

By Robert Christgau

Whatever else he was, Sid Vicious was a fuckup. It doesn't look like he killed himself, but he was known to say he wouldn't live to 25, so it was probably just a matter of time. And though he was a lot less dangerous to the world than Nelson Rockefeller, you can be sure Rockefeller has more mourners, and you can understand why: Vicious didn't cultivate friends, and he's not the sort of public figure the public misses. Me, I only knew him the way most people did, by way of gossip and what I read in the papers, yet I find myself grieving for him.

Not that I was any fan of Sid's music. Except on his inspired sendup of "My Way," he never gave off the spark which has been rock and roll's gift to its legions of inspired amateurs. His role on the Sex Pistols' album was indistinguishable from that of his predecessor in the group, Glen Matlock—in other words, he contributed nothing, or at least nothing unique to Sid Vicious. Except for a few Johnny Thunders screwie faces, what he contributed to the only Sex Pistols performance I witnessed, their U.S. debut in Atlanta, was less than nothing. And although I'd like to call the solo gig I caught at Max's a travesty, it wasn't that colorful—just a run through the most witless punk motions.

Of course, Sid never claimed to be a musician—he claimed only to be Sid Vicious, a smart, good-looking council-flats lad with

# Sid Vicious, 1957-1979



JOSEPH STEVENS

one of the worst cases of anomie ever observed in an ambulatory human being. For a negligible cult of less spectacularly alienated kids, as well as a few sympathetic outsiders, that made him a symbol. But he illuminated only the dead end of the punk continuum. He was an idealist in his way—he never

showed any active interest in money, for instance—and he was bright and original enough to offer moments of insight and charm. Mostly, though, he was stupid and destructive, and his ideas were literally infantile, because he was almost incapable of separating the subjective from the objective. Dec'

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icated new wavers tended to regard him as an embarrassment.

But none of this means Sid Vicious killed Nancy Spungen. For what it's worth, I'd say there was more chance he did than that he didn't, but that the chance he didn't was real. I'd also guess there wasn't enough evidence to convict him, which us unalienated types are supposed to believe means something. And more important, I'd also say he was obviously very sorry Nancy was dead—a lot more so than most of those who purport to be horrified by her grisly story. I don't claim to be surprised that he attempted suicide in October, or that heroin remained his way of life. But I get the sense that Nancy Spungen's death had induced him to feel in a way he'd never felt before, and since she was gone regardless, I'm sorry no one will ever know where the feeling might have led. Toward a new perspective on the dead end of the punk continuum, I guess, and that could have been interesting.

He was bright, idealistic in his way, with moments of insight and charm. And yet though another thing we're supposed to believe is that people can change, even grow up, I haven't met many unalienated types charitable enough to have wondered whether growing up might have been possible for him.

Poor Sid.