

**GOIN'
FOR
THE THROAT.**

the stranglers





The Stranglers come out fighting



IV *Rattus Norvegicus*
The Stranglers
A&M SP 4648

By Glen Fidell

MOST GROUPS TODAY seem to lack the inner spark needed to record a compelling rock & roll album. As a result, the release of such an album would be more precious than Freddie Mercury's royalty check.

Two recent records, however, are quite compelling. Not surprisingly, both are debuts: Television's *Marquee Moon* and the Stranglers' *IV Rattus Norvegicus*. It's a rather quirky pairing, given

the groups' surface similarities but contradictory musical approaches. Both bands are forerunners of the New Wave though neither feels very comfortable within that category. Television opened up New York's CBGB's as a forum for the new young bands that followed; the Stranglers were among the first of England's New Wave to play a major concert hall.

But where Television is cold, pristine and aloof, the Stranglers are manic, hyper and extremely aggressive. Television's Tom Verlaine adapts the prose of the French Romantics he envies; Stranglers' Hugh Cornwell and Jean Jacques Burnel espouse the polemics of the street they so admire. Verlaine is a painter of aural abstractions, a rock & roll impressionist. Cornwell and Burnel have no such pretensions to the world of art. They are rock pugilists, always on the offensive with their blunt-edged perceptions. Nothing could be more blunt than their new album.

Rock pugilists (from left): Burnel, Greenfield, Black and Cornwell

ROLLING STONE
PHOTOGRAPH BY [unreadable]

Disc Derby Boots Some Long Shots Home

BY ROBERT HILBURN



The Stranglers' "Rattus Norvegicus" (A&M SP 4748)
—Like most of the "new wave" sounds, the Stranglers' music is sometimes crude, clumsy and excessive. But there's a wryly appealing sense of individuality and purpose in the instrumental textures. The result is a haunting, compelling edge on several tracks. The dark, eerie music blends some light, airy tones with harsh, strident ones for a multilayered impact. A big hit in England, where it has been in the Top 10 for weeks. For the adventurous. **YES.**

THE DERBY WINNERS

WIN: The Jam

PLACE: Donna Summer

SHOW: The Stranglers

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Los Angeles Times

ROBERT HILBURN

July 16, 1977

"NEW WAVE" ARRIVAL: The release this week by A&M of the Stranglers' "Rattus Norvegicus" album is noteworthy both as the introduction of a highly promising new band and as the first British punk-rock/new wave LP to be issued on an American label. Island has already distributed an Eddie & the Hot Rods album here, but that group isn't as closely identified in England with the punk-rock movement.

Though albums by the Damned and the Clash beat the Stranglers to the British charts, "Rattus" has been by far the most successful new wave release there. It has been a solid Top 10 fixture since mid-May. The quartet's style is not as kinetic or sociologically explosive as the more publicized Sex Pistols, but it has undercurrents that are both appealing and intriguing. (The Sex Pistols haven't released an LP yet in England.) Part of the media fascination with the Stranglers in England is in defining its teasingly elusive, provocative stance.

The opening "Sometimes" mixes the keyboard-dominated, instrumental thrust of the Doors' "Light My Fire" with the surly, aggressive male chauvinism of the Rolling Stones' "Under My Thumb": "Someday I'm gonna smack your face . . . /Somebody's gonna call your bluff/Somebody's gonna treat you rough." There are also touches of everything from Lou Reed and David Bowie to Jimi Hendrix and the Stooges.

The music is sometimes crude, clumsy and excessive. But there's a wryly appealing sense of individuality and purpose in the instrumental textures that give the band a haunting, compelling edge. Somewhat like New York's Television, the Stranglers' music blends some light, airy tones with harsh, strident ones for a strikingly effective, multilayered impact.

When the band backs its instrumental caginess with accessible themes and convincing vocals, it comes up with

such marvelously high-yielding efforts as "London Lady," "Hanging Around" and "Get a Grip on Yourself."

