

“RAMONES: END OF THE CENTURY”

(a feature documentary)

a film by Michael Gramaglia & Jim Fields

Official Selection Toronto Film Festival 2003
Official Selection Berlin Film Festival 2004

108 minutes; 1.85:1, Dolby SR

Synopsis.....	2
Interviews.....	6
Biographies.....	7
Contacts.....	10
Credits.....	11
Press.....	14

SYNOPSIS

In 1974, the New York City music scene was shocked into consciousness by the violently new and raw sound of a band of misfits from Queens called the Ramones. Playing in a seedy Bowery bar to a small group of fellow struggling musicians, the band struck a chord of disharmony that rocked the foundation of the mid-seventies music scene. This quartet of unlikely rock stars traveled across the country and around the world connecting with the disenfranchised everywhere, while sparking a movement that would resonate with two generations of outcasts across the globe. Although the band never reached the top of the Billboard charts, they managed to endure in face of fleeting success and crushing interpersonal conflicts by maintaining a rigorous touring schedule for twenty-two years. Tracing the history of the band, from its unlikely origins, through its star-crossed career, bitter demise and the sad fates of Joey and Dee Dee, *End of the Century* is a vibrant, candid document of one of the most influential groups in the history of rock.

HISTORY OF THE RAMONES

End of the Century begins at the end of the Ramones' career with their 2002 induction into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame. Here, the wayward sons of rock music were honored by an industry that had ignored them for their entire career. It was a triumphant yet bittersweet night for the band. As drummer Tommy Ramone acknowledged in his acceptance speech, members of the group were still bickering and battling over issues that transcended even the death of their singer, Joey Ramone. Despite the ongoing rancor, Tommy recalled the common background and bonds of brotherhood that recent animosity couldn't obscure.

The story of the Ramones began in their childhood neighborhood of Forest Hills, Queens. The band members shared childhoods filled with alienation, salvaged only by their common love of underground music like Iggy and the Stooges and the New York Dolls. As high school students, amidst teenage delinquency, glue sniffing and a shared dark sense of humor, all set to a soundtrack of teen angst and frustration, the Ramones were headed nowhere. With seemingly no other options, and against a popular music terrain that was completely polar to their sensibilities, they formed a band and learned to make music by simply picking up instruments and just playing. And after a few false starts, they unveiled

their newly invented sound at the legendary CBGB on the Lower East Side.

With their stripped-down sound, clean aesthetic and fast attack, the band quickly became the darlings of the New York underground music scene. Before long, their reputation gained them fans among the ranks of New York's biggest scene-makers: Andy Warhol, Malcolm McLaren and Danny Fields all attended Ramones concerts. Danny was so impressed by their performance that he offered to be their manager on the spot. The band accepted under the condition that he provide them with the necessary funds (three thousand dollars) for a new drum set. Danny then brought them to the attention of Sire Records head Seymour Stein who signed them immediately. Although their first album, *The Ramones*, sold poorly in the U.S., it is now commonly acknowledged as a landmark album and became an underground favorite in London.

On July 4, 1976, the Ramones invaded the U.K. and inspired the nascent English punk rock scene. Members of the Clash, the Sex Pistols, the Damned, and Chrissy Hynde—all of whom had yet to make their musical debuts—appeared at their first gig. The Ramones blitzed London yet returned to the States to find manager Danny Fields begging to get them a gig in New Jersey. Wherever they played across the U.S., they drew only a small crowd of misfits bored with the music and culture of the time. Yet in their wake, the Ramones left behind numerous local bands who were inspired by their "do it yourself" musical philosophy. Others didn't know what to make of this band of freaks in black leather jackets.

Back in New York City, the band had a record deal but no money. They all lived with Arturo Vega, their lifelong art director, in his East Village loft. As their popularity grew through grassroots networks, they became major rock stars, if only in the eyes of rock journalists. At about this time, the bands from England that the boys had in a sense begat, exploded. The politically charged lyrics and the highly stylized images of the Clash and the Sex Pistols drew the attention of the world press and the Ramones seemed relegated to the background, to the point where the Sex Pistols were commonly referred to in the secular press as the creators of punk rock and its origin traced to London, rather than the Bowery. The Ramones countered the punk invasion with two of their best albums, *Rocket to Russia* (1977) and *Road to Ruin* (1978), although neither album broke through commercially in the U.S.

The stress of touring and the pressure to sell records put a great deal of strain on the group's interpersonal relationships. Tommy—drummer, producer and one of the founders—left the band. In a desperate attempt to release a hit record, the group enlisted the services of legendary

producer Phil Spector. Joey, who had pushed the band to experiment a little and make a different kind of album, was the impetus behind the union. On paper, the pairing of the two made sense, as the Ramones drew much of their inspiration from the kind of pop songs Spector was known for producing. But the reality of the working relationship was very different. Almost immediately, Dee Dee and Phil, both eccentrics in their own right, clashed, with the veteran producer once forcing Dee Dee to play bass at gunpoint. The Ramones, who were used to recording an album in one week at the very most, compared the experience of working with Phil Spector to Chinese water torture. The strain of the sessions caused the engineer to suffer a heart attack, while the finished result, *End of the Century* (1980), was to no one's liking. The band was never the same after that session, with the relationship between Johnny and Joey, although strained at the outset of the Spector session, completely ruptured by the end of recording the album. Following disappointing record sales for *Century*, the band resigned itself to the fact that they would probably never be a chart-topping recording act.

Johnny viewed being a rock star as a means of employment, recording an album every couple of years and touring constantly. After Tommy's departure, Johnny and Joey butted heads over the direction of the band. Johnny wanted to make the same music in the familiar Ramones mode, while Joey fought for creative change. A full-blown power struggle ensued and the aggression intensified when Joey's long-term girlfriend left him for Johnny. Joey was heartbroken and the relationship between the two band mates was fractured for good. Though they continued to tour in a small van together for years, they never spoke to each other again.

As the 1980s moved forward, the touring continued to be the only source of income. Marky Ramone (who replaced Tommy) succumbed to alcoholism and was kicked out of the band, only to return to the group a number of drummers later. Dee Dee decided to experiment with rap music and released an album, much to Johnny's embarrassment. Shortly thereafter, Dee Dee, overcome with exhaustion and bloated by anti-depressants, left the band, his wife and his psychiatrist. In the face of all this, Johnny refused to give up. He found CJ, a younger, cheaper version of Dee Dee, and continued the never-ending tour for another eight years. With Dee Dee's replacement, CJ Ramone, the band entered a new decade with a renewed influence on the bands that would become the grunge movement. CJ, who was a lifelong fan of the band, found that the "united" front he'd admired was anything but. Their relationships were splintering even further, but the band found acceptance in some inexplicable Beatle-like way in South America where screaming fans filled 30,000-seat arenas shouting "Hey, Ho, Let's Go!" Much of this late career

success was mitigated by the deteriorated relationships and constant feuding. The premature deaths of Joey and Dee Dee a year apart were sad punctuations to the legacy. In the end, the music industry recognized the huge influence the band has had over two generations of rock music. As Legs McNeil says in the film, “The Ramones saved rock and roll.”

