

## John Frusciante - Space Cadet

"Raw" (n°163 -1994) -

John Frusciante was the guitarist for the RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS during their climb to stardom, but walked out on them during their last tour. Why? He had a premonition that he had to do it! With his first solo album due, Frusciante reveals he's living in a different dimension, man! ARTIE NELSON freaks out...

A skinny guy with bleached hair and pale skin comes down the stairs. He's wearing a blue shirt, is smoking a filterless Camel, and answers to the name of John Frusciante. Yes, THE JOHN FRUSCIANTE, ex-Red Hot Chili Pepper who's now embarking on a solo career. He sits next to me on an old two-piece shocking velvet couch from which we can take in a panoramic view of Los Angeles. With plenty of Evian water and Fruit Smoothie drinks on the table, the topic of conversation is naturally John's new album, called 'Niandra La Des And Usually Just A T-Shirt'! It's out early next year on Rick Rubin's American Recordings label.

"It has the vibe of when I was recording it" Frusciante begins. "Just for myself to trip out. It had the same kind of vibe as Jane's Addiction without drums. It seemed just as heavy. Some people are after as macho thug's presence (with the drums), but as long as the feeling of macho stud is there ..."

When did you finish the album? "About a year ago. But it's taken this long to get it out, because it was recorded so casually. I actually recorded it in my house", he says, pointing to some guitars, a bass, a clarinet-looking thing, a Moog synthesiser and a four-track. "Then I asked Rick (Rubin), 'Do you wanna put it out?', and he said yeah ... and we were excited about it. But when you're not looking at it as the big new promotion money-making object, people are slower. So it's taken a year."

Having been lucky enough to hear an advance of 'Niandra ...', I couldn't help but realise how much impact John had on the Chilis with their 1991 album, 'BloodSugarSexMagik'.

"Yeah ... it was like sixty-forty" he nods. "I wrote like, sixty percent of the music and Flea wrote forty"

So it must have been John who gave the Chilis another dimension, helping them transcend the party Funk thing and broaden their sound.

"Yeah, I had a good time 'cos I was always looking at Flea and my amp," John nods. "Me and Flea (RHCP bassist) and Steven Perkins (drummer with Porno For Pyros) have a band. We're called the Three Amoebas. We have ten or 15 hours of stuff on tape, and it's great. There are never any dull moments ... it all f\*cking flows perfectly. It doesn't have any of the things that made instrumental Rock laughable a few years down the line. So we're gonna release that, and they're the main people I'm interested in jamming with. Me and Flea jam now and then, but Steven's really busy with Porno right now. I don't really know any other musicians.

Tell us about your friendship with River Phoenix, the late actor who actually features on 'Niandra'. "Me and River used to play together. We had a sort of communication that was intense, on just two guitars."

How many tunes did you cut with him?

"We did two songs," John expands. "One's called 'Bought Her Soul', and it's the second song on the album. I recorded the song and I said to River, 'Make sounds with your voice and I'll record you backwards over this song but you're not allowed to hear the song.'

"So he made sounds into the mic while I recorded and listened to it on the headphones. That's the other voice in the background besides my voice. It went perfectly with the song. We were cosmic together."

"The other song is 'Soul Removal'. He sings and wrote the first half, and I wrote the second half, and you can hear the guitars on that. It has the thickness of a bunch of guitars, but the unity of one guitar. We weave in and out of each other in a really cool, natural way.

'Bought Your Soul' struck me as being driven by a powerful emotion.

"Syd Barrett (original Pink Floyd singer and well-known eccentric) really inspired that song. I was thinking about him a lot at that time. My girlfriend, Toni, is pretty insightful into what I'm doing,'cos I always avoid realising that I'm even in this dimension. She thinks the three major influences on the album are Syd Barrett, Robert Johnson (ancient Bluesman) and Captain Beefheart ('60s psychedelic star)."

Now seems to be as good a time as any to talk about why John left the Chili Peppers. Is it true you quite while the band were touring Japan?

"I had a weird premonition that I should quit immediately after I finished my guitar parts on ('BloodSugar ...')," John recalls. "I'd say to myself, 'I know you don't have any reason to, but you've gotta quit the band!'"

"But I couldn't bring myself to do it, because I knew they (The Chilis) wouldn't let me. It wouldn't make sense to them. But I had this feeling that the road was really gonna f\*ck with me. The road had been f\*cking with Flea for so many years, and it'd be bad of me to have quit then, but I was sure I should do it."

"It just had to do with my subconscious and my development as a person and spirit," he continues. "I felt like a guy with 400 ghosts telling him what to do all the time. I just wanted to lay back on the couch and think about nothing, and that's what I did till I went on tour, aside from one miserable two-week European interview thing."

"The unity hadn't been good with the band for ages. Anthony (Kiedis - singer) and I hadn't talked for a couple of tours, and we didn't look at each other much onstage. So Flea took me to the park and said, 'Is there anything you like about being in the band?', and I said 'No, I'm just in the band 'cos I love you. I love playing with you, and I don't want to just leave you, but there's nothing I like about being in the band.'"

"And he said, 'I guess you shouldn't do it just for me'. He understood, but he didn't think about it for the next year. So when I quit it was a shock. To them, it seemed like it was getting better as far as the getting along went. But I didn't wanna do it anymore. I was really happy, like my own version of happy, in outer space every time I would look at Flea's eyes, or my amp, or Chad's (Smith - drums) foot. But the popularity thing bummed me out."

"It's not like I'm against popularity," John admits. "When I was 17 and I was at the last Chili Peppers show I ever saw before joining them, Hillel (Slovak, the Chili's original guitarist who died of a heroin overdose) asked me, 'Would you still like the Chilis if they got so popular they played the LA Forum?'"

"I said, 'No. It would ruin the whole thing that's great about the band. The audience feels no different from the band at all.' There was this real kind of historical vibe at their shows, none of the frustration that runs through the audience when they jump around and can't get out of their seat. I didn't even watch the shows. I'd get so excited that I'd flip around the slam pit the whole time. I really felt like a part of the band, and all the sensitive people in the audience did, too. So I couldn't picture the band playing the LA Forum, and when we got to that point of popularity it bugged me for that and a number of other reasons."

Since completing 'Niandra ...', much of which was written at the same time as 'BloodSugar ...', Frusciante has come up with 70 other songs.

"My whole object as a musician - no matter who I'm playing with - is to get as far away from myself as possible," John admits. "The further I am away from the situation, the better the music is. I feel like I'm letting the air play with me, and the air makes the music and I'm just an outline within that. The air that surrounds me is the actual walking person and this bit of flesh in between is just a blob," he laughs.

"Did you ever try to disappear, actually to be in another universe, when you shut your eyes? I used to do things onstage to trick myself. Like tell myself I'm gonna start this solo on this fret note, then when it gets to the last second I'm not allowed to get to that fret, and I have to start somewhere else."

"Or I'll tell the audience that this song is dedicated to the baby born right now. But when it gets to the solo, the audience thinks they're thinking about the same baby as me but we're really thinking of two different babies. That kinda thing."

"You have to make fun of yourself. I'd just think it was a joke whatever I played, like what I played was ridiculous, and they'd go, 'That was so beautiful', what I'd just played for the album ('BloodSugar...'). And I'd just think it was full of shit."

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