

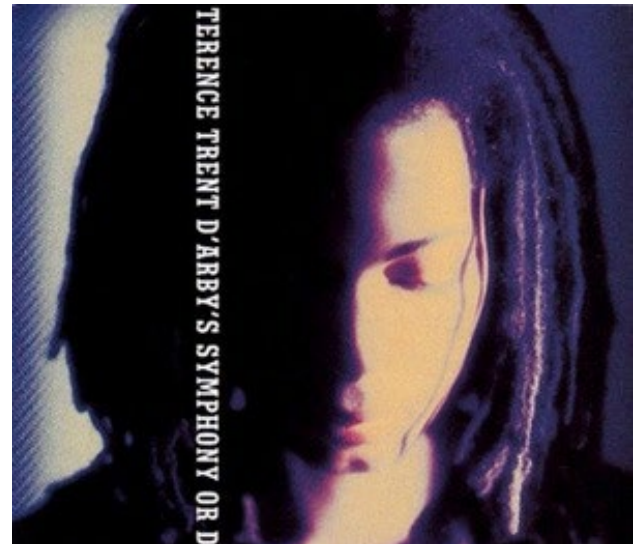


SoundVapors

Interview & 20/20 Review: Sananda Maitreya – Symphony Or Damn



August 24, 2018



One of my absolute favorite records of the 90's was *Symphony or Damn* by Sananda Maitreya, then known as TTD. This year is the 25th anniversary of that brilliant album.

It's the kind of album that had it all for music fans. It had the hard edge of *She Kissed Me* but the gentleness of *Delicate*, which features a beautiful duet with Des'ree. If you wanted to dance it had the body moving, *Do You Love Me like You Say*, but it also had the piano driven *Let Her Down Easy*.

In this business you're lucky when you get what I like to call "a front to back" album. An album that is one that I can honestly listen to from beginning to end. *Symphony* is most definitely this, for me.

Sananda, born in Manhattan, now resides in Milan, Italy. I had the opportunity to correspond with Sananda and ask him questions regarding *Symphony* as well as his current projects. He has not slowed down in any way, shape or form. He has been busy creating music, touring and enjoying his family!

SoundVapors: *Symphony or Damn* is such a special album. Do you have any memories you can share about the recording of it?

Sananda Maitreya: It was a very heady time. I was

coming off of my disappointment in my record company having failed to embrace '*Neither Fish Nor Flesh*' as the leap forward that I felt it was.

It wound up influencing a lot of artists and genre's (including 'Alternative' & 'Grunge' as well as what was later to be called 'Neo-Soul'), and played a role in the very early establishment of Alternative Radio in America. But I still couldn't fire up the Record Company at the time to do more for it than they did.



In that light, I recall spending A LOT of time with friends in FLORENCE, ITALY soothing my wounds because the PRESS had turned on me as well, and I needed another space to lick my sores with people who knew how to help me heal. The Italians are great at this.

So many of the SONGS for '*Symphony Or Damn*' came to me while hanging out in Florence & Rome. I was seeing a Countess at the time who came from a very old family long known for their patronage of the Arts. And I was visiting lots of museums & partying with good people. This journey produced a lot of songs, which I commenced to begin recording once I got back on my feet & moved to California, where I recorded it in my house in the Hollywood Hills with a great young engineer



from Australia, named CRAIG PORTEILS.

I recall that recording it was pretty easy & a lot of fun. I was free to do whatever I wanted to do, and being able to roll out of bed in the mornings and STRAIGHT into the Studio was like living in Paradise. And I felt no pressure to follow up the previous album.

It all felt like a dream.

SV: How long did the recording process take?

SM: I suspect that it took about 2 months top to bottom.

SV: The mix is superb and makes me wish more records were mixed like that today. Were you involved in the mixing process?

SM: Thank You. My Engineer CRAIG PORTEILS & I were very much involved in the mix.

It was a special time in the transition of music. I am always involved in the mixing of any of my work, it is a very big PART of my work.

SV: How long did it take you to write it? Were there any songs that were completed sort of on the fly?

SM: As previously stated, it took root mainly from my travels the year before to Florence & Rome Italy where I spent a great deal of time with friends hanging out. Most of the songs were already written by the time I began recording. A few of course were written AFTER the recording began. In fact 'LET HER DOWN EASY' was written WHILE Craig PORTEILS & I were Mixing the album in Sunset Sound in Los Angeles. I went back to my house to write it & 2 hours later we had a recording.

I then went to LONDON to Master it with MARK 'SPIKE' STENT, who was a WIZARD of whom I am proud to say I've worked with.

SV: I love the entire album and listen to it front to back. But if I had to list a Top 3 song list I would list: Castilian Blue, She Kissed Me and Penelope Please. Do you have 3 or 4 songs that really stand out for you? (note: as I write that top 3 I'm remorseful to not put Do You Love Me Like You Say and Seasons)

SM: I am always loathe to choose tracks since they all meet their logic with me.

Perhaps for EMOTIONAL reasons several songs stand out because they were tied to special stories. The OTHER Songs I came up with in America were 'Frankie & Johnny' because I was asked by the film of that name for a TITLE SONG, which was a great honor & ' She Kissed Me', which was originally written because my publisher had asked for a song for a new GIRL GROUP they were sponsoring. I wrote it and did the demo in a day, brought it back to him and he said to me: "No, This Is Too Cool, You've Gotta Keep It". So I changed the title of it from 'He Kissed Me' to what it is now, re-recorded a few pieces and the rest is on the Record!

SV: There seems to be some personal experiences throughout the album. Is there any one song that is very personal to you and why?

