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Comics' Rebel Yeller: 'The Story of Rock n Roll Comics'

By [Jeremy Estes](#) 6 June 2012

It's been a long time since rock 'n' roll was considered rebellious. The most debauched bands of the past have cleaned up and have hit the nostalgia circuit with whatever members are still living or willing to talk to one another. There's still some resistance, a few believers in back masking or folks convinced KISS is an acronym for Knights In Satan's Service, but if that were true, Gene wouldn't be shilling Dr. Pepper and Ace would still be in the band.

Beyond these fringe figures, rock 'n' roll is accepted and even revered in American culture. More importantly, to bands and their management, rock 'n' roll is lucrative.

In the '80s Todd Loren founded Musicade, a mail order and retail business focused on import and often bootleg music merchandise for bands from Anthrax to Frank Zappa. Sales from shirts, key chains, posters, and buttons paid the bills, but Loren eventually decided to return to his first love: comics.



Unauthorized: The Story of Rock N Roll Comics

Director: [Ilko Davidov](#)

Cast: Todd Loren, Alice Cooper, Jay Allen Sanford, Mojo Nixon, Spike Steffenhagen

(US DVD: 24 Apr 2012)

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Combining Musicade's bootleg success with the comics form, Loren created Revolutionary Comics, a publishing house which created unauthorized rock star biographies, beginning with Guns N' Roses in 1989. Despite featuring artwork which looked like it came from the back of a metal head's study hall notebook, the comic was a success.

The Story of Rock 'N' Roll Comics tells the story of this strange business venture by beginning at the end. On 11 June 1992, Todd Loren was murdered in his apartment. The killer was never found. This tragic event is unrelated to any enemies Loren made in the comics or rock industries, but it colors every event and every anecdote about the man related in the film.

Revolutionary's tag line "unauthorized and proud of it" rankled the legal teams of VERY FAMOUS MUSICIANS, and Loren's refusal to stop publication of his comics made him a spokesman for the protection of the First Amendment by default. His motivations, however, may not have been so noble, and this is the key to both the man and the film.

Anyone associated with Loren from his father to *The Story of Rock 'N' Roll Comics'* only authorized biography subject, Mojo Nixon, says the man was passionate about what he did, but an equal number say he was a rip off artist, a schlockmeister, and a cheapskate who ripped off artists, writers and anyone else in his employ. The praise and criticism are played off each other again and again, from interview to interview. It's not played for laughs as it could be, instead the film becomes like one of Loren's comics: it's kind of a mess, but a hell of a lot of fun, anyway.

What emerges is a clear picture of an interesting man. Complicated isn't the right word: Loren was clearly out to make a buck, but in the process he stepped on the toes of some powerful people, most notably the machine that was New Kids on the Block, and he ended up a symbol of perhaps Americans' most sacred freedom. Not bad for a schlockmeister.

Rating: **Extras rating:**

Jeremy Estes lives in Nashville, Tennessee.

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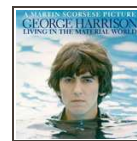
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