

# MUSIC By Michael Musto VIEWS & REVIEWS

**Q: What do you get when you add Blondie and the Clash? A: Winners of the punk rock endurance race.**

Of the bands that started out as part of the "punk" movement in the mid-'70s, Blondie and the Clash (along with Talking Heads) have been the most durable. Not that these two bands sound at all alike. Blondie's sound is slick pop-rock-disco that borders on the coyly superficial—the musical equivalent of high-tech design and liqueurs you've never heard of. The Clash goes for a raw sound—ragged guitars, slightly off-key vocals half spoken, and a defiant energy that's more constructive and intelligent than the nihilistic anger of the early punks.

Yet there's a remarkable resemblance between the groups, as their current releases show. Both are open to innovation, trying every new—or old—musical style they can find. They even deal with some of the same themes. On Blondie's new album, *The Hunter*, Debbie Harry does a rap that takes off on all the accoutrements of stardom ("My picture's been reprinted, interviews requested 100 times a week . . . I hit the hot spots every night"), while the Clash makes fun of celeb-spotting on their album *Combat Rock* ("I

thought I saw Lauren Bacall/Yeah, I don't believe it"). Both groups are struggling to cope with the pressures of showbiz—a world of "baloney" threatening the unpretentiousness that's fundamental to this musical genre.

Futurism—the sounds and sights of tomorrow—fascinates both groups. Blondie's "Dragonfly" involves all sorts of planets and spaceships, rendered in short bursts of futuristic phrases, while the Clash opts for space jet sound effects and a synthetic hand-clap beat in "Rock the Casbah." Both are obsessed with the exotic and with the rap form, though the Clash's raps are more free form—not the direct R&B rip-offs of Blondie—and, on this album, veer toward Blue Oyster Cult absurdity.

Blondie has gone through almost as many genres as its lead singer has had hairstyles. *Auto-american* was a venture into 1981's trendy forms—reggae ("The Tide Is High") and rap ("Rapture") and now they've delved into this year's underground style—calypso—on the incredibly infectious "Island of Lost

Souls." This is the kind of catchy ditty you know is a hit—bubblegum of the most enjoyable kind. Sounds like Blondie's been listening to old Harry Belafonte records.

Sparkling as it was, *Auto-american* was a stylistic mess, trying to cover the entire history of 20th-century music. This time, the band—produced again by Mike Chapman—has striven for more consistency, and even a theme: animals. Why animals? Because, as guitarist and co-songwriter Chris Stein puts it, "We relate to them."

Like many of Blondie's fascinations, this one is purely tongue-in-chic, stringing a few songs together without tying the group down. Against a tribal beat, "Orchid Club" has Harry sounding like Tondelayo making her love call with natives chanting in the background. The rap song about fame is called "The Beast."

There's plenty of non-animal stuff, too. Stein and Harry wrote "English Boys," a nostalgic lament for peace, love and English rockers. "Little Caesar" is like a spaghetti western theme with a reggae beat, with Harry talk-singing like a true punk, and "For Your Eyes Only" is Blondie's entry in the James Bond sweepstakes. All in all, it's an album of oddities, not up to



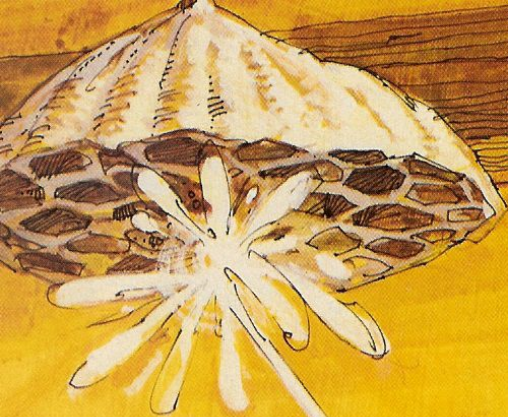
Ebet Roberts

*Combat Zone* takes the Clash from the ridiculous to the sublime to the inscrutable, while Debbie Harry (inset) and Blondie keep tongue in chic in *The Hunter*.



Merry Alperin/LGI





# Now you can kill wasps and hornets in their nests from...

*Parallel Lines*, but not bad, either. Blondie's come a long way since Harry wore a bloodstained wedding gown and sang "X Offender" at the Manhattan club CBGB's. The punk image has been watered down, the music polished up and now she can even be on *The Muppet Show*.

The Clash, on the other hand, haven't reneged on their punk roots. The darlings of the critics, these "rude boys" followed their acclaimed *London Calling* with the overwhelming three-record *Sandinista!* This time, the exotic strains are still heard on the Mid-eastern touches of "Sean Flynn" and the Oriental bamboo stick rhythms of "Straight to Hell," but the more prevalent strain seems to be a gritty, urban sound with heavy doses of funky cynicism. The album—written and produced by the Clash—starts with the harshest cut, "Know Your Rights," which informs that we have a right not to be killed (except by cops or aristocrats), a right to food and money (if we don't mind humiliation) and to free speech (as long as we're not dumb enough to use it).

The Clash go from the ridiculous to the sublime to the thoroughly inscrutable. The last song on the album, "Death is a Star," sounds like a Henry Mancini-Kurt Weill collaboration with bird sounds and lounge piano. This is one group who've hit the Top 40 without anyone accusing them of selling out.

## Don't Miss:

*Dreamgirls* (cast album) (Geffen): Not even the creators of this dazzling show would contend that this

score—recorded with more care than the usual slipshod manner—has much to do with Motown, but that's the point. The show is about the watering down of soul into a white, saleable commodity, and the people who are stepped on in the process. Tom Eyan's unpretentious, recitative-style lyrics and Henry Krieger's insipidly catchy music have a way of getting to you, especially when Jennifer Holliday bellows to her departing lover, "You're gonna love me . . . You're gonna love me." This woman has soul enough to compensate for any dearth elsewhere. She and the rest of the excellent cast help make this exercise in superficiality fun, heart-breaking and ultimately educational.

*Tommy Tutone-2* (Columbia): Tommy Tutone, a California group helmed by Tommy Heath and Jim Keller, has scored a big hit with "867-5309/Jenny," the tale of a guy falling for a girl after seeing her number on a wall. The entire album consists of the same invigorating kind of rock 'n' roll—nothing new, but all effective within its formulaic confines. It's nice to come across rock songs that tell stories again.

## Don't Bother:

Pia Zadora—*Pia* (Elektra): Pia's Zadorable all right, but unfortunately, her singing is on the same level as her acting—all pout, no substance. At least here she has the help of lots of backup singers and musicians. Put this one in the same bin with those other classics by Patty Duke and Sally Field, and pour me another Dubonnet.

# ...12 ft. away!

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