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RECORDS

The Clash: music to fight by



THE CLASH: Combat Rock, Epic FE37689. The Clash's last two albums — London Calling, and Sandinista — sounded the battle charge for Revolution Rock. And now there's Combat Rock: music to fight by.

Though rock purists have directed their pointed fingers at the Clash's diminishing political awareness, I feel the British group has taken a more mature, imaginative approach to its lively political stance.

The mood of the album is quickly established with the opening track, Know Your Rights. "This is a public service announcement — with gui-tar," shouts lead singer Joe Strummer whose voice strongly recalls Bob Dylan (from his Hurricane days) but powered by classic punk angst. Mick Jones adds his distinctive guitar "wang" to the song, though at times it's reminiscent of Ventures/Eddie Cochran.

Another song, Straight to Hell, examines the dark side of modern realities — everything from the rusting of idled steel mills to the "Amerasian blues" in Ho Chi Minh city, a post-Vietnam war legacy that's cloaked in an eerie, clanging Oriental rhythm.

What other rock band sings about Agent Orange (in a song titled Car Jamming), about cold murder in a motel room (Death Is a Star), New York subway vigilantes (Red Angel Dragnet) and the banning of pop music by the iron-fisted Moslem regime in Iran (Rock the Casbah)?

But the Clash devotes an equal amount of energy to its music. Should I Stay or Should I go is a

delightful bit of '60s garage-band thrashing, and Overpowered by Funk satirizes — not to mention outfunks — the current British rediscovery of American-style funk.

As an indication of the Clash's unique talent, the band utilizes background vocalists like Ellen Foley, Joe Ely and spraycan graffiti artist Futura 2000.

Best of all, perhaps, is the use of one of the gurus of modern poetics, Allen Ginsberg, who incants the horrors of a "starved megalopolis" while Strummer describes with Rimbaud-like imagery the advance of the "ship of progress" — a nuclear submarine with its "klaxons blaring" as the "admiral snores command."

The Clash, however, provide few answers to the nightmarish visions. Yet, one message is clear: Know your rights. Then run.

SQUEEZE: Sweets from a Stranger, A&M SP4899. The Squeeze's last album, East Side Story, was a stroke of pop brilliance which invited comparison to the songwriting masterpieces of

the Beatles. And this LP easily matches the band's last success, though there isn't a monster hit like last year's Tempted.

But the one problem here is the songs are too much of the same thing — either romantic tunes full of impassioned kisses or marriages turned sour. The pop packaging is deliciously sweet, but a varied diet would have been more appealing, even for my extra-sweet tooth.

ROLLING STONES: Still Life, Rolling Stones Records XCOC 39113. There's still life in the old boys yet as Mick Jagger and Co. prove on this live LP — a collection of Stones classics, everything from Under My Thumb and Satisfaction, to Start Me Up and Shattered. Also included is Eddie Cochran's Twenty Flight Rock, and the Motown classic, Imagination. Not an outstanding album, but an interesting one for its live renditions of songs old and new.

ROXY MUSIC: Avalon, Warner Brothers 92-36861. Avalon will likely be the album which takes this influential British group beyond the cult status it has enjoyed for the last 10 years.

This is a striking album filled with Bryan Ferry's airy keyboards and dreamy vocals, and Phil (Primitive Guitars) Manzanera's understated guitar. Worthy of note is the album's crystal clarity, especially the soprano sax solo on the short instrumental, Tara, which concludes the LP.