

*excerpts from the*

**P R E F A C E**

*by Penny Rimbaud*

IF TWENTY-SIX YEARS SOUNDS LIKE A LONG TIME, OVER A quarter of a century sounds more like an eternity, but either way, that's how long ago it is since Steve Ignorant and myself started messing around with ideas which very quickly developed into a band. In those days Steve, who was young and working-class, was mildly bored, while I, who was older and middle-class, was very angry. Apart from our ages, nothing much has changed, but in the interim we created Crass and since then have suffered the consequences. It seems to me that anything involving more than two people and which sustains itself for more than two days stands in grave danger of becoming an institution, and Crass was no exception. When eventually we had expanded to become a full band, we gave ourselves a sell-by date; we'd shut down in 1984, which, Big Brother or no, gave us seven years to change the world, and the rest of our lives to de-institutionalise ourselves. I'm still trying, although just recently I've gone full circle and got back into world changing. I'll bet you've noticed the difference.

[...]

Crass were a diverse group of artists, writers, film-makers, musicians, activists and drop-outs sharing a communal lifestyle deep in the Essex countryside. Whereas Rotten's call for 'Anarchy in the UK' had been little more than a hollow nihilist groan (and where's my percentage?), to us it represented a battlecry. For over a decade the various members of what became known as Crass had been involved in exactly the free-thinking anti-commercial ideology the McLaren clique were now attempting to exploit as a commodity. We believed that you could no more be a socialist and signed to CBS

(The Clash) than you could be an anarchist signed to EMI (The Pistols) and we set out to prove the point. Having been on the road for some time, appearing at cost price or below, we formed our own collectively run record label to promote ideas and to undermine the stranglehold that the major labels had both creatively and commercially over 'signed' (read 'captive') artists. Of the hundred or so artists that were released on our label, Crass Records, not one was 'signed', no paper-work was worked upon and no-one was expected to do anything but their best. The whole operation worked on trust and co-operation and without exception it was successful.

Selling records at under half the price of the majors, we demonstrated that huge profits were not necessary (unless you hankered after a Mercedes, a pad in California and needed to support a bad habit). The DIY ethic behind Crass was one which inspired untold numbers of activists. We weren't attempting to sell anything, we were seeking to share our ideas and any small profits that we might accumulate with as many like-minded people as possible. The limo-style exclusivity demonstrated by the so-called punk elite was an anathema to us: we were our own band, own roadies, own management, own PR and own label. The ideas that we promoted (pacifism, vegetarianism, anarchism, feminism, environmentalism, activism) were heartfelt and considered, and, like the Internet now, posed a major threat to established music business practises. No wonder then that we were lambasted by the lackey music press. No wonder that HMV banned our records or that the BBC black-listed them. No wonder that when our records were outselling any other band in the UK they did not appear in the charts.

Crass' effects will not be found within the confines of rock 'n' roll history (from which we have largely been written out), but in the genuinely autonomous movement that we inspired. Without Crass, punk would have died the death of all pop music fads; Rotten's was not a 'false' promise because it was no promise at all. Socially, The

Pistols contributed nothing but loud-mouthed cynicism, whereas we succeeded in creating a meaningful political dialogue. That is our legacy, which is a long way from the regressive kitsch nostalgia of punk postcards for tourists, and the endless, pointless re-forming of bands who had nothing to say twenty-five years ago, and even less to say today. Which, conveniently, brings me round to this book, *Love Songs*.

[ ... ]

It was The Pistols' and the Clash's willing acceptance of commodification that should exclude them from any serious discussion on the subject of the 'movement' for which punk is best remembered. If however it's simply a trip down memory lane that you're after, throw away this book, forget the very crucial issues of a world choking from American moral and military terrorism, and pop out to Woolies for a cut-price CD of *Punk As It Really Was*, and while you're about it, grab a six-pack so you can piss yourself into oblivion.

In a rampantly capitalist society dominated by the sickeningly Orwellian spin of Big Brother Bush and his arse-licking paramour, Tony Blair, it comes as no real surprise that dimbos like Johnny Rotten should be allotted space in the history books; ignorance is, after all, strength. In challenging that ignorance, Crass inspired what was perhaps one of the most powerful cultural movements of the late twentieth century, the radical substance of which is as alive today as it was then. In the fearsome wake of the jingoistic clap-trap generated by the WTC, our messages are as pointed now as they were prophetic twenty-five years ago.

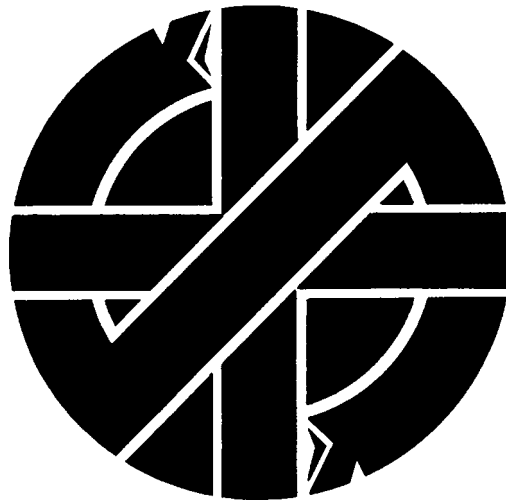
[ ... ]

In conclusion, you might very well be asking what in hell this has got to do with love. The answer is simple—everything. Despite what Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley might want us to believe, love is not an emotional commodity exclusively reserved for a personal

possession (wife, husband, partner, lover), neither is it the gift of a diamond. Real love is the fight to free the slaves who in their degrading poverty are forced to dig those 'precious' stones from the earth. Love is not a puppy for Christmas. Real love is the fight to free animals from the obscene torture of the vivisector's scalpel and the butcher's knife. Love then is not a word, it is total action. Rather than being 'in a state', love is a state of being.

For as long as there are those who use their lives to devalue that of others, it is up to those who love life to oppose them. That is the only true meaning I can give the word. So here they are, 'Love Songs'. I hope they inspire you to act.

. . .



WHEN YOU WOKE THIS MORNING YOU LOOKED SO ROCKY-EYED,  
blue and white normally, but strange ringed like that in black.  
It doesn't get much better,  
    your voice can get just ripped up shouting in vain.  
Maybe someone hears what you say,  
    but you're still on your own at night.  
You've got to make such a noise to understand the silence,  
screaming like a jackass, ringing ears so you can't hear the silence,  
even when it's there, like the wind seen from the window,  
seeing it but not being touched by it.

Words sometimes don't seem to mean much;  
of anyone we've used more than most,  
feelings from the heart that have been distorted and mocked,  
thrown around in the spectacle, the grand social circus.

Up against the rows of grey robots who control our lives  
the things we have to offer sometimes seem so frail.  
As they plan destruction and gain respectability,  
we offer our creativity and are made outcasts.

We didn't expect to find ourselves playing this part,  
we were concerned with ideas, not rock and roll,  
but we can't avoid that arena,  
it's become a part of us even if we don't understand it.

In attempts to moderate, they ask why we don't write love songs.  
What is it that we sing then?  
Our love of life is total, everything we do is an expression of that.  
Everything that we write is a love song.

— *excerpt from* YES SIR, I WILL.