THE BAND

Joey (Jeffrey Hyman) – vocals
Johnny (John Cummings) – guitar
Dee Dee (Douglas Colvin) – bass
Tommy (Tom Erdelyi) – drums, producer
Marky (Marc Bee) – drums
C.J. (Christopher John Ward) – bass
Ritchie (Ritchie Reinhart) – drums

for more information on the band members, see www.ramones.com

DISCOGRAPHY

1976 The Ramones
1977 Leave Home
1977 Rocket to Russia
1978 Road to Ruin
1979 It's Alive
1980 End of the Century
1981 Pleasant Dreams
1981 Rock 'N' Roll High School
1983 Subterranean Jungle
1985 Too Tough to Die
1986 Animal Boy
1987 Halfway to Sanity
1989 Brain Drain
1990 Pet Semetary
1991 Loco Live
1992 Mondo Mizarro
1993 Acid Eaters
1995 Adios Amigos

Interviews

Johnny Ramone
Dee Dee Ramone
Tommy Ramone
Joey Ramone
Marky Ramone
Ritchie Ramone
Elvis Ramone
C.J. Ramone
Arturo Vega
Monte Melnick
Danny Fields
Linda Stein
Seymour Stein
Debbie Harry
Chris Stein
Clem Burke
Legs McNeil
John Holmstrom
Roberta Bayley
Joe Strummer
Walter Lure
Mickey Leigh
Charlotte Leshner
Ritchie Adler
Rickey Salem
Mark Ralin
Glen Matlock
Rob Zombie
Eddie Vedder
Rodney Bingenhiemer
Ed Stasium
Daniel Rey
Dan Kessel
Dave Kessel
Gary Kurfurst

Biographies

Michael Gramaglia

Co-director, Co-producer

Michael Gramaglia was born in 1964 living his early life in Mamaroneck New York. The son of a feature Soundman, Michael was raised in a family with extensive ties to the film world. After graduating high school he worked as boomman and video operator for eight years. He lived in Rome, Italy for three years where he apprenticed under Vittorio Storaro. Upon his return to the U.S. Michael daylighted in an entertainment financial management firm where he worked with and befriended the Ramones. "End of the Century" is Michael's first feature film. He lives in Queens, NY with his wife, two cats and a dog.

Jim Fields

Co-director, Co-producer, Co-editor

Jim was born in Manhattan in 1964 and grew up in Larchmont, New York. He met Michael at Mamaroneck High School where they shared an enthusiasm for super-8mm filmmaking, the Ramones, The Clash, the Buzzcocks, Elvis Costello, the Cars, Blondie and many others. After graduating Vassar College, in 1986, Jim became an apprentice editor and later, editor and graphic designer for TV commercials, music videos and long format projects. Jim has edited and directed for a wide variety of clients including MTV, NBC, SONY Music and "The Howard Stern Show". "End of the Century" is Jim's first feature film. He lives in Brooklyn, NY with his wife and 15 month-old son.

John Gramaglia

Principal editor

Brother of Michael, John was born in 1966. After working in production and sound recording for eight years, John joined commercial editorial house Dennis Hayes & Associates in 1994. He joined Chinagraph Editorial in 1997 continuing his career in film editing as a staff editor. Having been a musician in local N.Y. rock bands for some twenty years, John's musical sense has afforded him a strong talent for music editing. He has edited commercials, EPKs, music videos and documentaries. His music videos include Coal Chamber, Mark Lizotte, Olu and Slipknot.

Rosemary C. Quigley

Producer

Rosemary C. Quigley was born in New York City in 1959. She began her post-production career at Scali, McCabe, Sloves Advertising in 1981, working in both the print and broadcast departments. She joined Denis Hayes & Associates in 1988, a premier editorial company, where she served as Executive Producer for seven years.

In 1997, she and four colleagues from Denis Hayes created Chinagraph Editorial, a New York City-based off-line editorial company that produces high-end commercials, documentaries, and feature films.

Quigley is a member of the Board of Directors of the Association of Independent Creative Editors and Secretary of The Kalish Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the relief of Tibetan refugees. She received her B.A. in Communications from Fordham University in 1981.

Quigley lives with her husband, James S. Richards, a gaffer and artist, and her nine-year-old son, Jamie, on the Upper West Side of New York City.

George Seminara

Producer

George Seminara was born in Bad Kreuznach, Germany in 1961. He broke his nose at a Ramones show at CBGB's in 1975 and proposed to his wife at a Bad Brains concert in 1982. He is an award-winning filmmaker. He has directed many music videos for the Ramones including the classic "Blitzkrieg Bop" and the perennial "Merry Christmas (I Don't Want to Fight Tonight)". He is also the Director and Producer of *Lifestyles of the Ramones*, which will be released for the first time on DVD in 2005 from Rhino Home Video. His 1991 film, *Live in New York: The New York Hardcore Story*, will be given the deluxe treatment when it is released on DVD by Victory Records this winter.

Currently, George has two films in the final stages of post-production, *Reach For the Moon: The Tay Sachs Story* and *Billy Strayhorn: Lush Life*. He lives near Joey Ramone Place in New York City with his wife and eight-year-old son.

Tracy McKnight

Music Supervisor/President, Commotion Records

Commotion Records co-founder and president Tracy McKnight has worked in and around entertainment media for more than ten years, and in that time she has emerged as a premiere talent in music supervision for film and television.

In addition to the current slate of projects at Commotion, McKnight has overseen the musical direction for some 50 films, a good deal of them having won acclaim and awards from all corners of the industry. She also draws upon her lively "rock 'n roll years" in the record industry as a producer and associate producer of over 200 studio recordings, dating from 1992 to today, for inspiration.

Her work embraces a range and diversity of tastes, and recent projects include such musicians and filmmakers as Jim Jarmusch (*Coffee and Cigarettes*), John Waters (*A Dirty Shame*), Guy Pearce (music from the film *A Slipping-Down Life*), Nathaniel Kahn (the Oscar-nominated best feature documentary *My Architect*), Jim McKay (*Everyday People*), David Holmes and Stephen Hilton's *Free Association* (soundtrack to Michael Winterbottom's *Code 46*), Nathan Larson (film score compilation including music from *Storytelling*, *Dirty Pretty Things*, and *Boys Don't Cry*) as well as Alice Wu's directorial debut *Saving Face*. (McKnight's come a long way from her native New Jersey, where she first took to the skies to see the world as a flight attendant for National Airlines!)

In the late 1990s, McKnight served as music director at Independent Pictures (*Swingers*, *Rudy*, *Scream*), and executive director at Good Machine Music. She also consulted on soundtrack acquisitions for Walter Yetnikoff's Velvel label (distributed through Navarre and BMG) and for Koch Entertainment. For several years, McKnight also worked with an eclectic array of artists at New York-based musician and producer Bill Laswell's Material, Inc, including George Clinton, Bootsy Collins, William S. Burroughs, Ornette Coleman, Motorhead, The Jungle Brothers, Sly & Robbie and many more.

When not music supervising and releasing groundbreaking music for your listening pleasure, McKnight has also served as a consultant for the Independent Film Project (IFP), and has spoken on numerous panels for the BMI and ASCAP writers' societies. She has sat on the Sundance Mentor Committee for the Mark Silverman Award, as well as participated as an Advisor for the Sundance Producer/Composer Lab. The Sundance Channel has twice profiled her career.

