



Sananda Maitreya Speaks! A SOBOMag.com Exclusive Interview

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by Christopher Whaley

In today's music industry, to sell one million copies in a week is monumental. Most likely that artist will have the top spot on the charts and the CD will move some massive units. There will be the multi-platinum plaques, various music awards, and the world tour to go with the success. That may be fine and dandy but Terence Trent D'Arby did that twenty years ago so in all honesty - what's the big deal? Add into the equation that it was his debut project, *Introducing the Hardline According to Terence Trent D'Arby*, and it sold that many units within the first three days of release. Take that Justin Timberlake!

You remember the hits: "Wishing Well," "If You Let Me Stay," and "Sign Your Name." There were the videos on MTV as well as a Grammy for Best R&B Vocal Performance. Rocking a head full of locks and dancing himself into a frenzy onstage, TTD mesmerized and wowed audiences wherever he went. He was compared to Sam Cooke for his vocal abilities and his name was said in the same breath as Prince for his talents on a variety of instruments. He was *The Man* and *The One* who would take R&B to the another level but TTD did something that is considered somewhat of a taboo: he changed musical directions. On his follow-up album *Neither Fish Nor Flesh* (1989), critics were very harsh towards the experimental sounds and although it moved double-platinum numbers, TTD was considered a victim of the "sophomore jinx." There would be two more projects, *Symphony or Damn* (1993) and *Vibrator* (1995) before TTD left Columbia Records under strained relations.

While at Java Records at for four years, he recorded Terence Trent D'Arby's *Solar Return* that unfortunately was never released. Feeling like it was time for a change, he bought the rights to the unreleased project in 2000. In 2001, he moved from Los Angeles to Munich, Germany where he formed his own label, Sananda Records, and revamped *Solar Return* into *Wild Card*. It was also around this time that TTD, following a series of dreams, changed his name to Sananda Maitreya. Since then, he has made some great music (*Angels and Vampires*, Vol. I and II) which can be found on his official website - www.sanandamaitreya.com and continues to be cutting edge.

SOBO recently sat down with Sananda who spoke in depth about his music, influences, and the maintenance of his locks.

This brother is wise beyond words and the epitome of a true "Soulful Bohemian." Ladies and gentleman - Sananda Maitreya!

Sananda, when did you discover your gift of music?

Thank you for asking! My earliest recollection is of hearing the Beatles, at the age of two. I knew then that whatever they were, I was as well. I can remember singing in a church at four and afterwards being hugged by a woman with breasts so big, I almost got smothered. My career began in earnest after that.

Growing up, who were some of your musical influences?

The Beatles, Motown, The Rolling Stones, The Jackson 5, Sam Cooke, Stevie Wonder, Frank Sinatra, and various other gospel (Andrae Crouch, The Hawkins Family), jazz, country, and blues artists. Not being allowed to listen to the "devil's music" until after the age of 16 whet my appetite for a broad range of music. I am also a major fan of the Masters Mozart and Beethoven.

Did you go to any music school or receive any special training for your talents? What instruments do you play?

I play keyboards, drums, bass, guitar, and percussion with relative confidence and a few other instruments which I can comfortably approach only after consultation with Mr. Jack Daniels. All throughout the school system, I took advantage of whatever musical group or class would have me. Not all of them were too fond of my passion for music. Also, the woman who took me in and raised me, my mother, Mrs. Frances Darby, was a great singer and musician and that helped a lot.

Where are you originally from, Sananda?

Thank you. I am originally from the region of Alpha



Centauri and spent some formative years in the Pleidean star system before earth where I came, like a fierce ball of fire, into a woman's heart who at that time lived in New York City.

If I am correct, you served briefly in the military. Did you find the transition from the armed services to singing sensation to be difficult?

The only difficulties in life generally come when you forget who you are and begin adopting other's philosophy of living. The Army was absolutely great for me and was less racist than the society which had raised me, which prepared me for my greater mission with people. It only got difficult after it was discovered that I was real and not a pushover.

How did you come to the attention of Columbia Records for your debut project, *Introducing the Hardline* According to TTD?

After having been rejected at least twice by every major label, management went back to CBS to beg for another listen. As it was in the process of being rejected for the third time, the newest, youngest A&R man overheard it coming from someone's office as he went to use the restroom. That is how I got started, being overheard by an employee who asked if he could instead have the project. I got offered the lowest deal allowed by law.

How did you feel about the great reaction you received from your debut project including a Grammy win for Best R&B Vocal Performance, Male?

