



London Calling (song)



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"**London Calling**" is a song by the British punk rock band the Clash. It was released as a single from the band's 1979 double album *London Calling*. This apocalyptic, politically charged rant features the band's post-punk sound, electric guitar and vocals.^{[1][2][3]}

"London Calling"

Song

B-side "Armagideon Time"

Writing and recording

The song was written by Joe Strummer and Mick Jones. The title alludes to the BBC World Service's station identification: "This is London calling ...", which was used during World War II, often in broadcasts to occupied countries.^{[1][4][5]}

The lyrics reflect the concern felt by Strummer about world events with the reference to "a nuclear error" to the incident at Three Mile Island, which occurred earlier in 1979. Joe Strummer has said: "We felt that we were struggling about to slip down a slope or something, grasping with our fingernails. And there was no one there to help us."^{[3][4]}

The line "*London is drowning / And I live by the river*" comes from concerns that if the River Thames flooded, most of central London would drown, something that led to the construction of the Thames Barrier.^{[3][4]} Strummer's concern for police brutality is evident through the lines "*We ain't got no swing / Except for the ring of that truncheon thing*" as the Metropolitan Police at the time had a truncheon as standard issued equipment. Social criticism also features through references to the effects of casual drug taking: "*We ain't got no high / Except for that one with the yellowy eyes*".

The lyrics also reflect desperation of the band's situation in 1979 struggling with high debt, without management and arguing with their record label over whether the *London Calling* album should be a single- or double-album. The lines referring to "*Now don't look to us / Phoney Beatlemania has bitten the dust*" reflects the concerns of the band over its situation after the punk rock boom in England had ended in 1977.

The song fades out with a Morse code signal spelling S-O-S,^[6] reiterating the earlier urgent sense of emergency, and further alluding to drowning in the river.

"London Calling" was recorded at Wessex Studios located in a former church hall in Highbury in North London. This studio had already proved to be a popular location with the

The Clash "London Calling" (1979)



0:20

30-second sample—with applied 3-second fadein and 3-second fadeout—of

Sex Pistols, the Pretenders and the Tom Robinson band. The single was produced by Guy Stevens and engineered by Bill Price.^{[1][4]}

"London Calling" taken from *London Calling*.

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Personnel

"London Calling"

- Joe Strummer – lead vocals, rhythm guitar
- Mick Jones – backing vocals, lead guitars
- Paul Simonon – backing vocals, bass guitar
- Topper Headon – drums

"Armagideon Time"

- Joe Strummer – lead vocals, piano
- Mick Jones – guitars, harmonica, sound effects
- Paul Simonon – bass guitar
- Topper Headon – drums
- Mickey Gallagher – organ

Artwork

Continuing the theme of the retro Elvis Presley-inspired *London Calling* LP cover, the single sleeve (front and back) is based on old Columbia 78 rpm sleeves. The cover artwork was designed by Ray Lowry and is identical to the Columbia sleeve with the exception of changing the blank 78 covers that the young teenage cover models are listening to classic Rock and Punk LP sleeves. From left to right they are, the Beatles' debut *Please Please Me*, *Never Mind the Bollocks*, *Here's the Sex Pistols*, *The Rolling Stones* debut, *The Clash* debut, Bob Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* and finally the Elvis Presley debut LP.

Reissues

The single has several issues, all with different covers. Four are from 1979 (catalogue number: 8087; S CBS 8087; 128087; S CBS 8087). In 1988, a special limited edition boxed set was released, containing three tracks, "London Calling" on side one, "Brand New Cadillac" and "Rudie Can't Fail" on side two, a poster and two badges (catalogue number: CLASH B2). Two were released by CBS Records in 1991 (catalogue number: 656946; 31-656946-22) both with "Brand New Cadillac" on the B-side, the second one has an additional track on side two "Return to Brixton (Jeremy Healy 7" Remix)" (see the table below).

In 2012, on the occasion of the International Record Store Day, a limited edition 7" was released, with a new mix of the song by Mick Jones, and an instrumental version on the B-side. ^[7]

Year	B-side	Format	Label	Country	Note
1979	"Armagideon Time"	45 rpm 7" vinyl	CBS S CBS 8087	UK	Released on 7 December 1979; No. 2 for 1979, No. 37 overall.
1979	1. "Justice Tonight" (Version) 2. "Kick It Over" (Version)	45 rpm 12" vinyl	CBS 128087	UK	A-side: 1. "London Calling" 2. "Armagideon Time".
1979	"Armagideon Time"	45 rpm 7" vinyl	CBS S CBS 8087	UK	Alternate cover.
1979	"Armagideon Time"	45 rpm 7" vinyl	CBS 8087	NL	—
1980	"London Calling"	45 rpm 7" vinyl	Epic 50851	USA	A-side: " <u>Train in Vain (Stand by Me)</u> ". Released on 12 February 1980.
1988	1. "Brand New Cadillac" 2. "Rudie Can't Fail"	45 rpm 7" vinyl	CBS CLASH 2	UK	Boxed Set; Limited Edition
1991	1. "Brand New Cadillac" 2. "Return to Brixton" (Jeremy Healy 7" Remix)	45 rpm 12" vinyl	Columbia 31-656946-22	UK	—
1991	" <u>Brand New Cadillac</u> "	45 rpm 7" vinyl	Columbia 656946	UK	—
2012	"London Calling (2012 instrumental)"	45 rpm 7" vinyl	Columbia 88691959247	USA	New 2012 mix by Mick Jones and Bill Price. Released 2012/04/21

Chart success and critical reception

"London Calling" was released as the only single in the UK from the album and reached No. 11 in the charts in December 1979,^[2] becoming at once the band's highest charting single until "Should I Stay or Should I Go" hit No. 1 ten years later. The song did not make the US charts, as "Train in Vain" was released as a single and broke the band in the US, reaching No. 23 on the pop charts.