Contacts

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Credits

END OF THE CENTURY: THE STORY OF THE RAMONES

A Magnolia Pictures Release

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY

Michael Gramaglia and Jim Fields

EDITED BY

John Gramaglia and Jim Fields

ALSO PRODUCED BY

Rosemary Quigley
And Chinagraph NYC

ALSO PRODUCED BY

George Seminara

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Jan Rofekamp
Diana Holtzberg
Andrew Hurwitz

MUSIC SUPERVISOR

Tracy McKnight

CAMERA

David Bowles
Jim Fields
John Gramaglia
Michael Gramaglia
Peter Hawkins
Robert Pascal
George Seminara

BACKSTAGE & ROAD FOOTAGE

Marky Ramone

SUPER 8MM S. AMERICA FOOTAGE

Eddie Vedder

PHOTOGRAPHS BY

Roberta Bayley
Danny Fields
Godlis
Bob Gruen
Gary Pearlson

SOUND

Robert Gramaglia
John Gramaglia
Michael Gramaglia

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH & CLEARANCE

Jessica Berman-Bogdan
and Footage Finders

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

Susan Faulkner
Noelle Livreri

ASSISTANTS TO MUSIC SUPERVISOR

Sonya Dawson
Jon Solomon
Alysia Oakley

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Bo Lee
Chris Pensiero
Wes Waldron

MOTION GRAPHICS

Wes Waldron

RE-RECORDING MIXER

Tony Volante

RECORDIST

Travis Call

SOUND DESIGNER

Marshall Grupp

DIALOGUE EDITOR

Branka Mrkic-Tana
Keith Reynaud

ASSISTANT DIALOGUE EDITOR

David Briggs

AUDIO POST PRODUCTION

Sound Lounge

SOUNDTRACK PRODUCER

Chris Rich
MIX FACILITY
Soundtrack F/T

DOLBY CONSULTANT

Paul Sacco

POST-PRODUCTION PRODUCER

Rosemary Quigley

POST-PRODUCTION SERVICES

on Avid Media Composer
at CHINAGRAPH

COLORIST

Lez Rudge

ASSISTANT COLORIST

Ron Sudul

NICE SHOES EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Pat Portela

VIDEO POST PRODUCTION SERVICES

Nice Shoes, New York

TECHNICAL CONSULTANT

John Cummings
Tommy Erdelyi

LEGAL SERVICES

Epstein Levinsohn Bodine
Hurwitz & Weinstein

Press

***The New York Times*, "Rock Rock, Rock 'n' Roll Standoff," Bill Werde**

Over the last 15 months, "End of the Century," a documentary about punk rock's founding fathers, the Ramones, has been shown at major film festivals in New York, Toronto and Berlin. It has attracted a following among influential figures like Nicolas Cage and the director Jim Jarmusch. It has been praised in *Variety*, *Entertainment Weekly* and *The Los Angeles Times* for its unflinching portrayal of the dysfunction that both fueled and undermined the Ramones.

About the only thing the film hasn't gained is a release date.

The filmmakers, Michael Gramaglia and Jim Fields, say the movie has not been released after nearly seven years of work because of the very same tenuous relationships they hoped to document.

With their super-fast, two-minute, three-chord songs, the Ramones almost single-handedly created punk rock in the mid-70's, inspiring bands from the Clash to U2 to Pearl Jam along the way. But while the Ramones presented a united front on their album covers — black leather jackets, canvas Converse sneakers and bowl haircuts — the band was fraught with tension and jealousy among its members. Johnny Ramone, the guitarist, ran the band like a dictator. Dee Dee Ramone, the bassist, was a heroin addict (he died of an overdose in 2002). A cast of drummers came and went because they were either too drunk, too opposed to constant touring or too upset over not getting a larger share of the money from T-shirt sales. And Joey Ramone, the singer, was dumped by his fiancée, Linda, for Johnny in the early 80's. Joey and Johnny did not talk to each other during the 15 more years the Ramones toured until they retired in 1996. Joey and Johnny, in fact, never reconciled before Joey died of lymphatic cancer in April 2001.

"Part of what made the Ramones great was this negative energy they had that really worked for them," said Mr. Gramaglia. "It hasn't always worked so well for us."

When Mr. Fields and Mr. Gramaglia, now both 40, began the project in

1998, they were novice filmmakers, full of passion and completely lacking in any real sense of how to make a movie. They had met in 1980 at Mamaroneck High School in Westchester County and bonded over cars and the music they both loved — outcast rock like the Buzzcocks, Clash and, of course, the Ramones.

When he proposed making the documentary, Mr. Gramaglia was an assistant to Ira Herzog, the Ramones' longtime accountant. "All along," Mr. Fields said, "Joey was afraid it was going to be a movie about Johnny's perspective, and Johnny was afraid it would be a movie about Joey's perspective."

But Joey died before the filmmakers could interview him. "He e-mailed me on New Year's Eve and said he was looking forward to a three-hour therapy session," Mr. Gramaglia said. The next day, Joey walked out of his East Village apartment, slipped on some ice and broke his hip. His cancer killed him before he could leave the hospital.

Instead, Mr. Gramaglia and Mr. Fields used audio recordings of Joey that they obtained from Donna Gaines, a reporter for The Village Voice. The filmmakers submitted a rough cut of the movie to the Slamdance Film Festival in Utah. It was accepted and shown for the first time publicly at the festival in January 2003.

Even when the movie was shown at Slamdance, the filmmakers had not obtained permission to use archival concert footage and music from the Ramones and other bands. They had also never gotten the Ramones to sign releases for their interviews, which took more than three years to conduct. Now Dave Frey, the manager who represents Joey's half of Ramones Productions Inc., and Mickey Leigh, Joey's brother, say they will withhold their approval until the movie contains more Joey. "He's totally absent," Mr. Frey said. "Why not take out the three minutes of Joey and call it 'End of the Century, the Story of Three Ramones'?"

The film's release has been further complicated by the filmmakers' financial situation. By the time the film was presented at Slamdance, Mr. Gramaglia and his brother, John, a producer, had amassed a debt of about \$65,000 in production expenses. They owed Chinagraph, an editing house, another \$150,000 and they estimated they would have to spend several hundred thousand dollars more to secure the rights to music and concert footage.

Meanwhile, distributors were offering them \$30,000 for the rights to the movie. "We assumed we would make such a great movie that the Ramones would just love it and sign off, and someone would say: 'It's

great. Here's a million dollars,' " Mr. Gramaglia said. "We were so naïve."

Mr. Fields laughs at how clueless he was then. Penelope Spheeris, the director of the punk rock documentary "The Decline of Western Civilization" as well as "Wayne's World," introduced "End of the Century" at the Slamdance festival. Afterward, she found Mr. Fields. "She was like, 'Wow, do you have all the music rights?' I was like: 'Yeah! Sure! Totally!' I had no idea what she was talking about."

