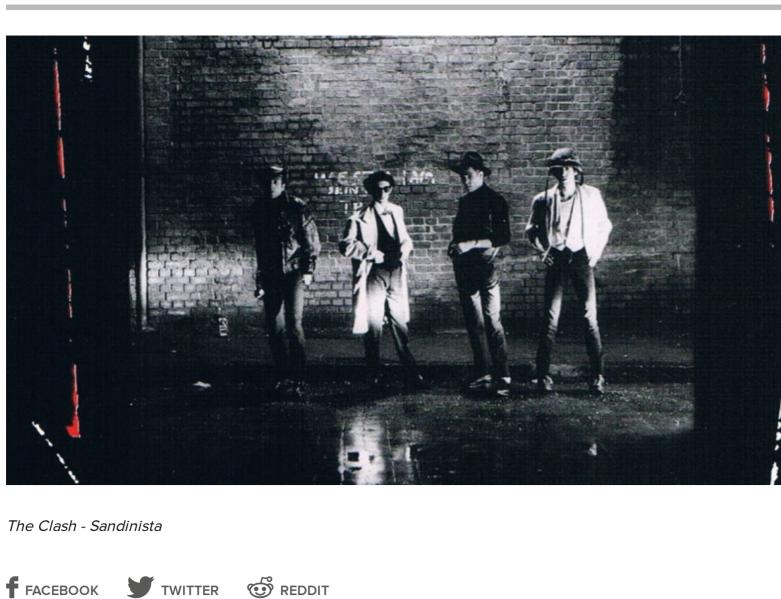
An Oral History of The Clash's "The Magnificent Seven"

Featuring Mick Jones, Paul Simonon, Kosmo Vinyl, and the late Joe Strummer

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BY JEFF SLATE ON DECEMBER 11, 2020, 5:00AM

INTERVIEWS



song triple album set, Sandinista!, over beers in an East Village bar back in the early 1990s. While Strummer's tongue was firmly in cheek, he wasn't backing down on his claim. He

past, not to mention both their collective creativity and rock star excess – and still stands today as a remarkable, if beguiling, achievement.

Featuring forays into everything from jazz and gospel to hip-hop and rockabilly, Sandinista!

loved his former band, and Sandinista! loomed large in the legend about everything they

stood for – the good and the bad, planting feet firmly in the future while still honoring the

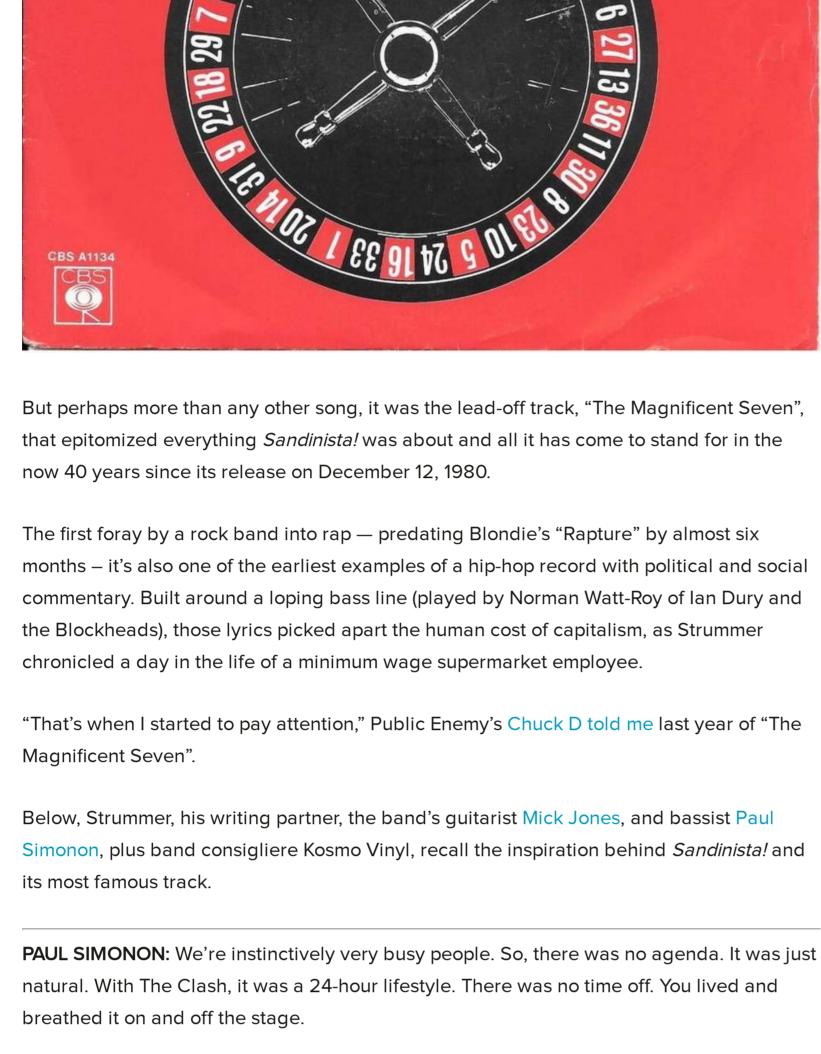
"It's perfect," Joe Strummer insisted about The Clash's fourth album, the sprawling, 36-

