



GOOD VIBRATIONS



1998

'HUH' MAGAZINE: ISSUE 1998

By Pamela Des Barres

The monastic Terence Trent D'Arby mystically makes sex religious and religion sexy. Devoted sexpert Pamela Des Barres makes a pilgrimage to his inner sanctum.

I needed to see Terence Trent D'Arby at the Hollywood Palladium really bad. The concert was sold out. I was desperate to get in and it felt good. It had been a while since I gave enough of a shit to hunt down a ticket to see *anybody*. His debut record ***The Hardline According To Terence Trent D'Arby*** had just come out - and had hit me right between the legs, just like good rock and roll is supposed to do. It felt indecently delicious.

I was also mighty intrigued about all the high-assed, hijinx bullshit he was talking about himself. It reminded me of when John Lennon said the Beatles were bigger than Jesus. Now Terence Trent D'Arby was saying his debut record was better than *Sgt. Pepper's*. I've always liked a little vanity in a man. He was easy on the baby-blues too - tall, lean and haughty, with eyes the color of sin and skin like Cafe Mocha - slinging those dreads around, doing splits like Jackie Wilson in his prime. I had to see this loud-mouthed hot-shot sex-god for myself.

At the last possible instant, my recently-exed husband Michael called with tickets, and I could have waltzed with him down the aisle all over again. We watched TTD sizzle, and all that long-lost groupie-lust-dust came oozing out of my pores like honey. Since then I have always anticipated new Terence Trent D'Arby music with panting and hot flashes.

The hot-shot's highly-anticipated second record ***Neither Fish Nor Flesh*** confused me, though I grew to love it wildly after repeated playings. It certainly confounded the press, and they took every opportunity to shred the

outspoken upstart. I ran into D'Arby at a party about this time, asked him for an interview, and he said, "Don't you think I've said enough already?" Sense of humor intact. Cool.

The third record, ***Sympathy or Damn*** - all steamy creamy - sent me absolutely reeling. It had plenty salacious innuendoes and the usual dose of naughtiness. But where was he going besides to bed? To church? I knew Terence produced, arranged etc. all his stuff, but it sounded like the Almighty Himself might be leading the chorus "Jesus, Allah, Krishna, Buddha loves you" - and wasn't he quoting a smidgen of Walt Whitman? Hmhmhm.

Now Terence Trent D'Arby's ***Vibrator*** is coming out, and once again I am trying to stay calm. Yes, the record title is an apt one, but you can also *meditate* to this massive, seamless explosion of music. This time the Almighty seems to be sitting in for the *entire* record. I not only want to find out where Terence Trent D'Arby is going, but where the hell he's coming from. Listening to "Surrender" - "I don't believe in the existence of sin" - I realize there are a few things I need to ask him. Because, forgive me Father, but I don't believe in sin either.

I know I have to inquire about the humongous success of ***Hardline***, his past ego trips, his "fall from grace" period after the second record - all the crap a good journalist should delve into - but only briefly. I have more profound things on my mind. And so does he, it turns out. A complex, quick-witted soul-scamper, he's also pretty damn left-field funny.

D'Arby lives like a king - marble floors, ultra-high ceilings, endless windows, exquisite paintings, antique cherubs, sculptures, a baby-grand, a harp - everything in its place and glimmering with gold. We sit on the floor in a beautifully lit room - candles, a light show playing on the ceiling, incense burning. The dreads are gone. The skin-tight hair is now white, which makes his large gold eyes even more luminous. Draped in black velvet, he's a stunning, quixotic, otherworldly creature with a lot on his mind. I start by asking Terence what he meant by, "Don't you think I've said *enough* already?"

"At that time, I had said a lot of stuff that I wish people hadn't taken the wrong way," he grins ruefully. "I figured at that point, the less said the better. Some of the egomaniacal stuff was totally tongue-in-cheek. Some of it was real because I was just trippin'. Nobody gives you



a manual. It's a hard adjustment to go from being able to go to the shops and buy the papers - and the next day you *can't* go to the shops and buy the papers. Literally. When you're an impressionable type like I am, when something happens that fast and intense, it can kind of throw you for a loop and you start trippin' a bit. When I first became known to the public, shit, I was still growing up. I'm still growing up now."

"People were disappointed in the second record, right?" I inquire. "The fact that you strayed from the obvious?"

"That's something I had to deal with because I wasn't going to retreat. There's a time in your life when you set out to do something: 'Okay, am I going to retreat into the safety of this, or am I going to continue forward - trusting that what I burst through is going to bear fruit?' And I trusted it would bear fruit. I think the asset I have that I'm most grateful for is my sense of faith in the talent that the gods have given me - allowed me to utilize."

I know he's one of a handful of people who is completely autonomous in the studio. Is that a pressure?

