



[The Story of Rock and Roll Comics](#)

[Todd Loren & Various Artists](#)

MVD Visual - MVD5348D (DVD)

Available from *MVD Entertainment Group*.

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
(progdawg@hotmail.com).

Geez, how do I start this one off? Well, first things first: I've been big time into comics since discovering Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko in the 60s. I have thousands of 'em, buy 'em all the time, even recently had my own *Desert Dawgz* published in a buddy's title, *Arizona Funnies*. If you think there's an arrested growth factor there, I suggest you talk to Federico Fellini and Alejandro Jodorowsky as prime fans and go forward from there. But there are good comics and bad comics, and Todd Loren (ne Shapiro), the center of a very sleazy but rather intriguing storm, published material that was at best half-assed, often crap. He managed, though, to embroil himself in a world of nasty imbroglios, getting crossways with a number of top bands, screwing creatives right, left, and center, and ended being stabbed to death in his condo. Sound strange enough on its face? There's a lot more.

Loren's dad, Herb Shapiro, a curiously banal character with grandiose delusions, started his son off by giving him \$200 to underwrite a comic convention. Loren proved to be a capable businessman and ended, before escaping from his teens, having made enough money to buy his own home. Impressive. But being a shopkeeper was not his gig, so he sold his music memorabilia businesses (Musicade) and started publishing maverick unauthorized comics about rock 'n rollers, a perfect blend of the guy's manias: coimix and rock. When Guns 'n Roses along with several other well known bands took exception, suing, Loren fought back and obtained a landmark First Amendment decision. His fame and fortune were assured...except...things kinda went both uphill and downhill from there.

This Wild Eye/MVD video undergoes a feature length exploration, with bonus footage, to lay out the entire weird story and scandal, along the way roping in musicians Alice Cooper and Mojo Nixon, writer Ian Shirley, and slimeball publisher Gary Groth, among others. What emerges is tawdry and fascinating, but first and foremost comes the fact that Loren was a spoiled, self-infatuated, suburban, weekend warrior dipshit. Prissy too. Yet he had a way of ruffling feathers, and that's always interesting. On the other hand, like most in the industry, the bastard was stealing artists' rights through subterfuge while grossly underpaying them and not exactly endearing himself much of anywhere. Enemies and pissed off creatives were beginning to rapidly stack up along with irate rockers as he began an aspirant climb to King Shit Businessman status.

Enter Gary Groth, one of the most reviled individuals in comics history and co-owner of Fantagraphics Comics; thus, a competitor in more ways than one. In the interests of full disclosure, Groth and I had an epic several-issue row over censorship in comics (he for it, me against) in his vanity publication *Comics Journal* about 20 years ago, after which many couldn't help but note he went underground for an appreciable term. I have no use for the a-hole, nor do many, but to see him emerge in connection with all this is just too delicious and oh so appropriate, a matter of the pot calling the kettle black, which he does from the git-go. Though they were adversaries, Loren was in solidly kindred company with Groth as the two went at each other in catcalling essays, dueling flimps in a chicken wire Texas grudge match, impotence reigning supreme. All Loren had to do to get into trouble was wake up in the morning.

The most entertaining personality in the documentary is Mojo Nixon, quite a character, but the legendary Robert Williams appears, himself no stranger to controversy, as well as many recognizable others. Slowly, Loren's paranoia emerges, his junk food addiction, closeted homosexuality, which seems to have understandably prompted the paranoia, and other matters leading to the day of his slaying, unsolved to this moment, precisely because the San Diego police don't give a shit. A mass of contradictions surround this strange disturbed individual, and *The Story of Rock and Roll Comics* takes care to present both sides without assuming a position, the only such forum to do so. Perhaps the most unusual fact in all this is that Revolutionary Comics, Loren's brainchild, managed to issue, according to his father, about 500 titles before shutting down, a victim of its foundationally small and then steadily decreasing market share after Loren's death. Still, Todd and his line are genuine pieces of not only forgotten rock history but legal importance as well. Of course, had the prime player in that been anyone but Loren, the entire matter would undoubtedly have read much differently.

Edited by: David N. Pyles
(dnpyles@acousticmusic.com)

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Website design by David N. Pyles
DNPyles@acousticmusic.com
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