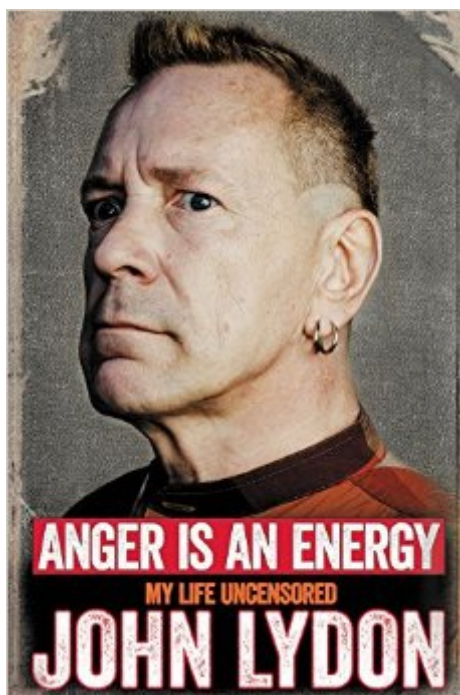


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# Anger Is An Energy: My Life Uncensored



## Synopsis

From the legendary frontman of the Sex Pistols, comes the complete, unvarnished story of his life in his own words. John Lydon is an icon "one of the most recognizable and influential cultural figures of the last forty years. As Johnny Rotten, he was the lead singer of the Sex Pistols-the world's most notorious band. The Pistols shot to fame in the mid-1970s with songs such as "Anarchy in the UK" and "God Save the Queen." So incendiary was their impact at the time that in their native England, the Houses of Parliament questioned whether they violated the Treasons Act, a crime that carries the death penalty to this day. The Pistols would inspire the formation of numerous other groundbreaking groups and Lydon would become the unlikely champion of a generation clamoring for change. Following on the heels of the Pistols, Lydon formed Public Image Ltd (PiL), expressing an equally urgent impulse in his character: the constant need to reinvent himself, to keep moving. From their beginnings in 1978 PiL set the groundbreaking template for a band that continues to challenge and thrive to this day, while also recording one of the eighties most powerful anthems, "Rise." Lydon also found time for making innovative dance records with the likes of Afrika Bambaataa and Leftfield. By the nineties he'd broadened his reach into other media while always maintaining his trademark invective and wit, most memorably hosting Rotten TV on VH1. John Lydon remains a captivating and dynamic figure to this day "both as a musician, and, thanks to his outspoken, controversial, and from-the-hip opinions, as a cultural commentator. In *Anger is an Energy*, he looks back on a life full of incident, from his beginnings as a sickly child of immigrant Irish parents growing up in post-war London to his present status as a vibrant, alternative hero. The book includes 70 black-and-white and color photos, many which are rare or never-before-seen.

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## Customer Reviews

LOVE this book. John Lydon's childhood is archetypally Shamanic, if you know your Joseph Campbell Hero's Journey. A lot of dismemberment and trauma, and close encounters with self-reinvention. He also confesses to having his own psychic gifts, which I find truly fascinating. You can read this autobiography on quite a few levels, he's obviously a very complex personality, and a very original thinker. He has gone out, used his traumas, and brought us back some real gems. He even says that he has opened a door into something, wanting us to walk through also, more safely now, because he's done some of the hard work for us. If that's not Rock N Roll Shamanism, I don't know what is. Very entertaining read, and I could not put it down. He writes very candidly and openly about his own life, but you also get a good rock history thrown in for good measure.

IMO John Lydon is one of a very few genuine people in the cesspool known as the music business. The fact that he has succeeded almost 40 years and stayed authentic throughout is a great subject for a book. His universally fine sense of humor shines throughout this book as it has throughout his career. It's a great read.

