

HENRY ROLLINS

By Liz Nord
Photos by Alison Dyer

Meeting Henry Rollins is a little nerve-wracking. And it's not just that he fronted Black Flag, it's because he's still adding to the boatload of thought-provoking work he's spent his lifetime achieving. His legend is as intimidating as his most iconic images: either buff and tattooed, jumping into pits of hardcore kids or buff and painted Satan-red, screaming, "Liar."

Fortunately, Henry was charming and entertaining and not any less intense than I expected. I aimed to focus on TV and film, especially since his latest career turn has him hosting a show on the Independent Film Channel. But we covered a lot more ground than that—from the "War on Terror" to what it's like to be present at an awards show to how he'd rather read quality literature than eat. I even got a show-and-tell session that included such gems as listening to a voice message from Iggy Pop ("Hey Henry, this is James Osterburg..."), and previewing the incredible jazzy-spoken-word collaboration between Henry and the one and only William Shattner.

The day we met he had just returned from a film shoot in Vancouver. His post-interview activities included going to see *Clerks II* (he plans on interviewing Kevin Smith for *The Henry Rollins Show*) and then introducing the world premier of the Ramones' movie, *It's Alive*, later that evening.

He's a busy man. In spite of

the aforementioned Hollywood renegade, he managed to squeeze in a couple hours for me and, not surprisingly, had plenty to say.

The Henry Rollins Show

I don't want it to be "The Happy, Nice Guy Show." If I did everything the producers wanted, it would probably be way more mainstream—those guys are very cool people, but they think more in the box than I do. I go, Yeah but it's my show, and people will watch the show because it's my show, and there are going to have to be some moments on this show where it's not spoon-feeding. Where they're going to have to sit down and say, "Who is this person?" and "Why should I care about the Southern Poverty Law Center?" for seven minutes. Because white power is a problem in this country.

I'm not saying that people at the Independent Film Channel say, "It has to be beautiful people," but some of them were extreme kind of

fire-throwing, fire-breathing people that I wanted on the show. [IFC] are kind of like, Well, maybe next season. I reconcile it with the guests we do have by trying to bring out what's interesting about them as best I can, taking full responsibility, and answering the hate mail very candidly. And by trying to do as much as I can in that medium—to get across as much provocative and hopefully riveting material.

One of the most interesting interviews we did was with Stephen Gaghan (*Traffic*, *Syriana*). He talked about his five years of research for *Syriana*; going around the world and meeting arms dealers and professional hit men. He was abducted by Hezbollah. I mean, when he was telling us these stories, me and the entire room were like [*sucks in deeply and his mouth drops wide open*]. He was fascinating and really humble and very cool and very talented. I mean, I try and travel a lot, but this guy *rules* on the travel stories.

Preparing Guests to appear on His Show

I gauge how they are when they come in. You know, some people have people who come in hours before to check all the camera angles, check the room, check me out. When they are on a major promotional tour, these people come in, and they're cool, but they're not that cool. And then the artist comes in and they're usually cool. I always take them to the side and I go, Look, as much as I would like to have people on this show that I disagree with and don't like—so we could really have a healthy debate—I don't have enough time. I don't have an hour-long show so I only get people on I like. That's why you are

here, and we're so happy you are here. Everyone here is cool. We're an independent show, you can say what you want, do what you want. I don't care what you are driving, who you go out with. We're not going to do the Leno couch patter about you. We care about this film you did and we're completely uncensored. Say what you want. If you don't like any of your answers, we'll stop and start again. You're here because we are all fans of yours. So this will be very painless, and we have the shittiest coffee in Santa Monica. Here ya' go.

Living in Hollywood

I don't like L.A. but it has been very good to me, and I don't hate it. I'm from the East Coast. I'm from Washington D.C. I like deciduous trees and people burdened by intellect. Here, it's about career. Everyone here is an immigrant from the Midwest. They are the prettiest girl in Defiance, Ohio and they come out here to find that pretty girls are a fairly generic thing. There are a lot of pretty girls, a lot of pretty boys and a lot of pretty homeless people. There are just a lot of very talented, good-looking people trying to get that one slot.

Everyone comes out here thinking, It's gonna be me. I'm gonna be Axl Rose. I'm gonna come out here and be Johnny Knoxville. I'm gonna make it. But there are not many of those people. The rest are stripping, working at Blockbuster, or hanging out with their Treo and their résumé and saying, "I have some things in development," which means, I'm trying to hit on a girl. Which means, I sent a letter over to Fox once and said, "Hey, I have this thing I want to do about a guy." Otherwise, it's been hot, polluted, dangerous, dry streets

cluttered with SUVs and Humvees driven by emaciated women on cell phones.

I'm not trying to say I'm the guy on the top of the water tower, picking people off, nor am I better than anyone. I just stay on my own, which I'm supposed to do anyway. The work I do is very time intensive. And so that's how I deal with L.A. I don't go out into it much. And, thankfully, I'm on the road a lot and when someone goes, Hey! Movie on location! I say, "Great, I don't care what it is—I'll take it. A western-porn-sci-fi? Great! It's in Canada? Yay! I'll go."

Acting With Al Pacino...

I'm not an actor. I've been in like twenty movies or more but I'm no actor. But you learn to give footholds for the other person in the scene and how to be there for them, so they can be there for you, so you both tell, hopefully, the truth of that script. Yes, it's make-believe, but it's the truth when you're in that moment. And I learned that from acting with Al Pacino. My twenty minutes acting with Al Pacino was huge. Because when they say, "Action," he is that guy and you better look out. I mean it was powerful.

He is a really nice guy. He's like, How'd you do, Henry? Call me Al. Then on "Action"—holy fuck. And when actors weren't giving him what he wanted [whistles], you wouldn't want to be in the way of that. "Do you have wood in your head?" And he's smiling the whole time and the other actor's laughing but Al's saying, "Young man, did you read the script? Are you in the same film as we are?" The whole time, he's smiling, but like, *gulp*. It definitely makes that second take really crack. Second take was fine. **D+T**

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