

LOBOTOMY

**SURVIVING
THE RAMONES**

DEE DEE RAMONE

WITH **VERONICA KOFMAN** INTRODUCTION BY **LEGS McNEIL**

FOREWORD BY **JOAN JETT**

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Lobotomy



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Surviving the Ramones

**DEE DEE
RAMONE**

with VERTON GALKO MAN

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Stanley Hart, Western Union, Neil Ortenberg and Thunder's Mouth
Press, and everybody who has stood by me in my life.

Dee Dee Ramone epitomizes the quintessential punk rocker.

In a time when rock stars have become neatly packaged products trading on twenty five year old ideas and music they neither originated nor improved on, Dee Dee stands as a reminder as to why rock & roll stars used to be so compelling—when rock stars actually meant something. I know it seems hard to believe now, but they did mean something once, a long, long time ago.

And the reason why they were so compelling, besides those cute haircuts and tight leather pants, was because they were *sexy losers*. Before the music, we only got to see these beautiful losers in newscasts and newspaper headlines after their spectacular crime sprees came to a screaming finish.

Charles Starkweather, the James Dean look-a-like who, along with his girlfriend, Carol Ann Bugate, killed her parents because they didn't approve of him, then went on a week-long killing spree across North and South Dakota (and became the subject of the movie, "Badlands") is the perfect example. The guy was a rock star. He had the look.

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the hair, and the sweater. We knew him. We understood when he said, "Fuck it."

So when Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Mick Jagger, Bob Dylan, Keith Richards, Jimi Hendrix, Keith Moon, and Janis Joplin all got up there and did the same thing, only to music, we knew who they were. They were sociopathic criminals who found a forum in rock & roll, and became overnight superstars, because we loved them for getting away with it.

DEE DEE RAMONE, is the last of this breed of authentic rock star, for he was an authentic bad guy who got over, and in so doing, forever changed the face of rock and roll.

Dee Dee was the archetypical face-up who's life was a living disaster. He was a male prostitute, a would be mugger, a heroin dealer, an accomplice to armed robbery and a genius poet who was headed for prison or an early grave—but was side-tracked by rock & roll.

When I was 18 and doing Punk Magazine and hanging around the "Ramones Loft" at a East 2nd Street with Joey Ramone, trying to find money for beer instead of working, Dee Dee used to come by in the afternoon to write songs.

Dee Dee had lived at the "Ramones Loft," owned by the Ramones lighting and t-shirt guy, Arturo Vega, but was thrown out when his fight with his girlfriend, Connie, almost destroyed the place. I think the fight where they splattered the place with Arturo's paints was the final straw.

After he was thrown out, Dee Dee would show up with his well-worn repenta nt look, pick up the three string folk guitar and huddle at the corner with Joey to taut up out one of his

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latest masterpieces. I would stand across the room & stounee that his guy was actually capturing the complexity of our lives on the Bowery in the simplest rock & roll songs.

As a writer, Dee Dee always had a knack of distilling the most intricate ideas to their most basic forms without losing any of the context. Example:

*I don't wanna walk around with you,
I don't wanna walk around with you,
I don't wanna walk around with you,
so why ya wanna walk around with me?*

The entire story is there. Yeah, it's blunt and simple, but if it's so easy, why didn't you do it?

Hearing Dee Dee's songs today, I'm still amazed at how emotionally and psychologically accurate they are. Musical snapshots of living degradation. Whenever I hear "Chinese Rocks," Dee Dee's anthem to copping heroin (that Johnny Thunders appropriated, though he had no part in writing) all the images of that time come flooding back to me. I can actually see Connie crying in the shower stall at Arturo's, Connie dragging Dee Dee out of the loft by his ear because he was about to fuck Eileen Polk in the bed by the windows; Dee Dee and Richard Hell taking the walk to Avenue C to cup; Dee Dee unable to sit down because Connie had stabbed him in the ass; Dee Dee pulling a knife on Johnny in the van because Johnny was calling Connie a pig . . . all those daily dramas of watching the Ramones go from a gang of incredible losers to an American institution.

