



STRANGE THINGS ARE HAPPENING

THE STORY OF ROCK 'N' ROLL COMICS

DVD. Wild Eye.

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Rock 'n' roll, comic books, freedom of speech, censorship, murder and Mojo Nixon – this documentary has it all, as it tells the fascinating, contradictory, controversial story of Todd Loren, comic book publisher, agent provocateur and con man – depending on who you ask.

Loren was the man behind Revolutionary Comics, a small scale, cheap comic book publisher that specialised in unauthorised – and often rather fictionalised – comic book biographies of rock bands and performers, as well as sports figures, conspiracy theories, porn and horror. Hated by the comic book establishment, threatened with law suits from various bands (or more often, their management) – only one of which, bizarrely involving New Kids on the Block, went to court, resulting in a First Amendment victory for Loren – and loved by most of those who worked with him, even as he screwed them financially with dubious contracts, Loren comes across as a shady wheeler and dealer. The sort of man who seemed to take pleasure from offending and irritating people – most of whom probably deserved it, to be honest – and yet a genuine, passionate defender of free speech, even if his motives may have been as much financial as social. Yet I doubt anyone expected his story to come to such a sudden end – in 1992, he was found stabbed to death in his home.

The documentary does a good job of suggesting that the murder was under-investigated by the San Diego police (the cop interviewed can barely hide his distaste as he reveals that Loren was 'a homosexual' and suggests that this played a part in his death), and there is the suggestion that he may have been an early victim of serial killer and Versace shooter Andrew Cunanan, whose M.O. matches this killing.

The documentary does a good job of telling the story of this renegade publisher, through the words of his writers and artists, his rivals and rock stars Mojo Nixon and Alice Cooper... as well as Loren himself in archive video footage. It's a pity that there are not more band interviews – it'd be interesting to see what the bands who threatened lawsuits now think (especially those like Motley Crue who would later republish the comic as part of a box set). But perhaps that's not the important story here.

As a look at the world of outlaw publishing in an increasingly corporate rock 'n' roll world, this is a story that remains relevant, and the documentary tells it is an entertaining, fast-paced way that will make you want to seek out the comics themselves. Well worth a look.

DAVID FLINT

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