

# Austin American-Statesman

## BET ON JETT

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The Runaways are the patron saints of any woman who ever cranked up an amp and wailed on a Gibson 'til her ears rang. And, like saints, they suffered greatly for their cause, enduring taunts from every angle: press, audiences, even fellow musicians. Insults were hurled like spitballs from the back of the class, words that are hard to stomach even now.

*The Runaways are gimmicks. Trash. Horrible musicians. Fakes. Jokes.*

But they persevered, releasing five albums, stellar examples of hard rock storytelling, solid musicality and a wholly original, wild, in-your-face style. And the Runaways remain influential to this day, due in no small part to the black-haired, black-hearted rhythm guitarist, the one and only Joan Jett.

Calling in from New York, her trademark gravel-and-honey voice purrs sleepily into the phone. I ask her what it was like being a Runaway.

“People didn't know what to think of us! We took a lot of s—! And the press was always getting on our case, trying to get us to react so they'd have something to write about.”

Like what?

She growls a little at the memory. “Ah, you know. They'd ask us stuff like...do

you feel like a man or a woman when you're on stage?"

Woah.

"I know for a fact that we wouldn't have to take the s— we took in the Runaways today," Jett says. "On that level, it would be easier."

After the Runaways broke up, Jett survived by relentlessly touring and recording, cementing her legacy as a musical prize-fighter, punching back against record company rejections and stereotypes.

From tiny labels like Boardwalk to giants like Warner Brothers, eagle-eyed music fans have noticed the presence of a single, fat, black heart on the back of all of Joan's albums — the symbol for Blackheart Records, Joan's own. The reasoning behind this is still hard to believe.

"Well...we couldn't get signed by anyone else," says Jett, still sounding incredulous. "It was 1979. We sent tapes around to 23 labels, minor and major, all of 'em, indies, everybody. They all heard I Love Rock 'n' Roll, Crimson and Clover, Bad Reputation; and we got 23 rejection letters."

"We knew we had to form our own label if we wanted to put records out, so that's what we did. We scraped some money together, printed up 5,000 copies of Bad Reputation and sold them out of the trunk of the car."

The first batch sold quickly, and by the time the second 5,000 were printed, a buzz had begun to build, and eventually the band signed to Boardwalk Records, producing two massive singles for the Blackhearts: I Love Rock 'n' Roll (which went to No. 1) and Crimson and Clover.

Victory was indeed sweet.

"You hear from everybody that you suck, suck, suck, suck, suck, and that something like I Love Rock 'n' Roll could never get played on Top 40 radio 'cause it's too hard. Well, you know..."

A honey-and-gravel laugh travels from New York to Austin.

"We proved them wrong."

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