

# The All-New Adventures of the Ramones

## Joey on the Phone



Joey Ramone

The Ramones are now 15 years old, and Joey Ramone is trying spin me the line that they are better than ever, "stronger and tighter than ever." But y'know, were punk rockers really meant to go 'til they were 40? Gabba gabba hey — no-one's gonna tell the Ramones just what and what not to do, okay?

The Ramones are coming downunder for only the second time. Joey can't really remember the 1981 visit. This month also sees the release of *Brain Drain*, the band's 12th album. Produced by Bill Laswell, the LP is stripped back — from speed-metal through to their poppiest moments since *Subterranean Jungle* — and not too bad at all. More energy than the Stones had after 15 years, and better than *Chicago 12* anyway.

So what's Joey Ramone got to say for himself? Mostly he says "Y'know" but I've cut most of those out. There are still some left in for flavour. Anyway, do the Ramones really know how supremely ironical they are, or are they totally serious? Read on, make up your own mind, and remember just how cool these guys are!

There's a band down here, Joey, and they're called the Ramonees. They're a Ramones tribute band, doing your songs.

"Huh?"  
A band who just play Ramones songs.  
"That's exciting, do they play anything else?"

"I don't think so. Are young bands the world over still playing Ramones songs? Ten years ago, everyone was playing Ramones songs — they were so good and easy. Are kids still starting out in garages with 'Rockaway Beach'?"

"More bands cover our songs now than ever, y'know. It's cool. It's exciting what you hear about, y'know. It's great."

What about the new Ramones album, *Brain Drain* — do you think those songs are gonna inspire kids to go out and emulate the band?

"Yeah, well we think it's one of our best albums that we've ever done, y'know what I mean? We think it's up there with *Rocket To Russia* or *Too Tough To Die* or *Road To Ruin*, y'know, and we really enjoyed making it and things were just going really well with the band and there is a really good vibe in the band now and has been for a bit, and we enjoyed working with Bill Laswell, y'know, and things are going really good, y'know, I mean, y'know, things're going good everywhere

and we're excited about hitting the road. We just got a new bass player now."

I heard that Dee Dee left. What happened to him?

"Dee Dee left to pursue a solo career."

Yeah? I heard he's done an album.

"Yeah, so we have a new kid with us and, ah, things sound great, y'know. It's exciting. I mean, it's a shame Dee Dee left, but that's what he had to do, so everybody's happy 'cos we're really happy with the new kid. His name's CJ and he's great: he's a really good bass player and he's got a good attitude and it's refreshing, y'know. It's new blood and the band sounds really exciting."

[They say that Dee Dee was a terrible bass player. Johnny Thunders said that he came along to audition for the Heartbreakers and couldn't play a thing. A new Phil Spector book, *He's A Rebel*, details an incident where, during the recording of the Ramones LP *End Of The Century*, Spector held a gun to Dee Dee's head to make him play. The sad thing is, though, that Dee Dee was possibly the funniest Ramone; I could almost believe that he actually believed all the shit. "When you see Johnny play a barrage of power chords and make a mean face, you know that's really how he's feeling," says Dee Dee in the Ramones' presskit! Shee-it! I guess we can only hope CJ is as funny, or at least has some mean faces of his own.]

Do many diehard old punks still come along to see the Ramones, Joey?

"We really got a broad mixed audience, y'know. We still get a lot of our old fans who, ah, aren't deaf and didn't get old, y'know what I mean? But like I guess for the most part the crowds seem to be a lot younger, but on the other hand we get all the different sorts of facets of crowds, like we get all the metal kids and we get all the bands themselves — people like Guns n' Roses, Metallica, all those bands come to see us, y'know what I mean? Motorhead. And we get young kids and older people, it's a good mix. And everybody has a good time and that's what it's all about, y'know."

Do you think that the Ramones have more in common with bands like Guns n' Roses and Metallica than what passes for "punk" these days.

