

'Combat' album by Clash—infighting mostly

By CLINT ROSWELL

IT'S NO WONDER The Clash have entitled their new album "Combat Rock." The group seems to be battling with itself.

Unfortunately, the provocative title of this album is deceptive—it won't serve as a new rallying motto for rock's most socially conscious group.

Drummer Topper Headon left the group just last week, according to Epic Records officials. He believed that this, the band's sixth album, would be the one to bring the record-buying masses to the group's doorstep.

Headon's departure, which comes only two weeks after singer and focal point Joe Strummer disappeared for a week of solo London concert performances, reveals that the in-fighting has become too intense for this English band that revels on living close to the edge.

While this weekend's concerts in Asbury Park were planned to open the group's 1982 American tour, no one is quite sure what to expect and who will be supplying the percussive firepower that Headon made a trademark of the Clash.

The album has an underlying percolating rhythm to it, but its current is less defiant than cynical. Strummer, no longer the rude boy of punk whose fiery vocals could rouse a crowd to riot, appears to be straining on some of the tracks and even turns in an embarrassing ballad attempt on "Death Is The Star." There's no question the album contains some of the group's best lyrics, but if Strummer wants to think of himself as a modern-day Bard, let him write instead of sing.

The group even employs a guest appearance by poet Allen Ginsburg on "Innoculated City" who recites a rhythmic limerick while the group paints a mid-tempoed sound-painting of grey gloom.

Coming after the bold achievement of "Sandinista!"—last year's most acclaimed album—the new issue doesn't have the provocative character that had been the trademark of the Clash.

The band seems to have lost touch with its audience, once the punk underclass, and is internalizing most of its themes. The result is that instead of the Clash's usual call to arms, there's a less dramatic package which highlights the band's ability as musicians first and its reputation as rebels second.

The only English band that could rival the Clash as provocateurs, Public Image Limited, led by ex-Sex Pistol John Lyndon, has lost its record contract in America and, for all intents and purposes, is defunct. One of its key members, drummer Martin Atkins, who now lives in New York and has formed a group that goes by the name of Brian Brain, has just released a hot dance single, "Jive Jive," which received favorable responses at live shows at the Mudd Club and Irving Plaza recently.

Atkins, 22, has remained innovative and dynamic in performance. Rather than sit behind a drum kit and let his partners front the music, Atkins brings a pre-recorded tape of his drumming to the sound-board and prances about on stage with Pete Jones



The Clash: living up to their name

playing bass and Bobby Surgeoner guitar almost on cue to the tape.

"It was just too confining to sit behind a drum kit all the time," said Atkins, a 5-foot-7 chunk of drummer's delight. "If people want to listen to my drumming let them buy the record, but on stage I like to perform."

The effect is almost staggering and has a burlesque quality. There's Atkins jumping around and the musician in him, the main attraction, is packaged on tape. Atkins is not the first to bring pre-recorded music to a concert. Depeche Mode, a Euro-disco high-tech synthesizer group, among others, have had success with this strange approach, but it does reveal a philosophy by Atkins pointing toward a new trend: music without social awareness.

"I'm into music that is a form of escape, to get away from reality, from the depressing sides of life and get people dancing again for fun," said Atkins.

Where is Johnny Rotten when we need him? CLUBLAND: Opening night jitters at the new Peppermint Lounge Wednesday night turned into a frenzied mob scene outside the doors at 100 Fifth Ave. Doors were supposed to open at 8 p.m. for

invited guests and 10 p.m. for the general public to see top-act Pete Shelley. With crowds pushing and shoving, the doormen didn't let the guests in until 10 p.m. and the mobs still continued to push for hours. While the new venue appears impressive inside, particularly the video bank on the top of the three-floor club located at the former site of the Electric Circus, the stage floor is small and it's difficult to get a good spot up front. The smell of fresh paint—cans were stored in the hallways—and some less than complete work, like unfinished bathrooms, took away some of the glamor but, worst of all, prices of beer reached a new all-time high at \$3.25 a pop for imported brew. It seems the famed night spot brought uptown prices downtown. Let's hope the new Pep, which has some of the best acts on tap this summer, including Flock of Seagulls tonight, learns to treat its guests and clientele better in the future. . . Rockpool's dance charts for clubs show the music is aimed more at the feet than at the head. Here are ratings: 1. Thompson Twins, "In the Name Of Love"; 2. Flock Of Seagulls, "I Ran"; 3. Human League, "Dare" LP; 4. Haircut 100, "Love Plus One"; 5. Ministry, "Cold Life." . . Here's RockAmerican's video ratings; 1. Human League, "Don't You Want Me?"; 2. The Clash, "Radio Clash"; 3. Kraftwerk, "The Model"; 4. Chas Jankel, "Questionnaire"; 5. Fun Boy Three, "It Ain't What You Be."

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