The version of the film that played at Slamdance and the TriBeCa Film Festival was a bit unwieldy at more than two hours. (It has since been shortened to 90 minutes.) But its tracing of the band's origins from glue-sniffing toughs from Queens to kings of punk resonated with a sincerity and sweetness that won over critics and the audience. Among its highlights are the last known interview with Joe Strummer, the Clash frontman, before he died of a heart attack in December 2002; early performance footage of the Ramones at the famous Manhattan club CBGB's, in which they fight with each other onstage over which song to play; and several hilarious observations from the spacey (but incisive) Dee Dee. More than anything else, the film chronicles a band chasing a breakthrough hit that never comes.

"The first night I watched it," Johnny Ramone said, "I thought, 'Whoa, this is dark.' It actually disturbed my sleep. If someone asked, 'Did you guys get along?' I'd say no. But seeing a whole movie dedicated to our not getting along? It's like we were a bunch of nuts!"

Later he showed the film to one of his friends, Mr. Cage. (Johnny was the best man at Mr. Cage's wedding to Lisa Marie Presley). He in turn set up a screening at the offices of the Creative Artists Agency in Beverly Hills last May. The screening was attended by film and music industry luminaries including Sofia Coppola, Adrien Brody, Flea and Anthony Kiedis of the Red Hot Chili Peppers. "The Ramones were a relentlessly honest band," Mr. Cage said in an e-mail message from Chicago, where he's working on a new film. "I think this documentary shows just how honest."

Today, Mr. Gramaglia and Mr. Fields are working to find more footage of Joey Ramone to add to the movie and to secure distribution deals to cover their expenses. The filmmakers say they are negotiating with the Warner Music Group for the DVD rights and with Magnolia Pictures for a theatrical release of the movie. The filmmakers are optimistic that the film will come out this summer.

Since they began making "End of the Century," Mr. Gramaglia and Mr. Fields have both gotten married. Mr. Gramaglia's parents died. Mr. Fields has a 2-year-old son, and his wife, Maria Arbusto, no longer allows him to discuss the film at home. "We sacrificed everything," he said. "Maybe that was dumb, but it was a great story about an important band that no one understood. The Ramones just wanted to be a band and follow their passion. And that's what we did."

Apr. 25, 2004

Variety, Scott Foundas

A sweeping overview of the career of seminal punk-rockers the Ramones, "End of the Century" is compulsory viewing for fans of the group, though pic's length (nearly a full two hours) may prevent it from crossing over to a general audience. Yet this is an exhaustive survey, not just of the Ramones, but of the entire underground music scene in New York (and abroad) in the late 1970s. And at pic's best, it recalls Michael Winterbottom's "24 Hour Party People" in its tribute to the music of the times and the way in which that music provided a voice to a generation of social misfits.

The better part of a decade in the making, "End of the Century" makes use of some candid interviews with the ex-bandmates and their contemporaries to depict just about every rise, fall and petty squabble the Ramones had. What emerges is an encyclopedic chronicle of addictions, lineup changes and the ravaging pressures of two decades spent on the road, in pursuit of a hit record that never really materializes -- like a punk "The Last Waltz" with the performance and backstage footage in inverse proportion.

*Reviewed at Slamdance Film Festival (Documentary Competition),
Jan. 21, 2003*

***Entertainment Weekly*, from “Rock And Shock,”
Owen Gleiberman**

I went into “The Agronomist” Jonathan Demme’s documentary about Haitian radio freedom fighter Jean Dominique, hoping that it would illuminate the soul of Haiti’s terrible struggle. The movie, however, is more dutiful than insightful: The director was friends with the gauntly charismatic Dominique, yet we learn precious little about him apart from his political idealism, which the movie enshrines to the point of idolatry. For a documentary that reveals as much as it celebrates, I vastly preferred “End of the Century: The Story of the Ramones”. It’s a seismic snapshot of the early days of punk, yet it also chronicles the amazing discord and unhappiness that propelled this most ecstatic of thrash bands. Call it the real “School of Rock”.

Sept. 26, 2003

***International Documentary Magazine*, Sarah Jo Marks**

Michael Gramaglia and Jim Fields set out to make the anti-Behind the Music documentary about the seminal punk band the Ramones. Penelope Spheeris, known for her Decline of Western Civilization trilogy, was on hand to introduce End of the Century, the almost complete doc detailing the rise and fall of the Ramones. Told through in-depth interviews, archival footage, radio interviews, frontman Joey Ramone's quotes and loads of great concert footage, the film holds the viewer in a headlock. End of the Century is an important piece of music history, and unlike most fan films, it is honest and open-hearted in its telling. These filmmakers' clear vision even extended to the marketing of the film. When asked about Sundance, they astutely answered, "We actually didn't send it to Sundance; we only sent it here."

April 2003

***Los Angeles Times*, from “Club Buzz,” “A ‘Century’ of the Ramones”**

Bopped into a special screening of "End of the Century" at CAA's Beverly Hills office, and I am still pining. The bittersweet Ramones documentary laid it all on the line: the good, the bad and the ugly truth of life in the rock-star fast lane. Along for the celluloid ride were guitarist Johnny Ramone, Nicolas Cage, Anthony Kiedis and Flea from the Red Hot Chili Peppers; Billie Joe and Mike Dirnt from Green Day; Tim Armstrong from Rancid and the Transplants; as well as Slim Jim Phantom from the Stray Cats and Steve Jones from the Sex Pistols. But the biggest stars in the house were the ghosts of Joey and Dee Dee Ramone. R.I.P. (Rock in peace)... And word to Clash lovers: "End of the Century" features Joe Strummer's final interview (R.I.P. once more).

April 2003

***Toronto Star*, from “Toronto International Film Festival—Docs shone at fest,” Geoff Pevere**

Story Of The Ramones: A terrific rock doc. In providing an up-close-and-personal history of one of rock music's most aggressively impersonal noise machines, Michael Gramaglia and Jim Fields' affectionate and comprehensive account of the 20-year sonic assault of perma-punks The Ramones takes nothing away from either the music or the legacy, but contributes much to one's appreciation of both. As gumsmackingly goofy as the band's image was, it was dead serious stuff to the boys themselves.

Sept. 18, 2003

***The Guardian*, “Baby, I don’t love you: The Ramones’ rows make up for John Boorman’s emotional dud at the Berlin film festival,” Peter Bradshaw**

Icy wind and snow in Berlin have matched the diplomatic frost reportedly existing between the director of the Berlin film festival, Dieter Kosslick, and producer Harvey Weinstein over the latter's failure to deliver his two big stars at the opening night movie gala for *Cold Mountain*. Nicole Kidman and Jude Law were no-shows for the big bash, leaving a gaggle of disappointed paparazzi and depriving Kosslick of the glamour sugar-rush he had been promised to kickstart his festivities.

Finally, on Sunday, *Cold Mountain* co-star Renée Zellweger was prevailed upon to come to town and smile for the cameras. "Besser spat als nie," snapped the German press - better late than never. Jack Nicholson, by contrast, was an absolute trouper, grinningly putting in an appearance to publicise the screening of his new movie *Something's Gotta Give*, and causing the media to swoon with excitement by going out on a "date" with Germany's ice-skating queen Katarina Witt.

