

# INTERVIEW

# Rollins on Rollins

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Photos are courtesy of Dreamworks Records



Many people might view 37-year-old Henry Rollins as a basket case, an over-aggressive punk or a man stuck in his own world unable to escape.

From screaming out lyrics on stage with Black Flag to talking quietly about the funny things that happened throughout the years, he is a direct representation of what we have made him.

Henry Rollins was born into a destructive home life and his parents divorced while he was very young.

He lived with his mother and saw his father occasionally on the weekends.

"It's been 12 years since I talked to my dad. Why? I don't like him. I have no intention of talking to my dad," Rollins told *SPM*. "People say that's really cold. Well, welcome to the freezer. It gets so much colder."

In 1981 Rollins moved to Los Angeles to join up with the hard-core Punk band, Black Flag. He started his musical career by recording the monster anthem "Rise Above." The band was considered to be one of the heaviest and hard-hitting influences on the alternative music genre.

"Phoenix was an early stronghold for Black Flag," Rollins said. "We used to play there all the time."

Rollins said the band would do a Phoenix and Tucson show every six weeks or so.

"We would play these little dive clubs, because those were the only places that would give that type of music any time," Rollins explained.

The band argued constantly and got into fights with everyone from security to each other at the concerts. But most of all they tore up every stage with the intense, animalistic sound they produced.

Eventually, after constant bickering and struggles within the band, guitarist and founder Greg Ginn called Rollins on the phone to put an end to Black Flag.

With the end of Black Flag, Rollins found himself faced with a decision to end his musical career or start over.

He decided to form Rollins Band and take his music to an entirely new plateau of aggression and disorder.

It was at this time Rollins decided to vent his feelings on paper as well as with his music.

### Rollins the Author

Rollins started writing because of his interest in what was happening in the world and as an avenue to chronicle the events of his constant touring. He put out a small fold and staple book but still needed a way to release it. As a means to give his thoughts to the world he came up with the idea to start his own publishing company to distribute the book and called it 2-13-61 (Rollins' birthday). The publishing company started to take off and many other authors came to him for help.

"People came to me asking, 'How do I get published?' I tell them one of two things," Rollins said. "Either do it yourself or sleep with the publisher. I do both, thus bettering my chances at staying in print."

Over the years Rollins has published many books including *High Adventure in the Great Outdoors*, *You Can't Run*

*From God, Works, One From None* and *Black Coffee Blues*. Rollins is currently expanding his writing with the book, *Do I Come Here Often?* (*Black Coffee Blues, Part II*). *Do I Come Here Often?* is a compilation of many stories Rollins has written for magazines including *Spin* and *Details*.

"*Do I Come Here Often?* has some journal writing in it," Rollins said. "It has a lot of interviews and articles that I wrote for different magazines and newspapers as well. There's a cool interview in there with Issak Hayes, Jerry Lee Lewis, David Lee Roth and one with John Lee Hooker."

His company has also published books by many of his friends and up and coming authors. Some of the authors include Joe Cole, Nick Cave, Iggy Pop, Henry Miller, Natalie Jacobson, Bill Shields and Don Bajema.

"I love it, but it is a lot of responsibility. I have this amazing woman running it. I own it, but she runs it," Rollins said. It's a tough business though, any independent book company will tell you.

"It's a struggle," he went on. "It's a labor of love and no one is getting rich off of it. My book royalties, from my books, go into the new artists. I don't see any of the royalties, I just want to see books come out."

### Twist of Fate

While touring with Black Flag, Rollins met Joe Cole. Rollins had no idea of the impact Cole would have on both his life and his art.

Cole and Rollins soon became best friends and moved into a house on Venice Beach together. Cole toured as a roadie both with Black Flag and Rollins Band so the two became like brothers.

On December 19th, 1991 Rollins and Cole were returning from the grocery store when two young men

came out of the bushes with guns. The men rushed Cole and Rollins into their house and told them to lay down face first on the ground. Rollins heard a scuffle and shots were fired. Cole was shot point blank in the head, dying instantly.

Three hours after Cole's funeral Rollins was back on stage.

Rollins wrote many passages about his feelings and events of that day in his book *Now Watch Him Die*.

"I don't really have a lot of friends," Rollins said. "When I'm bummed out, there is nobody I call. There is nobody that I tell my deep dark secrets to."

His journal writings took a more intense look at the internal anarchy Rollins dealt with day-to-day after the death of his beloved friend. In the books *See A Grown Man Cry* and *Now Watch Him Die*, Rollins wrote prose, essays and journal entries that broke through his rough exterior and vented his emotions.

"The writing is a very solitary place; you go there alone," Rollins said. "Like Hemingway said 'Face eternity or the lack there of it everyday.' That's where I go for a very intimate connection. I do a lot of journal writing where I just kind of check in with myself."

### Business As Usual

Throughout the years, the advertising industry has sought after Rollins as a spokesman because of his strong, deep and powerful voice. Rollins has done advertisements for the Gap, Saturn, Nike and is currently the voice of GMC automakers.