I am forever grateful to have been able to witness, first hand, the mess of Dee Dee's life, and then watch how he

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transformed all that craziness, all that shit, into art. I hate people who use that term. They're usually no-talents pretentious pieces of shit who never had an original thought of their own. But I can use the word "artist" without any reservation when it comes to Dee Dee.

Because the guy really should have been a crime-squee newspaper headline instead of a voice and an attitude that inspired millions of kids to write songs, play music, join bands and re-invent themselves according to their own fantasies.

IN A time when the only voice around originates from the corporation instead of the heart, and kids are lining-up to conform to the mediocrity, then wake up in the sludge of the brutal sameness with an automatic weapon in their hands, Dee Dee's life and work seems more valid than ever.

For Dee Dee taught us it was okay to feel like Charlie Starweather or one of those kids with guns in Littleton, Colomán. But Dee Dee added, Why shoot your wad with just twenty minutes of fun, when you can scream out the depths of your desperation and keep the insanity going an entire lifetime?

Legs McNeil
Co-author of
Please Kill Me,
The Uncensored Oral
History of Punk,
North Hollywood, Calif.

When I heard the Ramones for the first time, I fell in love. I couldn't believe it . . . a band playing with that much energy and so intensely—for every song. It was impressive, and it's hard for people to appreciate what the atmosphere was like back then. If you really think about what was going on in the mid-seventies, it was quite archaic, and the Ramones were very shocking to a lot of people. They challenged and, for some, probably even insulted people's preconceived notions about the *right way* to approach rock 'n' roll. I'd sensed that kind of thing in my own experience, so I could relate. The Runaways faced a lot of closed-minded attitudes in trying to play rock 'n' roll too.

I'd read about the Ramones in 1975, around the time the Runaways were starting out. I was a teenager and lived in LA, so it wasn't easy for me to bang into them on the street or in a club—yet. I remember the press trying to draw comparisons between us because we were on opposite coasts and sort of breaking at the same time. It was this thing that the media tried to create. I guess we were both an assault on the stale and

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self-indulgent music scene that was so widely accepted—and expected—in those days. If so, I'm glad we could be of service . . .

In 1978 the Ramones and the Runaways would co-headline a tour together for three months, driving across the country in vans. It was one of the best three months of my whole life. Every night just *LOVING* what we were doing, *LOVING* the band you were seeing, knowing *every note* to the songs. I vividly remember being side-stage for their sets. I can picture it in my mind so clearly. I can see Dee Dee's foot going up and down and then counting off relentlessly, night after night. Some of those places we played were so small that it was really an incredible thing to witness. You were so close to the music, it was as if you were standing on stage with the band. It was just one of those awesome things you experience as a teenager that you wish you'd paid more attention to, taken in every detail when it was happening. In the moment I was thinking to myself, *Remember: this is something special. It's going to come and go before you know it—and that will be it.* But even so, it was a hard thing to actually do. You're diggin' every minute, but it's just not enough.

It was amazing and funny too because no matter where we were in the country, one thing was always the same: if the audience liked the Ramones, they didn't like us. If they liked us, they didn't like the Ramones. But the fans who came and loved it were getting a real treat. It was an incredible bill. We were waging war on mediocrity—together. The Ramones wore leather jackets as their armor,

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and I had my guitar and my leather jacket for mine. It was us against the world, but we were having a great time because we were doing what we wanted, the way we wanted to do it. I think a lot of that spirit has dissipated because entertainers, audiences, and even the public at large feel more attached to everything these days, whereas then the climate was much more of an us-against-them vibe.

We were kindred spirits, I definitely felt it, and I think they knew it too. The boys were a little older than me, and they were well versed in a variety of song styles and classic rock 'n' roll. You could hear it in their music. I was still figuring out what my influences were when we met, and the Ramones certainly influenced me, no question about it. Anything up-tempo is something that comes from them. I got to see their music blossom, and I'm grateful for the experience I had.

