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Route 19 Revisited: The Clash And London Calling



Synopsis

Twenty-eight years after its original release, The Clash's London Calling was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame as a recording of lasting qualitative or historical significance. It topped polls on both sides of the Atlantic for the best album of the seventies (and eighties) and in publications as wide-ranging as Rolling Stone, VIBE, Pitchfork, and NME, and it regularly hits the top ten on greatest-albums-of-all-time-lists. Even its cover—the instantly recognizable image of Paul Simonon smashing his bass guitar—has attained iconic status, inspiring countless imitations and even being voted the best rock roll photograph ever by Q magazine. Now the breakthrough album from the foremost band of the punk era gets the close critical eye it deserves. Marcus Gray examines London Calling from every vantage imaginable, from the recording sessions and the state of the world it was recorded in to the album's long afterlife, bringing new levels of understanding to one of punk rock's greatest achievements. Leaving no detail unexplored, he provides a song-by-song breakdown covering when each was written and where, what inspired each song, and what in turn each song inspired, making this book a must-read for Clash fans.

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Customer Reviews

London Calling shows the Clash transcending their punk beginnings to create one of the most brilliant and eclectic double albums in rock history. *Route 19 Revisited* examines the tracks on the album in fascinating, rigorous detail. The music is placed into its social, historical, cultural and musical contexts and like the best music criticism, draws together a range of threads into a compelling narrative of how this album came to be. Gray also looks at the album's life over the years and why it is still a seminal piece. Gray also tells the story of the album's iconic cover, which is fascinating in itself. The discussion of each song is extraordinarily meticulous. Gray's capacity to deeply contextualize the song's was the book's highlight for me. The alchemical mix of politics, biography, economics, ecology, musical genres, history, books and film is intellectually bracing. Even if you do not accept all of Gray's intertextual and extratextual links, his discussion is unerringly thought-provoking. The photographs and text recall a world gone forever yet hauntingly familiar. One of the greatest albums deserves such an amazing account. No Clash fan should miss this.

London Calling is the one great, essential punk record. And, it's deeper and more complex than you think. This book shows you how it was put together, with a vast amount of fascinating background information.

Lots of interesting info on how the band that really matters created one of the best albums in music's history. If you are a Clash fan, is a must have it.

Are rock albums worthy of a 500+-page book? In the case of The Clash's landmark 1979 album, *London Calling*, Yes! Marcus Gray's detailed study of *London Calling* is much more than a by the numbers "making of" account, but a portrait of an era similar to our own. The year 1979 witnessed the Islamic Revolution in Iran, a near nuclear meltdown at Three Mile Island, fears of climate change, massive unemployment in the West, the end of detente after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, and the rise of right wing leaders Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. All the songs on *London Calling* were a partly a response to those events, but also a dialouge with the past that offered some glimmers of hope for the future. *Route 19 Revisited* will immerse you into the world of The Clash and make you reexamine your own environment - in a good way. The Clash (1976-1985) Joe Strummer (guitar, vocals), Mick Jones (guitar, vocals), Paul Simonon (bass), and Topper

Headon (drums) burst onto the scene in 1976 as part of the punk movement. By the mid 1970s many were disillusioned at the direction of popular music with corporate rock bands that played safe middle of the road music (Boston, Wings), ego driven bands who made their millions and then ignored their fans (The Rolling Stones), and pretentious "art" rock (Sex Pistols frontman Johnny Rotten was noted for wearing "Pink Floyd Sucks!" t-shirts). The release of *Never Mind the Bollocks* by the Sex Pistols in 1977, dubbed "Year Zero," in the punk manifesto, sent a sledgehammer into the music industry. All the songs were under three minutes with sneering vocals spitting bile at the bourgeois. The punk manifesto divided the world up between the loves and the hates. The hates were establishment and "soulless consumerists", while the loves charismatic outlaws, amoral, unconventional. The Clash's self titled debut, *The Clash* (1977) was well received as a punk masterpiece, but also hinted at an ambition to go beyond the confines of punk. Tracks like "Remote Control," "I'm So Bored with the USA," and "Career Opportunities" all fit into the anti-authoritarian punk ethos. One of the last songs recorded for the album was a reggae cover "Police and Thieves," that ran for six minutes signaled their independence from the punk scene. After touring America with Bo Diddley, Strummer and Jones traveled to Jamaica to prepare for an album of all reggae music. Their sophomore LP, *Give Em' Enough Rope*, which featured a cover with an army of Maoists marching over a dead American cowboy, flopped with critics and nearly forced the band out of their recording contract with CBS. In 1979, the Clash regrouped and wrote one of rock's all-time classic albums. The iconic cover, with Simonson smashing his bass guitar, symbolized their rage at the bleak world of 1970s Great Britain. But as Gray points out, a recurring theme through the album is dealing with anger and channeling it towards positive ends. All nineteen tracks are given their own essays that go into great detail about the influences behind them. The styles of the songs move from 1950s rockabilly, disco, reggae, ska, rock - blurring genres and styles in a way not seen since the Beatles. Many of the songs originated from newspaper articles, books, and movies they were watching - with subjects running the gambit from the Spanish Civil War, Montgomery Clift, consumerism, coca-cola, and revolutionary politics. In the essays, which comprise half of the book, Gray delves into the cinematic, literary, and musical influences. Like The Beatles, the Clash rarely created anything original, but took all their influences and shaped them into their own distinct style. For instance, on "Death or Glory," Gray connects the ideas in the song to Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade" and the 1942 film *Casablanca*. Strummer wrote "Spanish Bombs" after reading Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. This book is a must read for anyone interested rock and roll history. Gray wrote that *London Calling* continues to endure not because of its dark themes, but its "defiant spirit, its power to uplift, and determination to lead by example . . . it looks fear in the eye, then pulls

on its boots and goes out to face the day." Like any great album its meaning will change after repeated listenings to the album and anyone who reads this book will immediately go out and buy a copy.

It's a big book. It must be chock-full of new information and in-depth interviews with the surviving band members, engineers, and friends, right? Wrong. It's almost a vanity book, peeling off-topic into tangents and reaching far, far, far into obscure reference and history. It then tries to assert that these were the basis for the ideas behind the songs on London Calling. The song histories go like this: Mick only vaguely remembers who wrote what. Paul doesn't care- he likes the sound of it. Topper remembers specific songs, vaguely. His own parts, anyway. The engineer, Bill Price, is the most illuminating and insightful. He remembers what effects are on what songs. Sometimes. Guy Stevens is soundly dismissed and made to sound like an incompetent buffoon. Fact is, The Clash had a manager that told them how to sound, what to sing about, how to look, and what to read. They fired him. Then they were left to their own devices, and decided to celebrate the music that they grew up with. The results speak for themselves. The book, however, goes to great lengths to sound important and historical, but ends up falling flat. It'll start a chapter with a history of the skull and crossbones. 4 pages later, it implies that The Clash ripped off the idea for Death or Glory from the Knights Templar of the 14th Century. The Clash, or at least Joe, were aware of history, but c'mon... This is a book about the authors ego; trying to cash in on a timeless album while, at the same time, denigrating almost everyone involved with its creation. You could buy the Nuggets compilation, any 70s reggae compilation, and a lot of gangster films, and you'll end up with a lot more insight into the making of this album than this tome provides. Not that it's a bad read, but there are 36 pages of biblio from elsewhere, pictures that were too boring to be used in other books, and the greatest sin- an almost complete disregard for band interviews. Seriously, the comments from the actual people involved could probably fit on 20 pages. The rest are history essays. I like history essays, but not in a book about a band and an album that showed me that history also ROCKS. This book doesn't rock.

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