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ALBUMS

GIVE 'EM ENOUGH DOPE



...and watch 'em turn into the Rolling Stones

THE CLASH
'London Calling'
(CBS CLASH 3)**

'THE HELL with it! Let chaos reign, louder music, more wine, the hell with the standings, the top rungs are up for grabs. All the old traditions are exhausted, and no new one is yet established. All bets are off! The odds are cancelled! It's anybody's ballgame! And out of such glorious chaos may come some nice new fat Star Streamer Rockets that will light up the sky.'

Transplanted, Tom Wolfe captures the feel of '76 punk with an unnerving accuracy. The old ways were dying on their bland, boring bourgeois feet and punk was gonna build a new EVERYTHING. 'No Elvis, Beatles, or Rolling Stones in 1977' Strummer sneered in 1976, and we believed him.

We didn't realise that by the winter of '79 Elvis would be advertising the third Clash album, its cover a Presley pastiche, its content a sad justification of escalating jibes about 'The Rolling Clash' as Strolling Bones clones...

No, back then it was possible to believe that punk was gonna change things and that the Clash gave the whole movement real meaning, tempering wasteful nihilism with revolutionary optimism and destructive fury with angry humanism.

The white riot was against apathy and for social justice while the music was pure unadulterated rock 'n' roll energy, blistering brain-bashing dance music free of cliché and slovenly superstar condescension. Their debut album 'The Clash', now over

two and a half years old, still towers above everything else released this decade.

Yeah, but we played the hand wrong, you don't change the world with music alone and divorced from real political muscle the radical assault of the best punk was diverted relatively easily by the system, while, with media assistance, the movement itself degenerated into safety-pin and bondage pants plastic posing and sickeningly stupid swastika/death-trip schtick. At its best punk became just the most vigorous music on offer, at its worst it wasn't worth talking about.

IT'S FUNNY how fan worship can blind you. One of my colleagues recently compared the blossoming Jam unfavourably with the Clash, claiming that Joe's gang were driven by world-conquering no-compromise ambition (etc).

The sad reality however has been that the Clash turned out to be the laziest bunch of mothers going. When we needed them most, after the Pistols had split and the disintegration really set in, THEY blew it, not CBS or Bernie Rhodes, but the Clash, whose meagre output and coke-snorting indolence was made worse by the squandering of vital months in lavish Stateside recording studios.

But this time last year they roared back fighting with 'Give 'em Enough Rope', a magnificent fiery rock album, brimming with metal attack and renewed purpose. Yeah, give 'em another another chance, they'd junked the charlie and were coming on as punk saviours and, and, and... punk was all Sid Vicious stupid by then. The band failed to resurrect the movement, they lost their optimism and

renounced their followers.

And while 'headbands' sprang up in opposition to the UK Subs pogo genre and the unpretentious Mod/Ska 'live fun' axis (shame about the revivalist/powerpop elements etc) the Clash devoted two tours to conquering the place they were so bored with, played a handful of disappointing London gigs and recorded 'London Calling'.

On the face of it the album's great value for money — 19 tracks (one unlisted) for the price of one album, a double lp for just one crisp Lady Godiva. Ah but here's the rub, bub, it ain't even worth plundering the piggy for.

SIDE ONE is the best side on offer, opening with the single 'London Calling' a fine irrepressibly catchy melodic groover — the most impressive new number here. Next comes Vince Taylor's old R&B workout 'Brand New Cadillac'; followed by a sort of Fats Waller jost called 'Jimmy Jazz' that sounds like Louis Armstrong and Bing Crosby ought to be toasting over it; then a catchy Stones-do-Bo-Diddly number 'Hateful'; followed by 'Rudie Can't Fail' a cross between the Stones reading of Eric Donaldson's 'Cherry Oh Baby' and 'White Man in Hammersmith Palais'.

The mood of second-rate Stones copyists is set from the start with the Clash resorting to feeble old-fashioned formulas justified by a mask of 'progression'.

Side two follows suit with the lightweight pop of 'Spanish Bombs'; hoary old horny rock on the Ian Hunter soundalike 'The Right Profile'; the Al Stewart type pop-rock of 'Lost In The Supermarket' with Mick Jones trotting out his best Jagger take-off; the truly

embarrassing bloodclaat 'Guns In Brixton'; Simonon's limp vocals gracing a feeble reggae setting for more of the Clash's degenerating 'guns and gangs' outlaw vision — lumpy lyrical fantasy world populated by druggies, crooks, gambling dens, dingy basements and gun-toting niggers.

A vision interrupted once on this side with 'Working For The Clampdown', Clash rock in the style of 'Rope' with a necessary put-down of EVIL fascist cul-de-sacs, repeating the Clash's always vague alternative — 'Kick over the wall/Cause governments to fall'.

Shame that one of the Clash's biggest failings has been their inability to link their righteous sentiments with the power struggle in the real world. Like, shouting 'Long live the revolution' don't make it come, y'know.

The nine tracks that follow are even less interesting, featuring more variations on standard Stones formulae best of which being the unannounced 'Stand By Me' (?) which sounds like a Stones bash through an early sixties Tamla number (maybe a nod to producer Guy Stevens' mod dj past...)

Elsewhere there's the uninspired plod 'I'm Not Down'; the confused pop of 'Koka Kola'; a couple of covers — a pretty gutless reading of Jackie Edwards and Danny Ray's 'Revolution Rock' (not in the Armageddon Time/'Police And Thieves' league) and a cover of a reggae version of 'Stagger Lee' called 'Wrong 'Em Boys' which sounds like the Selector avec 'Sea Cruise' type of sax. Leaving just the ropery 'Rope' out-take sound of 'Four Horsemen' which, you guessed it, sees the band as the four horsemen of the apocalypse etc.

AS A CLASH FAN the impression I'm left with after two days of solid playing is overwhelming disappointment. There's no hunger here, no vision or coherence or charisma, no killer punches, no sense of fighting to be heard, nothing that makes you go 'WOW'.

Ironically they're condemned by their own words on 'Death Or Glory' — 'I believe in this, and it's been tested by research/That he who fucks with nuns will later join the church'.

In the Clash's case the church is the good ol' wanked-out rock tradition — the sicko corrupt mythology built up from fatboy Presley to the Stones, the antithesis of what they said they set out to be.

No, aside from sporadic spurts of brilliance (like one every six months) the Clash seriously dried up well early on, losing their perspective and momentum. Unable to go forward they've clutched at straws, ending up retrogressing via Strummer's r&b past and Jones' Keith Richards fixation, to the outlaw imagery of the Stones and tired old rock clichés.

Sure 'London Calling' will be their biggest hit to date, and sure this album'll sell and sell and I bet you play it to death till you're convinced it's great though I wouldn't play it in close succession to 'The Clash' if I were you.

Hey, maybe if we're lucky they'll still be playing 'White Riot' as an encore in a few years time. Y'know just like the Stones drag out 'Street Fighting Man' for you to clench your fist to at Earl's Court. After all's said and done it's only rock 'n' roll after all, and now the Clash are only another rock 'n' roll band...

...but just think what they could have been. GARRY BUSHELL