The Ramones brought a unique aspect to rock 'n' roll and some real high energy that music was lacking. It was a different world back then. Now, as people reflect and look back, they finally see just how talented they were. Sometimes it takes the extreme, like the death of the artist, to get people to wake up and say, "Whoa, what was going on here? . . ." All too often people just don't see it in its time, but isn't that always the way with great art? When the Ramones became recognized more widely and inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2002, I'm sure it opened some minds and some doors, because I was inducted in 2015. All of a sudden, people who once didn't care or even know you existed immediately took

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notice. I don't know whether that's good or bad—it just is. I'm glad the Ramones were here and that the people who recognized it all along were too. I know I was one of them.

Dee Dee brought a steadiness to the Ramones, and that doesn't have everything to do with just keeping the beat either. I'm talking about being the heart of it. Dee Dee was the heart and soul of the Ramones. He brought that aspect to everything he did. It was in his bass lines, his vocals, and his songwriting—oh god, what classic songwriting. His work has been an unbelievable influence on so many, it's incredible. Dee Dee set the tone for who and what the Ramones were, giving their identity consistency and setting the bar for what would eventually define punk rock. He had a great energy, both on stage and off. He was a fun person, and even years later we'd occasionally play together. He was the kind of guy who would make you feel good about just being there. We had a mutual respect and admiration for each other's music and what we'd both built through the years, the fan bases, the friendships.

I think it's a beautiful thing that Dee Dee was able to express himself creatively, beyond music, into visual art and literature. After all these years I'm still learning more about him. There were a lot of layers beneath the surface, so I'd expect nothing less. It's more difficult than you might realize trying to sum Dee Dee up in a single thought. That would be like trying to name your favorite Ramones song: *Really, just one? . . . How can you choose?* Even as I shape and reflect my deepest thoughts,

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it's never enough—Dee Dee and the Ramones are just too important to me.

When I was a kid we always used to dig back to music and cultural influences that came before us. A lot of people did. More recently I've met a lot of younger kids who don't want to look back much further than a couple of years, and I find that kinda strange. So for those who were there and those who weren't, it's my pleasure to encourage you to read on and be enriched. It was a special time that I don't think will ever be recaptured—you could almost bet your life on it . . .

Dee Dee



Photo by Jenny Lens. © Dee Dee Ramone LLC. All Rights Reserved

Do you remember lying in bed

with the covers pulled up over your head

and playing so no one can see?

"Do You Remember Rock and Roll Music?"

..



Kristin Green

Introduction:

If there is a logic to this life, then I'd like to know what it is. I'm at the Chelsea Hotel in New York City again. I've taken a lot of drugs in this hotel. Now I'm going to get off drugs in this hotel. Strange, isn't it?

It's two weeks before my birthday. I am two weeks into withdrawal from methadone, which is the most addictive

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drug there is. This is going to be the hardest test for me, I can tell. It's going to be quite an experience. All the demons from my past are tormenting me.

They say that the Chelsea Hotel is haunted. I agree. A dragonfly is flying around in my room right now. A "she" dragon. Like Connie, one of my demons from a long time ago.

She flew into my room here seventeen years ago, didn't bother to knock, she just burst through the door yelling curses at me. Connie was very, very drunk. Eventually she passed out and slept it off; but before she did, she completely destroyed the place. She broke a champagne bottle on the radiator and tried to kill me with it—slashing at my neck with the sharp glass edges. Finally she exhausted herself and threw the broken bottle through the window, smashing it in the process. That was how Connie said good night: "Fuck you. It's over. Go to sleep." So I hit the sack.

In the morning we acted like everything was normal. We would get ourselves together the best we could, then go downstairs to the street and hail a cab to the Lower East Side, get out and go cop some dope from someone. This was 1974 or 1975. Connie was a go-go dancer. I was struggling in the Ramones. We were both dope addicts.

It's the beginning of a new era now and I am fed up with it all. I am going to fight back. I give the dragonfly a look that could kill, but she shrugs it off. She's in a frenzy now, flying at me from behind, then changing direction and flying straight at me. Trying to sucker me to look into the light. Fuck that. That ain't gonna happen.

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I am going to send every shitty memory I have of this hotel straight back to hell. I start a fire on the rug and come at her from behind. I set light to her head with another match, then watch her burn. Then I feel normal again. So I start to relax and stare at an unplugged fan, trying to will it to spin. Don't fuck with me.

If you're experienced, I think you'll understand.



Die Die going up.
Honey, I'm in

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