



The Clash as a trio (L-R) Joe Strummer, Paul Simonon, Mick Jones.



Tall Dwarfs, Chris Knox & Alec Bathgate.



Aerosmith (L-R) Joe Perry, Steven Tyler, Brad Whitford, Joey Kramer and Tom Hamilton.

albums

THE VERLAINES Ready To Fly (Slash)

The Verlaines' remarkable college radio success and solid track record meant they were always the most likely to join the Chills in signing direct to the Warner-affiliated Slash records. So has their foray into big-label land changed them beyond recognition?

Anything but. The opening song, 'Gloom Junky' is Verlaines Archetypal Song Number One: Miserable Bugger Artist struggles to relate to Uncomprehending Woman. That's the way women tend to appear in a Graeme Downes' lyric. As hometown academic, he's experienced the grandest, most exotic things, but vicariously and can only translate them through the most domestic of woes.

Ergo, his bony frame still takes a pounding in the songs. That well-worn victim, his throat, cops another thrashing in 'Such As I', along with his knees ("balding with prayer"); and the whole body aches in 'See You Tomorrow'. And he's still drinking in the front room — wine, whisky, beer and brandy spill all over the lyric sheet.

Slash will be pleased he hasn't lost the ability to turn out a hook, but where most rock bands think you can only do it in the chorus, Downes gets to the nub of what is, after all, only a melodic device and works one into the fabric of both tune and lyric of most of the songs.

But it's his musicologist's perspective

which lets him down sometimes. When he does a honky-tonk shuffle ('Hurricane'), or an R&B chug ('See You Tomorrow'), he has probably, as far as he's concerned, got every detail of the form right — but the occasional listener will probably just hear another Verlaines song. In that respect, he's almost a polar opposite to his label-mate Martin Phillipps, who works with a limited bag of chords, but sets his head towards creating the tastiest of sounds.

Thus, the complex string quartet piece 'Moonlight On Snow' comes almost as a relief after an album's worth of that reined-in guitar sound (a kind of partner in crime to Downes' voice) and you wish he'd had a crack at the kind of jet-thrust of 'Lying In State' or a stab at a grandeur like 'Ballad of Harry Noryb'.

It would be no surprise if *Ready To Fly*, blessed with all the virtues of Verlaines records, did considerably better in the US than it does here, where support for the band has perhaps fallen away. For Downes, familiarity may prove to be the enemy. **RUSSELL BROWN**

TALL DWARFS Fork Songs (Flying Nun)

Fork Songs was recorded in what has become Tall Dwarfs' time-honoured style — Alec comes up to Auckland for a week or three and whatever falls out of the zeitgeist is the new record (Chris went down to Christchurch for some of it too, but let's not bugger up a perfectly good intro). A clue to that zeitgeist lies in the gigs they play while they're together.

I don't know about you, but the only

performance I saw was, frankly, a bit flat and some of that flatness seeps into *Fork Songs*. If it's not half as difficult as *Louis* or even *Canned Music*, neither is it possessed of the infectious silliness of *Slugbucket* or the heavily barbed, poppy little gems which crowded *Weeville*.

But, judging by the lyrics, it was never meant to be a charmer. We tumble through the unspecified abuse of 'Where You Dare To Tread' and the fatalism of 'Skirl', whose sort of subliminal bagpipes sound is one of the musical highlights, along with Alec's 'Small Talk', which is typically and, in this context, unusually uplifting. It's a long fall to the dark, nasty horrors of 'Boys', another Knox song about the evil that men do. They just can't find much to be happy about, even in 'Lowlands', a song about those saviours of modern life, yer friends.

It all came a little clearer when I unplugged the CD player and ran it through the ghetto blaster — the smaller it sounded, the better. Given the perverse history of the TDs, you wouldn't expect an album of America's Cup anthems to celebrate their 10th anniversary, but they've been more fun that they are on *Fork Songs*. **RUSSELL BROWN**

THE CLASH Clash On Broadway (Epic/Legacy)

Rolling Stone got it right when it voted *London Calling* as the album of the 80s. An ironic choice if you consider the bewildered and almost hostile reception that corporate America initially bestowed on punk as it burst through the rotten boardwalks. The British strain didn't seem to have

the same arty restraint or pop antecedents as the CBGB scene of Blondie, Talking Heads et al, but by the late 70s in American critical hindsight, the Clash had grown up enough to have entered the mainstream of rock 'n' roll culture.

