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Sid! By Those Who Really Knew Him MVD

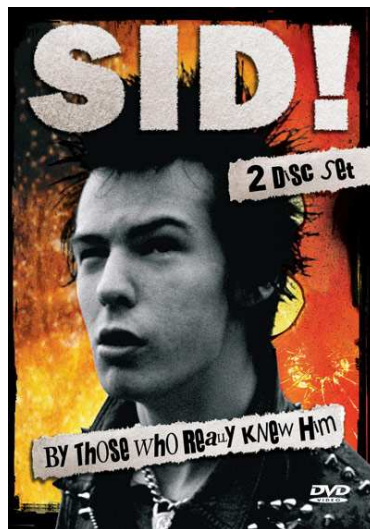
As an antithesis to everything that came before it—not only musically, but also in a larger cultural sense—punk rock was built by hand by shocking characters. Indeed, a principal M.O. was, to some degree, to shock, as names like Rat Scabies, Johnny Rotten, and most importantly, Sid Vicious would indicate. And while the British variety owes some of its existence to the socioeconomic doldrums of the times, the nihilism that accompanied it could just as easily be contributed to sheer boredom as financial woes.

February 2 marks 31 years since Sid Vicious' death from a heroin overdose at the age of 21. And while he played bass for the Sex Pistols during their most notorious years, Sid made a mark more for being himself, which included violent, loutish tendencies, than for his musical abilities. If it weren't for a very special set of circumstances, which included falling in love with a junkie, a tragic American tour with the Pistols, and ultimately, drug addiction and codependency gone awry, Vicious may have occupied about as much space as Paul Cook (the other half of the Pistols' rhythm section) in the punk pantheon. But as it is, he has become one of—if it not its ultimate—supreme archetypes. He is its forever-young snarling visage, its leather-clad rebel without a cause.

That there has never been much biographical information on the man born John Beverly has only further aided the myth. Recently, there was *El Sid*, David Dalton's "biography" from 1997, but that book explored the idea of Sid Vicious more than the man himself. (Dalton coincidentally also wrote an excellent James Dean bio.) There has been little else, to the point that it's almost hard not to picture him as Gary Oldman stumbling his way through *Sid and Nancy*. As such, *Sid! By Those Who Really Knew Him* is a near revelatory look at Vicious that finally gets past the caricature. The video features interviews with people... well, the subtitle has it right. Jah Wobble (one of the "three Johns") talks about the difference between the guy he knew before and after the Sex Pistols. Similarly, Viv Albertine (of the Slits), who roomed with Sid, and Steven Severin (of Siouxsie and the Banshees) offer warm personal recollections.

Throughout the film, what is repeated as often as his friends' dislike of Nancy Spungen (Vicious' just as ill-fated junkie girlfriend), is Vicious' need to become who he became. Writer Caroline Coon, one of the first journalists to cover punk, sees the extremities of Sid Vicious to be necessitated by the emotional wants of John Beverly. He took to extremes to feel something, and in turn the be-spiked masses idolized him for it. It may be impossible to see Vicious as anything other than some humanized form of the anarchy sign, but *Sid!* at least shows that there was, as he sings on the accompanying live CD, "something else."

Stephen Slaybaugh



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