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### Film Reviews: The Story of Rock 'n' Roll Comics (2005) - By Cary Conley

Posted on Thursday, May 03, 2012 @ 17:31:47 Mountain Daylight Time by Duane



Todd Loren was many things to many

people. He was a rabid supporter for free speech and an outspoken critic of censorship. He was a very successful businessman but a poor manager and boss. He was a great friend and a hated enemy. But no matter which side of the coin you were on, everyone agrees on one observation: Todd Loren was a polarizing figure.

Loren first came to prominence in the mid-80's selling foreign and bootleg music merchandise through his own mail-order business called Musicade. He raked in the money, expanding his empire and creating a hugely successful business. But at the height of Musicade's success, he laid off his 18 employees, closed his store, and sold off much of his inventory. Loren thought it was time for a change. Long a fan of comics as well as music, he decided to meld his two passions and create a series of

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comic books about rock and roll. So in 1989, Loren used \$2,000 and founded Revolutionary Comics, with plans to release his first series to be called Rock 'n' Roll Comics. Along with his father, they created a slogan for the comic: "Unauthorized and proud of it!" His first comic creation was a history of Guns N Roses who were at the height of their fame in 1989. Rock 'n' Roll Comics immediately drew the ire of famed bad boy and all-around general whiner Axl Rose, the frontman for the group. By all accounts, the comic was amateurish at best, but the media frenzy Rose created by threatening to sue Loren also created a buying frenzy. Thus was born the short-lived but popular and always controversial line called Rock 'n' Roll Comics.

For the next three years, this line of comics published books on music acts ranging from the aforementioned Guns N Roses to other popular acts such as Alice Cooper, Kiss, and Motley Crue. There was even a comic on The New Kids on the Block! But as more and more artists threatened to sue Loren, the controversy continued to build. At one point there were threats from the camps of Jon Bon Jovi, Skid Row, Motley Crue, Guns N Roses, and The New Kids on the Block. But for every detractor, there were many unlikely supporters, including Gene Simmons of Kiss, Lemmy Kilmister from Motorhead, the boys from the Crue (who disagreed strenuously with their management agency), Alice Cooper, and Mojo Nixon.

Ever the rebel, Loren kept publishing his comic line, going so far as to publish more comics on the bands who were threatening to sue him. Hence, there were multiple comics for bands like Guns N Roses and The New Kids on the Block. An ardent supporter of free speech, Loren argued that he was not infringing upon any trademarks

and, if he was, so were the myriad music magazines such as Circus, Spin, Rolling Stone, and Hit Parader, all of whom depended upon music acts to make a profit. Not content to merely print rock comics, Loren branched out to start comic lines featuring sports stars, real-life conspiracies (such as Marilyn Monroe's death and the assassination of President Kennedy), and even a horror comic entitled Tipper Gore's Comics and Stories which poked fun at the Vice President's wife who headed up the PMRC and was the cause of album and video game ratings. Another line of comics included an adults only line called Carnal Comics, featuring erotic stories and biographies of adult film stars.

But as popular as these comic book lines were with the fans, between Loren's grating personality, shady business dealings, and sometimes vulgar exchanges with rivals in both the music and the comic business, Revolutionary Comics never made a great deal of money. Perhaps it was partially due to the fact that neither music outlets nor comic outlets knew how to handle the various lines; perhaps it was simply that Loren had burned too many bridges in the business. But Loren was happy working with his passion, making enough money to survive, creating an outlet for his First Amendment rants, and enabling himself to continue to rub people the wrong way. But it all came crashing down on June 11, 1992, when Loren's body was found in his home. He had been brutally murdered, with multiple stab wounds, and his body was discovered by his father. Some people were frankly happy to see him go. They speculated that some of his rivals got tired of him and had him killed. Others were devastated and had no explanation as to who would have murdered Loren. The case remains open to this day, but

lately, speculation has surrounded famed serial killer Andrew Cunanan, who gained notoriety for a spree of murders in 1997, including the killing of Gianni Versace, the famous fashion designer. While nothing has been proven, both Cunanan and Loren were homosexual and both frequented the same upscale gay bars in San Diego during the early nineties, leading some to believe that Loren may well have been Cunanan's first victim.

This film, directed by Ilko Davidov, an experienced documentarian, is a fascinating but brief peek into Loren's life. Featuring interviews with original Rock 'n' Roll Comics artists and writers as well as with stars like Mojo Nixon, Alice Cooper, and Cynthia Plaster Caster (if you don't know about Cynthia, look her up...) and using rare video footage of Loren himself, this documentary traces Loren's early life, his business genius, his passion for music, comics, and First Amendment rights, and the creation of Rock 'n' Roll Comics. The film examines the controversy the comic line generated and we hear from some of the stars that were written about as well as many of the fine folks who were in the trenches during this time. There are some particularly poignant segments with Loren's father, who was President of the company. The film is well-balanced and accurately portrays the two sides of Loren's personalities, using interviews with his rivals (who still speak about him with disdain) as well as his closest friends (some of which are brought to tears as they remember Loren).

The only real flaw with the film is the lack of in-depth reporting about Loren's death as well as the subsequent investigation. To be sure, the subject is covered, but not in enough detail. We hear Loren's father describe finding his son's body as well as several

of Loren's friends and associates who declare the investigation was haphazard and incomplete. We also hear from the police department which, of course, denies the claim. The possible link to Cunanan is mentioned only in passing. As fascinating as the story of Loren and Rock 'n' Roll Comics is, the mystery surrounding his death is equally fascinating and deserves more coverage, especially the exploration of the Cunanan-Loren link. Running at a relatively brief 80 minutes, more time could certainly have been spent on this angle.

But at its core, the film is more a celebration of Loren's life and the beliefs he held which lead to the development of his famous comic line than it is a murder mystery. Sometimes touching, sometimes funny, but always entertaining, The Story of Rock 'n' Roll Comics is an excellent documentary about one man and his personal mission. It is a tribute to Todd Loren, who took no guff from anyone, let nothing stand in his way, and did things on his own terms, everyone else's views be damned.

The Story of Rock 'n' Roll Comics has just been released by Wild Eye Releasing and is being distributed by MVD Entertainment. For more information or to purchase a copy of the DVD, which contains a plethora of terrific extras like extended interviews, television clips as well as original TV commercials, a huge stills gallery of original Revolutionary Comics covers, and terrific liner notes by the co-creator of Rock 'n' Roll Comics, Jay Allen Sanford, go to [http://mvdv.com/?site\\_id=mvdv](http://mvdv.com/?site_id=mvdv).

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