Because its themes aren't relentlessly political or devoted solely to expressing the sentiments of Britain's disaffected, working-class youth, the Stranglers are better termed a new wave than a punk-rock group. But the group—Hugh Cornwell, Jean-Jacques Burnel, Jet Black and Dave Greenfield—have benefited from the punk-rock movement, which forced English record executives to open the doors last year to fresher, younger, rawer bands.

"It's given us a lot of recognition which, without it, might have come a bit later on," Cornwell, 27, told a Melody Maker reporter in England. "We were going around record companies with tapes 18 months ago and they were saying, 'We're not signing anyone for a year at least. Come back in a year' . . . What the punk scene has made them do is turn around and see what's right under their noses."

Like most new wave musicians, Cornwell, 27, is outspoken in his criticism of '70s rock. He identifies most with the rawer, more intense '60s approach. "The whole thing died when Hendrix died," he said. "I remember I was coming home from a party that night and I saw a newspaper saying 'Hendrix Dies.' I took it out of the stand 'cause that, to me, was like the death of a lot of things. And I was right. A lot of spirit in the music died . . . Hardly anything happened until last year."

It's a view shared generally by various American new wave bands, including Tom Petty, Television, the Ramones and Mink DeVille. The question facing these acts is whether their driving, raw-edged approach will be able to turn audiences away from the smoother, more conservative bands of today. The success of the Sex Pistols' singles and the Stranglers' album in England is encouraging to New Wave fans. We ought to learn a lot about how American audience respond in coming months.

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Albums

GRIPPING STRANGLERS

THE STRANGLERS:
'Rattus Norvegicus IV'
(United Artists UAG
S0045)

How three blind mice musicians are led Indian file style into a drainy abyss by the loneliness - is such a - drag voice of Hugh Cornwell. Hot rats in every way. See, the Stranglers have this cold cream foundation of sound with Cornwell's stormtrooper tones pushing up through the white mass like a sore. He's the street corner spiv with a suitcase, whispering in your ear "I've got something 'ere that might interest you" - viz 'Peaches', a package holiday song. But what really sets them apart from the other new rave bands is Dave Greenfield's slicing keyboard work - 'Sometimes', 'Goodbye Toulouse' with its Pink Floyd 'Welcome To The Machine' fade-out and 'Grip', the single,