was the ultimate rock and roll indulgence by a band that had only just started to crack the big time after releasing the near-perfect double album London Calling, which still stands as both their greatest moment and their manifesto. "Sandinista! represents an amazing moment in time for us," Strummer recalled that afternoon. "In less than a month, we recorded all that music."

For all the genre-hopping and experimentation across its six sides of vinyl, *Sandinista!*, which actually took about six months to record and was named in honor of Nicaragua's freedom fighters, featured an astonishing amount of highlights. The Eddy Grant/Equals cover "Police on My Back" and "Somebody Got Murdered" were instant hits with the AOR rock crowd. "Bankrobber", "The Call Up", "Hitsville U.K.", "Washington Bullets", "Ivan Meets G.I. Joe", and "The Sound of Sinners" picked up where London Calling left off.

Meanwhile, "Junco Partner" and "One More Time" – bearing the heavy influence of coproducer Mikey Dread – whetted the appetite of many of the band's fans who were only just discovering reggae in a serious way. *THECLASH*

The magnificent seven



always saying, "Credence Clearwater Revival! Three LPs in 23 months. Come on man, we are dragging here!" It never struck me as strange being as busy as we were. There was always a feeling that more could be done, because we also had the influence of the Jamaican record industry. They would just put their records out. If you had a song, something current, you put it out, and bam, it would be on the street. I think we were kind

MICK JONES: What I really liked about the bands that influenced me was that you couldn't

wait for their next record to know where they were at. And it also offered you the chance to

of immersed in that idea of immediacy.

find out where you might be at, as well.

KOSMO VINYL: I always used to think there was too much time in between stuff! I was



by and writing lyrics for the tunes Mick was coming up with. JONES: When we visited places, we were affected by that, and what was going on there, as well. When we traveled, our experiences broadened and we brought that music that

was going on around us into what we were doing. And for me, New York City was really

VINYL: St. Joe once said that we consumed music perpetually — that we listened nonstop.

All the people involved brought all these various influences – the little flavors here, flavors

there, different people bringing things in – literally nonstop. They'd make us turn off the

boomboxes in the airport or wherever, but if they didn't enforce it, I don't think we ever

JONES: Besides, when you come off tour, that's a really great time to make an album,

New York City 1980s Stock Shots - www.NBCUniversalArchives.com

because you have the momentum. We'd just come off the road, so it was like bang, bang,

bang, we're going to do this and that. It was like a burst. We never really thought about it.

Watch later

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Watch later

In the Spring of 1980, The Clash moved their London base of operations to the tatty

Gramercy Park Hotel in New York City and set up shop in Electric Lady Studios in the heart

JOE STRUMMER: I built a bunker in the corner of the live room, with our flight cases. I'd sit

there and not bother anyone while they were working, smoking spliffs with whoever came

The Clash, photo courtesy of © Pennie Smith

of Greenwich Village.

happening at that moment.

stopped listening.

open for information.

too late.

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"The Magnificent Seven" came from the burst of inspiration that New York City gave the

STRUMMER: Paul was off in Canada making a movie, so we brought in Norman Watt-Roy

and Mickey Gallagher so we could keep working. That's when "Mag Seven" happened.

