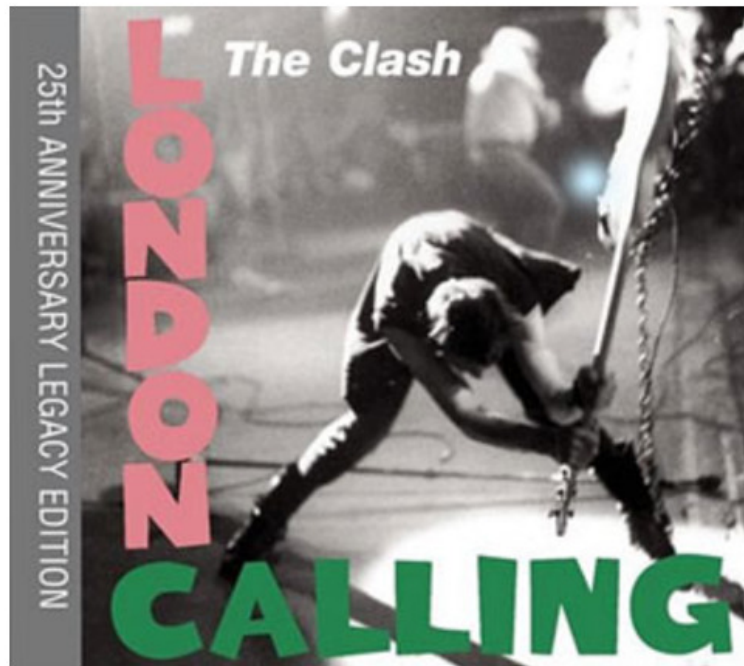


The Clash - London Calling

25th Anniversary Legacy Edition
(Epic/Legacy)



Spring, 1984: I'd just turned fifteen years old, and, as a burgeoning punk rocker, I was determined to make a black mark on the suburban landscape. My ninth-grade friends and I were so "bored, bored, bored with the U.S.A." that we spent our free time watching episodes of *The Young Ones*, giving each other bad haircuts and escaping to downtown Atlanta. Our parents were blithely unaware of the life we led once the sun went down—drinking bottles of Boone's Farm behind the Metroplex, conning our way into shows at the Buckhead Cinema & Drafthouse and pogo-ing until dawn at 688 Club.

When local college station WRAS announced The Clash

concert at the Fox Theatre, we were undoubtedly going. Although "Rock The Casbah" had been co-opted by the jocks and preps at our high school, we still owned The Clash. My friend Lynn had liberated a copy of *London Calling* from the local Turtle's record store just before Christmas, and, by the time the new year rolled around, we were speaking in Rude Boy lingo, calling each other "boyo" and "Jimmy Jazz."

I painted anti-war logos—heralding the Spanish Revolution of 1939, a subject I'd ignored in my history class—on a white T-shirt, clamped a black felt hat on my asymmetric bob, and marched down to Turtle's to buy tickets. The concert was scheduled for April 3, which fell over spring break; my folks would drop us off at the show, then, afterwards, Lynn's parents would pick us up on Peachtree Street. For the hours in between, we were free—or, at least, as free as two underage middle class kids could be.

Our first Clash concert was actually the band's third Atlanta appearance. In 1979, they played the tiny Agora Ballroom; three years later, on the strength of *Combat Rock*, they graduated to The Fox. A photograph from that first, seminal show was prominently featured on the back cover of *London Calling*—we'd studied it, looking for faces we knew—and we hoped this show would prove to be a similarly historic event. Outside the Fox, it looked like Piccadilly Circus—hundreds of punks, many sporting elaborately coiffed Mohawks and heavy eyeliner, crowded

under the marquee, ignoring the redneck cops trying to keep order. My dad rolled his eyes when he stopped the car, but before he could embarrass me, Lynn and I hopped out and joined the throng entering the theater.

We missed the opening band, but it didn't matter. After saying hi to our downtown friends, we found our seats as the lights dimmed, and The Clash—minus Mick Jones, who'd quit the group a few months earlier—took the stage. Suddenly, the rumbling bass line of "London Calling" came pouring out of the amplifiers, and Joe Strummer paced the floor, inciting the audience with his incendiary lyrics. "Come out of the cupboard, all you boys and girls," he sang, and we all roared. The four walls of the theater melted as we were magically transported to the streets of London.

There was just one problem—Strummer was wearing a tailored white suit, à la Bryan Ferry, and he'd combed his Mohawk into a slick pompadour. What about the leather jackets and blue jeans? This was "The Clash Go Back To Basics Tour," right? In my mind, punk rock had a uniform, as surely as any other career.

While I mused over these questions, the band ripped through "Safe European Tour," off *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, and a new song called "Are You Ready For War?" Then Strummer and company tore into "Rock The Casbah" and "This Is Radio Clash," followed by "Guns of Brixton," and all their sins were forgotten. Wearing our army surplus

combat boots—mine were a clunky size 10—we climbed onto the backs of our chairs and danced. “You can crush us / You can bruise us,” we shouted, “but you’ll have to answer to the guns of Brixton!”

Twenty years later—after *Cut The Crap* somewhat diminished my enthusiasm for The Clash, after the band splintered into groups like Big Audio Dynamite and Havana 3 A.M., after such films as *Mystery Train* and *Straight To Hell* and, sadly, after Strummer’s untimely death in December 2002—the tracks on *London Calling* still hold up. Today, I’m less struck by the take-no-prisoners politics of the lyrics—it’s the music that catches my ears, the Rock & Roll Trio riffs of “Brand New Cadillac” and the dancehall rhythms of “Rudie Can’t Fail.” Now, I recognize the Jamaican foundation anchoring the anthemic “Guns of Brixton,” the straightforward rock lines on “Death Or Glory,” the bluesy chords running through “Train In Vain,” and the Phil Spector-inspired melodies of “The Card Cheat.” Without consciously studying any lessons, I now realize The Clash taught me the vocabulary of modern rock ‘n’ roll.

With the 25th anniversary edition of *London Calling*, Epic/Legacy has outdone itself: Disc one combines the two vinyl records comprising the original album, while a second CD, entitled the *Vanilla Tapes*, features 21 rehearsal tracks, circa 1979. A 36-page booklet and a DVD documentary, *The Last Testament: The Making of London Calling*, complete the package.

Scaled down to CD size, this box nevertheless has heft. It makes me want to head out to the suburbs and hail some unsuspecting fifteen-year-old. I want to tell her about the night of April 3, 1984, and explain the joy we felt while dancing on our seats. Even though I'm 35, I want to say, "I know about rebellion and bourgeois families, and walking down the block after a concert so no one sees my folks drive up."

I want to commandeer her stereo for a few minutes—turn off Audioslave or Evanescence or whatever's passing for good music these days, and give her an earful of The Clash. She'll probably stand around, petulant and confused, but I'll make her listen 'til the end of the song. "London calling / Yeah I was there too / An' you know what they said / Well some of it was true!" Of course, I still know the words by heart.