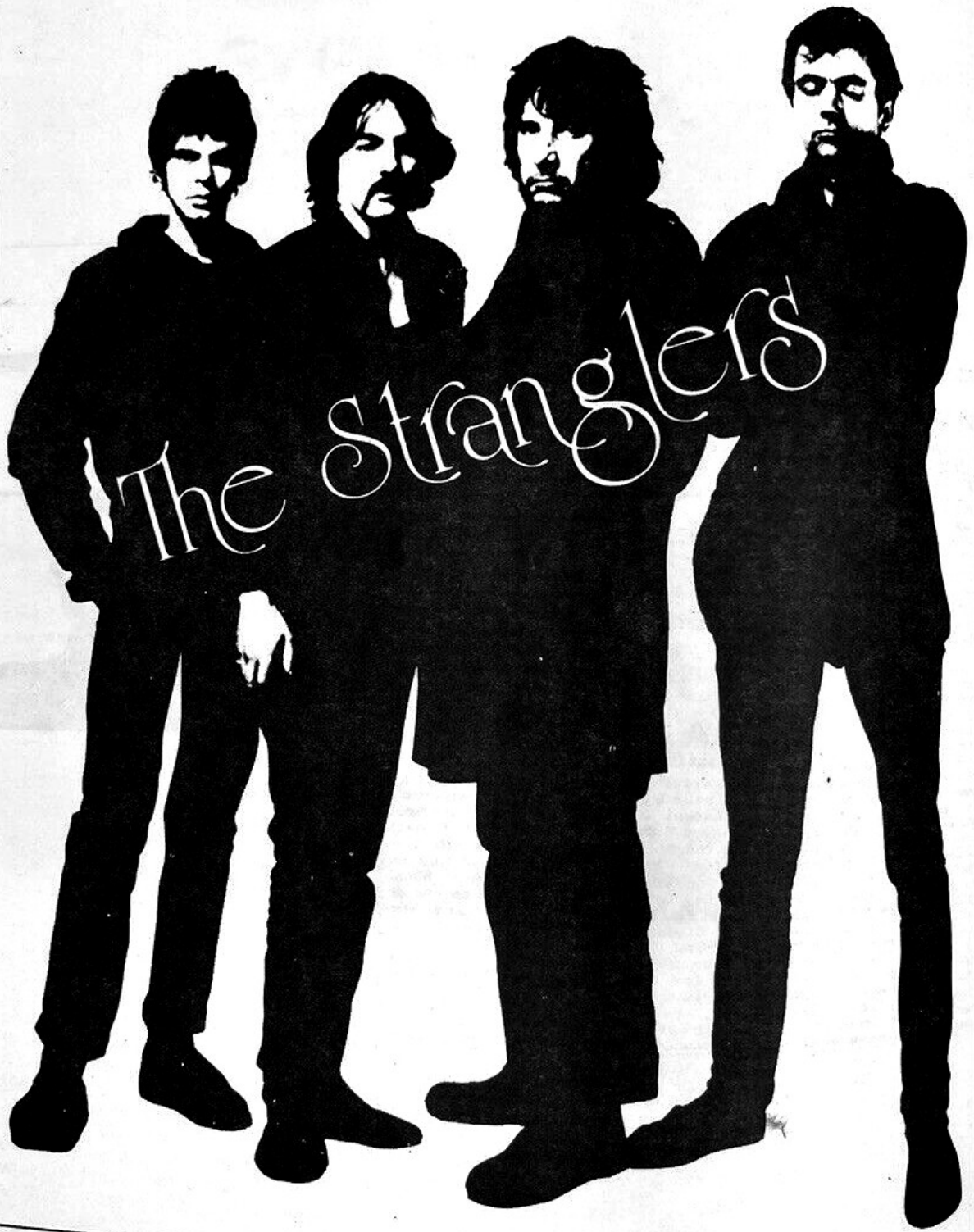


THE STRANGLERS: call cream foundation of sound

Hence a Velvet Underground with balls tag - an understatement. Bassist Jean Jaques Burnel, noted for his rodent-like stage movements, has a pretty fair voice himself, exemplified on 'London Lady', and Jet Black is a powerhouse drummer. Cornwell's guitar work occasionally sounds like Television's Tom Verlaine - on 'Princess In The Streets', the best track on an initial

hearing, and 'Hanging Around' - and that can't be bad. Oh and the final 'Down In The Sewer' suite, always effective live, comes off well on vinyl. Criticisms? Shoddy production on one or two tracks and the annoying inclusion of a 'limited edition' single, one side of which was recorded live at the Nashville. But apart from that + + + + Barry Cain.

JULY 28-AUG. 3



SHMOOZIN

A STICKER SLAPPED ACROSS THE Stranglers' Debut A&M LP, titled **Rattus Norvegicus**, screams "Warning: This album has not been edited for family listening (does anyone do that anymore?). The tune, 'Ugly' contains explicit language. Beware!" If that's an indication of what's to follow, let's hope you're all over eighteen.

For the record, criminal or otherwise (check-out photo), The Stranglers consist of Hugh Cornwell, Jean-Jacques Burnel, Jet Black, and Dave Greenfield. Nowadays every city has their strangler, so naturally.

The breakthrough for the Stranglers came when they supported Patti Smith on her May '76 tour of England and were spotted by Andrew Lauder, A&R Head of United Artists Records who perceived an energy and excitement in them that contrasted with the bland predictability of most current music. By October the band was signed to U.A. in Britain, and by January 1977 they were recording their first album in London, with Martin Rushent producing.

The Stranglers' refusal to compromise or play it safe presented problems for traditional promotion methods;

SHAKE, THROTTLE & ROLL

Britain's got to get into the act. After only ten days The Stranglers leaped to number four on the English charts, with a sound that's so unique it's guaranteed to ignite bored audiences and disorient reviewers.

