

singles Reviewed by PAULO HEWITT

Punch drunk on the Clash



CLASH OF HEADS

THE CLASH: "The Magnificent Seven" (CBS). No bones about this one, Jack: it's a great record. Their best shot from "Sandinista!", this 45 is the Clash's answer to disco and Sugarhill rapping.

It features a superb bass line and sound, an intelligent lyric, and succeeds beautifully because Joe Strummer understands that the rhythm of his words are just as important as Mick Jones' careful funk guitar. The Great Work Rap is upon us. A compulsive dance number and you can listen to it as well. Give it all you got.

THEATRE OF HATE: "Rebel Without A Brain" (Burning Rome Records). Currently touring with the 2002 review, this sounds about as futuristic as Woking Football Club. Produced by Mike Jones, this is not an easy record. Wild drums rumble and crash, Kirk Brandon sings in a manner designed to seduce or alienate, and the more I play it the more I get. Jones' pristine production ensures that the song's eminent disquieting elements come through and it'll be number one in the alternatives for weeks.

ELLEN FOLEY: "Torchlight" (Epic). Written by Strummer and Ellen's boyfriend, who also duets with her, this takes time before the actual point of the song comes through. Even then you're not sure whether it was worth waiting for. Still, its chopping guitar, prominent xylophone(!) and lack of force are not really what you'd expect. On second thoughts, maybe you would.

PEARL HARBOUR: "Cowboys And Indians" (WEA). Closely associated with the Clash, this is expert rock'n'roll put together by both band (Clashers?) and Pearl. Also contains the week's funniest lyric.

"Just relax in my cowboy slacks after I've stole the show," cries Pearl in her best Loretta Lynn voice, "but the best that I can do is a cowboy hat in my one room flat... in downtown Waterloo."

A thousand broken fantasies await on this 45.

JOE ELY: "Musta Notta Gotta Lotta" (MCA). If it wasn't for the Clash, Joe Ely would be just another country name for Mike Oldfield and Allan Jones to bandy about. As it stands this authentic slice of energetic dance music for bar room boys should be flipped over for Ely's spanish stroll and lament for a lost loved one in "Wishing For You".

It's a far better proposition. Hold yourself tightly as the guitars drift gently into oblivion carrying Joe's mournful vocal with it, breaking your heart at the same time.

HEAVYWEIGHTS

DAVID BOWIE: "London Boys" (Decca). Superb re-issue (must feel sick about Adam eh, Decca?), that showcases the talent of DB back in those early years. A pure mod record, it's the evergreen tale of growing up set over a Booker T organ and an incredibly strong Bowie vocal. The same ideas that have plagued Townshend for years are present, as our hero takes pills, dresses in flashy clothes, seeks the respect of the London Boys and winds up lonelier than ever.

Anyone under 25 will understand this song. Anyone over 25 should have done it.

PARLIAMENT: "Agony Of DeFeet" (Casablanca). Now that funk is all the rage let's not forget one of its funniest and most literate men, George Clinton. Head of so many bands you'd run out of fingers, George pioneered the heavy funk sound years ago, and Parliament with Clinton producing show that they haven't forgotten the rules.

Catchy choruses, nagging guitar lines and a wicked bass make the case for Clintonmania! The flipside is him, a saxophone and soul. A true champ.

THE GAP BAND: "Humpin'" (Mercury). He-e-a-vv-y! This has a whiplash funktronic drum sound so strong and so hard that it will either galvanise you into action or beat your brains out for not agreeing.

On top of this rhythm muscle are

synthesizer notes tumbling and crazy vocals shouting things like "16 tons of coke and what do you get? A hump in your back."

Crazy excitement. Play before you go out on Saturday night and then see how the evening goes.

LIGHT OF THE WORLD: "Time" (Mercury). And already they're on my TV screen as irresistible as ever. In some quarters they're looked upon as being too soft, too poppy, but I think this is close to exhilaration.

Great funk riff backed up by timely horns and Tubbs' immaculate bass, this has no pretensions other than dancing and putting a smile on your lips.

On the flip side break your heart to the bitter sweet "I'm So Happy", awash with pain and emotion. Just because you like the Who or the Bunny-men doesn't mean you won't like this.

CONTENDERS

THE DECORATORS: "Pendulum & Swing" (RS 009). Stylish cover, stylish song. Starts off with a warm saxophone and scratchy guitar before it bursts into a glorious chorus that you never expected would happen. The vocalist says more by his actions than his words and the whole thing is short, sharp and very much to the point. Cliche time I know, but very promising.

23 SKIDOO: "Ethics" (Pineapple Products). Should have been reviewed weeks ago as Skidoo now play a different ball game: funk. Still when they're huge and famous we can look back at this weird concoction of reggae and Jim Morrison influences and say I told you so.

Intelligence with a beat.

THE SPIZZLES: "Dangers Of Living" (A&M). Having never been a fan I didn't expect anything from this, let alone its fine bass and drums movement, plus a vocal I can't make head or tail out of. Their best since "Soldier Soldier", this is in a similar vein and no disgrace to your stylus or shoes.