Oscar nominee Charlize Theron has been another wildly popular visitor: her movie *Monster* is in competition. Written and directed by first-timer Patty Jenkins, it's the fictionalised account of the life of Aileen Wuornos - the itinerant prostitute who became America's first woman serial killer. Theron turns in a terrific performance in the lead, wearing full "ugly" make-up. She is belligerent, angry, pathetic, but intelligent enough to realise that her predicament is partly of her own making. Her murdering starts with the shooting of a violent creep who was about to rape her; after that, killing her clients simply becomes a habit. Jenkins does not turn Wuornos into a feminist icon, but she interestingly shows how being a "serial killer" need not involve consciously transgressive or psychotic Hannibal Lecter-type behaviour. As with our own Harold Shipman, it can be the habitual activity of a self-justifying career criminal. *Monster* is a hot tip for the big prize here, though there are mutterings that people are confusing elaborate make-up with good acting: a case of Nicole Kidman's false nose.

The awful disappointment in Berlin has been John Boorman's new film *Country of My Skull*: a drama about the Truth and Reconciliation hearings in post-apartheid South Africa. Samuel L Jackson plays a Washington Post reporter who initially clashes angrily with a white South African liberal, played by Juliette Binoche with an Afrikaans accent that sounds like Gouda being trodden underfoot. Naturally, they end up in bed, thus solving South Africa's tragic racial history in one naive liberal-humanist

clinch. The movie does not scruple to use quasi-real testimony as an emotional heart-wrencher to counterpoint this soupy romance and even has a little black boy forgivingly hugging the white cop who killed his parents. How can a director as intelligent and sophisticated as Boorman have come up with such drivel?

For my money, the best film at Berlin so far has not been in the main competition but in the Panorama international cinema sidebar. Untold Scandal, by the South Korean director EJ Yong, is an exquisite reworking of Dangerous Liaisons, transplanted to 18th-century Korea. The story of a cynical seduction that turns to grand romance, then to tragedy, is revitalised by this magnificent-looking film. Its eroticism, mystery and poignancy are captivating, and the performances are outstanding. It surely can't be long before UK audiences will be able to see this marvellous film.

Annette K Olesen's In Your Hands is a contrived but blazingly emotional story from a Danish director, presented under the Dogme 95 banner with ultra-realist low-budget production values. A woman prison-pastor befriends a female convict believed by the other inmates to have supernatural healing powers, and who appears to cure the pastor's infertility; their relationship leads to a tragedy depicted with uncompromising grimness. There were plenty of sniffles in the audiences for this. The lead performances from Ann Eleonora Jorgensen and Trine Dyrholm are both tremendous.

Thirty- and fortysomethings here were crazy **for the documentary by the Americans Michael Gramaglia and Jim Fields, End of the Century: the Story of the Ramones.** The legendary leather-jacketed, mop-haired punk rockers kept on going for over 20 years after their storming New York debut in 1976: never changing, never looking or sounding any different, and never making it into the super-league. The pseudo-surname handle "Ramone" for each appears to have encouraged a family type dysfunction, and the Ramones ended their career hardly speaking to each other, a bitterness that seems to have carried on after the death of two of their members, Joey and Dee Dee. A fascinating and melancholy documentary.

Three movies from France have livened up proceedings. The Anatomy of Hell is about sex, sex and more sex. Unmistakably the work of Catherine Breillat, this is an explicit, hardcore film using an old-fashioned softcore aesthetic: a woman pays a gay man intimately to inspect her naked body for a number of nights at the kind of chateau that used to exist in 1970s art-porn films. It's conducted with a strange kind of unflinching mandarin seriousness and the gay man, played by porn star Rocco Siffredi, has

plenty of tremendous lines that sound like punky Nietzschean epigrams: "The lie about the softness of women is hateful!"

L'Esquive by Abdellatif Kechiche is an endearing French take on the Hollywood high school Shakespeare genre: in the tough outskirts of Paris, an Arab boy falls for his leading lady in a school production of Marivaux. Cedric Kahn has reinforced his formidable festival reputation with Feux Rouges, or Red Lights, a thriller updated from a Georges Simenon novel. This turned out to be a classically elegant and gripping French film to thaw the freezing Berlin winter.

February 11, 2004

***RollingStone.Com*, "Two Ramones Films Due—Rare interviews, performance footage unearthed," Colin Devenish and Christina Saraceno**

A pair of Ramones-related documentaries -- End of the Century: The Ramones Story and Hey! Is Dee Dee Home?, a profile of bassist Dee Dee Ramone -- will debut at the Tribeca Film Festival this May.

End of the Century, which features interviews with members of the Clash, Blondie, Sex Pistols and surviving Ramones members, was co-directed by first-time filmmakers Michael Gramaglia and Jim Fields. The documentary begins with the pre-Ramones era in 1968 and holds a tight focus on the band's first years, concluding with the group's induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2002 and Dee Dee's death later that year.

"They really did grow up together," says Gramaglia. "Johnny beat up the other Ramones on the playground, until they became a band. They were as close to a family as you can get. It becomes more than a bunch of guys who don't get along, it becomes brothers. It's like a rock & roll version of The Godfather, the disintegration of the family."

A former employee in the Ramones' accountant's office who had previously dabbled in film, Gramaglia first approached guitarist Johnny Ramone about the idea for the documentary in 1994, but cameras didn't roll until five years later. Featuring unseen live and studio footage, along with extensive interviews with the various incarnations of the group, the film was independently financed, with the directors hopeful for a full theatrical release down the line.

"It's a very dark movie," says Johnny Ramone. "It's accurate. It left me disturbed as I was watching it. I'm basically portrayed as a tyrannical monster, Dee Dee is on drugs, Mark is an alcoholic and Joey is an alcoholic and drug addict at various times."

In gathering the footage, the directors walked a tightrope between the wary and occasionally warring factions of the group, causing delays in assembling the film and ultimately coming at the expense of getting singer Joey Ramone in front of the cameras. "He had his health issues," says Gramaglia. "That was the big thing. He was on chemo and he was very bloated and weak. We had scheduled probably ten interviews that at the last minute he would cancel. Then he broke his hip, and he never really got out of the hospital."

Gramaglia is hoping to track down what could be the Holy Grail for his documentary: three hours of interview footage with Joey Ramone shot by the producers of the Ramones concert film *We're Outta Here*. "Nobody knows where this footage is," Gramaglia says. "But apparently the producers did three interviews with Joey, where they talked to him at least an hour each time."

Some of the footage on *End of the Century* comes from Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder, who accompanied the Ramones on their final tour of South America. "They were huge down in Brazil and Argentina," says Gramaglia. "He's got great shots of them in a huge stadium filled to see the Ramones. He was actually filming when Dee Dee Ramone showed up to this concert and got in a huge fist fight with Marky in the midst of the crowd."

Agreeing to let the Ramones' story be told meant allowing the odd piece of dirty laundry to hang out on the line for all to see. "I guess I could sit there and be pained by certain things, like, 'Oh God, I don't want people seeing this,'" says Johnny. "At the same time it could have come out by someone else who doesn't do it accurately. It's a portrayal of what it was. I think you feel how hard it is for a band staying together for twenty-two years and what you have to go through and the difficulties of having the certain levels of success we had. We'd play some really big places in South America and then come back and play little clubs in New Jersey."

