

# RONNIE KING

"IT'S ALL ABOUT THE MUSIC"



*What sets Ronnie King apart from other producers is that what you see is what you get... He is a very friendly, genuine person, and with all the things he has accomplished he is also very humble... He can tell you amazing stories about the things he has done and been a part of, but it is never bragging. He really doesn't have to talk himself up; the gold records are on his wall... he lets them speak for themselves*

— **Duncan Nibset** lead singer of **Core 10**

Ronnie King created his own sound with a Moog synthesizer and a Hammond organ that made him in high demand within the genres of hip hop and popular music. Best known for his multi-platinum collaboration with the late Tupac Shakur, his work with the pioneer producer, Johnny J., laid the groundwork for the rise of one of hip hop music's greatest stars as well as establishing a sound that was uniquely Ronnie King's.

My interview with Ronnie was one of my longest and most entertaining ever. I sat down with him in his new spot at 17<sup>th</sup> Street Recording Studios. It has a great view of Costa Mesa and Ronnie was ready to unleash his story-telling magic. Laid back and with shoes off, Ronnie has lived a musician's dream. From playing in a band at the age of 17 to playing keyboard along with famous artists on Death Row, Ronnie came out the other side still relevant and making hit after hit through his current run with The Offspring. What keeps Ronnie going? A true inspiration, a love of music and an ear for the next best thing! To keep it simple, "It's all about the music!"

**What got you started in a lifelong career in music?**

I come from a family of musicians; my whole life has been about music. I don't know anything else. When I decided to go into the music business I was about 16. I started playing in night clubs when I was still in high school. I played with my brother, John, and figured out I can make music and money at the same time. I found the piano to be perfect for me because I was into the melodic more than rhythm. The Berklee Theory of Music came to my school when I was 17 years old so by the time I was 19, I had a college education in music from Berklee Theory.

**With whom have you toured and what was it like?**

I play and live in the Coachella Valley. My first tour was Frankie Ford whose hit song was "Sea Cruise". Frankie said to me, "Hey, want to go on tour?" I said, "I am still in high school." He said, "When you graduate, come on tour with me." After I came back from touring with him I moved to Los Angeles and met Richie Rich who was from the "LA Dream Team." He introduced me to Jerry Heller who was the manager of NWA. From that, Jerry said he thought I would be great in the studio because I was very proficient. I played the key boards for bands like Mellow Man Ace and Cypress Hill.

**From hip hop to punk/rock to metal, what's your favorite genre?**

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When I played with The Joy Killer (a punk rock super-group from Huntington Beach, California), I was the key board player for punk rock music. I enjoyed all the genres. I would go from a Tupac recording session to an Offspring session and then play for Rancid at the end of the day. I would just do it. I didn't have to think about it. At the end of the day those songs went on to be classics.

**What is the most challenging part about developing a group?**

The challenge is the advent of technology. People think, "I can make good music in my living room," but they don't get that there is a lot that goes on after that. There is a business side to music and that is getting your work to the right people. That's the biggest obstacle.

**Tell me a crazy back stage story during your punk days?**

The craziest backstage story? (Ronnie bursts in laughter) This was during my days with The JoyKiller, an all-star punk band with the lead singer of TSOL, Jack Grisham. I really love that one night we were in Cincinnati and we didn't even need to play the show because the crowd was too crazy. We got paid first (which does not happen too often) then the cops showed up and we got quarantined in our bus because the crowd decided to get violent. The energy was so hyped up about the show that the audience started fighting. I don't even know why they started fighting in the first place!

**You have referred to the music industry being a lot like high school. What do you mean by this?**

So, bands that are starting out in the music industry are obviously the freshman. Seniors in the music industry can tell freshman, "I am going to give you a shot on my show." We have seen this a million times where we have been, "Who the hell is this guy and why is he opening up for Cypress Hill?" There is always someone bigger. In the music business that's the way it is, just realize where you are. If you do a show and can't draw 100 people you are a freshman. You need to figure out how to get 200. It is the reality of the music industry. Thank God we can be popular in America and around the world.

**What are some of the great up-and-coming bands are you working with?**

Core 10 from Orange County. I love these guys. OC is known for punk rock, reggae, beach style music. I think these guys are the first group that is going to come out of that genre and really make a name for

themselves in the metal business. There is a new rock/metal scene coming out of Orange County that is yet to be discovered and I think we are all excited about that. There is something coming. Here at 17<sup>th</sup> Street Recording Studio we have produced albums with the Dirty Heads, Sugar Ray and I have worked with every OC band in some aspect. Lewis Richards, producer at 17<sup>th</sup> Street Recording Studio has played with everyone from Sublime and the Dirty Heads. I think all of us will create something new for OC. We are a hub, every town needs a hub for music. I am very excited about the metal scene. I see a bright future with the bands that I am working with like Core 10 and Beach City Cowboys. I see a very important movement with metal music in OC. 17<sup>th</sup> Street Recording Studio is going to be the place to go to get your music done for all music: metal, rock and punk rock, EVERYTHING! When I was younger and doing this in Hollywood we had Beach Recorders that was owned by Epitaph Records. Everybody went there. And with Death Row we had Can AM and that is where everything was recorded. So I want to make 17<sup>th</sup> Street Recording Studio the place that everyone comes to record.

**How has your relationship grown with Sullen Musik since first consulting with them?**

I love Sullen. I love Sullen Clothing and Sullen Musik which we started about two years ago. It's just a great company and we are doing great things. I am excited to be working with them and 17<sup>th</sup> Street Recording Studios and being able to record with them and really develop the artist here. That is why I think Sullen and 17<sup>th</sup> Street Recording Studio will be a perfect fit. It is already happening. Johnny Gillespy has already recorded here and he has become a staple here. We already started with that idea. We are not only going to make music here but we are also going to have that Sullen entity.

**What keeps Ronnie King current?**

I am blessed to have an international presence. I still work with Grenada, Los Fabuloso Cadillac's and Inferno 18. The secret is having these bands

come to America. My passion is to be the conduit between Latin America and the United States. I want to be the ambassador. We have done very well, but not in America. We do it big in Mexico, Central America and South America. I want to be the guy that brings the best rock music from Central America to the United States.

**What are the key components that bands need to have in order to be successful?**

Bands need to be realistic about who they are. Rock music is always universal. The bands that I work with don't deal with America because rock is more appreciated internationally from Japan, Spain, and Italy. They love American rock music, but American rock music is not really appreciated that much in America. It is my dream to start creating an awareness that there is great metal music coming from other countries and get them to come to America. We have a company in Costa Rica and we are doing concerts over there and concerts in Mexico and South America and that is our driving force. We can sell records there but I really want Americans to start embracing music from other countries. Bands are more successful in other countries, even bands from America. For example, Megadeth is really big in other countries besides America.

**What can you tell inspiring bands? What are three lessons that bands should live by to make it in the music industry?**

For new bands, the first life lesson is to be realistic with who you are. If you can't get 50 people to your show, then you are probably not so good. Second rule, if you have 50 people show up at your show, figure out how can you make it 100? It takes a village to make large movements. Just like we did with Epitaph, just like we did with Death Row. Stay regional with who you are and be able to draw a crowd.

**Tell me one thing nobody knows about Ronnie King?**

I love jazz. I am a jazz virtuoso. Most musicians love jazz but I put the musical knowledge into contemporary music in my hip hop and rock career.

Raquel Figlo