



Joan Jett.
Courtesy Blackheart
Records.

Jett, Joan (b. 1960)

by Teresa Theophano

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Pop icon of the 1980s turned contemporary star, Joan Jett has long been a part of the rock-and-roll world. Referred to as "the godmother of riot grrrl" for her emergence as an aggressive, punk-influenced guitarist and singer in a time when most mainstream female musicians performed either bubble-gum pop or folk, Jett remains vital as a musician, producer, and actor. Fans admire the fact that, despite her increasing technical proficiency, Jett's music has remained satisfyingly consistent since the outset of her solo career.

Jett was born Joan Larkin in Philadelphia on September 22, 1960. She spent most of her childhood in Baltimore. Her family moved to Los Angeles in 1972, where she became interested in artists such as David Bowie, Suzy Quatro, and Gary Glitter.

Jett's interest in performing rock music was piqued when she received a guitar for Christmas at age 13. Only two years later, in 1976, she helped form the Los Angeles-based, all-teen-girl band the Runaways. The group made a splash in Europe, but was not taken seriously in the United States; largely written off as a novelty act, it disbanded in 1979.

Jett, who had decided early on that she did not care about prescribed gender roles and wanted to succeed in the rock world, went on to establish her musical career without the Runaways. She produced an album for the punk band The Germs and recorded with former members of the Sex Pistols.

After the demise of the Runaways, Jett began looking for a new band; in 1980 she put together The Blackhearts. Their debut album, originally titled *Joan Jett*, was renamed *Bad Reputation* when it was released in the United States in 1981, on Jett and manager Kenny Laguna's own Blackhearts Records label (in conjunction with the now-defunct Boardwalk Records). But it was Jett's hugely successful second album, *I Love Rock 'n' Roll* (1982), with its #1-hit title track, that made her a star.

In the 1980s, Jett had some top-40 hits and then experienced several ups and downs in her career. She toured frequently in the 1990s and contributed to several soundtracks and compilation albums, in addition to issuing two full-length releases.

Jett's leather-clad, bad-girl image, and her collaboration with seminal Riot Grrrl act Bikini Kill, as well as with (female) rock groups L7 and Babes in Toyland, helped cement her reputation as a kind of queercore role model despite her lack of a genuine niche. The queercore movement, characterized by hardcore punk music and militant lyrics, embraced her, though she had already achieved prominence when queercore came to the fore in the late 1980s.

While she has not issued a public statement regarding her sexuality, Jett has performed publicly with a sticker on her guitar that proclaims, "Dykes Rule," and her sizable lesbian following is a formidable presence at her shows. With the Blackhearts, Joan has performed at numerous gay-rights events, headlining at St. Louis's Pride Fest in 2001, and she often appears at queer-themed shows and clubs in New York City.

In response to the rumors surrounding her sexuality, Jett has said, "I don't really care what people call me. I think it's important to support people you want to support and not be afraid of being called names."

Jett's acting assignments have included a role in the 1987 feature film *Light of Day* and a successful eight-month stint as Columbia in the 2001 Broadway production of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Her greatest hits album, *Fit to be Tied*, came out on Mercury Records--distributing the album for Blackheart Records--in 1997.

Recent albums include *Fetish* (1999), *Unfinished Business* (2001), *USA: Joan Jett and the Blackhearts* (2002), *Naked* (2004), and *Sinner* (2006).

In addition to maintaining a busy touring schedule, Jett hosts a Sirius Satellite Radio show, *The Radio Revolution with Joan Jett*.

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