

'London Calling' best new rock album

By **JOHN ROCKWELL**
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NEW YORK — Although it's only been available domestically for a couple of weeks, the Clash's "London Calling" still counts symbolically as the first important rock album of the 1980's.

This is a two-disk set that justifies its length, and the first Clash album that fully explains the acclaim that the band's admirers have been heaping upon it all along.

THAT PRAISE has indeed been extreme; for many serious rock critics the Clash is the best rock band in the world.

To this listener, the Clash's first album (its second album released in this country, oddly enough) was muddily produced but full of fine, fervent songs. But the band's live performances seemed more hectically energetic than emptily raucous.

The second album (the first released here) was slicker in production but less interesting as music. And so it stood, until "London Calling."

THIS IS an album that

captures all the Clash's primal energy, combines it with a brilliant production job by Guy Stevens and reveals depths of invention and creativity barely suggested by the band's previous work.

The songs are full of ingenious touches, as are the arrangements with their pervasive brass parts. Yet the directness and passion of the band are never subverted.

As with all the Clash's music, the themes are political, either directly or indirectly. They're direct in songs that call the audience specifically to battle; more often they're more implicit, as with descriptions of London life that make one realize all that's gone wrong with the English ideals of fairness and opportunity.

WHAT ONE doesn't have

here are the themes that normally make for success in the United States — sex and love. But the music is so superior, capturing all the diversity of present-day London underclass life, and

the Clash — with material like this to perform — can be such a passionately convincing performing band that it will be very surprising if Epic Records can't sell them to a mass American

audience.

"London Calling" may just be that increasingly rare phenomenon, an album prized for its seriousness even as it reaches out to the millions.