



Joan Jett



Joan Jett

**JOAN JETT'S MUSICAL AND SONG WRITING APPROACH IS HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY THE HARD-EDGED, HARD BEAT-DRIVEN RHYTHMS COMMON TO MANY ROCK BANDS OF HER NATIVE PHILADELPHIA, OFTEN FEATURING LYRICS SURROUNDING THEMES OF LOST LOVE, CRITICISMS OF INSINCERITY, THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY, THE STRUGGLES AND RESOLUTIONS OF THE AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS. SHE HAS 3 ALBUMS THAT HAVE BEEN CERTIFIED PLATINUM OR GOLD, AND SHE HAS BEEN REFERRED TO AS THE "QUEEN OF ROCK 'N' ROLL" MANY TIMES DURING HER CAREER.**

Joan Jett poses for a photo.

BORN	09.22.1960 PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA
DIED	
CAREER	QUEEN OF ROCK AND ROLL



Joan Jett  
1960-

THE BASICS



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Joan Jett  
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EARLY LIFE

**B**orn Joan Larkin on September 22, 1960, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. One of the top women in rock, Joan Jett had a string of hits during the 1980s and 1990s. Her passion for music began early, and she received her first guitar at the age of 14.

Moving to southern California, Jett began frequenting a popular youth club known as Rodney Bingenheimer's English Disco. There, she found inspiration from the glam rock stars of the day. "I learned to scream from Marc Bolan of T. Rex," Jett explained to Esquire. Jett started her musical career as a teenager, forming her first serious band, the Runaways, at the age of 15. The final line-up included Jett on guitar and vocals; Sandy West on drums; Cherie Currie on lead vocals; Jackie Fox on bass guitar; and Lita Ford on guitar. The band was ahead of its time in many ways, with its hard-rock sound emerging during an era when disco music was king. They also felt dismissed by audiences and critics because of their young age and their gender; the public didn't seem to know what to do with five girls who sang about sex, rebelling, and partying. The musicians' fashion choices also alienated them from mainstream fans; Currie chose to wear lingerie on stage, and Jett often appeared in her trademark red, leather jumpsuit.

In 1976, the Runaways released their first self-titled album, which failed to impress critics and music buyers alike. Still, the song "Cherry Bomb," with its rebellious and raw edge, which Jett wrote with friend Kim Fowley, became a punk hit. The following year, the Runaways released their sophomore effort, *Queens of Noise*, which featured such tracks as "Born to Be Bad" and "Neon Angels." While the album performed poorly in the U.S., the Runaways received a warm welcome in Japan, scoring three gold records there.



Joan Jett in posing on the street.



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THERE ARE VERY  
**FEW**  
PEOPLE LIKE  
**ME**  
WHO LOOK UPON  
ROCK AND ROLL  
**AS A**  
**RELIGION.**



Joan Jett playing a gig



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Joan Jett  
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Joan Jett rocking out.



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After Currie and Fox left in mid-1977, Jett emerged as the group's lead singer. She was already a powerful force behind the scenes, writing most of the runaways' songs. The band struggled through two more albums before they were dropped from their record label. The group called it quits in 1979.



Joan Jett and The Runaways.



