

INTRODUCTION

The granddaddy of all deceased rockers was probably Orpheus—a prodigiously talented musician from Greek myth whose untimely death came when he was literally ripped apart by women. His head, though, continued to perform his songs as it bobbed along the river Hebrus, with his lyre—much in the way that an enterprising record company might milk a deceased artist's back catalog.

Right from the birth of rock 'n' roll in the 1950s, death has been an unwelcome presence hovering at the sidelines, rather like a tone-deaf backing vocalist. And well before rock 'n' roll, proto-rockers such as bluesman Robert Johnson and country star Hank Williams lived fast, died young, and left the requisite handsome cadaver.

Of course, many rockers have lived to collect their pension, and you'll find a fair few of them too in this book. Their deaths might have been unremarkable but their lives were a different story, and we nod respectfully to them here. However, most of our entrants died well before their allotted three score years and ten. No doubt about it, rock 'n' roll (or reggae 'n' rap, for that matter) can seriously damage your health.

Many of the stars covered in these pages met their unexpected end through sheer bad luck, and not always through their own actions—as Buddy Holly, Peter Tosh, and Marc Bolan would readily attest. The abrupt departure of others was eminently avoidable though, and often not unconnected to the rampant

ego, cocksure arrogance, and recreational substances generally associated with success in the field of popular music. Untimely demise is always sad, but rarely boring.

We can't hope to encompass all the residents of rock 'n' roll heaven within this slim volume, but we trust it offers an insight into some extraordinary lives—and, indeed, some extraordinary deaths. It also provides a dark treasure trove for trivia fans. Who was rock 'n' roll's first big-name casualty? Who bought the plane he died in from Jerry Lee Lewis? And which guitarist took the ultimate showbiz last bow by being shot on stage? By the time you finish this book, you'll know the grim truth.

In the meantime, may we finish up this introduction—and whet your appetite for the funerary fare to come—with some heartfelt advice? If you want a long, prosperous career in rock 'n' roll—and are not already a member of The Rolling Stones—try not to:

- engage in bi-coastal rap tiffs
- use heroin
- use airplanes
- join seminal U.S. punk bands
- indulge in drunken gunplay
- sell your soul to the Devil

Rock In Peace.

RIGHT The Who's loon Keith Moon in action in 1971.