Hey! Is Dee Dee Home? features interviews with the bassist, who died last year, about his relationships with the Ramones, drugs and late New York Dolls guitarist Johnny Thunders. Director Lech Kowalski had initially interviewed Dee Dee for *Born to Lose: The Last Rock and Roll Movie*, a film about Thunders. "I think [Dee Dee] was really in the mood to tell his

story and to get something across," Kowalski says. "This was a point in his life when he was thinking about writing his book."

Kowalski pulled the title from the song "Chinese Rocks," a staple for both the Ramones and Johnny Thunders and the Heartbreakers, and point of contention between Dee Dee and Thunders. "It was a dope anthem that was written by a group of people," says Kowalski, "and there was always sort a tension between them about who actually wrote it."

March 11, 2003

Toronto Star, from "Toronto International Film Festival—Docs shone at fest," Geoff Pevere

The fire that burns behind Jack Black's eyes in *School Of Rock* is white hot: From beneath the most pointedly animated eyebrows since Jack Nicholson's, they glow like a demon's. And what possesses and ignites them is a force few menfolk reared in the west over the past half century will fail to look upon without certain awe. It is the God of Rock.

The mixed metaphor is deliberate, for the God of Rock is both deity and devil. And, standing in front of the classroom of prep school kids he's determined to render in rock's image, Black's Dewey Finn is both man of the cloth and messenger of the dark prince.

A failed rock musician who lives only to deliver the word of maximum riffage to his stunned charges, Dewey is both mortified by the kids' ignorance of Black Sabbath and perplexed by their desire to learn anything else - like math, maybe, or "world cultures."

To that end, the hero of Richard Linklater's idiotically entertaining new movie sends them home with copies of Rush's *2112* and Yes's *Close To The Edge* to feed their malnourished souls, and devotes precious class time to such fundamental rituals of rock orthodoxy as guitar-face, power-stances and castrato screaming. With what was once called "Satan's Music," Dewey has come to save them.

If Dewey is the most extreme example of rock's demonically possessive powers on evidence in this year's Toronto International Film Festival, he was hardly alone in his amplified fervour. The God of Rock was manifest in many guises and many films this year, but He always worked the same magic. He stole your soul. And once He had it, He never gave it back.

"All my life," says Gina Gershon's aging L.A. punk siren in Alex Steyermark's *Prey For Rock And Roll*, "I wanted to be a rock and roll star."

But what's she to do? Her band, an all-female chord-crunching machine that one member complains anticipated "the whole Riot Grrrl thing" a decade early, is still playing stinking beer joints for dope money, and 40 seems like an unseemly age for a woman to be strapping on a Stratocaster and howling at the ceiling.

But here's the catch for Gershon's rockchick Jacki - and anyone who's tried to hang up the Hammer of the Gods: Once you've lived the life, there's no backing out. The Rule of Rock is Rock Rules - for ever and ever amen.

(This I know only too well: I am a 45 year-old superannuated rock rat with greying hair and an MP3 player loaded with some 40 years' worth of carefully selected, embarrassingly fussed-over maximum riffage. I pray daily to the God of Rock, refuse to accept that it's not 1974 anymore, spend countless unproductive hours in music stores.

I will simply refuse to enter heaven if there aren't Led Zeppelin albums in the houses of the holy. How could it be heaven if it doesn't rock?)

Rock as form of possession, over which the possessed has no choice but to surrender unto eternity, is one of the music's most powerful mythological tropes: When you give up rocking, you fall from the God's grace.

But who can give it up? (And where do you land when you fall? In Willie Nelson's lap?) In Bob Smeaton's mesmerizing (for rockalytes) new documentary *Festival Express*, a train crossing Canada in summer 1970 is filled with some of the music's holiest ghosts: In one scene, Rick Danko, Janis Joplin and Jerry Garcia are captured jamming with exuberant, plastered abandon in their rolling honkytonk.

Recently assembled from footage long thought lost - and featuring startlingly fresh performances by the Band, the Dead and especially Joplin - Smeaton's film is on one level the story of a rock event belonging firmly to another era: *Festival Express* (featuring, among other holy rollers, The Band, the Dead, Joplin, Buddy Guy and the Flying Burrito Brothers) was conceived as a kind of moving Woodstock, a concert that brought - as one witness so aptly describes it - "the mountain to Mohammed."

Today, it is something else entirely: Nothing less than fresh images of the sanctified. That some come from beyond the grave (that place the poet called Rock and Roll Heaven) only makes the experience of watching that much more sacred. Not merely because these are images of some of rock culture's most revered dead, but because - in rock mythological terms, anyway - they died for the cause. Eventually, they gave their lives for rock and roll. Ultimate sacrifice, dude.

The allure of rock is like a calling. It lies somewhere beyond reason: This is its power and danger. Once heard, it can no more be resisted - or given up - than the opening chimes of AC/DC's immaculately titled "Hell's Bells."

When he was 14, it called to Rodney Bingenheimer, the almost ethereally serene subject of George Hickenlooper's *Mayor Of The Sunset Strip*. As the most ubiquitous invisible figure in Los Angeles music history - where he has introduced the likes of Bowie, Blondie, The Clash and Coldplay to listeners of his institutional weekly radio show on KROQ - Rodney has been likened to pop's Zelig and Hollywood's Andy Warhol, but the more apt analogy might be to rock music's ultimate pilgrim.

As the product of a love-starved childhood who heard in pop music the sound of belonging - and whose career began as a double to the Monkees' similarly height-challenged Davy Jones - Rodney has spent his life caught in the all-consuming thrall of rock.

Even his placid, almost somnambulistic demeanour - the diametrical temperamental opposite of the evangelical Dewey Finn - suggests someone caught in a kind of perpetual trance.

In *Afropunk: The "Rock n Roll Nigger" Experience*, James Spooner documents the experiences of black punks: Fans and musicians of a type of music traditionally associated with white suburban kids.

In addressing this rarely-acknowledged racial barrier in rock culture - one of many in pop music's history - Spooner also confirms the transcendent power of the high decibel high. While fully aware that their passion for punk draws them out of those categorically drawn grooves that usually keep kids of certain races and classes in their place, *Afropunk's* three-chord junkies also insist they had no choice: once the hooks got their hooks in, no racial barriers could hold.

Punk is of course a form of rock extremism: A fundamentalist, back-to-basics movement that insists on purity, passionate devotion and absolute

immersion. In no church of rock is the word "poser" more damning, and none ask for a more complete commitment to the life.

While this possibly accounts for punk's allure even to the most unlikely converts, it provides unequivocal rationale for the 20-year riff barrage fired by The Ramones, a band that walked the walk, talked the talk and rocked the rock of punk without so much as wavering for an instant.

Known not only for their locked-down image (jeans, moto-jackets, Chuck Taylors), two-minute songs and unmistakable sonic assault tactics, the Ramones - profiled in Michael Gramaglia and Jim Fields' **End Of The Century: The Story Of The Ramones** - were also inspirational for their almost pathological commitment to eternal snotbag adolescence. Never so much as changing their hair over the decades, The Ramones, who have now sent two members to Rock and Roll Heaven, were the Gods of the fundamentalist fringe, a sect of drugs and rock and roll.