So far they have been labeled by the press as everything from: Roxy, Animals, Seeds, Doors to a seventies psychedelic orchestra ^{chest} power. The only moniker missing is cock-a- poo ^{k-a-} Melody Maker says, "The band's appeal is awful, ^{is aw} Low Drama Surban but some people find them irresistible."

Elsewhere, they've been tagged a "punk rock" band by the same species of critic who thought the Rolling Stones were a part of the "Liverpool Sound."

"Nothing has changed for so long," Hugh Cornwell notes, "even we have to be compared with somebody ten years ago... music is what you make of it. An artist reflects the environment he's in, if he's committed enough he may even want to change it." Or as Jean-Jacques Burnel states, "What's the point in making little noises, you might as well use a vibrator. We were all told that rock was supposed to make you think about things, but it hasn't lately, it's just there to titillate...it's gotta be energetic, it's gotta rock, it's gotta be economic, and it's gotta be aware. And the trouble with rock in the last few years is that it's become verbose, self-indulgent, and safe."

During the two years they've been together, the Stranglers have shown little tolerance for indecisive audiences; they've emptied as many halls as they've filled. The Stranglers played 184 gigs in 1976, and the majority were to hostile crowds in less than prestigious venues. At a "Young Conservatives" dance in Purly, England, 380 people out of 400 walked out; at Bangor University the audience of rugby footballers rioted: even at the supposedly "hip" Dingwall's Club the Stranglers' style provoked 53 letters of complaint. None of which daunted the group. "We knew it would take time," Jean-Jacques Burnel grins, "it always does when you're doing something new."

the BBC flatly refused to play their songs during daylight (shades of Dracula?), while local authorities refused to let them play in more than 13 major cities (Leeds found them "Undesirable," Nottingham termed them "unsuitable," while other towns did "not wish to be involved with the sort of uproar surrounding groups of this kind") and used phrases of usual bureaucratic disapproval that finally made you think that there really might be something behind all those StonesWhoDoors comparisons.

Despite all the obstacles and amputations, the Stranglers persevered, and **Rattus Norvegicus** crashed right onto the album chart at number four, while the single, "Peaches", zoomed into the top twenty.

The Stranglers had no intention of letting anything

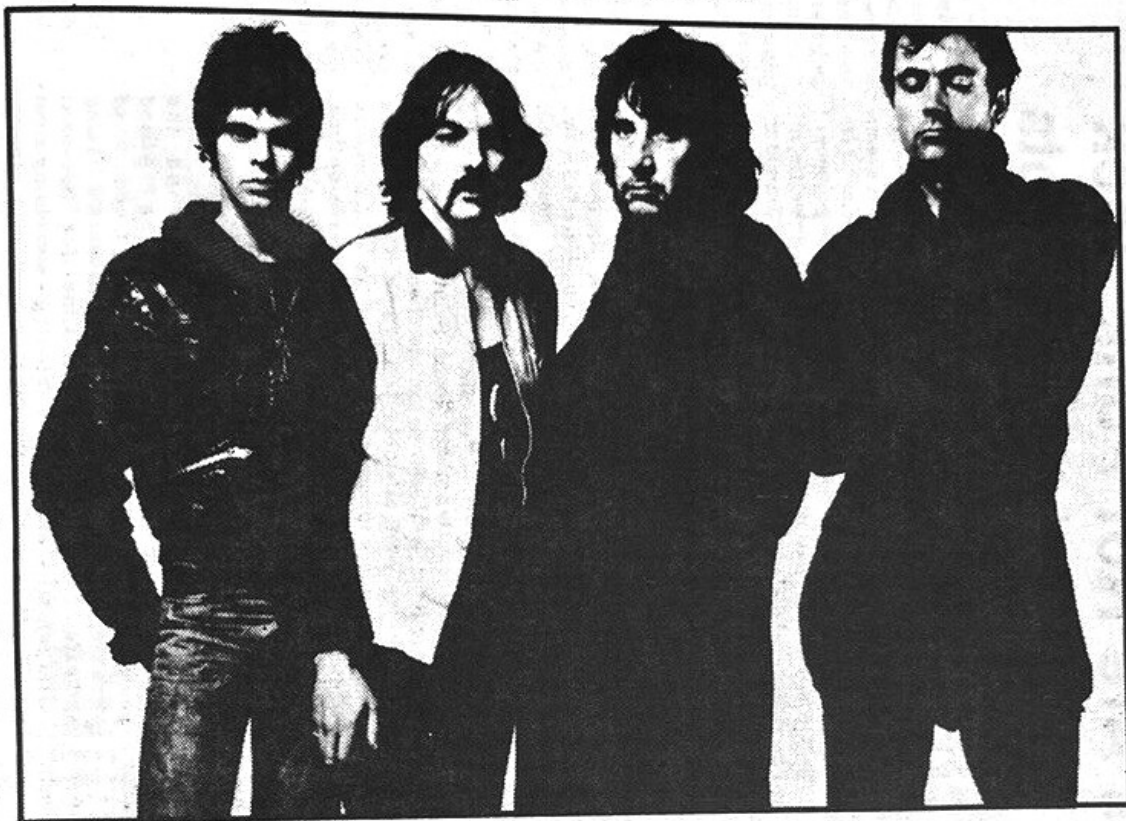
"We were all told that rock was supposed to make you think about things, but it hasn't lately, it's just there to titillate," explains Jean-Jacques Burnel.