*"I don't see myself being able to do something like this forever. People will get their fix, then move on to the brighter shinier object in the water. That's the harshness of this business. It's one of the things that gives you the tough skin."*

-Henry Rollins, on his worst fears.

<b>1981</b> <i>Damaged</i> Black Flag	<i>English as a Second Language</i> Various Spoken Word Artists	Green, and Bernie Wadell) <i>Pissing in the Gene Pool</i> (Published by 2-13-61)	<b>1988</b> <i>Wasted Again</i> Black Flag
<b>1983</b> <i>My War</i> Black Flag	<b>1985</b> <i>Loose Nut</i> Black Flag	<i>Art to Choke Hearts</i> (Published by 2-13-61)	<i>Life Time</i> Rollins Band
<b>1984</b> <i>Slip It In</i> Black Flag	<i>Who's Got the 10-11?</i> Black Flag	<i>Bang!</i> (Published by 2-13-61)	<i>Do It</i> Rollins Band
<i>In My Head</i> Black Flag	<b>1986</b> <i>Hallucinations of Grandeur</i> (Published by 2-13-61)	<b>1987</b> <i>Drive by Shooting</i> (featuring Rollins, Haskett, Green and Wadell)	<i>Works</i> (Published by 2-13-61)
<i>High Adventure in the Great Outdoors</i> (Published by 2-13-61)	<i>You Can't Run From God</i> (Published by 2-13-61)	<i>Short Walk on a Long Pier</i> (Published by 2-13-61)	<b>1989</b> <i>Hard Volume</i> Rollins Band
<i>Spoken Word Tours Begin in U.S.</i>	<i>Hot Animal Machine</i> (Featuring Rollins, Chris Hasket, Mick	<i>Sweatbox</i> Spoken Word	<i>Live in Switzerland</i> Spoken Word
<i>City of Angels</i> Various Spoken Word Artists			

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"I spent most of the summer on a sound stage," Rollins said "It was really cool. I just did the vocal looping for it. It was a blast."

In the movie *The Chase* Rollins played the small part of a "stupid" cop involved in a high speed chase with Charlie Sheen. In the movie (also featuring Flea and Anthony Kiedis of the Red Hot Chili Peppers) he also performed his own stunts. Quite a feat considering he has never owned a car or had drivers license.

Rollins just finished shooting a movie in Los Angeles entitled *Frost*, starring Michael Keaton and Kelly Preston. Although these small bit parts might be fun, he does not consider himself an actor.

"It's fun to go onto a film and know that I am totally unqualified and somehow pull it off," Rollins said, "Auditions are character-building experiences. Humiliation is good, it keeps me close to the ground."

## A Normal Guy

The rough exterior and self-reliance that Rollins exudes could be seen as merely a front to hide his vulnerable side. Yes, Rollins is a normal guy, who will most likely become irritable after a long day's work, just like anyone else.

"Truth be known, I'm not perfect, yet I'm really not all that bad," Rollins said. "I'm not that wretched of a person. I can have a rough exterior on account of I get four hours of sleep at night, travel 600 miles, then I have to hit stage and be good," Rollins said, explaining his moods between shows.

"Well that's not gonna make me the most gentle, 'Oh, hi-how-are-you-doing' kind of guy," Rollins said. And on his worst day, "It might make me the 'Shut-the-fuck-up-and-show-me-where-I'm-supposed-to-do-this' kind of guy."

But despite his temperament and steel-hard shell, Rollins also has shown a little bit of a change in his affection towards women over the years.

"I don't have a girlfriend. I wish I did. But you really can't serve two masters," Rollins said.

"With my schedule, all that's on my plate right now is me," he added. "That's really not a problem unless you have someone else involved. As it is, I'm single and I'm on the road. There is nobody I'm not calling, so they're not missing me, and I'm not missing anybody. I don't have that human attachment because you can't be on the road, hit it hard every night and still have that home attachment. People will tell you it can work, but in my opinion, something suffers."

A relationship might not be exactly what he's looking for right now, but at some point 37-year-old bachelor said he may find that special someone to settle down with.

"I'm quite content to be alone," Rollins said. "I like the sporadic company one finds here and there. Otherwise, I'm on a mission. I have this thing I have to do. Someday when my thirst is quenched, I might do the whole other thing, kids, wife—the whole bit."

When asked if he agreed that he was really a teddy bear

deep down inside, Rollins responded, "Am I sensitive? Absolutely. A romantic? Incurable. A teddy bear? You'd be surprised at how horribly insect, digital, and metric I can be with people."

He went further to add, "You fuck me over, I never talk to you again. So teddy bear, no. Sensitive, absolutely. I'm not a tough guy, I've been toughened but I'm not some ass-kicker guy."

## Fears

Rollins would be the first to admit that he's not fearless. He is faced with the same fears that everyone else is.

"The idea of dying, not like when is it gonna come," answered Rollins, when asked what some of his fears are.

"I wake up and think, God damn I'm nearly 40. That's

## The Spoken Word

Rollins' first foray into spoken word came during his Black Flag years, with the release of such albums as *City of Angels*, *Short Walk on a Long Pier*, and *Sweatbox*. Later albums, like *Live at McCabe's* and *Black Coffee Blues*, continued to build on his original vision.