I had told everyone I knew for years that I was going to be "massive." I felt it and just knew it and there was simply no room for anyone else's doubt or ideas. God told me that she would make it happen and did. Truthfully, I thought that the Grammy was but a political make-up call for not having won Best New Artist in the previous term. I felt I did deserve Best New Artist because I was, that year. I do not place much stock at all in those things, as they are almost entirely political. What a man or committee can give, it can so whimsically take away. I value most what I can most grant or give to myself. I try to stay as far away from committees, as God's karma allows. Self-reliance is a mainstay of my personal view of living and after my growing up years, as well as corporate experience, I absolutely hate being told by anyone other than my own conscience what to do.

My favorite track from *Introducing the Hardline...* is "Let's Go Forward." I notice that your lyrics are very poetic in a sense. Does poetry play a major part in your songwriting?

It is only the jealous and academics who make too clear a distinction between the two. For me Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell are poets, pure and simple. If they manage to figure out how to sing with it and not just read it, they are to me still poets as vicariously thrilling as Arthur Rimbaud or François Villon. I am always trying to write poetry, in one loose form or another, and it would be dangerous for me to wait until after a dry academic has given me "official" permission to be a poet. Life is too fleeting and short to wait for committees to form, granting one the rights to be what God in heaven has already ordained. Who dares wins, period.

As great of an album as your follow-up *Neither Fish Nor Flesh* was, why do you think the critics gave it such hostile reviews?

It was simply my time to be fried. Also, it is a kind of racist way to beat back ambition. Society in general, yet especially Anglo society gets breathlessly bothered when a stereotype begins to break the chains, and in case you haven't noticed, they go to great lengths to keep our "images" under strict surveillance and control, and that is no joke. In fairness to most boneheaded music journalists at the time, it took a while to register that it wasn't another clone of the previous, nor was it meant to be. I was later told by at least two major bands who came out of Seattle in the 90s that NFNF was critical to their formation. I always and shall always stand firmly, and with pride behind anything spirit gives me to do. I inspired a tremendous amount of anger and jealousy, and it was time for me to feel it. That is show-business. There was also other superstar's money behind bringing me down, and that money spoke volumes. Finally, it freaked out quite a few people the way I came in. I was later told by an industry veteran, that in over forty years in the biz, he never saw someone come in like that, so for a few people in the biz and the government, I had to be taken down in order to break my spirit. It worked so well I had to petition God for a new spirit, which is where Sananda came in.

What prompted you to take a more rock-influenced approach on your next two projects *Symphony* or *Damn and Vibrator*?

Simple. I grew up on rock as my ideal and always



wanted and planned to put my spin on it. R&B was never as exotic for me or as challenging. Plus the fact that according to the colonialists and the confusionists, we are not supposed to re-visit our own creation and gift to Anglo culture. I find absurd beyond words. Rock belongs body and soul to me as much as to another, and it is like playing with a fire that makes so many others nervous, that in and of itself makes it more exciting to work with. I will never agree to place racism and it's weak arguments above the music my spirit wishes to make. Every great hero that I have ever looked up to, I have because they suffered the same tribulations as I. From Miles Davis to Goethe, they all endured ass-beat downs for moving beyond critic's comfort zone, as if that is why we are here, to remain in someone else's artificial comfort zone. I as a warrior come, and we simply follow orders and leave complaints to the "complaint association."

How did you come up with "Supermodel Sandwich?"

I am a huge fan of Cream and was inspired by songs like "Strange Brew" and "White Room." As for the lyrical content, well these are the temptations which await exotic Moors who dare to dream.

What inspired "Holding On to You," which is such a beautiful song?

I am a big admirer of the great Rod Stewart, another famous disciple of Maestro Sam Cooke's. He was looking for a song to finish a project at the time but before I could get it together, his label called the deadline. It was written for him to sing, which I would have considered a great honor. At that time, however it seemed as if I were being quarantined and kept back from the space I earned by following my God's law. It was also a way to convince me that my luck had changed. I noticed how soon my luck reverted to form after I got rid of those types in my life. The consolation is that I got to keep the song.

If you don't mind me asking, what caused you to leave Columbia Records around 1996?

Roughly the same as what would cause a man to sprint off of death row, once the gates swung open. They were killing my spirit, and after eight years of trying to get released, I won the chance to begin again. Mind you, at that point it wasn't as if they were crying over it either. I just hope that they finally burned my voodoo doll and put those pins away. I did not leave Columbia, who were my

dream company, but Sony, who decidedly were not. We slaves have no say if our contracts are traded among corporations like horses.

What I have admired about you is that you are a black man who was not afraid to step outside the R&B world and branch off into other musical genres. Some would argue that it may have cost you major success on a much bigger scale. Do you have any regrets about the choices you made?