JONES: Because we'd come from a communal scene, we were used to building things

from out of our community, and that's what was happening in New York at that time. Joe

conversation you'd say, "Well, what's happening in this town?" They'd tell you, "It's crap,

communication. And by being informed in that way, you discover a lot more about the

town. Our situation in New York, we were in town at that point, and that's where we met

people like Futura and Grandmaster Flash and Kurtis Blow and got informed. We were

JONES: We were going backwards to go forwards. You're bringing everything from before

with you, but you kind of make it your own, and then you're in the present moment. I know

this now because I can look back on it and understand it. But when we were doing it, we

didn't really think about it. We just did it instinctively and carried on.

The Clash - The Magnificent Seven (Video) (Remastered)

there ain't no clubs here." Or, "This place is good, and you should check it out." It's getting

looked at the graffiti artists, and I was taking in things like breakdancing and rap.

SIMONON: We found that in every town we went to, we'd get out and about and in

band, coupled with the post-tour adrenaline rush they were experiencing.

With what the band thought was a hit single on their hands, they were hot to get it played on radio, to set the stage for the album that was soon to come.

VINYL: We went to the guy at the record company, and he was just not interested. So, we

"No." Right there. We took them to another place and shipped them out from there. We

JONES: We got them to WBLS and WBAI, which were just starting to play hip-hop at the

VINYL: Somehow, that's when the Frankie Crocker version called "Dirty Harry" started

being played on WBLS. [NOTE: Crocker intercut audio clips from Clint Eastwood's *Dirty*

Harry films with the white label version of "The Magnificent Seven" that the band had sent

STRUMMER: "Mag Seven" was everywhere. You'd hear it on boomboxes and coming out

VINYL: That was the idea: That we could just slip it in there. Maybe if they didn't know who

it was, they'd just play it. But I think it's a very interesting moment that to a degree gets

swept over. That was really one of the first presentations of hip-hop to a rock audience. I

think we felt that the audience would be more accepting than it was. I think speaking to

of car radios and in cabs. These four white guys from London on BLS. It was fantastic.

time. The whole overall idea was that when they realized who these guys were, it would be

actually sent out these singles with blank labels that I handwrote.

his station, WBLS, and it became a hugely requested track.]

went to the R&B guy at the label, and he wasn't interested. He wrote it on the record label,

people afterwards, culturally, there was a much bigger anti-disco resentment in rock fandom in the US at that time. The whole "disco sucks" thing. And I think when a lot of these people were confronted with that, they were like, "Shit, what's this? It's fucking disco!" **JONES:** There was some hostility, but many groups now see it as a good thing.

SIMONON: I've just about finished the second side.

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THE CLASH

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MICK JONES

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After fighting with their label for months – and giving up any royalties in order to keep the

price of the 3-LP Sandinista! down to the cost of a single LP – the album was released. DJs

were overwhelmed (and a single LP "best of" version was released for their benefit) while

STRUMMER: It was too much information. But that's what I love about it. It's that moment in

SIMONON: The idea anyway was that it would be a whole experience. Getting to know The

Clash would mean more than just buying a record. Maybe it would influence your politics,

your worldview, the way you dress, the way you think. It wasn't just music like a jukebox.

JONES: Six sides is hard, isn't it? You get into the time-space thing at that point, don't you?

You're getting into the realms where time is bent by that time.

critics and fans were baffled.

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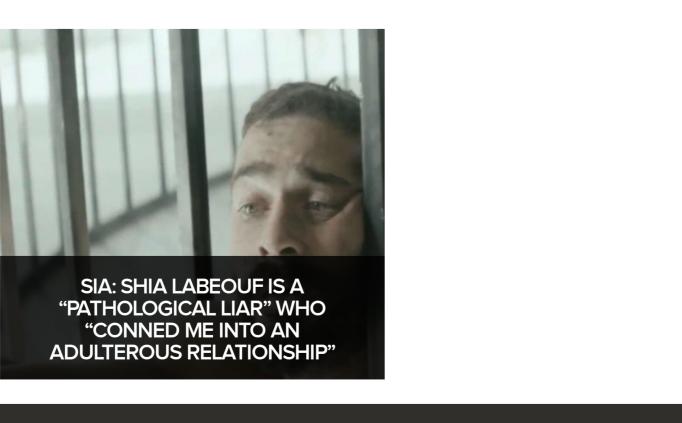
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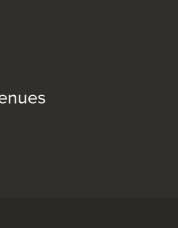
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