

'London Calling' sweeps music awards

by Gisele Marie Baxter

The Best of 1980—A Pop Music Review

1980. The year is now over, its moments stored up in history. As we tend to see years ending in '0' as beginnings of something, the music of 1980 is perhaps best considered in that context. The '70s, and even the late '60s, despite producing some vital, excellent music, became a sort of Dark Ages of rock'n'roll. The idiom seized on glitter and theatrics trying to preserve its fading youth, and floundered on its own excesses. Then, in the late '70s, like a beacon slashing the fog, came the so-called New Wave. This music has been most crucial in shaping the best of 1980.

When good, it is topical and interpretive music, delivered with wit, intelligence, and a new sense of irony. It is frequently cynical, but then it belongs to an era which does not hold out easy answers or immediate hope. It is energetic and experimental. Much of it is danceable, and much of it is challenging.

1980 saw brilliant work from artists like The Clash and Bruce Springsteen, who redefined the best of the 1950s' and 1960s' rock'n'roll, making it musically and thematically valid for the 1980s. John "Rotten" Lydon's Public Image Ltd. (PiL) created haunting, energetic, often discordant images in sound which redefined rock's boundaries. Gary Numan's starkly compelling technopop reflected the modern world in visions of the future and achieved a much-underrated yet singular importance.

1980 was a good year for third albums from many of the new artists. Dire Straits produced their best work to date in "Making Movies", which joined solid rock to moments so achingly beautiful they could make you cry. The Police brought the influences of a precedent-setting world tour to a perceptive, refreshing album of internationally-flavoured pop, "Zenyatta Mondatta". The Joe Jackson Band's "Beat Crazy", a vibrant, sharply political look at modern life and romance, had ska, reggae, and other exotic rhythms, if not the frenetic immediacy of earlier work.

Yet despite the prevalence of strong material from new, young artists, there were notable offerings from those who helped shape the music we call rock. The Rolling Stones' "Emotional Rescue" was a major disappointment, predictable and overly calculated. Artists as disparate as the late John Lennon and Brian Ferry of Roxy Music attempted to come to terms with their maturity in years within a rock'n'roll structure, but of such attempts, Pete Townshend's proved strongest and most satisfying.

Rock'n'roll, ska, reggae, punk, technopop, '60s-style dance music, experimentation: all were facets of 1980. What follows is some of the music I found most impressive last year; I feel these artists reached a synthesis of music, theme, and production, and the results have importance for now, and for later on. The selection is, of course, quite subjective, and you're perfectly free to disagree.

BEST ALBUM: The Clash,

"London Calling"

BEST ARTIST OR GROUP: The Clash

BEST SONG: "London Calling"

"London calling, yean, I was there too, / And you know what they said? Well, some of it was true! / London calling, at the top of the dial / And after all this, won't you give me a smile?" (J. Strummer / M. Jones)

With power and panache, with a sense of glory yet a clear perception of a decaying world, The Clash drove into the '80s on the strength of a landmark double-album set. This is at times harsh, loud music, not for the faint of spirit. Yet it is also vital, buoyant, comic, and ultimately compassionate. The songs, energetically produced by Guy Stevens, are eclectic in style. Like a montage of film clips, "London Calling" provides incisive visions of the modern world and the history and myths which shaped it: from the streets to the stage to the office towers, from the Spanish Civil War to Montgomery Clift, from the threat of nuclear disaster to the plight of urban children. No answers are detailed. Yet, in this band and this album, we can see the results of a cooperation which enhances rather than compromises individual strengths. The title song, with its strident guitars and arresting percussion, marches us into the record like a clarion call, on a brilliant lyric delivered with passion and conviction. The final song, "Train in Vain", is one of my choices for best singles. It should become a rock'n'roll standard; it could have been

standard; it could have been recorded in 1956, yet is perfectly relevant to 1980. It wistfully recognizes the pain of loss, yet realizes one must find the will and the strength to carry on.

The Clash consists of Joe Strummer (vocals, guitar), Mick Jones (guitar, vocals), Paul Simonon (bass, vocals), and Topper Headon (percussion). Hats off to the four of them.