Rollins' spoken word albums deal with what's going in his life, be it animalistic, self destructive, or funny. On the new release of *Think Tank*, he took a wide variety of material and compiled it onto a two disc set.

"There were about four CDs worth of material, and I chose this stuff to put on the two discs. I wanted disc one to be a kind of fast, furious, very irreverent thing and the second disc to be more of the story telling stuff, which I get into about an hour into the set."

In past recordings, Rollins was known for his macabre look upon life. Surprisingly he has changed the feel on *Think Tank* with a slightly comedic approach.

"I do my best to try and run the whole gamut and show a lot of different stuff," said Rollins. "During the show there is some stuff that is funny and some stuff that's not. The material revolves all the time. All kinds of different things happen. There is a lot of humor that is inherent in it, but there is a lot of humor inherent in me, the way I see life and the life I'm living."

Rollins also released a video called *You Saw Me Up There* to compliment *Think Tank*. He seemed to veer away from his history of depressing undertones and bring out the more humorous aspects of his day-to-day life. Rollins looks at what he does as an art, he reads the crowd and takes the best material out of their response.

## The Audience

Henry Rollins' shows adds a different approach to today's rock star venues. The crowd is a mixture of people from the die-hard Black Flag fans sporting purple mohawks to the more conservative black-suited business type.

"It's a good relationship for a weird person like me," Rollins said. "It's a one way conversation; I'm up there talking to you, the audience. There is this great intimacy we have. We meet briefly once or twice a year for a couple

hours. We have this thing at the appointed time and even if I only see you from 30 feet away we connect at a certain level. I really like that."

Rollins has grown to appreciate his audience more. He said he physically misses the feeling of them. He misses the faces, the people, and the feeling of performing.

"The older I get the more I love it, the audience, and the art of performing," Rollins said. "Now that I'm older I can enjoy it more, I understand what I'm doing more. I don't know if I am any better or not, but I have grown secure enough to really like the audience. I never hated them, but back in the 80's audiences could be very antagonistic. You would catch a bottle in the mouth, or a fist for that matter. So it made me always a little weary of crowds. Now they're here to listen to a guy talk, it never gets rowdy."

"I have a weird life. I travel all over the place, I meet all these people and have these experiences. If you can't have a laugh at it, if it doesn't occur to you that this is really funny or at least really fucking strange, you are kind of missing out on you're own irony."



so intense. That's kind of a sobering thought."

The fear of death is not what he fears most, however. The thought of losing the audience is a larger consideration to him.

"The thought of not being able to perform somehow," Rollins said. "The idea that there will come a time when no one wants me, and that will be a rejection that will be hard to take."

"It will happen, I don't see myself being able to do something like this forever. People will get their fix, then move on to the brighter shinier object in the water. That's the harshness of this business," Rollins reflected. "It's one of the things that gives you the tough skin. You realize that you bust your ass and work harder than most of the people that you know and at the end of it all you're looking at a kick in the teeth."

<p><b>1990</b>  <i>Turned On</i> Rollins Band  <i>Live at McCabe's</i>  <i>Spoken Word live 90'</i>  <i>One From None</i>                  (Published by 2-13-61)  <i>Like a Girl, I Want You to Keep Coming</i>                  Various Spoken Word Artists</p>	<p><b>Joe Cole Dies</b>  <b>1992</b>  <i>The End of Silence</i> Rollins Band  <i>See a Grown Man Cry</i>                  (Published by 2-13-61)  <i>Big Ugly Mouth</i>                  Spoken Word Live 1987-1988  <i>Human Butt</i> Spoken Word  <i>Talking From the Box</i> Video</p>	<p><b>Weight Rollins Band</b>  <i>Now Watch Him Die</i>                  (Published by 2-13-61)  <i>The Boxed Life</i> Spoken Word</p>	<p><b>Everything Audiobook</b>  <i>Black Coffee Blues</i> Audiobook</p>
<p><b>1991</b>  <i>Fast Food For Thought</i> Wartime                  (Featuring Rollins and Andrew Weiss)  <i>Black Coffee Blues</i>                  (Published by 2-13-61)</p>	<p><b>1993</b>  <i>Electro Convulsive Therapy</i>                  (Japan Only) Rollins Band</p>	<p><b>1994</b>  <i>Get on the Van: The Road With Black Flag</i> (Published by 2-13-61)</p>	<p><b>1997</b>  <i>Eye Scream</i> (Published by 2-13-61)</p>
		<p><b>1995</b>  <i>Get on the Van: The Road With Black Flag</i> Audiobook</p>	<p><b>1998</b>  <i>Think Tank</i> Spoken Word  <i>You Saw Me Up There</i> Video</p>
		<p><b>1996</b>  <i>Come In and Burn</i> Rollins Band</p>	<p><b>To Be Released</b>  <i>Do I Come Here Often?</i>                  (Published by 2-13-61)</p>

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-Henry Rollins, on his use of humor.