As ruinous as the condition of Dewey Finn's bedroom is in *School Of Rock*, it serves as both crashpad and place of worship: The walls are a shrine to the holiest of rock and rollers, and prominently placed is the legendary, against-the-brick-wall black and white shot of the Ramones.

Beneath it, Dewey lies on his aging dorm-rat floor mattress, a properly reverential attitude under the circumstances: In the presence of such awesome power, none of us is worthy.

Rock on. And on...

Sept. 18, 2003

***Washington Post*, "For Films, Some Northern Hospitality—Toronto Festival Is Teeming With Quality Movies, and Good Vibrations," Desson Howe**

If Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Sundance and other prestigious film festivals are scattered seedbeds for new movies around the world, Toronto's is the grand hothouse of them all. And as the festival here winds to a close this weekend, it's clear that the Canadian hothouse has had another good year.

"This is one of the best in a long time," says Dylan Leiner, head of acquisitions at Sony Pictures Classics. "There's a lot of very decent films. I've talked to a lot of distributors from all over the world and members of the public. There's a genuine sense of joy over the programming this year."

Leiner's personal shortlist includes "Greendale," musician-turned-director Neil Young's loose collection of vignettes set in California; Ron Mann's "Go Further," a documentary about the many virtues of hemp; Stephen Fry's "Bright Young Things," an adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's "Vile Bodies"; and Korean filmmaker Kim Ki-duk's monastery-set drama, "Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring."

For most filmmakers, Toronto is a win-win event. Everyone flies home with something, even if it's just a rousing reception from audiences legendary for their cultural openness and enthusiasm. Of course they're hoping for more, whether it's the exclusive People's Choice Award, a distribution deal with the movie studios, or possibly a television contract with someone like TV executive Paola Freccero, senior film programmer for the Sundance Channel, who has been on the hunt for "all kinds of films, small Asian films, unknown French works, Icelandic works, Russian films." Freccero says she already has found "real gems in the little stuff," such as Iranian filmmaker's Samira Makhmalbaf's "At Five in the Afternoon," about the determination of a young girl to get an education in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

Of course, the star-driven Hollywood movies -- most of them shown at gala premieres during the opening weekend -- have enjoyed most of the attention. The crowds have swelled for the likes of "In the Cut," Jane Campion's stylish, strangely muted comedy-drama featuring a very nude Meg Ryan and Mark Ruffalo, as well as "Matchstick Men," the Warner Bros. thriller starring Nicolas Cage and Sam Rockwell.

But there has been no shortage of fervor for the less heralded delights, such as Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan's "The Small Town," an exquisitely delicate black-and-white film about the passing of seasons in a Turkish village; Jim Jarmusch's delightful "Coffee & Cigarettes," a crowd-pleasing collection of deadpan sketches featuring a ton of actors from Cate Blanchett to Iggy Pop; and **"End of the Century: The Story of the Ramones," a fun, midnight-madnessy documentary about the cult band by New York first-timers Jim Fields and Michael Gramaglia.**

Toronto has already led to exciting deals for some. Japanese director Takeshi Kitano's "Zatoichi," about the fictional blind swordsman, was snapped up by Miramax, and Turkish-born director Ferzan Ozpetek just

shook hands with Sony Pictures Classics for "Facing Window," a multi-character drama that's made big box office in Italy.

These newly bought films are just some of the strong works that graced this year's festival, and which are almost certainly coming to an art house, multiplex or hip cable channel nearest you.

Sofia Coppola's "Lost in Translation," which has reaped praise already at the recent Venice festival, and Tom McCarthy's "The Station Agent," which won big at Sundance, are two of the unquestioned -- and well-deserved -- audience winners here.

"Lost," a sweet-toned encounter between two Americans in Japan (played by Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson in a charmfest of a partnership), has already opened across North America this weekend; and "Station Agent," a gentle indie drama that marks a winning performance by dwarf actor Peter Dinklage -- as the inheritor of an abandoned train station -- looks destined for a powerful commercial run, too. (It opens in Washington in October.) Toronto's offerings have brimmed over with already proven good films -- works that have either won prizes or gotten a lot of buzz at previous festivals. Their success in North America -- on the art house circuit, with possible chances for Oscar attention next year -- seems virtually assured. And they're great films to boot.

These include "Elephant," Gus Van Sant's Golden Palm winner at Cannes, a sort of minimalist but mesmerizing interpretation of the Columbine massacre; "In This World," Michael Winterbottom's gritty, moving film about the dismal plight of political refugees, which took the top prize at Berlin in February; and "Goodbye, Lenin!," a charming crowd-pleaser about the post-Berlin Wall climate in Germany, which also did well in Berlin.

"Dogville," Lars von Trier's ambitious, well-constructed allegory about small-town nastiness in the United States, also drew strong reception here, as did "The Fog of War," Errol Morris's superb documentary about former defense secretary Robert S. McNamara.

Other films that have enjoyed a consensus of critics' thumbs-up include "Fuse," Gori Valtra's bittersweet comedy set in a corrupt Bosnian village; Ross McElwee's low-key personal diary-documentary, "Bright Leaves"; "The Yes Men," a documentary by directors Sarah Smith, Dan Ollman, Sarah Price and Chris Smith about the hilarious exploits of a group that stages elaborate con jobs on unsuspecting corporations; Canadian cult director Guy Maddin's satirical drama "The Saddest Music in the World";

and Bob Smeaton's "Festival Express," a film originally shot in 1970 in which rock-and-roll luminaries including Janis Joplin, the Grateful Dead and the Band journeyed to various Canadian venues on a wacky train tour.

It remains to be seen which film will get Toronto's ultimate nod -- the People's Choice Award; the winner will be announced late today. But Spanish-born filmmaker Isabel Coixet looked to be getting a boost for "My Life Without Me," a tearjerker about a young woman (played by Canadian Sarah Polley) who keeps her terminal cancer a secret from her family. Judging by the small coterie who walked from the movie straight to the dispenser of voting slips outside the theater, eyes streaming, a good cry could be someone else's winning smile.

September 14, 2003

Creem Magazine, W.C. Moriarity

Well the end of the century has come and gone, and the Ramones have certainly come a long way, baby!

Forget their induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, their music has now achieved such common currency that AT&T is even using it to sell cell phones in their TV ads. What makes it so ironic that the music industry would now be paying homage to these punk rock pioneers and that well-respected corporate entities would even be jumping on their bandwagon to help move their merchandise is the fact that, as this new documentary on the band points out, the Ramones spent the latter part of the last century playing the role of the outsiders with their noses pressed up against the glass, fruitlessly hoping to be let in the club and given some kind of validation. Having given up long ago on the lofty notion of achieving any kind of mainstream acceptance, it's more than just a little ironic that here they are, after the end of the century (and years after the band's demise), seemingly more widely accepted-and even respected-than ever before. Maybe God is a Ramones fan after all!

But End Of The Century, a full-length documentary about America's favorite dysfunctional rock 'n' roll family this side of the Osbournes, serves to remind us that punk rock wasn't always quite so socially acceptable. This yet-to-be-released, two-hour film that's currently making the festival circuit isn't exactly a rah-rah celebration of the inspired blitzkrieg bop that the Ramones first unleashed upon an unsuspecting world over a quarter of a century ago. Rather than simply hoisting the Ramones banner and asking a cretin nation to salute, the film instead chooses to cast its focus on the complicated internal dynamics of the band and the struggles that go along with trying to reach for the brass ring while still holding on to some sense of integrity. As you might guess, it ain't always easy!