as trifling as the Atlantic Ocean stand between them and us; so while the band was still in the studio, rough copies of their tapes were mailed out to all major U.S. labels, including John Anthony at A&M. John (who's produced Genesis, Queen, The Tubes and Ace among many others) was immediately smitten with the Stranglers, and within weeks they were signed to A&M for American distribution, with promises of a tour before Xmas. How about a Strangler in your stocking?

According to the Stranglers' press release, "If you can hear the Stranglers, then a rare gothic intensity awaits you." Well, all we can say to that is, Victoria Holt eat your heart out!!! †

ED. NOTE: Thanks to Bob Garcia at A&M Records for helping us put together our piece on The Stranglers.

The Stranglers are the third of England's New Wave bands to make the charts, and more importantly, the first to release an album in the United States.



The Stranglers

of economic depression and social turbulence, while here in America we're still deciding what the issues are while getting over the '60s with a larger degree of passivity.

"We've done more gigs than all the other new wave punk bands put together," he continues. "Over 400 gigs in three years and you can reach a lot of people in that time. Over the last year it's been audiences of at least 500 people and they all go out and buy records." Similar devotion has paid off for the aforementioned Sex Pistols who can sell phenomenal amounts of records without radio support and lately even without touring. All in all, an unlikely marketing technique that won't be duplicated in this country. In America the thrill is gone in favor of a stricter business approach and more reliable methods of promoting records.

There's a certain amount of rivalry between the top New Wave bands, fueled primarily by Johnny Rotten's frequent outbursts concerning the other band's "selling out" to record companies. Cornwell remains unruffled: "If you want to maintain an elitist position as a band, then you've got to slag everyone else off but I'm not into that personally and I think it's crazy that all the bands are slagging each other off. That's exactly what the established order wants...It should be a complete unified thing."

What these bands and their followers do have in common is a solid disaffection for the situation in Britain today and the manner in which the government has been controlling the country. It's a volatile political climate with union disputes that could wreak further havoc upon

an already shaken economy.

"The press are making it worse," adds Cornwell, "especially music-wise. They feel it's threatening them, like Marcus Lipton one of those Members of Parliament said, 'If punk rock is going to destroy our established order then we should wipe it out.' And that's the type of talk that Hitler came out with and that's the type of talk that isn't going to kill it at all, it's gonna make it even stronger cause straight people are reading that sort of thing and they're saying 'Whatever punk rock is, it doesn't warrant that type of talk. What type of country are we living in? Has anyone got any free speech really. Okay, I don't like the Sex Pistols swearing but if they want to make that record it should be played.' Freedom of speech. Suddenly people are realizing in England they haven't got it anymore."