I stumbled across the previous work by John Lydon - 'No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs' - because I got interested in the punk scene of 70-80s. This period in music is what I have totally skipped during my teens. Now I grew to like some of the bands from end of 70s-start of 80s and I read some stuff on them. Then Billy Idol mentions Sex Pistols a lot (no surprise), I read about them and discover Johnny Rotten has a biography. That was nice. After reading the book I got so hooked up I could not wait for the announced "Part II". Eventually, out it came and of course, I grabbed it. Well, where should I start? I totally love 'Anger is an Energy', much more than 'No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs'. It is less aggressive and very positive in a way. However, if you are hunting after juicy details and scandals, this book is obviously not for you. Mr. Lydon is quite decent in these regards and does not mention many names or private stuff. This book is more about emotions, ideas and trends in a man's life, memories and deeds re-thought and re-analyzed. Now I don't think that everything in this book is 100 % accurate and it should be regarded as gospel of any sort. No, it could not possibly be so - a guy is talking about his life, it should be subjective and biased. The ghost writer - Andrew

Perry - is Lydon's fan all right, so I don't think he interrupted or opposed Mr. Lydon's speech much. Yet 'Anger is an Energy' is full of amazing vibe. I generally enjoy an interesting plot and whatever else, Lydon definitely had / has an eventful life. He talks of himself and unveils his story in a very appealing, humorous and acid way - even if the described story is quite grim. The main character - with bits and tats from real Mr. Lydon, I hope - is hilarious. He really has a rough start, but his relentless energy, audacity and people around him are such great fun. His life is actually very rich - with events, people, ideas, music, pain, gain, evil and good luck, death of the loved ones and near-death experience. The variety and differences are rather colorful. And these colors are not much smudged by drug haze which is a great thing for a reader. "We were often portrayed as speed-crazed maniacs onstage, but that was far from the reality. The other three weren't 'up there' at all. Regardless of Steve joining AA years later, he's never been big on anything, barely a pinch of salt by equivalent. And me, I stopped. I wasn't going to become too infected with drug pleasures, because I really wanted to conquer the opportunity. Also, you can't be singing on any kind of upper, forget it, ain't gonna work, with your heartbeat racing..." The guy there is not lucky at all. Everything he touches turns out to be a problem or at least an issue. Yet his sentiments are quite understandable and his ideas reflect some individuality. He is not preaching any ideology or offer universal pill of happiness, but in the end this book is a praise to being what you are and doing what you - and only you - think is right, no, what you feel is right for you. Then everything is easy: "When we went back to the shop and I sang to Alice Cooper's "Eighteen" and various other records off the jukebox, I really wanted it. I was up for it. I instantly had the mannerisms, the characterizations of the words. That I could do, I just couldn't sing. A minor thing..." And yes, I am quite biased, because I really, really loved this guy, main character - and I don't care if he is a fiction or reality. He has charisma and bravery - in very nontraditional and somehow uncomfortable way. He takes the risk to be beaten up just because of weird clothes and color of his hair. Now, that is a strange cause to die for. "So, there I was in mid-Hackney at 3 a.m., and I had to run the gang gauntlet to get back to Finsbury Park. That was a death walk, a serious death walk, particularly how I was dressing and how I was. I gave a toss for no one. I knew it was coming. Even local Arsenal boys, they'd still have a reason to row with me, just because of my attitude and I - don't - back - down." It is hard to resist such approach to life and some funny quirks of character put out with utmost style and force. However, if you do not like lunatics, you obviously will never like the book. It is a story of a crazy human being, very determined, straightforward, stubborn, witty and maddeningly irritating. All his friends and people who matter in his life are also quite lunatic. Even his enemies and people who harm him - they are far away from being normal. The book is full of mad, mad world and

