



## Terence Trent D'Arby Sans Ego



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*Glenn Duley Smith reports for Addicted To Noise, the on-line rock & roll magazine.*

I was only supposed to get five minutes with Terence Trent D'Arby (TTD) after his show in Palo Alto at the Edge this past Friday (Oct. 13), but he let the interview stretch to 40 minutes. When his tour manager signaled us once that our time was up, the singer/writer/guitarist/band leader waved him off. Following a question, D'Arby's eyes would widen and he'd stare off in the distance, before answering in his soft, sanded alto voice. "I don't want to force my vibe on anyone, but you've got to learn to love yourself, as opposed to being in love with yourself," was the message he wanted to send, apparently referring to the rather dramatic change that has come over him since the beginning of his career (when he told the world he was better than the Beatles).

"Live more in the moment. We are all divine and loved beyond condition. Realize it. Children are born with pureness, and gradually become distracted with all the little pressures going on. I'm always trying to get to those moments of pure, and not be affected by the external BS, as well as my own. I don't want to preach, but it's important to get past the petty little BS. Look between the lines, and get around your fear." D'Arby returned to the Bay Area on a leg of his first U. S. tour since his first tour, and he has returned with power, soul, and a killer band. He left his ego behind.

I caught two of the shows: the first at the Catalyst in Santa Cruz on a Wednesday (Oct. 11), and then Friday's show in Palo Alto. During my post-show interview, D'Arby was philosophical as he shared his thoughts on music and life, his past and his present. Still dressed in his green satin skin-tight flared stage pants, and now sporting a fuzzy black robe and brown slippers, he would lean forward from the couch, chin on hands, elbows on knees, and softly answer our questions, often adding his personal,

philosophical viewpoint, or even quote Socrates. At one point he mentioned his influences, and I could tell that this was the short list: Led Zeppelin, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Sam Cooke, Sly Stone, Todd Rundgren, Arabic jazz saxophone, Beethoven, the Monkees (of which he said, smiling, "If I could write my own 'Daydream Believer,' man, I'd be way too arrogant to be talking to you."), Rod Stewart, and Prince.

But will he "kill off" Terence Trent D'Arby and change his name to the symbol of a multi-sexual flugelhorn? "Pfft! Yeah." During a pause in the Palo Alto show, D'Arby gave a nod to the past and the megalomaniacal press he garnered for himself early on. It was almost an apology. "We can tend to be too ambitious when we're young, and a little blind. We can think we're the shit, but really we haven't seen the bigger picture." There had been a four-year hiatus between Neither Fish Nor Flesh and Symphony Or Damn. After the show, Terence seemed reluctant to go into specifics about that period of his life. "About three years ago, something happened in my life.. that grew like a positive cancer.. and now I'm consumed entirely," he said. "I am now more in the moment, and more objective.

"These changes shed a positive light on his next two records, Symphony Or Damn and Vibrator, which arrived with more power, integrity and pop sensibility than Fish, and less self-indulgence. "I learned that I can't be as indulgent as I'd like to be when I record." Terence did not shy away from early material, instead working them into his show with renewed style and vigor. "Wishing Well" began as a low hint of the rhythm line most listeners knew, and as the tune dawned on the audience and the applause erupted, the band kicked in with a loud, driving funk version of the hit dance song. At the Santa Cruz show, "Rain" surprised us with a quicker tempo, that locomotive kick drum, and an uncontained grin on the singer's face.

"If You Let Me Stay" pocketed the Motown sound of the recorded version. "Sign Your Name" was the most radically changed song, whispered out with acoustic guitars rather than a sequenced, synthesizer sound. "This Side Of Love" drove in really hard, with a snare drum that cracked straight through to the feet. ("I like to record with a piccolo snare. It has a bright sound," he said during the interview.) The biggest surprise was his treatment of "Billy Don't Fall," a song about a young man fallen in love with the singer, who softly refuses him. The young man dies young. With AIDS more in the forefront



of the general mind these days than when the song first came out, "Billy" took on a more somber note than it did when *Neither Fish Nor Flesh* was released. Stripping out the upbeat, candy-pop sound of the original, "Billy" was played slower, with more groove and soul. It was a vast improvement.

What really pushed out the walls of these small-club shows was TTD's new material. The sound draws heavily on soul and sixties funk and rock, with a stellar lead guitar provided by Louis Metoyer ("Some people kept telling me that he looks too much like Lenny [Kravitz], but he has so much soul. In L.A., you can spit out of a window and hit a guitarist, but the two most important things I look for in musicians are that they have soul, and that they truly love music for music's sake."). Combined with a driving rhythm section composed of bassist Kevin Wyatt, drummer Stephen "Stevo" Théard, guitarist/saxophone player David Judy, and Terence's guitar, the band built slinky walls of sound around the most pumping stuff Terence has written. "She Kissed Me," "Vibrator," "Supermodel Sandwich" and "Do You Love Me Like You Say?" flanged and ground relentlessly, fusing heavy funk and hard rock, with the wah-wah pedal always just a verse away.

On one of my personal favorites, "Castilian Blue," they kept the verse heavy, and allowed the chorus to soar. The band slowed down and somehow grooved even heavier into the funky "Are You Happy?" and "Wet Your Lips," with D'Arby's unflagging vocal soaring into the outro, accompanied by keyboard/percussionist John Pahmer and the surprisingly capable voice of bassist Wyatt. "Girl you take me higher. Yeah you take me deeper." Pahmer's talents led the slinky "Delicate" to a very appreciative audience, ("[John] is a big Deadhead. To my embarrassment, I don't know much about the [Grateful] Dead, but I'm learning a little bit from John.") and provided the swirling organ and Bulgarian choral samples for the wonderful "Read My Lips (I Dig Your Scene)." As an encore at the Santa Cruz show, the band played Neil Young's "Cinnamon Girl" as if they'd written it, and in Palo Alto it was T-Rex's "Children of the Revolution."

The last song of each evening was the brilliant "Holding On To You." Terence wrote "Holding" for Rod Stewart about four years back; it was intended for an album with Rod Stewart and Trevor Horn, but to date hasn't appeared on a Stewart album. "Whenever I tell people that the song was written with Rod in mind, they go 'Oh. Yeah! I can totally hear that!' Rod has been very

supportive and a big influence." Backstage, Terence seemed happy, if a little embarrassed, at my gushing praise of this song. It makes me picture Terence on Stax records, cutting duets with Mable John, and pushing the label straight to the top. What's next for TTD? "I'd like to do some producing ..take on a George Martin role for a band. I'd like to teach others what I have taken a long time to understand." Earlier, Terence had provided an example of his musical philosophy. "There's an underlying structure to all music, built of the music that came before. All music is influenced by other music, and in turn it is a springboard to something new. An individual song is fool's gold if you aren't aware of the structure that existed for it to build on."

A film score is in the immediate future: "I'll also be working on a score for a film about the Marquis de Sade," said D'Arby. "It's a gothic, orchestral piece. That'll be around January or February." I tossed in a rather different question during a particularly deep discussion. A friend of mine had me ask Terence how on earth he gets into those tight yellow stage pants. Terence smiled and blushed a bit, and after some consideration, replied, "Slowly." As to whether he might spare a pair for a friend of hers, he replied, "When the tour is over. But in the meantime, I need them!" "And angels fly because they take themselves lightly." --From a poem in the liner notes of *Vibrator*. ■