

Humanistic, Pan-Cultural World View

By Howard S.-M. Wuelling

The Clash, *Sandinista!* (Epic)
Ellen Foley, *The Spirit of St. Louis*
 (Cleveland International)

For all intents and purposes, *Sandinista!* and *The Spirit of St. Louis* may be considered different volumes of the same magnum opus. After all, the Clash do produce, compose and perform on Ellen Foley's *St. Louis*, while she contributes lead and backing vocals all over their *Sandinista!*. And Mick Jones is her "boyfriend." I guess the thought of a four LP set was too much even for them. These two albums are also joined conceptually—to wit, they both grow out of the same misconception: that music really "matters."

In this I'm referring to several issues: whether or not music, of itself, can bring about any worthwhile change in intimate or macrocosmic relations; whether its impact transcends the environmental factors that form it; whether—all other considerations aside—it can or need be anything more than pure cheap, transitory diversion. Moreover, if so... who? what? when? where? why?

And how. Obviously, since I'm involved in this biz to the extent I am indicates that I vote "yeah" on all the above. But I don't think that that's necessarily the case for all concerned.

Upon examination, *Sandinista!* is revealed as a didactic, idealistic undertaking. The Clash intend no less than sponsoring a vision of humanistic, socially aware, pan-cultural world society, with especial emphasis on embracing urban American ghetto dwellers and inhabitants of the post-colonial Caribbean. Hard to knock an idea like that! Unfortunately, they've made a glorious botch of it, employing frequently misguided, probably confused methods that ultimately seem presumptuous and not a little condescending to both audience and the intended benefitees.

Sandinista! presents us with the popular musics of these various oppressed masses, played as authentically as the Clash and their hired henchmen can manage. There are rap numbers, gospel, swing jazz, occasional rock'n'roll and lots of reg-



The Clash: Paul, Mick, Joe, Topper

gae—lots and lots. There are songs of rebellion ("Rebel Waltz"), economic oppression ("Magnificent Seven"), etc.

The thought underlying this is "Love the music, love the musicians"—hopefully the people who originated it. That's the Clash's first error—this sort of pop adulation seldom filters down to that level. Reggae-loving skinheads back in Britain never gave up hating the West Indians living down the street, no matter how fanatically they followed Prince Buster. In the States, discos spinning Donna Summer, without batting a false eyelash, would exclude black patrons. The Clash's espousal of exotic mu-

sics might do wonders for their own credibility and cement the loyalty of their more adventurous fans, but that's about it. The 2-Tone phenomenon impact in this area was due more to practical considerations, like a racially mixed line-up and audience, than any rhetorical force. If the Clash were smart or serious they'd start touring with Funkadelic.

A second problem with *Sandinista!* is that the Clash's rendering of these disparate sounds is ultimately ineffectual. It stems from the old "White-man-playing-the-blues" riddle—with a heartily negative punchline. Music of passion and commit-

ment comes in response to immediate, personal environmental factors; poverty, discrimination, and so on in this case. *They*

This input simply cannot be substituted for—and thus does not factor out into outsiders' language. That doesn't preclude appreciation, or sympathy with such musics, or even empathy under the right circumstances. But it does mean that the Clash's attempts at straight transcription fail utterly, lacking that spiritual element. The music functions as sound and rhythm, a second hand experience from the word go. It's just this, their overall perception of music, that undercuts the whole project.

On *Spirit of St. Louis* they aid Ellen Foley in fleshing out old clichés of pop orthodoxy and quite well too—they might as well be the Silver Bullet Band. There's no hint of broader perspectives, of unanswered questions of any consequence, unsolved problems here, yet the Clash play with the same gusto, the same amount of imagination here as on *Sandinista!*'s angriest manifesto.

Ultimately it's all just grist in the mill to them. Another stance, another sound to get up on stage and bang a guitar to. More words people can watch leaping from your face.

The Clash, first and foremost, are rock'n'rollers. Their prime motivation is making rock'n'roll as an end in itself. They're not bad sorts, really, but the extent of their public endorsement of morality is bounded, I believe, by the current acceptability of it. If the tide turned, they probably wouldn't start singing about "Christine 16" or anything, but I'm sure you'd see the social issues toned down—sincerely, naively, in good faith, probably.

