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## SCREEN DETECTIVE TELEVISION'S HIDDEN GEMS

# Vicious: he did it his way

**Sid! By Those Who Really Knew Him**

Saturday, Sky Arts 1 (HD), 9pm

**G**iven television's voracious appetite for latching on to any anniversary that's going, it comes as a surprise to learn that it's been 30 years since the death of punk-rock's nihilistic icon Sid Vicious. Where was BBC2's *Sid Night* last February? Fortunately, Sky Arts' increasingly impressive output puts the record straight with this entertaining rock'n'rollercoaster of a film, which assembles a rogues' gallery of Vicious cohorts, associates and even a friend or two. And no sign, mercifully, of John Lydon regurgitating old quotes.

Viv Albertine of The Slits, who played with Vicious in *The Flowers of Romance*, remembers Sid's first foray into punk. 'He looked good and that was all that mattered. No one ever asked anyone if they could play.' But there was not being able to play, and then there was Sid. When he took the stage at the 100 Club's celebrated Punk Festival behind the drums for Siouxsie and the Banshees, he'd only ever played for ten minutes in his life – and that was at a hasty rehearsal just before they went on. You could admire his balls but not necessarily his playing. Reports of his stickmanship vary dramatically. Club promoter

Ron Watts remembers, 'He seemed frightened of them, lightly tapping away as if he was at a tea party,' while Banshees' guitarist Marco Pirroni claims, 'Sid was a really good drummer. Technically not the best. But he played really loud for a long time.'

Vicious and the bass guitar got along a little better but, again, some witnesses prove more reliable than others. Sex Pistols' svengali Malcolm McLaren laughs, 'Sometimes we used to turn him off.' Vicious's mate Jah Wobble gives him a fairer crack of the whip, saying, 'It was about slinging it low and sneering. I'd tell him, "Sid, it's good to be hopeless."' Then there's the romanticised version from Albertine: 'Sid got hold of the Ramones album... I went to bed and when I woke the next morning he could play bass.' This from a woman who, later in the documentary, recalls Sid regularly stinking of Newcastle Brown Ale, followed by the adjectives 'sweet' and 'charming'.

The film makes a virtue of all this divergence of opinion, as is the way when musical egos clash, but one thing everyone seems agreed on is that from the moment Vicious joined the Pistols as replacement for cheesed-off bassist Glen Matlock, there was only ever going to be one

ending... And from the moment he hooked up with junkie groupie Nancy Spungen, that ending was going to be a lot sooner rather than later.

Banshees bassist Steve Severin brings it all together. 'The Pistols were supposed to explode and leave a lot of debris. One of them had to be a casualty to make the myth work, and Sid was only too willing to do that.' In an age of plastic antiheroes such as Pete Doherty, it feels right to celebrate Vicious's short, spectacular life. ■

By Mark Wareham