The film chronicles the band from its earliest beginnings in the Forest Hills section of Queens in the '70s to its last show at the Hollywood Palladium in 1995, as well as touching on the deaths of both Joey and Dee Dee in recent years. A great deal of time is spent on the early days-usually the most interesting period for any band-when everything was new and no one quite knew what to make of the sonic assault that this leather-clad gang of characters was cranking out. Classic early footage of the boys arguing onstage about what song to play next is priceless. ("Fuck you! I don't wanna play that song!") Fortunately, the film primarily focuses on the band members themselves and their inner circle rather than straying

too far afield with various hangers-on and fringe players as these films often tend to do.

The stars are clearly Dee Dee, the irrepressible little kid who chafes at every rule but whose sincerity and enthusiasm make him hard to resist; Johnny, the punk rock drill sergeant who makes sure the trains keep running on time; Joey, the freaky, geeky frontman whose strange demeanor masks the soul of a lonely romantic; and the parade of drummers... Tommy, Marky, Richie (who, in his current guise, seems to exhibit all the style of an office supply salesman), and even Elvis Ramone (briefly portrayed by Blondie drummer Clem Burke in a two-week trial run).

Other longtime Ramones confidantes who contribute their observations include "art director" Arturo Vega and road manager Monte Melnick, whose exasperated descriptions of Joey's obsessive/compulsive behavior reveal a lot about how having to deal with a band's (or a bandmate's) peculiar idiosyncrasies over the years can drive one over the edge more quickly than a spouse with a voice like Roseanne! Ramones manager Danny Fields does an uncanny-and quite unintentional-impersonation of mythical Rutles manager Leggy Mountbatten when he breathlessly describes what first impressed him about the young toughs he would soon find himself managing: "They just looked so great!"

Clash master Joe Strummer and Sex Pistol Glen Matlock both turn up to offer a few choice memories of the Ramones' arrival on the English scene and the impact they had on the hungry hordes of spotty young English lads eager to emulate the Ramones' do-it-yourself style. Fields recounts how the Clash's Paul Simonon once confided to Johnny that his band was so lacking in any kind of musical proficiency that they were afraid to play. Johnny's reply? "Well wait till you hear us!"

It was a little disappointing that no one decided to share the story of the Ramones pissing in the Sex Pistols' beer during their 1977 London encounter (maybe they still don't know why the lager seemed to have a distinctly American flavor that night!). Somehow, you can't help but think the Ramones felt it served them right for copping the credit for creating what they themselves had already perfected-and things just ain't been right between America and those weasely Europeans ever since.

Transsexual singer Jayne County turns up to share some entertaining reflections about one of Dee Dee's early girlfriends, Connie, the junkie prostitute (two words you don't normally want people associating with your girlfriend!) who managed to get her hooks into both Dee Dee and New York Dolls bassist Arthur "Killer" Kane. She did this almost literally-

reportedly stabbing Dee Dee in the ass and nearly sawing poor Arthur's thumb off! And people thought Yoko was a handful?!

County, of course, serves as a link to the whole decadent glam scene that was fueled by the New York Dolls a couple of years before the Ramones exploded onto the scene. And their influence on our young heroes is detailed here-though I'd have given anything to see just one good shot of the young Ramones-to-be dolled up in their platform shoes and feather boas headed out of Queens!

Things take an interesting turn midway through the film when the devil comes calling in the strange personage of Phil Spector-who made a career out of doing such a good job of playing an insane record producer that he actually became one! Up to this point, with every new album, the Ramones had held out hope that they were just one hot single away from their big commercial breakthrough. Promising them the one thing they so sorely lacked, that sure-fire hit record, Spector cajoled the boys into the studio to let him work his wizardry on the rough and raw sound of the Ramones.

Not surprisingly, the antics of the gun-toting perfectionist producer clashed with the band's usual slam-bang style, and the film makes the sessions sound like a living hell. The death of Johnny's father finally provided an excuse to escape the madness, and the guitarist even seemed to find having to deal with his father's death a welcome relief from having to deal with an all-too-alive Phil Spector. In the end, the deal with the devil didn't pay off anyway. The album, *End Of The Century*, didn't turn out to be the commercial breakthrough that everyone had hoped for.

The film points out that following the failure of the Spector collaboration, which had been strongly supported by Joey and reluctantly agreed to by Johnny, the band seemed to accept their lot in life and decided to soldier on without any of those dreamy little dreams of ever achieving anything resembling mainstream acceptance. The film also delves into the rarely-discussed romantic triangle in which Johnny eventually hooked up with the girl Joey still held a candle for (and to whom Johnny is still married to this day), and points out how this not only led to an irrevocable split within the band, but also may have served as the inspiration for the song "The KKK Took My Baby Away." *Cherchez la femme!*

With the band members personally alienated from one another and having given up any hope for a commercial breakthrough, the remaining years don't exactly come across as much of a party. In the film, Johnny refers to being in the band as "a job." And Johnny himself confirmed to

me that the film's mood and perspective were fairly true-to-life and added, "It really doesn't make being a Ramone look like much fun at all!"

At some point, virtually every modern rock 'n' roll documentary starts to look a little like "Spinal Tap." And in this one, it clearly comes when Dee Dee's rap career is showcased. It's pretty hard not to find the sight of the strutting, sweatsuit-clad Dee Dee anything other than hilarious. And as Dee Dee himself accurately explains, "I'm not a Negro!" What's not so funny is Dee Dee's obvious drug problem. And when someone points out that Dee Dee probably would have been happier being in a band like the Heartbreakers with legendary junkies Jerry Nolan and Johnny Thunders than in a band that collected baseball cards like the Ramones, sadly it seems this couldn't be any truer.

The copiously tattooed and perpetually spaced out Dee Dee still manages to come off as probably the most sympathetic and entertaining character in the film. When he expresses his sincere amazement at the young Tommy Ramone's ability to actually prepare hamburgers and potatoes for himself, you realize what a helpless soul he truly must have been, but you also can't help but feel some sense of sympathy for his seeming inability to deal with the basic details of life. In the final image we see of Dee Dee in the film, he's wandering down a hotel hallway during the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction festivities muttering to himself, "Poor Dee Dee..." Poor Dee Dee, indeed!

Every film that ends with a band of guys who've been together through thick and thin finally fracturing is always bound to have a slightly tragic feel to it-especially if two of them actually die! But in addition to providing a window into the unpleasant unraveling of a great band, this film also helps to give credit to this motley gang of outsiders who did something so simple that it seemed revolutionary-they brought spirit and passion back to rock & roll at a time when it looked like it might be in danger of dying an unceremonious death by a thousand disco cuts!

And thanks to their ardent devotion to keeping the rock 'n' roll flame alive, this strange little band that never seemed to be able to catch their big break somehow manages to resonate in the hearts and minds-and leather jackets-of so many people around the world today. Despite all their conflicts and struggles, End Of The Century serves to remind us that, just like rock 'n' roll itself, the Ramones are too tough to die after all!

July 2003