What cost me major success according to someone else's subjective definition was the "fatwa" delivered by a joint venture of interests which wished to silence me, precisely for the very reasons you cited. Our society is simply not comfortable with non-Anglos engaged to such a large extent in the big picture debate. We may actually say something that makes sense. My deal with God was to do my part and bear my karma, while God took care of the rest. No, they didn't let me receive the rewards I coaxed and earned, yet I still moved the ball downfield and therefore it is a little easier for artists like Ben Harper, as well as in absentia, Jeff Buckley. My major success is that I am still here and still ready to rock!

Briefly, you played with INXS, particularly at the opening of facilities of the Sydney Olympics. Were there ever any discussions to remain as lead singer of the band? What are your thoughts on Michael Hutchence?

Hutch was one of the greatest front men of our era. A real star as a performer and not a half bad songwriter. Yes, there were discussions, yet it was far more necessary to begin the long trek forward into a new life as Maitreya, who is the only reason that I am still bouncing and no longer bending. I also felt that, as wonderful an experience as it was, no one could replace Hutch because he was that good.

What was it about Europe that appealed to you?

The same that appealed to any number of our intelligentsia who escaped the wrath of home for not being willing to do monkey yodels. I grew weary of the yoga it takes to conform your spirit to a lesser shape, unless it upsets the lesser vision other's often choose to see us with. I grew disheartened trying to explain that I was neither black nor white, fish nor flesh, but an agent on his mission and that playing race and sex games were not



my instructions before leaving the mother ship. I came to help move hearts and heal. I couldn't possibly stay in my place because if you really knew my place, you would feel crowded out! I can only by the grace of spirit be this, and if I was designed to confuse people a little, then I trust that design fully because confusion always precedes new life.

Like Prince, you started your own independent label record label and began releasing your music on your website in the MP3 format. What are the benefits of having complete control over your music and how have the fans reacted to your endeavors?

The fans have been, as I suspected they might be after separating myself from a great source of pain, wonderfully supportive and excited to see me back in operation and in good spirits. Of course, there are always those who wish to dictate your law but life is like this. Complete musical control for a man of my age and level of musical experience feels as natural as it should be. It would seem silly to ask Picasso about complete control of his paintings for who else's hand should his brushes be in? Music is powerful and many fear it when it is not muted and diluted. I will not thin out my blood, neither will I thin out my music. Tremendous corruption and racism exists in the old distribution format, therefore MP3 allows me a chance to reach the people who simply want to take a chance on good music reaching out to all minds and not just the race minded. Let me also say that the Master Prince has always been a delightful inspiration.

Tell us about the transition from TTD to Sananda Maitreya and what is the meaning of your name?

Sananda which means "one who walks with light" and Maitreya which means "among the sons of God."

We're coming up on the 20th anniversary of Introducing the Hardline... and I wanted to know what are your fondest memories from that era?

The mind that spirit gave me to work with and the daring, before it was so brutally and callously yanked away. I promise you on his grave, that TTD was actually a really cool guy and you would have liked him.

How do you maintain your dreadlocks?

I have a spaceship visitation every fifth Thursday for the maintenance of my head space. As a special favor, I also get the "swoosh" machine to give me an Alpha Centauri, short back and sides. Barring that, I used to roll them individually on the virgin thighs of mulatto Creole Cuban girls but since marrying, my wife has convinced me that this might be an unnecessary expenditure. Italians generally like Cubans. I'm just not sure they like them THAT MUCH!

What else can we expect from Sananda Maitreya in the future?

You can expect only to witness his dumbfounded confusion at whatever miracles life and his Lord share with him and how to translate that into something possibly useful for your spirit. Also expect him to continue trying to make a living for him and Mrs. Maitreya by selling a few things. Anyway, we are grateful for your interest. Yes, it has been hard, at times harder than I felt I could bear, but I also got a chance to witness from a front row seat the birth of two men: one born of cheers and the other of fire. All in all, this story that I lived was far more book worthy than the one I dreamed. All that matters is that I keep what is left of my wits together and continue traveling on. Also, in the winter 2007, I will be touring the capitals of Europe to introduce Post Millennium Rock to the new audience reacting to it! For more info check www.sanandamaitreya.com/concerts.

Sananda, thank you so much for this amazing interview and for taking the time to speak with us at SOBO Magazine. You are a great artist and the real deal. Again, thank you, my friend.

Thank you. ■

For more information about Sananda Maitreya, visit www.sanandamaitreya.com as well as his MySpace page at www.myspace.com/sanandamaitreya