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# ALBUMS



THE CLASH: tales to astonish

THE CLASH  
'Combat Rock'  
(CBS FMLN 2)\*\*\*\*\*

## Fight to the finish

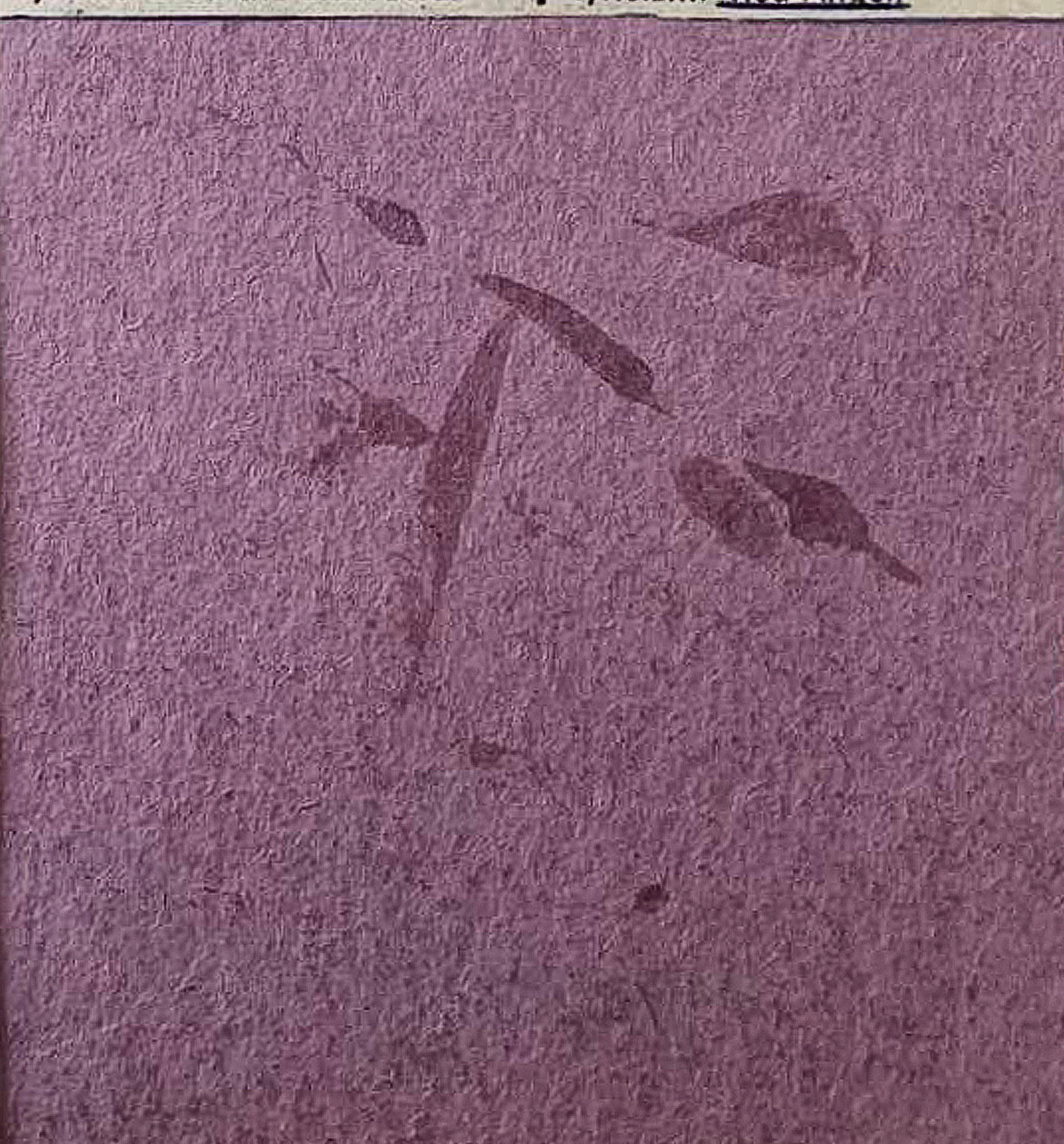
ASTONISHINGLY, THIS is Strummer's best work since 'The Clash'. In fact, it's his only work since 'The Clash'. 'Combat Rock' has a title that made us all giggle at *Sounds*, it has a grotty free poster (!) and it would have been surely less than cynical to think at the outset that, Sandawhatsit' style, here-we-go-round-again with the ads playing at being sort of hettoised Ronnie Reagans, with a world-politic for everything to match and a romantic stupidity that knows no bounds. 'Combat Rock' (Brighton Rock? Blackpool bleeding rock?) was certain to suck, it couldn't be less than offensive, it would (again) make 'The Clash' fan squirm - the enormity of the dismal expectations are only equalled by the pleasures of the surprises they're toppled in their heads by. 'Combat Rock' is wordy (very wordy!), luscious, low-lying, there is not one single up and at them lads-together-in-Cambodia rocker here, thank Christ and Bernard Rhodes. We all giggle again when we hear that 'CR' shows influence of J. Mitchell's 'Summer Lawns' classic, even Van Morrison. It is the Clash's first pop LP, it sees Strummer, when we all thought he'd snuffed it, back in control. Mick Jones is in complete

control (ie harness) here. There is not a pose amid Brixton's trouble torn streets etc. in sight. The songs aren't songs, they're little snatches of pop melodies done beautifully, say Orange Juice style. It seems the Clash are coming to terms with their overwhelming romanticism, the thing that was going to eat them up. It is a Big Truth of rock that the Clash were its best ever rebels ('The Clash' time) while at the same time being obscure toys with its AOR romanticism and lifestyles (drugs especially). They've been kinda mixed up between the two extremes ever since, but now they're coming to terms with their heritage and their fetishes. 'CR' sees the Clash go AOR fully, they aren't ashamed of it any more. It is closer to, say, Fleetwood Mac's 'Rumours' (which it is very like) than 'The Clash'. The Clash have (at last) matured, they're coming to terms with their problems. They're talking about 'em! No more splashing about in style and form. Each track here is different from the rest - they show richness instead of cluttered ill-measured hey-and-ya-gotta-hear-THIS-music grossness. Take three songs, each of which could be the best thing Strummer's ever done.

'Straight To Hell' is packed with words and only a humming, almost self-mocking lack of music. Just atmospheric, which they're doing so well now. It's a familiar Clash war theme, but Strummer's not rushing into solutions any more. He takes it all metaphorically now - he's a very talented lyricist! Even the disavowal

of drugs, as throughout the LP, isn't taken on a simple I-REPENT level. Life is not simple: Strummer is humming and buzzing like, well, never before. Hell, 'Ghetto Defendant' (do not cringe yet) has Allen Ginsberg reading counterpoint words against Strummer's flat-sprawling lyricism! 'Red Angel,

Dragnet' too has snatches from the important *Taxi Driver* movie skewered through the centre! This is a rich, mighty music indeed! And the Clash are laughing again instead of smirking like macho men. All the way through 'Combat Rock' is the certain feeling that the Clash, quite wonderfully for these 'legendary' old cronies,



aren't static any more but sailing down into their own 'Heart Of Darkness', trying to settle those wild contradictions they seemed doomed by. They've not so much come of age as exploded into it. It's a fascinating and important journey ahead. 'CR' doesn't suck, it smiles big and broad and long. It has enough weight in a completely different sense to crack the nut the Clash have been clichedly using all types of hammers to. Astonishingly, it's astonishing.  
DAVE McCULLOUGH