HONORABLE MENTIONS (in random order): **BEST ALBUM**—those mentioned in introduction; Pete Townshend, "Empty Glass"; The Jam, "Setting Sons"; PiL, "Second Edition"; Gary Numan, "The Pleasure Principle"; Bruce Springsteen, "The River"; Robert Palmer, "Clues"; The English Beat, "I Just Can't Stop It"

BEST ARTIST/GROUP—Pete Townshend, Gary Numan, Dire Straits (other best bands: The Jam, PiL, XTC, The English Beat, The Pretenders, Martha and the Muffins, Squeeze)

BEST SONG: album only listed if not mentioned elsewhere in article — Bruce Springsteen, "The River"; PiL, "Careering"; The Pretenders, "Talk of the Town" (Times Square); Gary Numan, "We Are Glass" (English single); The Jam, "Going Underground" (English single); Dire Straits, "Tunnel of Love"; Pete Townshend, "Rough Boys"; Billy Joel, "Close to the Borderline" (Glass Houses); The Clash, "Lost in the Supermarket"; Elvis Costello, "New Amsterdam" (Get Happy); The Kinks, "Lola" (One for the Road)

BEST SINGLE: The Clash, "Train in Vain"; Gary Numan, "Cars" (tie)

"Train in Vain", described above, is classical rock'n'roll. "Cars" quite deftly turns one of the great rock'n'roll myths—the car as romance object—on its ear, and is a delightfully ironic song. With the synthesizers soaring over Cedric Sharpley's electrified rock drumming and Gary Numan's strangely infectious vocal, the song makes safety in cars the perfect image for a world which induces paranoia. Both "Cars" and "Train in Vain" have terrific, immediate instrumental introductions. Brilliantly produced, these singles have all the catchiness their genre seems to demand, without sacrificing their integrity as songs.

HONORABLE MENTIONS: **BEST SINGLE**—Robert Palmer, "Johnny and Mary"; The Motors, "Love and Loneliness"; Peter Gabriel, "Games Without Frontiers"; Kate Bush, "Babooshka"; Stevie Wonder, "Master Blaster"; Pete Townshend, "Let My Love Open the Door"; The Police, "Don't Stand So Close to Me"; The Pretenders, "Brass in Pocket"; Squeeze, "Pulling Mussels from a Shell"; Joe Jackson, "The Harder They

Come"; Martha and the Muffins, "Echo Beach"

BEST FEMALE VOCALIST: Chrissie Hynde (The Pretenders)

Some years ago, Chrissie Hynde left Akron, Ohio, for London, England, where for a long time she struggled to put a band together while she watched her friends become famous. Now, she has deservedly achieved her own fame as lead vocalist for a bright new band, The Pretenders. Whether she is being aggressively declarative, as in "Brass in Pocket", or poignantly introspective, as in the lovely "Kid", her sweet, strong, sultry voice is consistently impressive. Her latest song, "Talk of the Town", is her most mature and sensitive work to date, proving that the debut album was a gutsy, emotional framework for great things to come from this talented lady.

HONORABLE MENTION: **BEST FEMALE VOCALIST**—Joan Armatrading, Kate Bush, Pat Benatar, Ellen Foley

BEST MALE VOCALIST: Pete Townshend

Pete Townshend's creative force has made the Who a band which has remained true to rock's primal, youthful directness while also achieving transcendent heights. His latest solo album is brilliant. "Rough Boys" is an anthem; sung with passion and compassion, it demonstrates that a true artist can unite real rock with mature perception. From the breathtaking, vibrant electricity of the keyboard work on "And I Moved" to the refreshing simplicity of "Let My Love Open the Door", this record is captivating, and the lyrics are frequently superb. "Empty Glass" has rough-edged power as well as spiritual insight, and Townshend sings it convincingly.

HONORABLE MENTION: **BEST MALE VOCALIST**—Joe Strummer, Mark Knopfler (Dire Straits), Robert Palmer, Gary Numan, Bruce Springsteen, Peter Gabriel

BEST NEW ACT: Martha and the Muffins

This Canadian band had to go to England to achieve the success it deserved, and its return, with a great debut album in "Metro Music", can only be termed triumphant. The vocals have a nice, sardonic edge, the music is a fine collection of haunting melodies and danceable rockers, and the songs provide a perceptive picture of the declining West. This is urban music for the Western world, performed with intelligence, but never at the expense of intimacy, directness, or, at times, humour.

HONORABLE MENTIONS: **BEST NEW ACT**—The Pretenders, The English Beat, The Demics, Pat Benatar, B.B. Gabor

BEST REGGAE/ RHYTHM AND BLUES ARTIST/ GROUP: The English Beat

continued on page 17

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