BBC Radio One DJ Annie Nightingale made a bet with Strummer that *London Calling* would make the UK Top 10 without them appearing on *Top of the Pops*, the stake being a Cadillac. When the record peaked at number 11, Nightingale was saved by a listener who donated a Cadillac. The Cadillac was subsequently auctioned to raise funds for the recession hit steel town of Corby.^[8]

"London Calling" was the first Clash song to chart elsewhere in the world, reaching the top 40 in Australia. The success of the single and album was greatly helped by the music video shot by Don Letts showing the band playing the song on a boat (Festival Pier), next to Albert Bridge on the south side of the Thames, Battersea Park in a cold and rainy night at the beginning of December 1979.^{[9][10]}

The single fell off the charts after 10 weeks, but later re-entered the chart twice, spending a total of fifteen non-consecutive weeks on the UK Singles Chart.

Over the years, "London Calling" has become regarded by many critics as the band's finest. In 2004, *Rolling Stone* rated the song as No. 15 in its list of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time,^{[11][12]} the highest position of the band and of any punk rock song. In 1989, the magazine also rated the album of the same name as the best album of the 1980s—although it was released in late 1979 in Britain, it came out in January 1980 in the USA.

"London Calling" was also ranked No. 42 on VH1's "100 Greatest Songs of the '80s". It was erroneously listed as being released in 1982, when it was fact released in 1979.^[13] It is one of The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's 500 Songs that Shaped Rock and Roll.^[14]

Notable appearances and covers

The Clash turned down a request from British Telecom to use the song for an advertising campaign in the early 1990s.^[15] In 2002, the band incurred criticism when they sold the rights to Jaguar for a car advertisement. In an interview posted on his website, Strummer explained the reasons for the deal. "Yeah. I agreed to that. We get hundreds of requests for that and turn 'em all down. But I just thought Jaguar ... yeah. If you're in a group and you make it together, then everybody deserves something. Especially twenty-odd years after the fact."^[16]

The song was used in the 2000 film *Billy Elliot* during a scene where riot police and striking coal miners clashed.

The song was used in the 2002 James Bond film *Die Another Day* to introduce the film's primary antagonist, Gustav Graves.

The song was used in the American TV Series *Friends* in the episode "The One with Ross's Wedding".

The song was used for a 2012 British Airways advert, picturing a jet aeroplane taxiing through the streets of London passing numerous landmarks and parking outside the Olympic Stadium.^[17]

Joe Strummer later became a DJ for the BBC World Service, on a programme called "Joe Strummer's London Calling".^[18]

The song was performed live twice by Bob Dylan during his November 2005 residency at London's Brixton Academy - a venue also linked with many classic Clash and Joe Strummer concerts.^{[19][20]}

The song has also been adopted by English football club Arsenal as an opening anthem upon game days at their Emirates Stadium.^[21]

Charts

Rel. <div></div>	Year	Chart	Peak Position
1st	1979	UK (Official Charts Company) ^[22]	11
	1980	Irish Singles Chart ^[23]	16
	1980	New Zealand (Recorded Music NZ) ^[24]	23
	1980	US <i>Billboard</i> Hot Dance Club Play	30
	1980	Australia (Kent Music Report) ^[25]	28
2nd	1988	UK (Official Charts Company) ^[22]	46
3rd	1991	Irish Singles Chart ^[23]	18
	1991	Sweden (Sverigetopplistan) ^[26]	30
	1991	UK (Official Charts Company) ^[22]	64

See also

- List of anti-war songs

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Notes

- Gilbert 2005, pp. 233, 235, 238, 257, 260, 267.
- . However, this song does not feature any kind of Reggae basslines which they have used in the past to great effect. "BBC - Radio 2 - Sold On Song - Brits25 - London Calling" (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/radio2/soldonsong/whatson/londoncalling.shtml>) (SHTML). *Radio 2, Sold On Song*. bbc.co.uk. Retrieved 31 December 2007. {{cite web}}: Check |url= value (help)
 - "Taken from the Clash's stunning 1979 double album *London Calling*, the single showcased the band's trademark fusion of reggae bass lines with punk guitar and vocals."
 - "Reaching number eleven in December 1979, the song was the only track to be released as a single from their acclaimed London Calling album."

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External links

- Template:MetroLyrics song
- "Anatomy of a Song" by *The Wall Street Journal* (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323407104579037083846165414>)

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