

Violent Femmes *Violent Femmes* 40th Anniversary Bio

The world may look different, but every generation goes through high school—or something like it.

Back in 1983, Violent Femmes documented the boredom, the anxiety, the elation, the depression, and the wonder of the high school experience, *while living it* on their seminal self-titled full-length debut, *Violent Femmes*. Akin to other totems to growing up a la *Catcher In The Rye*, this album has only proven more relevant as it's lived through the fall of the Berlin Wall, the advent of the internet, an uneventful Y2K, a very eventful turn-of-the-century, seven presidents, and one pandemic to celebrate its 40th birthday.

So, how did these tracks make it this long?

For starters, they're real. Frontman, singer, songwriter, and guitarist Gordon Gano chronicled life as a high schooler in Milwaukee as it was happening to him (*he didn't do so years retrospectively as a twenty-something*). So, his lyrics reeked of glorious awkwardness, whether it be the head-scratching confession of "*I stain my sheets*" on opener "Blister In The Sun" or the prick principal's warning, "*I hope you know that this will go down on your permanent record,*" during "Kiss Off." This was the ultimate report from the frontlines of the teenage experience—back when the drinking age was 18 – before we got so used to such a thing in wantonly self-indulgent social media posts .

As the story goes, Gordon, bassist Brian Ritiche and drummer Victor DeLorenzo recorded at Castle Recording Studios in Lake Geneva, WI over the course of one weekend. For as open-hearted as the lyrics may be, the single recording takes allowed for Brian's acoustic bass to drill through Gano's masterfully plucky riffs in a way that gives the listener the feeling that their witnessing a – the cracks and grooves of Victor's sole snare drum to rattle your brain and.

The record also harbors a quirky history befitting of its unlikely legacy. Of note, their fans practically destroyed Carnegie Hall when they played there in '86, leading to a ban for the group and every other rock band for the next 20 years!

It was also the album that enshrined Violent Femmes as folk punk progenitors. The album steadily sold a million copies in its first decade, going platinum in America by its 10th anniversary. Not surprising— a well-worn cassette of *Violent Femmes* and a dog-eared copy of *Catcher in the Rye* were rites of passage for high school and college kids from coast to coast. To date, the album has sold over 3 million copies worldwide, placements on "*greatest albums of the eighties*" lists by the likes of *Pitchfork*, a slot on the first *Lollapalooza* in 1991, co-headlining *Big Day Out Festival* with Nirvana in 1992, prevalence in *Grosse Pointe Blank* in 1997, and a cover of "Gone Daddy Gone" by Gnarl's Barkley [Cee Lo x Danger Mouse] on their platinum *St. Elsewhere* in 2006. *Violent Femmes* has proven to be a singular cultural artifact—as it continues to be the perfect companion piece to teenage angst and pubescent aspirations.

Some of Violent Femmes' contemporaries may have shifted tens of millions of units, received constant rotation on MTV, picked up GRAMMY Awards, and sold more shirts at Hot Topic, but few (*if any*) made an album as prescient, potent, and powerful from top-to-bottom as *Violent Femmes*. The master recordings may have been lost for over three decades, but the band will play it once again in its entirety on tour in 2023.

If you haven't seen them since high school or college, bring your kids and their friends, because Violent Femmes are just as daring, dangerous, and dynamic as ever. You know high school still sucks, but Violent Femmes fucking rule.

—*Rick Florino*, February 2023