

SOUNDS STAR RATING \*\*\*\*\*Very Important Platter \*\*\*\*Good album, hear it if you can \*\*\*Worthwhile \*\*Dull or disappointing \*Re-cycle

## ALBUMS



Pic by Ray Stevenson

# If you don't like The Clash, you don't like rock 'n' roll

THE CLASH  
CBS 82000\*\*\*\*\*

IF I remember my geometry lessons correctly, the triangle is the strongest physical shape; the three straight lines balancing each other perfectly and the angles focussing the intrinsic strength to three sharp points. When it comes to human triads, however, they have a nasty habit of splitting into more socially normal townships — two gangling up on the third and squeezing him/her out.

The only way human triads can work is if each member has total belief and ultimate trust in the other two. Arguments must cement rather than fragment the relationship.

Which is just what The Clash is all about. The name doesn't just refer to the obvious conflicts with the outside world but also to the internal antagonisms which far from sapping their collective energy actually provide indispensable bouncing boards for ideas and spur to action.

The band was never meant to be that way though. Before it crystallised as the current three man nucleus of Mick Jones, Paul Simonon I know it's normally written as Simonon but that's what it says on the album sleeve, and Joe Strummer, I know of at least one drummer who was tried out for a few weeks or so and retired licking his wounds and trying to re-establish some kind of mental equilibrium, unable to come to terms with the freneticism of their sureness that what they were doing was the right, nay the only possible thing to do.

What they were intent upon achieving was an artistic ensemble that reflected and created London late '76 and now mid '77 in the same way as Presley tapped the latent energy of the South in 1956 and the same way the Beatles and Stones rose from the streets as the front-line assault of the newly-affluent post-war youth on the shibboleths of a stultifying 'establishment' in 1963/4.

That The Clash are the essentials of street London personified is already a cliché. Like all clichés, it's partly true, partly false. But the falsehood contained within it enhances rather than diminishes any assessment of The Clash's creative powers.

That falsehood is based on a misunderstanding of the artistic process, seeing it as passive reflection rather than active creation. In their interviews, you see, they give the impression that they're poor white trash, straight out of the tower block on to the dole queue. In Joe Strummer's case, at least, nothing could be further from the truth but, given his lack of experience of being born (as opposed to living) at the bottom of the heap, the fact that he can write songs which so eloquently

express the frustrations and obsessions of society's overlooked is nothing short of an outrageous indication of his talent.

His abilities as a songsmith and charismatic on and off stage presence have been clear to anyone who's seen him work in the last 18 months. What is also clear is that it's taken most people that long to catch up with him. He knew just what he was trying to achieve with the 101ers early last year but didn't understand how to achieve it and became frustrated and bitter in the attempt.

Meeting up with Mick and Paul enabled him to channel that bitterness and together they've come up with the record that I've been waiting for since I first saw Joe perform, one that sets the standard to which any other band of the seventies will have to aspire.

It opens with the band's early stage favourite, 'Janie Jones' co-written by Jones and Strummer as all but two of the songs are.

'Remote Control' is newer and less perfectly finished but its SF/Fantasy phraseology and a couple of weird one-liners from Joe build to a climax of one of the most astounding choruses ever put on wax: 'Ree-presh-un' is chanted until its sound becomes as oppressive and pervasive as its meaning.

Seeing as how Joe Strummer is one of the best Chuck Berry impersonators I've ever heard, 'I'm So Bored With The USA' is a wry comment on that now-neglected area of his abilities.

'One, two, three, four'... and you've got 'White Riot', the single coming hard at you. It's a different, faster, take, lacking the sound effects but it's just as good and there's nothing more to say about it but to point out that if you still don't know it's a virulently anti-racist call to arms, you really don't know what's happening.

'Hate And War' is gut-wrenching, unflinching realism, far from the puerility of having the same slogan tattooed on your knuckles. 'Hate and war/It's all we've got today/If I close my eyes/It will not go away.'

Despite its gutsy street lyrics, 'What's My Name' (co-written with Mick and Joe by the band's original third guitarist Keith Levine) doesn't quite live up to the Muhammad Ali I-don't-care-what-you-throw-at-me implication of the title.

'Deny' also falls a bit short of its initial promise but the eighth and last track on this side is the truly epochal 'London's Burning'. The nursery rhyme is up-ended and the blame for the city's conflagration laid fair and square at the door of boredom and its physical manifestation as the omnipresent TV in the isolated cage/flat.

Side two opens with 'Career Opportunities', a song that gets the whole dead-end future of the average kid down to a knife-edge rammed into the catchiest chorus you can imagine. 'Every job they offer you's to keep you outta the dock'.

'Cheat' opens with the immortal lines 'I get violent when I'm fucked up/I get silent when I'm tucked up/Want excitement/Don't get none' but is unfortunately more than a little spoiled by phasing on the guitar, which is one of producer Mickey Foote's errors of judgement. I was rather unkind about his production the other week when reviewing the single and I here and now partially retract that criticism and admit that it's a commendable first time effort.

When I was first shown the words to 'Protest Blue' last summer I thought they were pretty dumb but that just shows how wrong you can be 'cos it's turned into a real neat 'n' sweet 105 seconds.

'Police And Thieves' was the reggae hit of last summer and The Clash turn it into the best white reggae ever, bar none. Joe chops harsh while Mick chimes in more authentically JA style clipped and Paul lopes all around with arresting bass lines. I'm still not sure if it is quite in keeping with rest of the album's very hang tough attitudes though.

Time has never been so condensed as it is on the very immediate one minute thirty four seconds of '48 Hours'.

'Garageland' powers it all out with its acerbic comment on a certain reviewer's remark that The Clash are "a garage band that should've stayed in the garage and... left the car motor running". It just shows how mistaken he was and also highlights the easy-to-miss but frequent humorous moments of the record.

At its most basic level, 'The Clash' is the best white dance album of the seventies. Every track has the potential of getting you moving. If you think that don't mean nothing, bear in mind that, apart from fucking, dancing is the most developed form of physical self-expression.

And when it comes to raw rock'n'roll energy, it makes almost anything you ever heard sound decidedly limp and polite. Someone wrote of the Damned that they're only a high-energy rock'n'roll band. Don't be fooled — rock'n'roll ain't about being only anything, it's about trying to be everything and wanting to be more. And that's the direction The Clash are going in.

The Damned's lyrics are irrelevant trifles next to those of The Clash and while their album might be better produced, when it really comes down to it the Damned are going nowhere (except maybe toward riches and fame) very, very fast while The Clash are aiming for and achieving excellence and startling originality. They've made an album that will change a lot of people's perceptions and hopefully channel their disparate frustrations. As a debut, it's frighteningly assured.

If you don't like 'The Clash', you don't like rock'n'roll. It really is as simple as that. Period. —PETE SILVERTON.