LEVEL 42: "Love Games" (Polydor). Superior jazz funk, though I doubt if that category is at all flattering. Funk-soul is more like it. The bass is phenomenal, bubbling and bursting like nobody's business, the hard funkified guitar riffs a treat, but the middle section is a bit of a bland let down. This has style though and is exactly what Freeez, who are too careful by far, should be looking at. Class and dance.

MATERIAL: "Temporary Music 2" (Red). Fast and tight, apparently this American band are a hit everywhere except here. On the sound of this matters will soon change "Reduction" has an insistent guitar held down by a tight bass, is overlaid with swishing threatening keyboards, weird vocals and anything else that comes to hand.

Evocative music for emotional times. Elsewhere "Heritage" relies too much on percussion but is still potent enough to warrant further investigation. The second side lacks side one's qualities but still one to keep an eye open for.

NO MOOKS!

THE KEYS: "One Good Reason" (A&M). Joe Jackson produced, the Keys are led by a good vocalist Drew Barfield who saves this song, but are stopped by their ordinary tactics and straight forward measures. A deviation from the straight and narrow would have helped.

JOSEF K: "Revelation" (Import). Jesus this is harsh. Frantic guitars burst into action and never let up, an Ian Curtis type voice enters with dense vocals and occasionally the bass pops up to say "Buuurrmmppppp."

This is either absolute crap or the best single I've ever heard. I'll come back to you on this one...

BURUNDI BLACK: "Burundi Black" (Decca). The new Adam Ant single!

Ooops sorry... The record he got it from, or rather where McLaren got it from. As you'd expect the drums are exactly the same as Adam's, as are the tribal chants and

ideas. Only thing is, Burundi is not good looking or dressing up for 13 year olds.

C'est la vie.

DISTRACTIONS: "And Then There's..." (That 1). Distraction songs have always been too understated for my liking and this is no exception. Everything is in its place from the tasteful guitar to the catchy chorus and yet it still lacks that one element to really take off.

Power and extreme passion missing I'm afraid. And by the time you've played it enough to fully appreciate it, it's time for bed.

THE FABULOUS THUNDERBIRDS: "Cherry Pink And Apple Blossom White" (Chrysalis). Pleasant enough instrumental led in hand by a familiar harmonica motif and backed up by a reverbering guitar. The editor informs me that the B side should have been the A side, and I agree, but why this should cause grown men to fly to Texas I'll never know.

TEDDY PENDERGRASS: "The Whole Town's Laughing At Me" (Epic). Best thing ever written about TP appeared in Rolling Stone of all places, opining that with a voice like his it's criminal that he should waste it on syrupy songs.

Tell that one to the ladies and his bank manager!

This was originally released in '77 and now sees light again due to his upcoming London gigs. Personally I reckon he shouldn't waste his incredible voice on syrup like this...

ASWAD: "Babylon" (Island). A disappointing, especially after the brilliance of "Warrior Charge" their last effort to join Sugar Minott in the charts.

This one just coasts along where it should roar and the dub section is surprisingly tame. Still justifies them as one of the best of the home grown.

THE MIGHTY STRYPES: "Natural Reaction" (Ape Records). Should be a lot harder and a lot better produced, but for a debut single it's pleasant enough. Here they seem to have lost their power somewhere between the microphone and the mixing desk. Great live band, however, in the right conditions, and if you catch them you'll see what I mean.

THE CHI-LITES: "Have You Seen Her?" (RCA). Classic song that's been re-mixed and tampered with as far as I can tell, stripping it of most of its undoubted charm and beauty. I remember this tugging at my heartbeat years ago and in parts it still does.

But not in the same way.

MANANA: "Amor" (EMI). Good time party music mixing disco with samba rhythms and joyful vocals. Only thing is, the party is in suburbia and not the heart of the city.

EXTRA! EXTRA! EXTRA!

THE WAITRESSES: "I Know What Boys Like" (Ze Records). Forget the previous guff about Pearl. This the funny one. Our heroine is world weary and a Waitress. She is incredibly beautiful, desirable and sexy. All the boys want her and don't she just know it!

"I make them want me," she sneers. "I like to tease them/they want to touch me... I never let them." Behind her is an hectic whirlwind of scratchy saxophone and half played guitars.

"Zippers and buttons, fun to frustrate them/they get so angry like pouty children/I laugh right at them... na na na na na". Then she spots him. The one. This time it's for real. (Or so it seems).

"Sorry I teased you," she coos. "This time I mean it, anything you want... how would you like to?" He closes his eyes and falls into her arms only for her to sidestep him and shout "SUCKER!" He falls on the floor slobbering and broken and she's off again.

"I know what boys like."

This is funny, pop and cheerful. Buy on sight.

KID CREOLE AND THE COCO-KNUTS PRESENT COATL-MUNDI: "Me No Pop I" (Ze Records). Available only on import, you won't find a better slice of funk anywhere. Dynamite riff, crazed vocal from Andy Hernandez, a coconut in his own right, beautiful backing vocals and a rhythm strong and hard just like it should be. This is ex-plo-sive material and a real treat.

If you can't buy it, then steal the bopper. But get it!

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