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## psychiatry in pictures

### Ian Curtis

Geoff Dickens and Marco Picchioni

18 May marks the 30th anniversary of the suicide of Ian Curtis, lead singer of Joy Division, who was just 23 when he hanged himself. Curtis's work comprises little more than two dozen songs recorded over 3 years but it remains disproportionately influential. A lineage can be traced from Joy Division through Siouxsie and the Banshees, The Cure, U2, through to contemporary artists such as Interpol and Editors.

Prescribed barbiturates for his poorly controlled epilepsy, Curtis was hospitalised following an overdose 6 weeks before his death. He self-discharged the next day to front the band at a chaotic gig. Curtis's last show at Birmingham University, 2 weeks before his suicide, was featured posthumously on the Joy Division album *Still*; the song *Isolation* is notable for the following lyrics: 'I'm ashamed of the things I've been put through, I'm ashamed of the person I am'. Curtis's band mates, however, felt his lyrics did not reflect his state of mind. Curtis had already told his wife that his life's ambition to release one album and one single had been fulfilled, and that he wanted to leave the band and 'join a circus'.

Thirty years on, Curtis's fame outshines that achieved in his brief lifetime. Best known for the single *Love will Tear Us Apart*, released a month after his death – the song features in *Rolling Stone's* top 500 songs of all time, with Curtis the subject of two feature films, numerous books, documentaries and reissued discs.

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