SM: There were a batch of songs I wrote while living in Florence the previous year that all have a very powerful attachment to my memories. I remember spending a lot of time listening to the 'Stone Roses' and writing tons of songs. It would be difficult for me to separate one memory from another. It was a very special time. I was young and growing up fast. There were many 'APEX' moments.

SV: Are there any un-released songs from that session?

SM: I am sure that there are. One day I may even search for them. Meanwhile THIS LIFE consumes my attention much more.

SV: You are a talented multi-instrumentalist. Outside of singing, do you have a favorite instrument to play?

SM: Again, thank you for your kindness & generous ear. I am blessed to play the instruments I play and LOVE being able to make music with ANYTHING. But IF I'd be forced to choose just one, I would say GUITAR because it was my biological father's favorite instrument. It was HIS desire to be a Rock & Roll guitarist that I carry with me today. He passed his legacy on to me & I LOVE that it is a unifying bonding thing between me and a father I never knew.



Neutralizing. *Prometheus* is the MASCULINE Principle in Action, *Pandora* the FEMININE, & *Pegasus* the RECONCILING, MEDIATING force. Since *Pegasus* choose mainly to remain silent, he was given most of the 'Instrumentals' which is meant to be a 'Chill-Out' kind of space before the hurricane that is *Pandora*.

SV: Your vocals are solid as usual. On a song like *Mid Life Crisis Blues* you really

SV: I listened to *Prometheus & Pandora* a while back liked it right away. Can you give us some background on the title of the album?

SM: 'PROMETHEUS & PANDORA' was born out of the previous projects that preceded it, it completes a 'Quartology' that begins with '*The Sphinx*'. It was meant to be the 'Reconciliation' project after '*The Rise Of The Zugebrian Time Lords*'.

Prometheus as the one who was cast down from Heaven and gave fire to man and who facilitated *Pandora* being raised from the Clay, as the first woman.

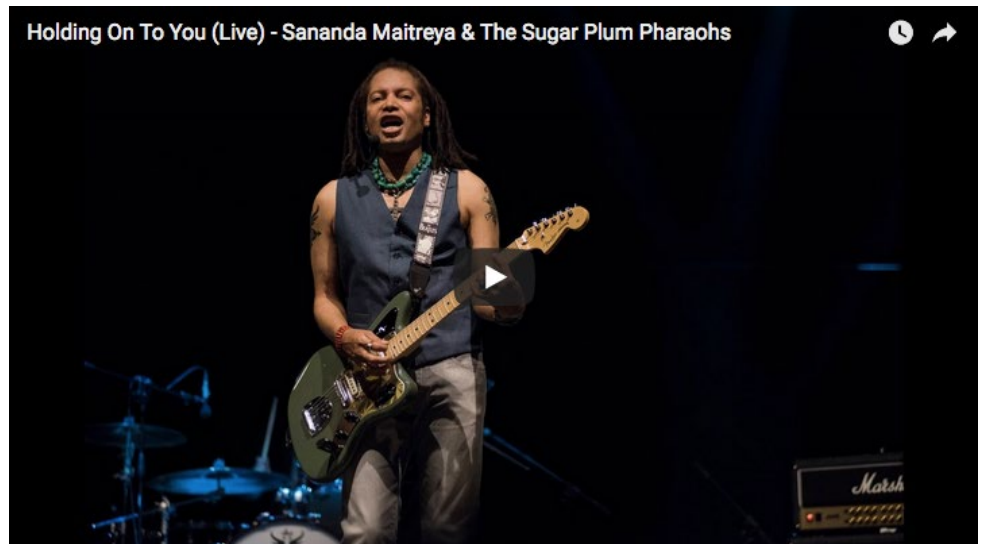
It starts to sink into the narrative the more it is absorbed.

SV: There's so much material! How long did it take to record all of these songs?

SM: All In All, it took about 6 months to record it mix it & about another few weeks to Master it. I record in my own studio, so I can set my own pace and get a lot of work done.

SV: Can you talk about versions that are *Pegasus, Prometheus* and *Pandora* versions? What is the overall concept?

SM: Each CD/Volume has its own thematic space. Such as does the Positive Force, the Negative Force & the



seem to push your voice and give your fans that classic tone. How long does it generally take to lay down vocals for a song like that?

SM: I allocate the same amount of time to every song in the sessions. After about 3 takes I should have every thing I need. We don't normally spend (by 'We', I mean myself and engineer 'Matteo Sandri'), more than an hour after we get up & rolling. Often to warm up my voice I will begin with the backing vocals first.

SV: Are you planning on releasing future albums?

SM: If all goes according to plan and God's Willing my next project will be '*PANDORA'S PLAYHOUSE*'. Whereby I finish portions of *Pandora's* journey & perspective through various filters. I've already got some songs lined up.



It should be fun! As long as I have ideas to work with AND a place to work comfortably at my own pace, I will be predisposed to making records. IT IS WHAT I WAS TRAINED TO DO, WRITE SONGS & Record them.

SV: Do live exclusively in Italy or do you also come back to the States?

SM: I have lived exclusively in Milan Italy since returning to Europe in 2001.

I live with my wife Francesca & Our 2 Sons. Life is a little less crazy here & has always been a culture supportive of the arts. As an artist I feel at home.

SV: Can you give a message to your fans about the past, present and future?

SM: The Message Is This: 'IT AIN'T ALWAYS WHAT YOU THINK IT IS, BUT IT IS WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE'. Go In Peace, & Much Gratitude, Sananda!

Here's an EXCLUSIVE United States premiere of his new song and video Hail Mary!