uncompromising ideas, violence, twisted but powerful energy while at the same time offering positive and optimistic approach to all of these. I was literally roaring with laughter while reading through Mountjoy prison experience: "On my arrival, the warders decided to make an example of me. They stripped me, threw me into the yard and hosed me down. But you know, you can strip me, cover me in flea powder and laugh at the size of my penis, it doesn't matter. It - does - no - matter. Over the years I've noticed that when these institutions get hold of you, the one thing they're trying to embarrass you about is your nakedness, and your penis. Let me tell you, Johnny's got a perfect penis to laugh at, and he don't care. That's not ever going to be a problem." Admittedly, after reading Lydon's biographies, I tried to listen to his music. I still don't like it - just a couple of songs from Sex Pistols and 4-5 from PiL, but whether I am influenced by his books or not, after listening to his bands, I actually understood why he is considered influential by some. What I did not like about the book - well, the detailed description of bands and songs the main character is listening to. I love music as well, but reading about music is not very captivating for me. Sometimes it was hard for me to understand the language - well, English is my third language, so all the manipulations, somewhat unconventional wording and slang, which I could not possibly look up in a dictionary - these were a challenge for me. In a way these add up to the flavor of the book, but it was hard for me to unveil the idea behind some paragraphs - and it took some time and consideration. I suppose some will find Lydon's words offensive - even when describing his friends (Sid Vicious, for example) or discussing some of the popular groups, but I don't mind his subjective opinions (although I am a fan of the majority of the music bands he so passionately criticizes, like Rolling Stones, Nirvana, to name a few). He also seems contradicting himself a lot, although I attribute the discrepancies to his sense of humor and irresistible urge to disturb the audience. Eventually, he forces the reader to take everything with a grain of salt and have a good laugh. I think Lydon sums that all up very well: "I'm not deliberately out to antagonize an audience or spite them or anything like that, but if they adopt the attitude of 'This isn't what we expected', then yippee, I'm gonna wallow in that, because you shouldn't sit back and expect anything at all. You can make the choice to like it or not like it, but if you're going to hate it because it doesn't sound like the previous album, you're not a John Lydon follower at all. You don't understand me. I don't follow myself so please - don't - follow - me." All in all, the book turned out to be one of my favorites. I have not enjoyed reading literature for quite a while, so thank you, Mr. Lydon, I had quite a time. I will definitely recommend this book to anybody - either interested in music or not, it is captivating and rich, much better than most of modern fiction.

"In fact, I changed music twice." So claims John Lydon early in these five-hundred-plus pages of

recollections. He later boasts that "I changed history." At fifty-seven, living in Malibu, the punk provocateur enjoys sailing and loafing, far from the "dustbin" he came from in London, a son among many in an Irish immigrant family. As he explains the title of his second memoir, *Anger is an Energy*, Lydon reminds readers that he channels anger for neither hatred nor violence, but to motivate principled, sensible change. As he covered his upbringing and his career with the Sex Pistols in *Rotten: No Dogs, No Blacks, No Irish* (1994), Lydon may repeat tales of his formative years here. He attempts to get the record straight; he castigates Jon Savage's *England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* (1991) for its distortions. Lydon's reminiscences, which may provide less insight than expected to audiences who have scoured Savage's book and other chronicles of punk's heyday, nonetheless capture his playful, wry voice. This book, set down by journalist Andrew Perry, does capture many moments when Lydon enriches our understanding. He speculates on what "a bitter, twisted f[---]" he must have appeared at Malcolm McLaren and Vivianne Westwood's SEX boutique as the band was formed. He explains why safety pins were sported. "It was about fallout, having an instant repair kit for when Viv's goods fell apart." Later, he judges that her "aesthetic counted more to her than the actual physicality of a human being." At ground zero for the punk boom, Lydon narrates McLaren's manipulation of him and his bandmates. He struggled against his wishes, and the other Pistols. He articulates that "my songs don't lecture, they give you freedom of thought, inside of the agenda I'm pushing." He makes enemies. But these are not people, but institutions. Placing no faith in political parties or armed resistance, he instead urges his audience to follow his lead. He forges, in his estimation, a daily struggle with "integrity" to banish a "witch-hunt" against dissenters, freaks, and those the system crushes or hates. Lydon challenges "punk as a standardized uniform" worn by those with no insights into non-conformity. When it comes to punk, "there are no rules." His disgust with the "Boo Nazis" who replaced the movement's open-mindedness with "rules and regulations" led him to Public Image Ltd. As for music and the message: "If you're not doing this for the poor old biddy that lives next door and can't afford the heating in the winter, then you don't count at all. Studded leather jackets for all is not a creed I can endorse." Here, you hear Lydon's humanism, the commonsense beneath his sly stance. He also offers insights into fellow musicians and singers caught up in the spotlight. Not only towards his friends, humble or famous, and his rancorous bandmates, but to such figures as Joe Strummer. Lydon contrasts the isolation of the Clash, who sought fame and big-label success, with the purported socialism and sloganeering that, in his opinion, made them a caricature of the values they mouthed. Breaking with such contradictions, PiL sought to reform the way bands made music. This is the second of the changes Lydon promoted. He attempted collaboration with Jah Wobble and