In the final analysis, *Sandinista!* is a good modern rock'n'roll album: well played; well written; nicely packaged. If I appear hypercritical of it, it's at least in part due to the monumental themes and presentation the Clash have saddled it with. It's nice listening taken in reasonable sized doses, and certainly more intellectually entertaining than Fleetwood Mac. O.K. So I'll shut up already.

P.S. The three LP's cost as much as two.

By Kenne Highland

Kip Korea
 "Calling on You"/"I Hate The Beatles"
 (BGN #26)

Billy Goon
 "The Ballad of the Billy Goons"/
 "The Goons are Drinking" (BGN #27)

Trademarks
 "It's Up To You" (Take It! A)

Creamers
 "Little White Lies"/"Moving Parts"/
 "945-3554"/"Nightmare" (Take It! B)

We've had EP's. We've had LP's. 45's. Picture sleeves. Colored vinyl. Cereal-box Monkees records. Shadows of Knight potato-chip 45's. But now in Boston there's a new craze, flexi-discs—more plentiful than Irishmen in Southy on St. Patrick's Day.

The *Boston Groupie News*, MA's pioneering new wave fanzine, helped initiate the flexi-explosion last November, including Kip Korea's "Calling on You"/"I Hate The Beatles" flexi in BGN #26. "Calling on You" is a highly commercial pop-metal tune that screams HIT SINGLE!, bearing no little resemblance to sounds of The Raspberries and Emmitt Rhodes' Merry Go Round. Kip (formerly bassist with The Kozmetics and Peter Dayton—he played on "Last Supper" from the *Sharp Cuts* col-

lection) plays all instruments from the classic Rickenbacher guitar whorls to the loud "vrooming" bass. "I Hate The Beatles" was written in response to head Kozmetic Lou Miami's dictatorial habits, during a Kozmetics' rehearsal. Sez Kip, "We wrote the words right there... writing lyrics on the labels of beer bottles." "Beatles" is half the speed of the Louriginal and more sinister and brooding for it. The "Day Tripper" cop is the best since The Move's "The Minister."

The subsequent BGN has a Billy Goon flexi comprised of "The Ballad of the Billy Goons"/"The Goons are Drinking." Imagine: The Three Stooges in Nashville; The Holy Modal Rounders if they'd grown up in Dorchester or Brockton; Ed Sanders if he'd lifted weights, watched wrestling and drank Red White & Blue instead of wallowing in neo-leftist claptrap. Led by ex-Unnatural Axe, current Mighty Ions guitarist, Tommy White, in the company of Jan Crocker and Les Miserables, The Goons are Boston's bluegrass-obsessed answer to The Dictators. Plain and simple. BGN is available for \$1.50 (p&p included) from L. Highland, Box 450, Cambridge, MA 02138.

Take It! is a new entertainment magazine with two issues out, both including

flexi discs. In the first came The Trademarks' "It's Up To You." All the art rockers crack on me coz I love these guys—but hell! Their pop influences go much deeper than The Knack, unlike Planet Street, say. In *Take It!* they admit that they want to be the next Monkees or Ohio Express. "It's Up To You," as well as their smash 45 "Magic In Your Eyes" c/w "Run For You Life," all have neo-Beatle harmonies and Y. Rascally organ (kudos to Jack Moran for reproducing Felix Cavaliere as faithfully as Monoman has the Northwest/W. Texas sound).

Take It! B's flexi features the Creamers and Moving Parts. The Creamers are a sorta pseudo-Cars act who have facial hair and play the suburbs; their brand of heavily-synthed 70's pop usually plays down the street from me at greaser joints like Gladstones and Bunrattys. Moving Parts was one half of Mission of Burma, plus premier record collector Erik Lindgren on Doug Ingle-ish (*Iron Butterfly—Ed.*) organ. I have fond memories of Moving Parts at Cantones circa '78 covering "Talk Talk" and "Careful With That Axe Eugene." A must have for all Missionaries.

You can get *Take It!* as well as The Trademarks' 45 for \$1.50 each c/o Mr. Music, Harvard Ave., Brighton, MA 02135.

NURSES

Scandals

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Psychedelly

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