"No, we maintain our own unique sound. I mean the Ramones isn't like nobody else, but on the other hand we're, y'know, probably heavier than anyone else too, y'know what I mean? Or we have our own unique sound and style and have always maintained to, y'know, to... y'know, I

mean, y'know... I mean, these kids like us. The kids that listen to those bands like the Ramones, and a lot of other bands are heavily influenced by us, and in a lot of ways we're responsible for... y'know, there's two decades of, um, y'know, bands and fans and stuff. Like Metallica and stuff — we met them in 1980 and they told us they thought our sound was more of a metal sound, and they're Ramones fans, Lars and all of them. Y'know what I mean? It's real cool and it's fun and nice to hear, y'know, and it makes you feel good, y'know. We're big fans of Metallica too, and Anthrax and Motorhead and Guns n' Roses and all that stuff as well as lots of other things. I mean, 'cos our tastes are very broad and we like a lot of things, y'know. I'm a rock fan. That's how I keep my enthusiasm and how I stay excited about stuff, right?"

They're making another *Rock n' Roll High School* movie with the Replacements in it. What do you think of them?

"They offered it to us, but we turned it down, 'cos we had done the original. The Replacements are alright, y'know. They're okay."

Do you think this one will compare very well to the original? That one managed to cram a lot of essential teenage rebellion shit into one

movie...

"I don't think it will really be anything, 'cos the original sorta kicked off a whole new genre of teenage film, y'know. It was a Roger Corman classic, and he had an all-star Corman cast, and all the teen films followed after *Rock n' Roll High School*. Now it's a classic; it shows on TV all the time here and abroad, so they're making a sequel 'cos it did so well. So it's kinda pointless for us to do it again. We don't want to do it again, y'know what I mean?"

The song 'Pet Semetary' off *Brain Drain* was written especially to be the title track for the Stephen King movie. But the Ramones don't appear?

"Nah, but I had a bit part in a film called *Road Kill*. It's a Canadian release, and it played at the Toronto film festival last weekend. It's a rock n' roll film and it's pretty cool, y'know. I have a part and I think 'Howling At The Moon' is in the film."

Is your part a cameo?  
"Yeah, I play myself. It should be pretty funny, 'cos I got to like write my lines. I haven't seen it yet, myself, though."

The Ramones have always been portrayed with a certain cartoon quality about them, talked about as "cartoon rockers". Would the kids go for a cartoon TV series, the

adventures of the Ramones or something?

"If someone wanted to do something, I guess. I don't really see the Ramones as being depicted in cartoon form myself. I mean, on one hand the Ramones have character and we're real people, so I guess if someone could do something, it could be okay. It used to sorta get me about being called "cartoon" but I guess that's the way it's done. Nowadays, these bands are just clones of each other and nobody has any personality or identity; maybe that's why people say 'I could see a cartoon of you.' I guess I couldn't really let it get me; maybe I should look at it like... I dunno, be flattered or somethin'. Like the Beatles."

I was being flattered. Do you think that the Ramones have ever come close to perfection — like as a concept, the Ramones are quite limited, but maybe perfectly fitted to those limitations?

"Yeah, I think so, in a sense. We're a real honest band, with a definite identity and personalities — something that doesn't really exist nowadays. If you see MTV or whatever, everybody looks and plays the same, even has the same hairstyle. It's all bullshit, y'know what I mean? Only a handful are unique, have identity and are doing anything really worthwhile."

Are there any new bands coming out that you think might have it?

"I've been working with a lot of bands in New York, putting on shows to expose new artists, theme nights and stuff. There's a band called Tribe 375 who are real exciting, real primal with good songs. They've been doing a buncha shows round town and I've been helpin' 'em — working with 'em, sort like shopping 'em, doin' kinda managerial work and there's a lotta label interest now. They're sorta like bands you don't find anymore — hard rock, very exciting, very visual, y'know. There's a lotta good bands in New York, it's very fertile as far as new artists go. I've been doin' that stuff, it keeps me stimulated and stuff."

Do you ever wanna sit down and talk about art or literature or philosophy kinda stuff, Joey?

"Yeah, I do that a lot too, y'know. I mean, it's really the circles you hang out with. I get off more on people who've got some brains in their head; I hang out with good people. I don't really "hang out" that much anymore though — I go out, but I don't hang out the way I used to hang out."

