

A final fling with the Ramones.

ADIOS AMIGOS

BY MARYELLEN GORDON



Joey Ramone's press agent warned me that the singer tends to run a bit late. So when I cruise around the corner from my apartment to his, it's no surprise that I have to hang in the lobby for 15 minutes or so. What his press agent didn't tell me is the reason behind this particular Ramone's constant race against the clock. It has nothing to do with the fact that he almost needs a machete to clear a path through his fax-strewn apartment, a place that looks sort of like the tornado-stricken Berkshires. It has everything to do with the fact that Joey likes to dish. In fact, my straightforward mission to find out if there was any truth to the nasty rumor about the demise of the forever-cool Ramones turned into a two-hour yapfest. What follows is just a tiny inking of the thoughts floating around the very fun Mr. Joey's head.

Maryellen Gordon: I know this is a rude way to start an interview, but I have to get right to it: Are you officially broken up?

Joey Ramone: Well, all things must come to an end. This is probably going to be our last studio record, but we're going to keep touring into next year. At the end of this year we're going to reevaluate things and call a farewell, final tour.

MG: Why?

JR: Well, it's been 21 years and it's been rough. I mean, it has been enjoyable but it's never been that easy. Hopefully things will get better, but then again I say that with every album.

MG: Like what things?

JR: I mean, like, MTV's never been very kind to us. Radio's never been very kind to us. Our lifeblood is live performance, so we tour year-round all over the world. And it's great. The best part is doing the live shows. But it gets to you after awhile. It definitely burns you out. I gather if we sold millions of records, it would make life simpler. We could do things a little differently.

MG: It seems like everyone knows the Ramones, but even given that, you've never made the crossover into a huge stadium band that sells a million records. Of course that probably makes your fans happy...

JR: Oh yeah, we have a real distinct, die-hard following. We've always stayed true to our vision and to what the Ramones are.

MG: Which is what?



(Joey) Ramone alone

JR: We're purists. We're nonconformists. We don't kiss ass to get on MTV. We've stayed true to ourselves. That's why we formed in the first place. Rock 'n' roll was a total bore when we came out. Our competition was Disco Duck and Donna Summer, the Rubber Duck song and Foreigner, Boston, Toto, Journey, Kansas, Styx and all that shit. It was us and them. It was almost like we were from Mars or something.

MG: You haven't conformed to the way things are done today in the music world. Is there any regret in that approach? Do you ever think, "Oh shit, we should've gotten friendlier with MTV because then we would've sold more records"? Because obviously it bothers you that you haven't sold a ton of records.

JR: Well, it's not about not getting friendly. It's that we wouldn't change. Everybody's got an opinion about what kind of material you should be playing, what kind of image you should project. But we always knew who we were and what we were. And we just wanted to be ourselves.

MG: Now it's 21 years later. Do you feel that your message has as much impact as it once did?

JR: The message has more impact now. What's so ironic about these shows we've been doing [in the past

few weeks] is that we're headlining and all the other bands are the newer bands of today, like Bush and Collective Soul and Letters to Cleo. Yet we're the ones who get zero MTV and no radio play. But now everyone's freaking out because we're talking about disbanding. They're saying, "You guys can't do that. You can't break up."

MG: What's your response to that?

JR: Well, it's taken awhile to really accept it myself. Sometimes I get really depressed about it. I'll have to go to a psychiatrist, I guess. But it's been ongoing. Internally, it's not like we're the best of friends, you know. But when it comes to the stage we're totally united. We strive to be the best we can because our fans are really that important to us. But it's rough. And there has been a lot of frustration...they make you do a video but then they don't fucking show the video.

MG: Why do you think that is?

JR: The record business today is simply a business. It really has nothing to do with music anymore. It's all lawyers and politics and money and payola and bullshit. It's just not about the music and that's why so much of what you hear is disposable. We grew up big rock 'n' roll fans and we still are. We take our music seriously. We appreciate what we do, but I don't think many people do.

Certainly our fans do.

MG: About the new album, *Adios Amigos*. It's very straightforward.

JR: I think this is one of the best albums we've ever made. It's like a sonic assault, musically. We recorded it live in the studio. We wanted to make a real great punk rock record — a real exciting record — and just do what we wanted to do and not let anyone interfere.

MG: Were you looking at this as your last album while you were making it?

JR: I think some of us were looking at it like that. It's never been easy internally in the band. There's always been a lot of friction and inner turmoil. The reason I've stayed is the love of the music. That always comes first.

MG: What do you think of the music scene and the punk revival?

JR: For a while there was nothing going on downtown, but now the Village is coming alive again. Everything now is very grassroots because of the new punk movement. It's not as much about power and ego. It's about being yourself and good energy and enthusiasm. I like the attitudes of the new bands — there's no bullshit.

MG: Doesn't it make sense for you guys to stick around to be part of that?

JR: Yeah...we've lasted three generations and the last two have been real Ramones-fanatical. That's why we're going to look at our plans at the end of this year, because I feel things are getting radically better. More young people are running things. All those old gray-haired farts are pretty much gone. But the problem is that the industry is not fueled by the love of music. It's fueled by the love of lust and money and greed.

MG: What's been the biggest revelation for you through all this?

JR: When I was a teenager, I'd buy *Creem* and *Circus* magazine and I'd read about the bands and say, "Wow." But being in the business is actually very disillusioning. You have to hang onto those gut feelings and remember why you got into it in the first place and not self-destruct and totally abuse yourself. The passion has to be real.

MG: What would ultimately make the Ramones happy?

JR: It would be great if this were the Ramones year and we sold lots of records. Like billions. I want to see the Ramones' place in music history firmly established. ★

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