The Stranglers are going to continue their challenge on America with the unusual move of releasing a second album in September just three months after the release of *IV Rattus Norvegicus* and at least three months before they'll play to American audiences. They are signed to A & M, the label that had the Sex Pistols for three days before they deemed the association unworthy, precipitated by the Pistols behavior. As for their stage show, it may appear a bit too reserved. "We don't have any tricks. We don't have any props or flashing lights or anything," reveals Cornwell. "We're very image-less. We're very unconscious of image, like we believe image is a falsity."

Punk Not All Junk

By JOEL McNALLY
of The Journal Staff

THE PLAN WAS perfect. I would take care of this punk rock stuff for once and for all. I would find the most disgusting, the most repulsive, the most absolutely revolting new British rock band regurgitating its material all over the music scene today.

The Stranglers looked just great. The album was "TV Rattus Norvegicus" (A & M SP4648). On one side of the album cover was a fat, slimy rat. On the other was the band itself looking only slightly less loathsome. Goodie.

The songs themselves promised to be absolutely nauseating. They had titles like "Ugly" and "Down in the Sewer." Oh boy. I could hardly wait.

The opening number was just the ticket. Called "Sometimes," it was right out of the old National Inquirer He Ripped Her Heart Out and Ate It School of Social Relationships. Love is a punch in the face. "Someday I'm gonna smack your face . . . Beat you honey 'til you drop."

The lines aren't sung. They are hissed and spat and moaned. But surprisingly the music behind them was not the undisciplined blaring noise that is associated with punks. It was carried by a driving bass and excellent keyboard work all around the edges.

The band moved on to another tribute to a young lady. "You're so stooopid. Fetid

brainwaves." And then another which delicately refers to a young woman as "a piece of meat." I was beginning to get the idea that there wasn't an Equal Rights Amendment in Britain.

I was also starting to notice that the same controlled driving rhythm continued song after song and that I liked it. I really did. They can't do this! Those punks!

I knew I was hooked when I ran to the closet and started rummaging around for a black leather jacket. All I could find was one glove. It was kind of small since it was my wife's, but at least it was black. I unbuttoned my rugby shirt all the way.

I wouldn't want you to think that contempt for women is the only theme of my new favorite band, The Stranglers. On "Ugly," there is remorse. ("I shouldn't have strangled her . . ."). On the philosophical "Down in the Sewer" there is the ageless uplifting moral of making the best of a bad situation. ("Gonna make love to a water rat or two.") Quite appropriately, that song doesn't just end. It flushes.

It's hard to explain. The songs are just offensive enough. The menacing vocals of Hugh Cornwell quickly become fun. But most of all the music, Dave Greenfield's keyboards, Jean-Jacques Burnel's bass and the drums of — are you ready? — Jet Black combine for one of the most infectious driving rock sounds of any new band around.

The Stranglers have been compared to the Doors,

which isn't bad. They also have a consistent sound that is theirs alone. Whatever they are, they are not punk junk.

I tried to explain this to my wife when she caught me swaggering around looking for somebody to spit on. She made me take off her glove and sent me to my room.

• • •

Windsong is a record label started by John Denver to give new artists a chance. For Roger Miller, it is another chance.

A decade ago, Miller was one of those creative talents that couldn't miss. One after another, he would put out slightly whacked out songs about roller skating in a buffalo herd or giving up a big chance at Omaha to remain a Kansas City star. Then he did miss and he's been missing in action ever since.

"Off The Wall" (Windsong BHL-1-2337) misses quite a bit too, but it contains several good songs and a few more good lines.

"Some People Make It" and "Ain't Gonna Work No More" are class conscious songs for the workers who suck lemon while bosses suck lemonade. The song about walking off the job is to be valued for the line: "I'm gonna leave 'em with a two word note."