The song 'I Believe In Miracles' on *Brain Drain* is full of lines like 'I believe in a better world'. It's a long way from 'Beat On The Brat' and the sorta things the Ramones used to say.

"Well, y'know, when the Ramones first started, we were dealing more with our own frustrations, being alienated — those were the kinda things that were affecting us more in those days. We were kinda broke, and that's how life was in those days, you dealt more with your own self. But as you live, the world's changed a

lot — it's got pretty intense lately, but things are getting better, with Gorbachev and stuff. People are realising about interaction, and I got hope now. Ignorance, basically, is responsible for people not getting along, but things are more optimistic."

Were some of the views stated by the Ramones in the past irresponsible?

"We're all individuals, so everyone's got their own view on things. Maybe John tends to be more right wing, and me and Dee Dee were more the other way, y'know what I mean? I think that now, everybody's a bit more open, a bit more realistic, y'know. I think some things were said in the past that weren't quite the way they shoulda been stated but, like, you live and you learn, y'know. Your views on things change just by living and growing — I think ours have."

The song 'Merry Christmas (I Don't Wanna Fight Tonight)'...

"Makes it a seasonal record, y'know. It's a true song, written one Christmas Eve, years ago actually. It's about fighting with your girlfriend, and it more or less says, "it's Christmas Eve — truce!" It's a good fun song; I always thought it would be good for the Ramones to record a Christmas song, y'know, like Slade did and a buncha other bands. I thought it would be cool to do, y'know, and I think it came out real good."

What's gonna happen when you're really old, Joey? Is some young band gonna find the Ramones playing in a bar somewhere and drag you out on tour so they can feel hip, like the Clash with Bo Diddley and now U2 with BB King?

"Things couldn't be better with us. The band's never been stronger and tighter, and we're getting on great together — there have been turbulent times, rough times in the past, with our being at close quarters as a touring band..."

"But things couldn't be better, so I can't really say. If we felt we weren't good anymore, it would be time to give up or break up the Ramones or whatever, but it's like the farthest thing from our minds right now. Things are goin' great, better and better. It's always been great in Europe, but it's picking up here at home, and in new territories. Things're going well. We're happy — ha!"

Does your mother know you're a Ramone?

"Yeah, she knows, and she's my biggest fan. She's always been really supportive. My father was the one, y'know. But he's happy now I'm successful. Ha ha! He can't call me a bum anymore — now I call him a bum, y'know."

So are they gonna be any good? "Stronger and tighter than ever"? Could be. Joey Ramone's mum and dad sound happy and the Ramones are a happy family again. And isn't it fashionable to have big rips in your jeans this year? Watch out for the Blitzkrieg Bop!

PAUL MCKESSAR

## Spotlight on CLIFTON CHENIER: The King of Zydeco



ZYDECO is the term used to describe the traditional dance music of the French speaking Black Creoles from South West Louisiana. It is a mixture of Afro-American rhythms and singing drenched with Cajun waltzes and two-steps, with the accordion out front leading the celebration. Zydeco music has changed and evolved over the years yet to a remarkable degree it has continued to serve as a very popular dance music and, like its white counterpart, Cajun music, has continued to utilise older and traditional tunes and songs.

The likes of Los Lobos, Paul Simon and the recent film "The Big Easy" have recently introduced this style of music to modern audiences, but the form began back in the 1920's when the French influence merged with the Delta blues. And it was Clifton Chenier, the Grammy Award winning undisputed originator and King of Zydeco who has put Zydeco music on the map. A multi-talented musician who plays accordion, harmonica, drums, guitar, piano, bass and sings, there is no one else who can match Clifton's fine musicianship, his charisma as a performer, his improvising ability as a singer and composer, his deep roots in the French-Creole culture of his region, and his ability to play for his audience according to their tastes and needs. Unfortunately he died in 1987 but has left behind no less than 13 albums. Check out the Clifton Chenier sound and savour for yourself the extraordinary variety of ingredients stirred into Clifton's unique gumbo pot of Zydeco delights!

### Available on LP and Cassette

"Out West"	1072/C-1072
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