"No," he says without hesitation, "the pressure would be if I wasn't. I saw a documentary on Mike Tyson, and he said 'The place I felt safest was in the ring. It's when I wasn't in the fucking ring I was having all these hassles.' I feel that way about the studio. This is my element. This is what I do. This is one of the excuses I have for taking up fucking space on this planet. I'd like to sometimes give the impression, 'Oh, this is difficult,' the brooding, moody artist who suffers for his art. But the simple fact of the matter is, I wish the rest of my life came as easy."

I ask if he's a loner, but I already know the answer's "yes."

"I'm a hermit, but as a hermit I can always rest in the fact that I can pretty much keep myself company," he says. "I have internal discussions. Most of the decent discussions I have in fact, are with myself."

He laughs. For the record, I laugh too.

"I'm still naive," he smiles. "Your laughter won't come through in the text and somebody will say, 'This is one haughty motherfucker!'"

"Is the haughty motherfucker ever lonely?" I wonder.

"Sometimes," he says, so matter-of-factly I assume that

loneliness is okay with him.

"Not always," he continues, "but it might be a condition of whatever might be transpiring within my soul."

Everything has a price. Darkness can be cleansing, because sometimes in the darkness you can realize there ain't nowhere else to go but up," he says, gazing into the liquidish multi-colored ceiling. "In the darkness you confront yourself. You come face to face with your demons. Rilke said a really fucking cool thing: 'Don't take my demons away because then you take my angels away.' And who said demons are bad? If you live in a cloud all the time, what do you know of the beauty of joy?"

Despite his undercurrent of joy, I sense a wicked streak of melancholia. Does he embrace it or try to avoid it?

"It depends on its nature. Some people can't handle it. There's a certain sweetness in melancholy, a bitter-sweetness. For me - a type that can exist within melancholy when it comes - there's a certain sweetness in it."

He's quiet for a moment. "What do you mean, 'when melancholy comes?'" I ask.

"What happens if a flower says, 'One moment I was in a lot of sun, and the next moment it was cloudy as hell.' Flowers don't have any control over the movement of the clouds."

"But don't you have control over your moods?" I ask.

"No, but I have control over how much I identify with it, and how much I allow it to pull me down into a spiral. If it happens enough you can learn to enjoy it, and other times you gotta deal with it. Just fucking get on with it. Sometimes if I'm feeling melancholy enough I'll actually try to do stuff to take me deeper down into it. It seems like the quicker you embrace it, the quicker you exhaust it. I have this theory that when the devil comes knocking on your door - you know what....?"

I wait with 'bated breath...."

"Let the fucker in, let him sit down and eat." Terence smiles as if he's entertained that particular guest a time or two. "If you keep trying to push him away, he's gonna get more and more pissed and just decide, 'I'm gonna



come strong onto this motherfucker,' it's like 'Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's.' Give the devil a fatass cigar and some cognac. After a good meal, he's happy, he's content. After a while he's gonna leave you alone - go to the next victim."

Knowing he's obsessively private, I ask if his public persona conflicts with his private face.

"I think the more time goes on, the more one learns to reconcile them. The way we're conditioned, we just ain't ready to handle that complete picture of a person and that's not what people want. They want a caricature of a man, but someone they can relate to as a caricature. I think anybody who gets older and seeks even a dollop of wisdom ... you want to simplify your life. It's learning to take your private self - maybe you gotta magnify this or diminish that into something that can be digested into this sound-bite culture - but something you don't have to slip in and out of like some kind of culture-shock."

Does it create any kind of artistic schizophrenia?

"Actually it doesn't even affect me at all. I don't need to analyze it to much. It's like if you're attracted to a woman, who needs to sit there and wonder 'Why?'"

Speaking of women, does the baggage of fame inhibit his personal relationships?

"Sometimes," he admits, then he smiles, "But it also helps create some. Really early in the fame thing, guys will say, 'How do you know if she's after me because...' Who cares? Did she come? Did she actually enjoy herself? It's not like the penis sits there and ponders 'Why?' It should also be said," he continues intently, "that it's completely human nature to be attracted to people who achieve. That's healthy and normal. And you gotta have a bit of self-confidence ... a healthy enough ego where you feel, 'I truly believe if this person spends enough time with me, she'll actually realize that I'm not the biggest dickhead in the world. I might actually have some redeeming features and she might wind up genuinely liking me for what I have to offer from my inner world.'"

Inner world? Okay, he's been talking about "the gods." Who are they anyway?

"Just a bunch of benevolent spirits - the next level equivalent of Krzysztof Kieslowski or Stephen Spielberg. They're directors, they help direct and move our plays -

make sure we're playing out roles and getting on with it. Some directors are more hands-on and some just trust the actor's intuition - step in to clarify what needs to be clarified, keep the whole thing running until we learn our lessons."

How does somebody make their acquaintance? I would really like to know.

