

## New release *Combat Rock*

# Clash returns to punkrock roots

By The Canadian Press

Fans of Britain's The Clash were inclined to more than a little head-scratching when the punk foursome mixed a liberal dose of conventional music with the scrap on their three-record *Sandinista* a while back. The surprise move ultimately foreshadowed the demise of punk's popularity, which has since succumbed to the likes of techno-pop, mainstream rock and a resurgence in heavy metal.

But just when you thought it was safe to turn on the radio again, the diehard Clash have re-emerged with **Combat Rock** (Epic), a 12-track collection that's as ragged as anything ever spawned by punkdom.

The fans likely will see it as cause for celebration, so much so that they may not notice one important ingredient missing from the new work — the biting and surprisingly sensible lyrical structure that made these socio-political bashers the foremost exponents of punk's anarchist creed.

The familiar ideas are there — the bulk of the album is given to gritty statements about war, government power-mongers and rampant lawlessness in the streets.

But unlike similar statements on previous recordings, notably *Sandinista* and *London Calling*, the material on *Combat Rock* is presented in an oblique, haphazard fashion, almost totally bereft of the rapid wit of which Joe Strummer and Mick Jones have proven themselves capable.

The most cohesive presentation is the stark cut *Innoculated City*, a tune which sees the military pooh-bahs bowing in turn to their superiors — who ultimately nod to government whim — while the poor bloke from the street falls to the guns' tattoo.

And there is a certain grim humor to the cuts *Know Your Rights* ("all three of 'em") and *Red Angel Dragnet*, a song presumably concerning America's Guardian Angels civilian police force. That number incorporates a bit of lunatic dialogue from the violent Martin Scorsese film *Taxi Driver*.

More often, the Clash slops its way through incom-

prehensible and seemingly impromptu meanderings, as if content (as was the punk norm) to let the very aggressiveness of the presentation carry the album. It's hardly enough.

Jones and Strummer apparently still haven't figured out how to work their guitars, while bassist Paul Simonon and drummer Topper Headon continue to show themselves as the quartet's real musical talent. (Headon, incidentally, is reported to have since left The Clash, with the group's original drummer Tory Crimes filling in for live dates.)

The band's reputation alone undoubtedly will sell *Combat Rock*. It'll have to — there are few other saleable qualities in this sloppiest of efforts.

The temptation to compare Gary Brooker's solo work with that of Procol Harum, the defunct, arty British band he founded, probably will strike the critical community at large.

Suffice to say that Brooker's first stab at lyric writing cannot hold a candle to the craft of longtime Procol wordsmith Keith Reid, who co-wrote the title tune of Brooker's solo debut *No More Fear of Flying* three years ago.

But if Brooker's long-proven composing talents and his superb vocals carry the bulk of his new album *Lead Me To the Water* (*Vertigo*), he doesn't exactly embarrass himself as a poet.

Much of the writing is kept simple but rather than hindering the album it serves to represent *Lead Me* as a clean, accessible endeavor. And it gives a certain innocent charm to such tunes as *The Cycle* and the melodic *Hang On Rose*.

Only with the last track, the overly dramatic *Sympathy* (sic) *For the Hard of Hearing*, does Brooker give in to the pomp tendencies that were his initial vision for

Procol. It's bearable, but a touch too busy to conform to the album's tone as a whole.

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