

## Kristen Stewart, Dakota Fanning Rock Out 1970s Style in ‘The Runaways’

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Joan Jett rocks and her 1975 roots are on display in a movie bio about her first band, “The Runaways.” Kristen Stewart portrays Jett and Dakota Fanning takes on the band’s troubled lead singer, Cherie Currie.

The year was 1975 in greater Los Angeles, and Joan Marie Larkin, who had renamed herself Joan Jett (Stewart), was pestering anyone who would listen about her desire to rock. Along came producer Kim Fowley (Michael Shannon, chewing scenery), who took Jett’s idea and ran with it, actually going out and discovering female rockers for an all-girl bad ass line-up.

Cherie Currie (Dakota Fanning) was a 15-year old poseur, hanging out at the rock clubs. After Fowley spots her coquettishly vamping to the in-house band, he enlists her for a tryout with the fledging girl rockers. At her audition, Fowley begins his over-the-top intimidation of his charges, toughing them up for the rigors of crashing through rock’s glass ceiling. He even makes up a song on the spot for Currie, which becomes The Runaways signature hit, “Cherry Bomb.”



The rise begins there. The savvy marketing of a tough chick line-up explodes onto a pop-disco landscape with a contrasting blast. An initial tour gets major label notice, and Mercury Records signs the gals to a record contract and accompanying tour. The rocket of fame takes off,

especially in pop star mad Japan, and the inevitable temptation of drugs, casual sex and ego clashes takes its toll on an not-so-innocent Cherie.

There are rock movie clichés a-go-go in this film. The early practices – in a trailer! – the bad road hotels, overindulged substance abuse, spinning headlines to fame, etc., but somehow it all ends up a lot of fun. Michael Shannon certainly gets into it, playing Kim Fowley like a rabid dog. When playing a larger-than-life character, Mr. S just figured to make him like the Titanic, oncoming iceberg and all. It is fascinating to witness, hambone included.

Kristen Stewart channels Joan Jett as if they came from the same womb. Even with Dakota in the lead as Cherie Currie, Stewart resonates from every scene she steals, because the portrayal is so dead on. She had fun simply snarling some of Joan's more pointed rock and roll dialogue. "This is my life," she as Joan snaps at one point, referring to rock.

Dakota Fanning, through her youth, had obvious restrictions to her Cherie Currie role, but makes the child-star-to-adult transition with more ease than others in her position. She has a naked dance at one point – when the gals score their record deal – that is artfully covered by a large sheet that only a prop department could find.



Michael Shannon has fun as Kim Fowley in 'The Runaways'

Photo Credit: © Apparition

Where it falls a little short is in story artifice. No offense to Joan and her life, but the first thought that comes to mind is, 'what is the real story?' The Runaways seem trapped in the rock movie clichés, where a little more background or reality would have been welcomed. The real story had to be either seamier or more ordinary, because each of those elements seemed watered down.

And what era are they living in? The calendar says 1975 and onward but the style and attitudes, even the clothes, screamed this-is-a-post-millennial-production-design concept of the 1970s. It wasn't that far away that some of us might remember. The language is another device that belied the era. It was more suited to the current era, although it served the rock movie cliché (again) very well.

But by the end who cares? Joan Jett went on to make the pure blast of rock sound that echoed from the big box venues for years to come. The Runaways had enough of a run to echo the madness of pure and instant fame. And the years have gone by just enough to lend an ear to that echo, fainter now, but repeating with a satisfying slam of the guitar riff and a backbeat to get us through the night.

*"The Runaways" has a limited release, including Chicago, on March 19th. Check local listings for theaters. Featuring Kristen Stewart, Dakota Fanning, Michael Shannon and Tatum O'Neal, directed by Floria Sigismondi. Rated "R"*



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