Joan Jett  
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EARLY LIFE

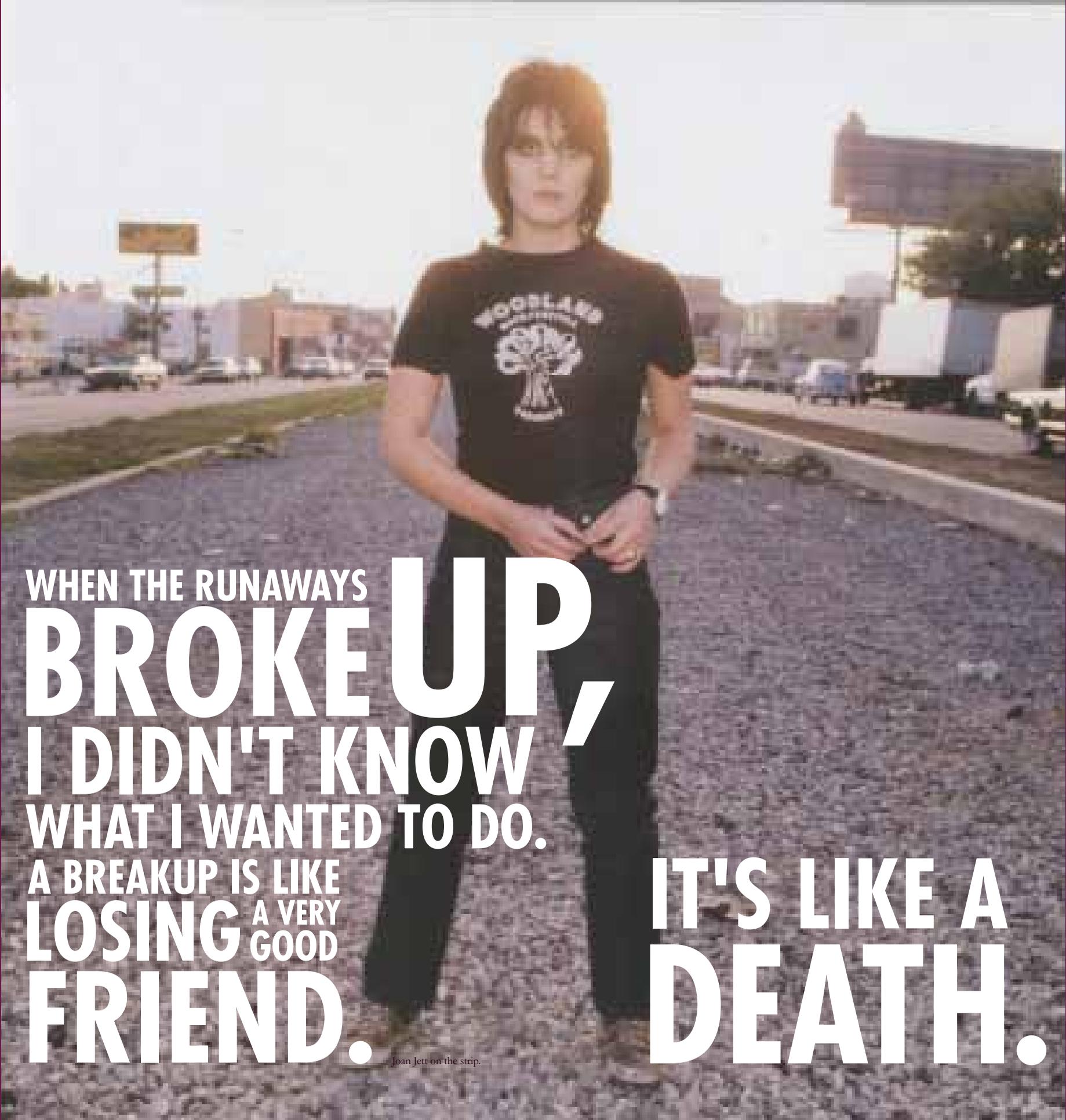


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EARLY LIFE



WHEN THE RUNAWAYS  
**BROKE UP,**  
I DIDN'T KNOW  
WHAT I WANTED TO DO.  
A BREAKUP IS LIKE  
LOSING <sup>A VERY</sup> GOOD  
FRIEND.

Joan Jett on the strip.

IT'S LIKE A  
**DEATH.**



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Joan Jett with walking with a friend.



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**D**eciding to pursue a solo career, Jett spent some time in England working with Paul Cook and Steve Jones, both former members of the legendary punk band the Sex Pistols. She then returned to Los Angeles where she worked as a producer for the first album of the L.A. punk band the Germs. She also tried acting, appearing in a film based on the story of the Runaways entitled *We're All Crazy Now*. Around this time, Jett met producer Kenny Laguna and songwriter Ritchie Cordell. Both men helped her with her first solo album.

Jett tried to get a record label to distribute her new album, but she was rejected by 23 different companies. Out of frustration, she and Laguna founded Blackheart Records in 1980. In making the record, she got help from an unlikely source—rock supergroup the Who. Laguna was friends with the band members and their manager, and they let Jett use their recording facilities. She later told *Rolling Stone* magazine that "We wouldn't have been able to make the record if they hadn't helped us. They basically let us record what became *Bad Reputation* and (said), 'Pay us when you can.'" At first, Jett and Laguna printed and distributed the record themselves, selling copies at Jett's shows. The record then was picked up by Boardwalk Records and re-released as *Bad Reputation*. Her rock-pop sound, however, didn't quite catch on. Not one to give up, Jett toured with her band, the Blackhearts, and put together another album. *I Love Rock 'n' Roll* became a huge hit, driven in large part to the title track, which hit the top of the pop charts in early 1982. She had two more hit singles that year with her version of Tommy James' "Crimson and Clover" and Gary Glitter's "Do You Wanna Touch Me (Oh Yeah)."

Building on her newfound fame, Jett released *Album* in 1983, but it failed to match her earlier success. It featured the top 40 single, "Fake Friends," and a cover of Sly and the Family Stones' hit "Everyday People." Her next effort, 1984's *Glorious Results of a Misspent Youth*, offered listeners her remake of "Cherry Bomb," but it did not fare well on the charts.



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Jett again tried acting with a role in *Light of Day* with Michael J. Fox. The film failed with critics and at the box office, but she had a minor hit with the theme song, a Bruce Springsteen cover. Just when it looked like her career was in decline, Jett returned to the charts in 1988 with two hits, "I Hate Myself for Loving You" and "Little Liar" from her *Up Your Alley* album. In 1990, Jett released a collection of cover songs, *The Hit List*, which included the minor hit "Dirty Deeds," originally performed by AC/DC. Two more albums followed with little commercial success. She did, however, receive a lot of positive reviews for 1994's *Pure and Simple*. The title came from her style of music. "Our music is still pure and simple basic rock," she told *Guitar Player*. "We never stopped playing three-chord rock and roll." Outside of her own music, Jett worked as a producer for groups such as Bikini Kill and L7, along with several other female-led rock bands that drew inspiration from Jett and the punk-glam rock sound of the Runaways. She also recorded with the surviving members of the Seattle punk band the Gits as Evil Stig.