SCENE Spotlight

Punks, make way for The Stranglers

"We concentrate on the ugly side of life because we think people should be kicked into seeing it."

by Cliff Michaluk

Seated in his Chicago hotel room, The Stranglers' Hugh Cornwell stated that he was less than enamored with the rounds of interviews and appearances he and drummer Jet Black are currently undergoing in this country as a publicity prelude to their band's debut U.S. tour (now scheduled for the beginning of '78). Tall and lanky in an Anthony Perkins mold — the type which always seems to get second glances from policemen — Cornwell quickly made his straightforward manner of thinking known:

"This is all really boring; I'd rather be doing it than talking about it. It's more tiring than doing a tour; we always have to get up early in the morning, whereas after a gig, we can sleep later. It's exhausting doing gigs, but at least you can rest afterwards."

As unsavory as Cornwell's immediate surroundings may have seemed to him (although some drink and feminine companionship at a reception later that day seemed to boost his spirits), the fact remains that he's played a major part — as lead singer, guitarist and songwriter — in creating a distinctive, uncompromising group style which fairly demands to be publicized. The Stranglers' debut album, IV RATTUS NORVEGICUS, has given American listeners the first taste of a band which has shot to the forefront, both in status and publicity, of England's new wave rockers.

Even though Cornwell, Black, Jean Jacques Burnel (bass) and Dave Greenfield (keyboards) have been automatically lumped in with the likes of The Sex Pistols and The Damned in their native land (and don't go out of their way to discourage the categorization), there are significant differences between The Stranglers and most of the rest of the safety pin set. For one thing, Cornwell and company are all in their mid-20's (Black is rumored to be even older) and middle-class oriented (Cornwell holds a degree in biochemistry and Burnel one in history), while working within an idiom dominated by kids in their late teens and early 20's from blue-collar backgrounds. The Stranglers' music functions at a level of maturity and versatility almost unparalleled among overseas new wavers, with multifaceted concepts and structures spewed out at a thus-far dizzying pace. The band is surprisingly prolific for its age of three years, and even that puts them months ahead of most

of their brethren. In fact, Cornwell has claimed that a few of his band's ideas have turned up in the styles of numerous punk musicians who used to be regular Stranglers followers in pre-gigging days.

Cornwell claims that the band has taken their top 10 LP and singles status (for "Peaches") overseas in stride, despite the brief time in which it's all been done.

"We're not overnight successes at all; it might seem like it, but we're not," he said. "We've done hundreds of gigs in three years, starved, we've been through all that shit."

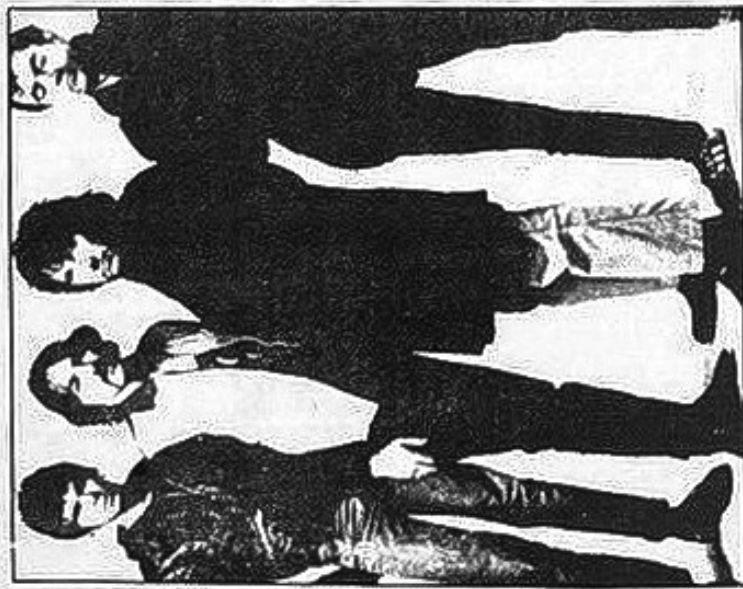
The group is still only a year or so removed from engagements where only a small handful of the original turnout saw the show all the way through, but they also took these trials in stride, Cornwell explaining it thusly:

"When we first started playing our own music, we did it very restrained, almost apologetically, and we found that people didn't respect us for it. So we thought that if we really believed in it we've got to stick by it, force it down people's throats if necessary, and we did. Our audiences were forced in the beginning. Some didn't like it and left, but those who stayed grew and grew. It's a thing of everyone gets what's coming to them in the end, and we knew you couldn't keep a good thing down, so we stuck with what we believed in."