"People sometimes say, 'This cat has *connections*, that's why he can drop his name and get into any restaurant in Los Angeles.' Sometimes we forget we got some *serious* motherfucking connections. If we could remember these serious connections it would just increase our faith and belief in a certain logic that rules the universe."

What? How? Where?

"The place you make those connections is within yourself," he says simply.

So who are they? Are they angels? People who have lived on the planet?

"I think some of them have lived on earth," he says. "I certainly would rather have an angel who knows what it's like to be human, instead of some motherfucker created in some angel factory who doesn't have a clue what it's like to have a raging hard-on - and try to balance your consciousness on the head of your dick."

What an image. I have to shake it off. It seems like Terence is taking care of himself pretty well. Is he scared of *anything*?

"My greatest fear would be not seizing the opportunity in this lifetime to finish all my unfinished business," he replies without hesitation, "and therefore by not doing so, have to come back. That's the biggest fear I have. I don't really want to come back."

Does he feel he's from somewhere else?

"I used to have a lot of questions as a kid, 'What the fuck am I doing *here*, of all places?' I had the feeling that earth and I weren't a natural match."

"Do you know where you might be from?" I inquire.

"No. I think wherever it was must have been the neighboring planet of Captain Beefhart. Wherever the



fuck he's from, I bet we've got the same zip code! I've spent enough time here," he says with obvious frustration. "Sometimes I feel profound homesickness and I just want to go home. The ultimate dichotomy is - the way I get home quickest is by bringing my home to me, no matter where I am. I still have to learn to do that."

Maybe he'll teach me after he figures it out. In the meantime, what does Terence feel is his greatest achievement this time around - on planet earth?

"That I've actually stuck around and not killed myself. It's not death I fear. It's somehow a realization - if you do a Kurt Cobain, you're not gonna be judged - there will be perfect love and understanding. But at some point you're made to realize you'll have to go back and finish the job - finish that particular performance, and I just don't want that, so I'm gambling. I'm a risk-taker by nature, so my ultimate gamble is that if I can just hang around this motherfucker and throw myself open to the universe, not only can I make it, but I might actually, by some sheer stroke of luck, be able to share and say a couple of things with other people that might actually help them. The worst thing that can happen is that I'm wrong. Fuck it."

He looks amused with himself and grins.

"It's appropriate that this magazine is called *Huh*, because I think a lot of motherfuckers are going to be reading this going, '*Huh!?*' Jesus said 'Let them who have ears, hear.' So for the people reading this who think I'm a complete headcase, that's cool. But it's the motherfuckers who will listen and say, 'Wait a second. This guy sounds so completely out that this actually makes *sense*.'"

Terence seems to sing so comfortably about both sex and God. Isn't there a dichotomy there?

"There is no dichotomy in God," he says. "There is just God. That spirit which animates the universe just is. We're the ones who limit it by our limited understanding. I think the time is coming where more and more people will be willing to accept that the earth experience is healthy because it allows us to balance the physical with the spiritual. Let the reader know that I'm being interviewed in a room where I can look up and see my portrait of my hero, Walt Whitman. And he said, 'I am the poet of the body and the poet of the soul.' He put it right into perspective. The earth experience is valuable in learning to balance the carnal with the divine, because ultimately everything is divine."

I want to know about the potent "Surrender" lyric. "I don't believe in the existence of sin

"In the original language of the Bible - to 'sin' meant to 'forget' and repent to 'remember.' So 'repent of your sins' is a call to remember. If I get to judgment and he says, 'Why don't you believe in sin?' I'll just say 'Because it's some negative shit and I've got enough problems!' I'm not afraid of God, and I completely reject the idea that somehow we should fear that energy, that spirit. That's bullshit. I will go on the record as saying to anyone - whether it's the Reverend Jerry Falwell, or my own father who is a Pentecostal Bishop: 'I don't fear God.' I used to hear it growing up in church, that if you did not accept God as your savior, you were going to burn in everlasting flames. I'm too delicate in my soul for that. As a kid, I said 'I'm not going to come to you out of that kind of blackmail! That's not a good enough seduction for me. You'll have to seduce me with some wine and chocolate, damn it!'"

I ask about a lyric from "Resurrection." Does the "dark angel" really call Terence Trent D'Arby?

"Oh yeah," he laughs, "in fact he's got a toll-free number! But he's instructive. The dark angel represents doubt and fear, and I'm saying I will fight until my last breath to keep from succumbing to that kind of numbing, self negating doubt and fear. I completely reject it. I've said before that my definition of an artist is someone who holds his balls in one hand and his heart in the other. And my balls are also numbered and four-squared like dice and I will fucking roll them. I *have* rolled them!"

Another mind-boggling image. Finally, I ask Terence what his greatest extravagance is - and I'm blissed out by the answer.

"My faith," he says. "I'm either the biggest idiot because of that, or the biggest fool, but even then I can't lose. God watches over fools *and* babies - so either way I'm safe." ■