

John Frusciante : To Record Only Water For Ten Days Review

"Kerrang!" (10 Février 2001)

Solo albums are odd concepts. They often make you wonder whether musicians are truly happy with their lot. Sometimes, these affairs simply give the artist a chance to flex their creative - and in this case, tattooed - muscles outside the musical boundaries imposed by their day job.

Red Hot Chili Pepper John Frusciante quietly released his own debut, 'Niandra Lades and Usually Just A T-Shirt', in 1995, at the behest of his celebrity friends Perry Farrell, Butthole Surfers' Gibby Haynes and the now deceased River Phoenix. The trio believed that "there's no good music anymore", and thought perhaps Frusciante's guitar genius could remedy the situation. The baby-faced guitarist was, however, suffering from depression and strung-out on heroin. The resultant lo-fi, self-produced effort was on the whole, an unlistenable din only momentarily revealing his unbridled talent which helped elevate the Chili Peppers to worldwide superstars with his performances on 1989's 'Mother's Milk' and 1991's genre defining 'Blood Sugar Sex Magik'. The album, unsurprisingly, sunk without trace, only managing to shift 45,000 copies worldwide.

Conclusive proof that the drugs don't work and do, in fact, make it worse.

Even 1997's 'Smile From The Street's You Hold' served only to show the junkie's sorrowful mind-set, and Frusciante himself admitted he recorded and released the album purely for drug money. Thankfully, self-determination freed the guitarist from the jaws of being another heroin-related waste of talent and cleaned up his act, eventually rejoining the Chili Pepper ranks for 1999's 'Californication'.

The guitarist is now a totally sober yoga devotee. 'To Record Only Water For Ten Days' reflects his new-found respect for life and while it retains the fly-by-the-seat-of-his-pants experimental touches which were evident on his first two albums, there is a profound sense of optimism and stunning songwriting in evidence - most notably on the touching 'The First Season'.

Although this is a solo album in every sense of the word - Frusciante wrote and performed all of the instruments on this album - there isn't an overriding cloud of self-indulgence that often blights the simplest song on your common-or-garden solo project. Opening track 'Going Inside' sets a precedent of positivity with the words 'You don't throw your life away', while a distorted squeal prefaces a stream of sensitive guitar flourishes and impassioned vocals. 'Remain' is a bastardized blues paean for the millennium, its acoustic refrain competing with an instant drum machine pattern to startling effect. 'Murderers' nurtures a simple riff reminiscent of 'Head (Beach Arab)' from Frusciante's debut album, 'Niandra Lades...', and is gradually coated in a pop vocal melody arriving at a sublime conclusion. However, 'The First Season' is the undoubted highlight of the album. Remaining consistent with the album's simplistic nature, it sees John flex a delicate vocal melody against a tear-jerking string section.

While it's safe to say that fans of the Red Hot Chili Peppers will get a surprise when they realise 'To Record Only Water For Ten Days' certainly doesn't lend itself to the libidinous nature of his funk-metal day-job, yet even the most cursory of listens will leave you wanting to hear more.

A lo-fi gem.

Kerrang!: Hello, Sir. Where did you find the inspiration for the songs included on 'To Record Only Water For Ten Days'?

John Frusciante: I think my songs exist before I write them, in a place called the fourth dimension where sounds and shapes and colours are the land. They're the air and the grass and the wood and they're all these feelings. When a collection of those feelings is put into my head, because I'm tuned into that place, I have the skill technically to turn it into a song.

Is it a simple process to translate these feelings into songs?

John: Once I write the song I believe that it creates a new atmosphere in a place called the fifth dimension where it creates new life and energy and it makes things better and it makes new places to live for the spirits who frequent these places.

Could you have made such a richly emotional and spiritual album without the dark experiences of your recent past?

John: No, to make the album without the experience in my life would be impossible. It's only because I've gone so deep inside myself and faced so many things that by nature I should be scared of. You know, being in a room and sitting there with a ghost, hearing their voice in your head and seeing them as clearly as I'm seeing you right now.

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