Even to this day, however, The Stranglers are discovering that a reputation is tough to shake. Their most recent British tour saw 12 out of a possible 40 dates cancelled by bans from local right wing politicians, a situation Cornwell sees as both ridiculous and ultimately damaging to the very traditions these councilors are desperately trying to preserve.

"They see us as a subversive influence on the nation's youth," Cornwell said. "The more they make a fuss about it, the more the whole protest grows. If they really wanted to stop it, they should just let it be, let things die under their own steam. It's the best possible publicity, because now it's generating reactions from the silent majority. A record or group gets banned and some of them say 'I hate the sound, but why is it banned? They've got a right to be heard.' The kids are testing these basic rights, and everyone is discovering they don't stand up to the test. It's always good to hear people raising questions."

cont...



Surely a major contributing factor to The Stranglers' outlaw image is the subject matter of much of their lyrics. Normally bleak and graphic to an extent unseen in rock since the heyday of The Velvet Underground, the band's motivation for this particular bent is quite clear to them.

"As in other folk art, we function as a mirror on the community," Cornwell stated. "They look at it at themselves through it, and maybe they see good things or ugly things. We concentrate on the ugly side of life because we think people should be kicked into seeing it."

The band's method of putting down these statements totally clashes with the Paul Simon school of months of agonizing over one's lyrical pearls. "The time it takes to write lyrics is the time it takes to write them down," Cornwell stated. "They may be formulating in our heads for months, but it takes the right set of circumstances to bring them out. It's like having a shit. The best ones are quick, while the slow, agonizing ones are a lot of energy wasted and never really satisfying."

The Stranglers' attitudes on recording time are equally to the point. Their first album was recorded in five days at a cost of around \$5000, figures which the music industry hasn't regularly seen since the period of the two bands most compared to this foursome, The Velvet and The Doors. The Stranglers' belief in the method of working out new material at live gigs instead of crafting it in the studio — like most of today's rockers — contributes, they feel, to efficiency and a work ethic which helps them maintain a sense of normalcy within a very non-normal business.

As Cornwell put it, "We don't want to get our realities screwed up. We don't want to end up like Presley, carried away into a complete fantasy world."

Perhaps as a reflection of this belief, Cornwell resides in London with friends who have nothing to do with his rock lifestyle, the vocalist feeling that it's useful as a means of balancing out his mixed-up, shoo-kup profession.

Future plans for The Stranglers include, of course, a U.S. tour, on which they're holding back because "we don't want to come over here prematurely if no one's heard us. The album's only been out about a month, with another one out very soon. Then we'll know where our strong areas are."

The follow-up to IV RATTUS NORVEGICUS is already recorded and should be out in the fall (see what I mean about efficiency?), and Cornwell promised it to be even lower than the often-raunchy first effort, with titles such as "Nubiles" and "I Feel Like A Wog", seemingly ready to further cement their reputation as rock's champion of the unminced word. A tentative battle plan of eight albums over the next five years could leave quite a legacy indeed for this merger of the old and the new in rock.

"There's plenty left to do," Cornwell summarized. "We may be older chronologically, but we're very young as a band."

Record Previews

Hitting the Big Time



THE STRANGLERS: "IV (Rattus Norvegicus)" (A&M SP-4448). This is punk rock of the most purely outrageous variety. Vocalist Hugh Cornwell sings in a razor blade growl, and the band plays the usual (for punk rock) minimally competent Animals-Doors hodgepodge, a little less funky than the former antecedent, a little less flowery than the latter. The lyrics, however, are the real hoot: women are worse than vixens, they are actually killers, ranking third to rats and men in their unbecomingly viciousness. Must be heard to be believed; the group that will make the Ramones seem genteel.

Dave Marsh
Rolling Stone

"... the group that will make the Ramones seem genteel."

