

# on music/ Bargain basement pop



The Clash, left, and 999, above, have new albums at easy-to-take prices.

By Wayne Robins

In response to buyers' disinclination to spend \$7 or \$8 for a new album, many record companies have responded by cutting the list price on catalog items (those albums more than a few years old). There's also been some innovation in releasing low-priced new records by relatively lesser-known artists. You usually don't get a full album's worth of music, but your investment is also substantially less.

A new record by the British group 999, which plays at the Irving Plaza in Manhattan tonight, is an example. Titled "The Biggest Tour in Sport," this Polydor disc is album-sized: 12 inches, with six songs, and with its \$5.98 list price should sell for between \$4 and \$5 dollars. (The layout is strange as well: one side has one four-minute song; the other is of conventional length for an album side with five songs.) The music was recorded live earlier this year at various stops along the band's North American tour.

The six songs reveal a band that comfortably straddles the line between punk and more traditional English hard rock. "Homicide," the track that occupies side one (perhaps in solitary confinement for its crime) is a kind of punk streamlining of "Sympathy for the Devil," complete with idiotic rhetoric: "I believe in homicide," indeed.

The band's attack is forthright enough, but "The Biggest Tour in Sport" also shows how derivative 999 is. "Feelin' Alright with the Crew" (yes, another road song) draws its inspiration from mid-1960s American garage bands such as Count Five, while "Inside Out" sounds like Steppenwolf doing the Monkees' and Paul Revere and the Raiders' hit, "I'm Not Your Stepping Stone." But although their tough, nervous approach can be quite appealing, it's clear that as long as 999 is reduced to copying riffs from Kiss (as it does on "Titanic Reaction"), it will never be more than second-line.

More music for fewer dollars is one of the more concrete ways that England's best band, the Clash, expresses its distaste for the vulgarity of capitalism and its sympathy for its minimum-wage earning fans. (At least, that's the way it is in England.) Earlier this year, it released an album called "London Calling" which was a two-record set that retailed for slightly more than the price of one. Now, after months of dis-

agreement between the English and American arms of its record company and the band itself, a 10-inch disc called "Black Market Clash" has been released.

The record appears as part of Epic's Nu-Disk experiment, a \$5.98 list price series. But rather than offering four songs, the traditional extended-play quantity, "Black Market Clash" has a full album's worth of material. The songs were recorded between 1977 and 1980, and most had been released in some form or another (singles, album tracks) in England. But none had yet been released here, so it's a good buy for the Clash fan.

It's a bit of a grab bag. The older songs include the sassy, sarcastic "Capital Radio One," while "Cheat," like much of the band's earlier material, is intense, dour and angry. The more recent songs reflect the Clash's interest in reggae music, with "Bankrobber/Robber Dub" the highlight, with its chanting, electronic effects and breakaway rhythms. A version of Toots and the Maytals' "Pressure Drop" is much closer to the spirit of the original than Robert Palmer's recent whitewash, while a surprising interpretation of the Booker T. and the MGs' instrumental "Time Is Tight" reinforces the similarities between reggae and 1960s American soul music. "Black Market Clash" isn't nearly as masterful as "London Calling," but it's not meant to be. It will, however, satisfy the appetites of fans while the Clash works on its next album, rumored to be a three-record set, for release in early 1981.

Tonight's the second of two long-sold-out Bruce Springsteen shows at Madison Square Garden, the first phase of a regional Springsteen blitz that includes two more concerts at the Garden (Dec. 18-19) and three at Nassau Coliseum (Dec. 28, 29 and 31). Those shows too, were sold out weeks ago.

Despite Springsteen's awesome appeal as a stage performer, his records have yet to make the multi-million selling impact of many lesser rockers. "The River," Springsteen's recently released two-record set, is the first No. 1 album of the New Jersey musician's career. The first single from the album, "Hungry Heart" is No. 11 on this week's Billboard chart, which makes it certain to be Springsteen's first Top 10 hit.

Among many reasons for the delay

in the release of "The River" (which came out nearly a year after it was initially scheduled) was the last-minute exclusion of a song called "Held Up Without a Gun." The song does appear as the flip-side of the "Hungry Heart" single, and it's a strange little tune. Just 75 seconds long, "Held Up" musically resembles "I Got a Crush on You" from the album, but it's even faster than that frenetic tune. Lyrically, one verse is social commentary; the other, autobiography. In the first verse, it's gas prices: "Pulled in an Exxon station out on Highway 1/Held up without a gun." The next verse offers a similar couplet about the naive young Bruce, who signed a managerial contract that almost destroyed his career.

Captain Beefheart, who appears at the Beacon Theater in Manhattan tonight, may be the most fawned over of all "critics' artists." Since the mid-1960s, Beefheart has been releasing records that the jaded especially appreciate: obtuse, superficially incoherent but structurally sensible, Beefheart's dadaistic blues records are appealing as much for what they aren't as for what they are. They aren't pop, they aren't predictable, and they give the listener the self-aggrandizing feeling of being in on a secret that a mass audience will never share.