Keith Levine, two strong-willed individuals. Drugs, egos, and drink worsened the communal situation soon. But the band's second album, *Metal Box* (1979), issued by musicians barely out of their teens, "is a stunningly beautiful tapestry of high anxiety." They never reached this peak again, and soon, despite what in Lydon's terms appears to be a misunderstanding of their mission, PiL soon became a series of musicians backing whatever the singer felt he wanted to do in the studio and live. Lydon worked with some stunning talent, such as guitarist John McGeoch, but the band never recaptured its first spark. Like this autobiography and like some of PiL's eclectic earlier music, this narrative resists linear fluidity through italicized interspersions. These deal with his wife Nora (whose daughter, Ari Up, was a founding member of the Slits), Shakespeare, celebrity woes, and bad teeth among other topics. These short excursions lighten the weight of so much detail from Lydon, who appears to have kept journals and archives well in order to draw upon, decades later, in the preparation of this account. As he admits halfway through: "But I digress here. Sorry, it's the way my brain works." By the mid-80s, Lydon warily suns himself in Venice Beach, determined to leave London for Los Angeles. Working with Ginger Baker, Steve Vai, Bill Laswell, and his band now consisting of Allan Dias, Lu Edmonds, Bruce Smith and McGeoch, *Album* (1986) defied its generic title and packaging. This line-up persisted until near the end of the decade, when again, PiL splintered and lost its direction. While Lydon acknowledges the difficulties of funding and handling a fractious lot of musicians, he appears to judge PiL's later music as worthy of acclaim as its earlier recordings. To me, as a fan, I find Lydon faces a blind spot. The band's music after *Wobble* and *Wardle* fit more into eclectic rock, but it no longer felt as unclassifiable or as alien as *Metal Box*, despite that album's humble budget. However, Lydon understands the challenge. He muses: do people want the "scandal-mongering of a nineteen-year-old? Or do they want to go on a journey of self-discovery?" PiL contributes to the soundtrack of *Point Break*, Lydon tries out for the cast of the film adaptation of *Quadrophenia*, and he announces on the inevitable *Filthy Lucre* reunion tour of the Pistols: "I'm fat, forty and back." He contributes ads for Schlitz, Mountain Dew and English butter. He appears on a brief-lived *Rotten TV* on MTV. He also graces *I'm a Celebrity*, *Get Me Out of Here*, and *Judge Judy*. He likes making nature documentaries: *Megabugs*, *Shark Attack* and *Goes Ape*. He roams about, doing what he likes in and out of music. Unfortunately, the production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* with him as Herod is cancelled just before it opens. He displays a likeable wit, and learns to handle his fame with grace. Lydon sums up his legacy. "My songs were echoes of revolution and empathy for people, and certainly not the work of some sneery, selfish little toad." He ends this genial, if garrulous, tale by praising his family, insisting on privacy and celebrating his "hobby" of PiL. In the end, he seeks "nothing but joy to the world." Happy on the beach, caring for

Nora's grandchildren, John Lydon lives as he pleases, and as fifty-odd years ago in North London tenements, as he had dreamed.

Who would have guessed, but John Lydon is as enlightening, entertaining and engaging a writer as he is a legendary personality. I've learned so much about music and life in the UK in the 70's just from the first couple chapters of this book. Loving every minute of reading it. One of the better music biopics I've picked up in a long time.

Lydon has always been an inspiration to me. This book is an enjoyable read. The style is somewhat rambling and stream of consciousness. Lydon reveals not quite all to show himself as very talented and exceptionally human.

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