



Route 19 Revisited: The Clash and London Calling

By Marcus Gray

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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 'n' 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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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Clash fans will welcome this comprehensive exploration of the band's landmark album *London Calling* by journalist Gray (*It Crawled from the South*), who has twice previously tried to tell this story, with mixed results. Gray kicks things off this time with biographies of Strummer, Jones, Simonon, and Headon. "There is...enough crossover of the four individuals' experience to provide pointers for the album's lyrical concerns," Gray says, rather dryly, positing that "if four musically creative people with such histories went into a rehearsal room they would almost inevitably" emerge with something like *London Calling*. At the heart of the book is a 200-page in-depth exploration of every *London Calling* track. Gray also discusses production details, the punk scene, promotion and touring, and the famous album image. *London Calling* continues to inspire today because "it looks anger, fear, impotence, and self-doubt in the eye, then pulls on its boots and goes out to face the day." Engaging and well-written, and rife with half a century of music scene details, Gray's third attempt at capturing The Clash is the one that fans have been waiting for. Photos. (Oct.)
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From [Booklist](#)

The Clash is considered one of the greatest of all rock bands. In this exhaustive treatment, Gray concentrates on the English punk rock band's third album, *London Calling*, released in the United States in early 1980. But first he sets the scene: offering biographical details on all four band members (Joe Strummer, Mick Jones, Paul Simonon, and Topper Headon) as well as discussing the band's previous albums. He looks at not only the recording sessions but also the songwriting style of Strummer and Jones, and analyzes each of the album's 19 songs. Gray writes about the packaging and promotion of the album, including the creation of its iconic cover: that of a live-action shot of Simonon smashing his bass guitar on stage, which was partly in homage to Elvis Presley's eponymous debut album. He concludes with a discussion of *London Calling*'s effect on popular culture and on the work of other artists, from Bruce Springsteen to U2. Although it may be too thorough for casual readers, serious rock fans will welcome this meticulously detailed examination. --
June Sawyers

Review

"Meticulous detail."

— *Telegraph*

"There are amazing stories."

— Andrew Perry, *Mojo*

"Well written and thoroughly researched, it is also perspicacious and ambitious in its placing of an hour of guitar music in the context of individual lives, post-war Britain, the heady power of American popular culture over British teenagers, and -- that redoubtable cliché of the rock 'n' roll life -- the trappings of fame... This seems to be the kind of celebratory chronicling that [lead singer Joe Strummer himself], who died at the age of fifty in 2002, might have welcomed."

— PJ Carnehan, *Times Literary Supplement*

"Gray's book is a triumph in that his obsessive detail enhances and illuminates a classic record."

— Alasdair Mabbott, *The Herald*

From the Trade Paperback edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Richard Martinez:

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