

FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

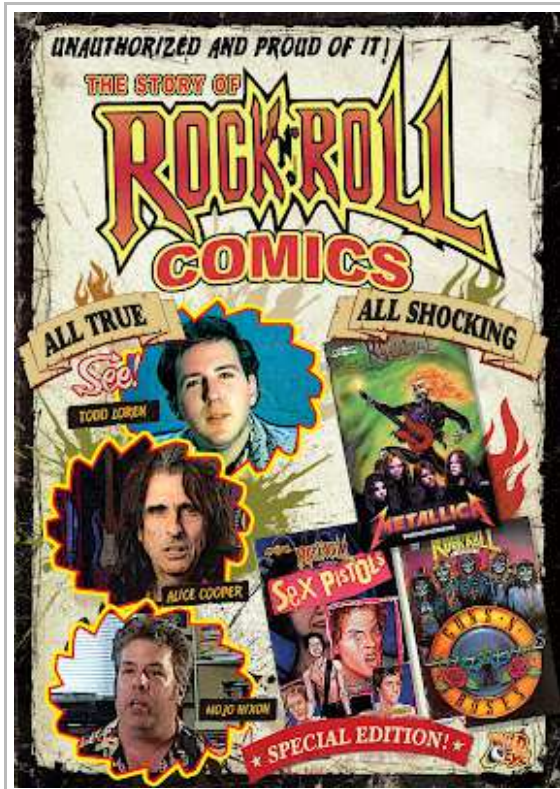
Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2012

DVD Review: Unauthorized and Proud of It: The Story of Rock 'n' Roll Comics

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Images from the Internet



Unauthorized and Proud of It: The Story of Rock 'n' Roll Comics - Special Edition

Directed by Ilko Davidov

Wild Eye Releasing

84 minutes, 2005 / 2012

Wildeyedvd.com

MVDvisual.com

Revolutionary Comics, the company that put out Rock'n'Roll Comics, was sadly short-lived, as was its creator, John Cusack-lookalike Todd Lauren (nee Stuart Loren Shapiro). With a mixture of r'n'r attitude and capitalist entrepreneurialism, Todd took his dream as far as he could go before his murder in 1992 at the age of 32.

Some people loved Todd for what he was doing, some hated him for how he did it, and others felt a mixture of the two for the same reasons. This documentary features all of these opinions, taking a less-than sentimental look at Todd, his products, and those directly or indirectly affected by him.

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About Me

Robert Barry Francos

Currently living in Saskatoon (email at RBF55@msn.com for address). From 1977-88, I used to publish a print version of a music magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). Now I write this blog, and have a column at jerseybeat (dot) com (slash) quietcorner (dot) html. And the beat goes on.

[View my complete profile](#)

Essentially, what Revolutionary Comics started doing was publishing “unauthorized” band histories in comic form. Sometimes the artwork was crude (reminiscent of the Chick religious tracts), oft the information was wrong, and much of it in black-and-white. As the owner of a bunch of them, however, I can tell you they were interesting and fun to read, even about the bands I wasn’t into.

The first issue focused on Gun n’ Roses, and in typical fashion, Axl Rose threatened to sue, which brought on a media fire that shot the sales of the book up astronomically. Some musicians not only didn’t mind being featured, but were happy about it, such as AC/DC (in fact, some pages of their comic form are published in *The Illustrated History of AC/DC* by Phil Sutcliffe, published earlier this year). KISS also reportedly was happy with the output.

Two of the artists that go on video record here that endorse their lives in print are Alice Cooper and Mojo Nixon. In fact, Nixon rather gushes about Loren. However, Todd was sued by New Kids on the Block, who had just had an “authorized” comic done by Harvey Comics; Loren won the case.

Those who were often not big fans of Todd, however, were apparently the stable of writers and artists (many are interviewed here), of whom were allegedly often taken advantage. One example given a few times is that when Loren gave the talent a check for their work, the back had a stamp on it saying that Todd owned the rights of the work into perpetuity. Essentially, to endorse (and thereby cash) the check, one *had* to agree to the terms. If you ask me, this is what capitalism in its purist form is all about: taking advantage.

Possibly his biggest critic was fellow comics publisher, Denis Kitchen, who produced Kitchen Sink Press (including *The Crow*, *Death Rattle* [one of my faves], *Melody*, *Snarf*, and *Omaha the Cat Dancer*) until 1999. In direct competition, Kitchen riles against Loren’s business practices with a mixture of righteous indignation and possible resentfulness of his success.

Music wasn’t the only topic of Revolutionary Comics, though. Loren also released *Conspiracy Comics* (the JFK assassination, etc), sports, porn (as did Kitchen Sink Press), and an arguably infamous horror short story series called *Tipper Gore Stories*. This was a (rightly) slap in the face to the politician’s wife who was intent on censoring records with her PMRC (Parent’s Music Resource Center) group. It is here we find a meta-story about Revolutionary Comics, as the DVD delves into First Amendment rights, which Loren was supposedly championing (how much was true indignation and how much good publicity, is up for debate).

Where Revolutionary Comics (et al.) would have ended up, who knows, had not Todd been murdered (supposedly by someone he picked up; I worked with a person to whom that this happened). In a supposition of theories which is quite interesting, the documentary presumes that it may have been done by serial killer Andrew Cunanan, who also killed Gianni Versace, among others. By some of the home movies, interviews and other information presented via people around him, big possibilities loomed; of course, according to his dad, a key figure here, he would have become a multi-millionaire.

[Some of my photos](#)

[Jersey Beat magazine](#)

[Life and Blog of Gary Pig Gold](#)

[Lethal Dose by Donna Lethal](#)

[Blitz! Magazine: Mike McDowell](#)

[Tom Bingham's blog](#)

[G-Mole: Bruce Farley Mowat](#)

[Suburban Voice: Al Quint](#)

[Blog of Lance Strate of General Semantics/Media Ecology Association](#)

[Who Really Cares blog of Craig Davison](#)

There are also some nifty extras tacked on, including video producer Duane Dimoch giving anecdotes about Todd's personality, writer Robert Gates describing how he got assigned the KISS comic and met the band, and of special interest to me, Cynthia Plaster Caster discusses in detail how she obtained the genital casts of both Jimi Hendrix (which we see) and his bassist Noel Redding.

A fascinating release on so many different levels, its scope covers many areas of interest for both music and comics fans, as well as freedom of speech issues and gay lifestyles.

Posted by [Robert Barry Francos](#) at 12:01 AM 

Labels: [Alice Cooper](#), [Comic Books](#), [FFanzeen](#), [First Amendment](#), [Guns 'N Roses](#), [NKotB](#), [Revolutionary Comics](#), [Robert Barry Francos](#), [Rock'n'Roll Comics](#), [Todd Loren](#), [Wild Eye](#)

Reactions: interesting (0) cool (0) informative (0)

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