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TOP STORY

## Henry Rollins talks origin of anger ahead of spoken word show 'Good to See You'

By [Josh Ewers](#) Main Street Nashville

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Henry Rollins is bringing his spoken word show "Good to See You" to Marathon Music Works in Nashville on April 12.

Amy Harris / Invision / AP

Henry Rollins thrives where anger is refined into passion and passion into fuel.

Rollins rose to prominence as the ethos-devout, muscled lead singer of seminal hardcore bands Black Flag and Rollins Band. Over the years, however, he's pursued roles as an energetic activist, world traveler, author, humorist, TV host and spoken word artist.

While performing music lost his interest years ago, the latent rage that led him to the stage still powers his particularly complex and powerful engine down every road.

"I'm just an angry person. I don't kick dogs or punch holes in walls. I just want things to go faster. I want the bang to be bigger," Rollins explained. "That car is red? I think it should be redder. It goes 140? It should go 170. I'm not going to drive the damn car 170, I just think it should go faster.

"Everything should be bigger, brighter, faster and should happen quicker. That's why I do these things. I'm impatient," he continued. "If somebody says, 'Well, one day you'll go to there,' I'm like 'One day? Frickin' book it. Like, watch me do this.' "

Rollins was raised a child of divorce in Washington, D.C., by a public education advocate mother, Iris, whom Rollins affectionately called "left of everything but Joan Baez and the wall," and a corporate lifer father.

His mother was interested in fine art and would save up for trips to European museums every few years, including one to Istanbul when Rollins was 10.

"You see poverty and you see kids your own age who live very differently, and it made me curious and not afraid of the world," Rollins said. "I'm not a tough guy. I'm not brave, but I don't fear an Islamic country. I've spent weeks at a time in them, and my experience has been nothing but kindness and civility."

When asked where his anger originates, Rollins harks back to his home soil as a kid in the heart of social unrest in the 1960s.

“Oh everything, being raised by a father who’s a fantastic racist, homophobe, misogynist, growing up in Washington, D.C., and watching it catch on fire,” Rollins said. “You could open the window and the smoke and the tear gas from D.C. on fire would drift in.

“(My mom’s) little VW fastback had a dent in the hood from a mace canister bouncing off it because she was caught in a riot trying to get home from work one day,” he continued. “And so that was a hell of a thing to go through as a dumb little kid.”

For Rollins, strained race relations were more than something happening out the window.

“It was being chased and mugged because I was white and trying to understand racism by having my lunch taken, my bus token, my bike taken, getting my ass kicked because of black-white issues,” Rollins said. “That politicized me at a very early age. I have a real thing with racism. It drives me crazy. I just kind of get irrational because it’s so insanely stupid and so I push back against it.

“You go outside, and some kid takes your lunch. ‘White boy, give me your lunch.’ ‘Well, why? Can we split it?’ “ Rollins remembered thinking. “It didn’t make me hate those Black guys. It made me want to understand what’s going on.”

Adding to an already difficult to understand childhood, Rollins was sexually assaulted by his mother’s boyfriend at 7, which he has spoken on publicly.

At 20, Rollins found an outlet for all his aggression with DIY California punk icons Black Flag after fatefully being brought on stage during a concert. Then,

instead of being chased by neighborhood kids, the straight-edge vocalist and his bandmates found regular scrapes with the scene's vehemently unwanted embedded skinhead contingent. The band also clashed with police who had no tolerance for punk music's seemingly violent and youthful mindset.

It was during those years that Rollins would find audiences taking an interest in his words absent music too. The subject of his first impromptu speaking performance in the 1980s centered on a bandmate being nearly run over by neo-Nazis on the way to practice.

"I'm mad. I'm not Mr. Nice Guy. I'm the Mr. Pissed Off Guy. But the anger, it has a good ending," Rollins said. "It's an activator. It gets me up and out the door to go do something good."

As his interests flowered, Rollins became someone who could be found advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, performing at USO shows, working to ensure access to water in South Sudan or rallying high-profile support to free the West Memphis Three.

"It's just how you pipeline the energy," Rollins said. "It ends up in the same place, but maybe the motivation that gets you to raising the money or doing the right thing starts differently.

"Things still anger me, but I do my best to punch up. I don't want anybody assassinated or killed. Some politician's death doesn't bring me any joy, but I punch up," Rollins said. "My enemies are bigotry, thirst, homophobia, people who think trans kids should be thrown in jail. That's what I'm punching up against."

That anger has led him all over the globe.

The man who grew up blocks from the National Geographic building longing to be “the guy in the documentary” has been found editing a novel in the Andes, observing and learning in North Korea and finding the best ice cream in Iran.

“I just put my withering carcass in just different parts of the world. I gotta do the work anyway. All I need is electricity and a desk,” Rollins said. “I’ve had an eventful life, and it’s not by chance. I target things. I just come up with these ideas and I go.

“The more I do this, the more I show myself what’s possible. If you are willing to haul your bones over there, you can get them there. And you do that enough times, you just start expecting more of yourself.”

Rollins will bring his latest show, “Good to See You,” to Marathon Music Works on April 12.



**'Rise Above' - Black Flag**

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