) is entitled "Revolution Rock." The song opens with the lines "Revolution Rock it's a brand new rock/A bad, bad rock this here revolution rock" and continues "Everybody smash up your seats and rock to this/Brand new beat/This here music mash up the nation/This here music cause a sensation."

The song works on many levels: as ironic self-appraisal; as commentary about the record industry's tendency to commercialize everything; as criticism of the knee-jerk visceral reaction of many fans.

In that sense, it is a fitting penultimate number, typical of the whole of "London Calling."

'Silent Partner' a cut above the usual bank-caper thriller

By R. H. GARDNER

Aside from a bit of gratuitous brutality (thrown in toward the end as a sop for the sadistic-minded), "The Silent Partner," at the Charles, is an unusually satisfying thriller—imaginative in conception and gripping in execution. I can't recall when a film has so thoroughly entertained me.

Elliott Gould plays a Toronto bank teller named Miles who feels alienated from and somewhat confused by the world he inhabits. A shy and diffident man (his passion is collecting tropical fish), he has no social life outside that arising from his day-by-day association with his colleagues at the bank, especially Julie, the stylish guardian of the safe-deposit vault, played by Susannah York.

Though he has never made any overtures beyond a half-hearted, unsuccessful attempt to take her to dinner, Miles has imagined a sort of unspoken relationship existing between himself and Julie. He is thus shocked one afternoon when the bank manager—a pompous and patently sleazy type for whom Miles has no respect—asks him to escort her to a downtown bar so that the manager (who is married) can pick her up.

It is his first realization that things at the bank—and perhaps even in the world itself—are not quite what he has imagined them to be.

The feeling of strangeness arising from this discovery is deepened by something that occurred at the bank earlier in the day. While fiddling around with one of the deposit slips put out for the convenience of customers, Miles discovers an inscription inadvertently left on the carbon by some-

one unaware that the slip was underneath the paper he was writing on.

The inscription reads "The thing in my pocket is a gun. Give me all your cash."

The bank is in a fancy shopping mall, peopled by Christmas shoppers and costumed Santa Clauses soliciting donations for the poor. The next day, Miles notices that the distinctively hand-lettered "G's" on a sign carried by one of the Santa Clauses matches those of the carbon. Later, the man comes into the bank and behaves in a pointedly suspicious manner.

Convinced that a robbery attempt is to be made on the bank the next day by the man in the Santa Claus suit, the fish-collecting Miles, who has never committed a decisive act in his life, now sets out to commit one. He prepares to use the anticipated hold-up as a means of robbing the bank himself.

And he does—with uncharacteristic brilliance. Unfortunately, the robber—who manages to escape with only a portion of the loot—is a psychopath. Thus when he learns he is being credited with making off with more than \$40,000 he didn't get, he becomes so furious that he begins to badger Miles in a manner that becomes more and more terrifying.

In short, "Silent Partner" is the story of a little man who, having decided that all people are crooked in one way or another, takes a calculated gamble, only to find himself in a struggle to the death with a maniac played here with impressive ferocity by Christopher Plummer.

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