

John Frusciante plays guitar in a league where no rock guitarist can threaten him.

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In 1991 he was the main reason The Red Hot Chili Peppers, with the classical album "Blood Sugar Sex Magik" and the singles "Under the bridge and "Give it away", took the step from being on the Los Angeles alternative scene to becoming one of the world's biggest band.

He was praised as being an innovator and a virtuoso: as funky as Bootsy Collins, "punk" as Johnny Thunders, and as equilibristic as Jimi Hendrix.

Then he quit his guitar playing, pushed the heroin needle in his arm and put the bong in his mouth, and drugged himself into the deepest state of misery.

In 1999 he was back on the album "Californication".

He returned with arms scarred by needlestick and infections. Back without teeth. But back - and better than before.

In "By the way" he takes it to a level so high, which no other contemporary rock guitarist could reach.

Now it isn't merely the most beautiful tones imaginable intertwined; now he is painting pictures.

Each song is a series of unique pictures. The variation of technique and colours takes the listener aback. John Frusciante is comparable to a soccer player like Maradona or Zidane. It's about men with fantastic visions, and the technique to turn them into reality.

Puls (newspaper thing) met him backstage before the Red Hot Chili Peppers outsold concert in Globen (Swedish arena).

Interviewer: The way you approach guitar playing today, how does it differ from the way you did it when you were younger?

JF: When I grew up I was only thinking about technique. I had a goal: no one, absolutely no one, could disagree with me being a fantastic guitarist.

My way of succeeding was to learn from people who were generally considered impressive:

Eddie van Halen, Yngwie Malmsteen... But I surrendered that thought.

It didn't fit the band's music, and it lacked originality.

Int: What made you realize that?

JF: I began following the colours in my head and I didn't care about how many tones I could play in the smallest amount of time, or how fast I could move my fingers up and down the fretboard.

I was thinking of Keith Richards. How colourful isn't his way of playing?

And he doesn't care about technique in that sense: if he'd done that, he would never have played the brilliant guitarsolo on "Sympathy for the devil".

Int: You weren't in the band between BSSM and Californication, what happened with your guitar playing during that time?

JF: I quit playing guitar. Instead I read about art, and I educated myself. I read about, and was inspired by Marcel Duchamp, Leonardo da Vinci, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Francis Picabia (his watercolour painting of machines). It has had a big influence on my guitar playing.

Int: How?

JF: The way of thinking... I mean, I could look at the fretboard and know exactly what to do in order to conjure a certain mood in a song.

There is no coincidence in that. I know exactly what to do and why.

In the same way, the great artists have an intuitive perception of perspective:

Where is the central of the painting, how do I get it, how do I fill the void in front and behind. As a guitarist, my intellectual way of approaching problems is the same.

Int: Concretely speaking, how is this evident on "By the way"

JF: There are no blood 'n' guts guitar solos. There is nothing of the guitar-hero kind of thing.

I don't show off for the sake of showing off. I'm not after drawing attention to myself. I subordinate myself to the song, in order to raise the song forward.

On every song I have a new idea of colour and sound. It becomes more like melodies, instead of traditional solos.

Int: When recording "By the way", which guitarists influenced you?

JF: John McGeoch. He's the kind of guitarist I want to be. He has a new and brilliant idea for every song.

I usually play along the stuff he is doing in the Magazines' albums and Siouxsie & the Banshees' "Juju".

I was listening a lot to the Sparks' albums "Propaganda" and "Kimono in my house".

Adrian Fisher is the name of the guitarist, but I'm sure it's Ron Mael (the songwriter of Sparks) who tells him what to play.

I was listening to Johnny Marr from The Smiths and Vini Reilly from The Durutti Column, the way they kind of weave a pattern with the chords.

Keith Levine from PIL was an influence on the song "This is the place". In the way my tones bleed into each other.

Int: Many rock journalists see a contradiction between technique and feeling, what do you think about that?

JF: I'm passionate about music. Nothing can stop that passion. As long as I start from that assumption I can be as technical as I want.

Technical knowledge is liberty. But I want to recommend everyone to play as simple as possible. Playing fast and intricate should never be for your own self: if you do it, it should be because the song requires it.

Int: Can you name some guitarist who play both technically hard, and have feeling in their playing?

JF: Steve Hackett in the early Genesis. Robert Fripp in King Crimson. Steve Howe in Yes. Frank Zappa.

They play beautifully, powerfully and with emotional depth.

When people say that they can't play with their heart....

You know, it just makes me want to puke. Only people without ears can claim such a thing. These are guitarists with so much colour, such an exuberance of ideas. You can listen to their stuff over and over again, and always discover something new. They took risks, crossed limits, they had courage and love of adventure, they didn't settle with walking into others' footsteps. I feel an immense respect for them. Yes' album "Close to the edge" and King Crimson's "In the court of King Crimson" are great albums that have been completely crucial for me.

Int: At the same time you love Johnny Thunders. A guitarist who plays in a simple and primitive manner.

JF: I am open and take inspiration from a lot of places.

Johnny Thunders doesn't have the same liberty as someone who understands music theory.

But he had enough technique to make his own thing, and it depends on the fifties rock:

Gene Vincent, Elvis, Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry... Rock 'n' roll in its purest form.

Pure energy. The glamrock and punk rock music also got its inspiration from there.

Int: You released your latest solo album "To record only water for ten days" two years ago. Are you working on a new one?

JF: Yes, it will be released in a couple of months, and it's called "Shadows colliding with people".

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