Joan Jett at a show in a famous jumpsuit.



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In 1999, Jett released *Fetish*, which featured a mix of old and new material. She took a long break between full studio efforts as she faced difficulties with her record company. Her next full studio album was 2004's *Naked*, quickly followed by 2006's *Sinner*, both of which she released through her own record label. *Sinner* marked a change in direction for Jett. The song "Riddles" was her first political song, which she wrote as "a commentary on the state of our country," she explained in *Interview* magazine.

While mainstream hits have eluded her in recent years, Jett continues to tour extensively and plays a variety of gigs. "I love playing fairs. I think they're great, because you get out and you see America. We always have wonderful, very boisterous crowds. You see families; you see lots of kids. And it's great," she said. Jett has also taken an active part in signing bands to her record label. "We made Blackheart Records what we wanted it to be," Jett said. "It's a place where girls can feel comfortable to be—both in a work environment and on an

artistic level." Current acts with Blackheart include *Girl in a Coma* and the *Dollyrots*. In the film world, Jett has played an important role in the biopic *The Runaways*, a film based on Cherie Currie's biography *Neon Angel: The Cherie Currie Story*. She served as an executive producer on the project, and assisted actress Kristen Stewart with her portrayal of Jett. Jett gave the actress audio tapes from when she was 14 years old, which were meant to help Stewart capture Jett's distinct accent—"a combination of Maryland-East Coast-Philadelphia slang," Jett said. The two also spent a lot of time together. "I was there to be a resource for Kristen. She watched me a lot—the way I spoke . . . the way I moved in space, everything," she explained.

Away from work, Jett devotes much of her time to social causes. She is active with Farm Sanctuary, an animal protection organization. Jett is also a vegetarian, but says her "goal is to be vegan. It helps the animals and the earth."



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Joan Jett getting rough after a show.



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Joan Jett with Kathleen Hanna.

**J**oan Jett was Born to Rock. I know that sounds Like some fucked-up bumper sticker, but it is absolutely true. Joan is one of those rare people who need to play music. Joan was born into a world that didn't quite know what to do with a girl like her. Luckily, she never let that stop her. In 1975, at the age of 15, she started her first band, The Runaways. While they are heralded today as the band that opened the door for female rockers everywhere, they were much maligned in their own time.

Some feminists didn't like that Cherie, the singer, wore lingerie on stage or that a man had crafted the band's jailbait image. Many male audience members felt threatened when they saw these talented girls crashing their party. At a show in London, a man threw a bottle at Joan's head and knocked her out cold. When she came to, she got up and started the next song.

The Runaways broke up in 1979, Joan embarked on what would become a highly successful solo career. What most people don't know is that her biggest hit, 'I Love Rock 'n Roll,' was released on Blackheart Records, the independent label she and her manager, Kenny Laguna, created because no major label would sign her. Joan and Kenny sold records out of the back of his car the year her record came out. The first time I heard 'Crimson and Clover' was in the front seat of my mom's brown Ford Fairmont. As Joan sang, "I don't hardly know her, but I think I could love her," I felt a pleasant sense of confusion, the same way I did when I saw David Bowie on Don Kirshner's Rock Concert and when I saw the cover of Prince's first album. As I listened, a whole new world of possibilities opened up—a world beyond tiny Laurel, Maryland, a world where sex was as gorgeous as Joan's round, smoky, perfectly pitched voice and gender could move and change like the signs along the highway. I met Joan in 1992, when she came to see my band, Bikini Kill, play. She told me she could hear the record she wanted to make with us inside her head. A few months later, she made good on her promise and produced a three-song single that is, to

date, the best record I've ever made. We've been friends ever since. Through her example, I've not only weathered the successes and pitfalls of my own career, I've had fun doing it. People always call Joan an "icon," and it kind of pisses me off. Not because she's not an icon but because that word tends to gloss over the fact that she is a total weirdo who continues to make great music. Who else can wear a spandex pantsuit that fits inside a sandwich bag while talking about politics like a Harvard Law professor? Who else has an audience that includes suburban moms, soldiers and S&M dykes? And who, who, who can stand like her on stage? You know that stance. The Joan stance—totally confident, tough and in charge, her guitar hanging down like she's the lost member of the Ramones. Who but Joan can step to the mike, tough as fuck, with that gorgeous vampire-face mask of a face and have that fucking voice come out? That voice—the one that recalls Lesley Gore and Suzi Quatro at the same time, the one that makes it feel like every door in your head is flying open, the one that is so friendly and welcoming, yet, in its perfection, so hopelessly impenetrable?



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**ONLY JOAN  
CAN DO THE THINGS SHE DOES  
THE WAY SHE DOES THEM  
BECAUSE SHE WAS  
TRULY  
AND IRREVOCABLY  
BORN  
TO ROCK,  
AND SHE WILL  
ALWAYS, ALWAYS,  
ALWAYS  
REFUSE TO LISTEN  
TO THE VOICES THAT SAY  
SHE CAN'T.**



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Joan Jett at a show.



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WOMEN BREAKING BARRIERS