Even Lenny Kaye in his brilliant, vivid liner notes in this triple CD set, marks out *London Calling* as their most "memorable work", but he also gives due respect to the play-fast-die-young urban punk focus of their halcyon first album and the splintered singles that followed. Kaye's appreciation aside, it's the first CD with its 25 tracks covering this early Clash and ending at the edge of *Give 'Em Enough Rope* that contains the most exciting, direct and potent rock 'n' roll.

The exhaustive and chronological nature of *Clash On Broadway* allows you to chart the development of the band and to compare the various stages of "pop progression". So the end of the first CD basically corresponds to the end of their spiky period whose beginnings here explode with demo versions of 'Jamie Jones' and 'Career Opportunities' and end with live versions of 'English Girl War' and 'I Fought The Law' originally covered by the band for its outlaw chic, but also proof of their broadening musical base.

The second disc beings with the blistering 'Safe European Home', easily the best song from their most disappointing album *Give 'Em Enough Rope* and includes a mediocre unreleased track 'One Emotion' and some B-sides from the 'London Calling 12". Most of *London Calling* is included and from the breathless warning of the

title track, the reggae crack of 'Rudie Can't Fail' to the even, emphatic tread of 'Clampdown', its meltdown of urban tension, anti-establishment aggression with every rock style available meant that the Clash had arrived at the gates of the West with their first great non-punk long player.

With Strummer still as the theoretician and the watchdog over the world's political evils and Jones the musical adventurer (check any BAD album for eclectic proof), the band launched into the sprawling triple deal, *Sandinista*, a project lambasted by too many converted hippies with embarrassing memories of similar Grateful Dead/Yes indulgences. However, *Sandinista's* scope has gained clarity with age and 'Police On My Back', 'The Call Up', and the sadly omitted 'Charlie Don't Surf' and a number of others on this third disc could easily have made it on *London Calling*.

Burn out from 14 sides of music and umpteen singles and the growing rift between Strummer's revolutionary zeal and Jones' less intense picture meant that *Combat Rock* was the Clash's last album. And it's lasted well. Strummer's 'Straight To Hell' is like a 'no future' five years on, while 'Rock The Casbah' and 'Should I Stay Or Should I Go' have survived the cruel indignities of being used as the soundtrack to bomb Baghdad and as promotion for a jeans ad. Turning idealism into money.

Of the children of the 1977 revolution, the Clash were the most successful at leading the masses out of the punk dead end street without sacrificing the disaffected spirit behind the combustion. Curiously though, as *On Broadway* reveals, it's those initial flushes of drainpipe rebellion and not

the later sophistications that still man the barricades. Whatever way you look at it, for five years the Clash ruled the airwaves. **GEORGE KAY**

AEROSMITH Pandora's Box (Sony)

Whether you've been rocking out to Aerosmith with your best friends since the 70s, or if you thought 'Janies Got A Gun' was their first single — you gotta have *Pandora's Box*.

Aerosmith slogged for several years, annually releasing a new album and touring constantly until they achieved their status in America as the biggest and the best hard rock 'n' rollin' band in the land. However, the success which sky-rocketed with *Toys In The Attic* and *Rocks* was wasting away as band members did likewise, partying night and day and developing dependent habits on various substances. The group was self-destructing and when the Joe Perry / Steven Tyler partnership ended, the magic went with it. The Aerosmith and Perry Project material that followed was still cool, but it wasn't classic.

The most remarkable thing is that when they reformed five years later, they had cleaned up and their playing, songwriting and popularity reached the greatest peaks of their career with *Permanent Vacation* and *Pump*.

What this box set contains is the first decade of that original Aerosmith energy and experience, expressed in excellent songs like 'Dream On', 'Sweet Emotion', 'Walk This Way' and 'Draw The Line', to name but a few. Even if you've already got all 13 of

THE
VERLAINES

READY TO FLY

*a superb new
album on
cassette and CD*

FESTIVAL
RECORDS NZ

SLASH
RECORDS

GETTING OVER

Roger selects the hits.

Finally out, the tenth anniversary
compilation we promised last
year. Twenty tracks Flying Nun
is quite proud of . . .

Tape, CD and Double LP

**The Flying Nun
Retrospective
Compilation**

FLYING NUN
1981-1991