On the other hand, the gushing that has greeted the release of Beefheart's new album, "Doc at the Radar Station," strikes me as not only obsequious but obnoxiously elitist. Certainly, the disassembling melody lines, the fragmenting rhythms, and incomprehensible lyrics are amusing, but it's hardly the work of genius that most of the print pack will have you believe. I'm terribly fond of some of the songs—"Best Batch Yet," "Sheriff of Hong Kong," "Making Love to a Vampire with a Monkey on My Knee" and "Dirty Blue Gene" are especially good, with the latter sounding like Chinese restaurant Muzak as interpreted by the great blues singer Howlin' Wolf—but as a whole, "Doc at the Radar Station" doesn't match such decade-old Beefheart classics as "Trout Mask Replica" and "Lick My Decals Off, Baby." And those who confuse Beefheart's confounding puns for the work of comic genius probably couldn't tell the difference between Rodney Dangerfield and Robert Benchley, the distinction between buffoonery and a real sense of humor. //

## preview

### ON LONG ISLAND

**ARS MUSICA TRIO.** Juilliard graduates, free, 3 PM Sunday, Salten Hall, New York Tech, Old Westbury, 686-7640.

**BANNERMAN HARP ENSEMBLE.** \$3, \$1 students, 8:15 PM tomorrow, Cathedral House, Cathedral Avenue and Sixth Street, Garden City.

**LAUREATE ENSEMBLE.** Gala Benefit Musicales with pianist James Gemmell, cellist Michael Rudiakov, flutist Timothy Malosh, \$12.50, 7:30 PM Sunday, Port Washington Library, 245 Main St., 883-4400.

**MASSAPEQUA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA.** Gershwin, Copland, Siegmeyer, with Marian McPartland, jazz pianist, \$7.50, \$5 over 65, \$4 students, 8:30 PM tomorrow, High School, Merrick Road, Massapequa, 798-3758.

**"MEET THE COMPOSER."** Forum String Quartet performs Siegmeyer, Schubert, Mozart, with Elie Siegmeyer, guest composer, \$6, \$4.50 Y members, 8:30 PM tomorrow, Mid-Island YM&YWA, 45 Manetto Hill Rd., Plainview, 822-3535.

**ROSALYN ARTISTS STRING QUARTET.** Grieg, Chopin, Mozart, others, with Pamela Ross, pianist, \$5, \$2.50 students, over 65, 8 PM tomorrow, Theatre Three, 412 Main St., Port Jefferson, 928-9100.

**UPCOMING: Long Island Symphony** performs Haydn, Debussy, Leonard Bernstein, with clarinetists Stanley and Naomi Drucker, \$6-\$10, 8:30 PM Friday, Dec. 5 (Mineola High School), 8:30 PM Saturday, Dec. 6 (Lindell School, Long Beach), 7:30 PM Sunday, Dec. 7 (John H. Glenn High School, Elwood Road, Huntington), 431-0800. "Clari or, The Maid of Milan," John Howard Payne's operetta, \$9, \$6 students, over 65, 8:30 PM Saturday, Dec. 6, Guild Hall, 158 Main St., East Hampton, 324-4050. Judith Alstadter plays "Music of Romantic Women Composers," free, 8 PM Saturday, Dec. 6, Fine Arts Center, Northern Boulevard, Roslyn, 484-9333. Long Island Philharmonic's "Pops Concert" features pianist Peter Nero, \$8, \$11, 8:30 PM Saturday, Dec. 6, Half Hollow Hills High School East, Dix Hills, 293-2222. Ann Carter-Cox, soprano, \$4.50, \$4 members, 3 PM Sunday, Dec. 7, Parrish Art Museum, Job's Lane, Southampton, 283-2118. Long Island Baroque Ensemble's Christmas Pageant, \$5, \$3 students, 8 PM Sunday, Dec. 7 (Christ Church, East Main Street, Oyster Bay), 8 PM Saturday, Dec. 13 (St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Brookside Drive, Smithtown), 8 PM Saturday, Dec. 20 (Fine Arts Center, Roslyn), 484-1581, 724-7386.

"Bach's Greatest Concert," featuring Sea Cliff Chamber Players, \$5, \$7, 8 PM Friday, Dec. 12, Fine Arts Center, State University, Stony Brook, 246-5678. Great Neck Choral Society performs all-Vivaldi concert, \$4, \$2 high school students, 8:30 PM Saturday, Dec. 13, Great Neck South Senior High School, Lakeville Road and Long Island Expressway, 482-5822. "Christmas at Coe Hall" features Renaissance and Baroque music by Guido's Other Hand, \$5, 2:30 PM Saturday and Sunday, Dec. 13, 14, \$12.50 includes concert/reception 8:30 PM