



## Jim Farber

### Pop Music Critic, New York Daily News

“If you really want to do this, you can't get discouraged or be afraid to fail. You've got to have a good attitude about all the knocks you're going to take.”

Jim Farber wrote his first review in seventh grade about Alice Cooper's *Love It to Death*. “I don't think anyone's first review is ever negative,” recalls Jim, “I was on a mission to tell people it was the greatest thing.” Later, when he was fresh out of college and full of ambition, he moved to New York City to make a name for himself as a freelance writer. His byline appeared in rock magazines like *Crawdaddy!*, *CREEM*, and *Circus*, and he contributed to the first *Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll*. After freelance writing for the *New York Daily News*' Music Video column for six years, he landed the job as their full-time music critic in 1990. “That's the short version,” he quips. As he finished his review of Kelly Clarkson's *My December*, Jim gave us the full scoop on how his hard work and savvy earned him his dream career.

#### What was your big break?

In 1974, Bob Dylan went on tour. I won second row center seats for the Madison Square Garden show. I got there early that night, and Loraine Alterman from *Rolling Stone* came over to talk to me. I had read all of her stuff, and I think she was sort of impressed that I knew about her. She ended up quoting me in her piece. My mom suggested that I send Loraine a copy of the review of the show I'd written for my school paper. Loraine liked it, and a few months later, I had a concert review in *Rolling Stone*—at age 16.

#### What do you cover in the *Daily News*?

Everything! We run feature interviews, breaking news stories, concert reviews, record reviews. On Sundays, there's a two-page spread that includes a full feature, like an interview or a trend story, and two big record reviews. On Tuesdays, it's more record reviews. And on Fridays, it's about the best shows that are coming to town that week, as well as an interview with a fresh band that's playing. I choose all of the content myself. In a mainstream paper, you have to cover all the things that are going to be big, but when I can, I give space to anybody who's good.

#### How do you critique music exactly?

It's sort of your opinion and sort of not. A lot of it is

remarkably objective, like descriptions of what the music sounds like, what genre it is, and where it fits in an artist's career. It also involves analyzing the lyrics—what I believe they mean. And then I also account for what I think the artist's audience wants. All of that is jumbled up together. People think a review is a biased piece of reporting, but I don't [express] preferences like, “I like chocolate more than vanilla.”

You have to have emotional maturity to judge music. When I listen to a singer, there is a technical thing, but I'm also evaluating whether they are really feeling [the music], or just hitting notes. People can decide for themselves whether what I've written is credible, and they always do—tons of people have told me I'm an awful person. As a critic, you've got to have a thick skin.

#### Your story is pretty cool. Has it been as fun as it sounds?

The short version sounds very easy, but it was a really slow climb. It was a struggle to make it freelancing, even with all the credits I had. It took a long time to solidify a real career rather than just getting a lot of things published in different places. I was 31 when I got the job at the *News*. If you really want to do this, you can't get discouraged or be afraid to fail. You've got to have a good attitude about all the knocks you're going to take.

—VERONICA DOMINGUEZ-GARCIA



Want to check out more music careers? Go to [www.mymusicalive.com/coolcareers](http://www.mymusicalive.com/coolcareers)