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CAN TERENCE TRENT D'ARBY BE AS GOOD AS HE THINKS HE IS

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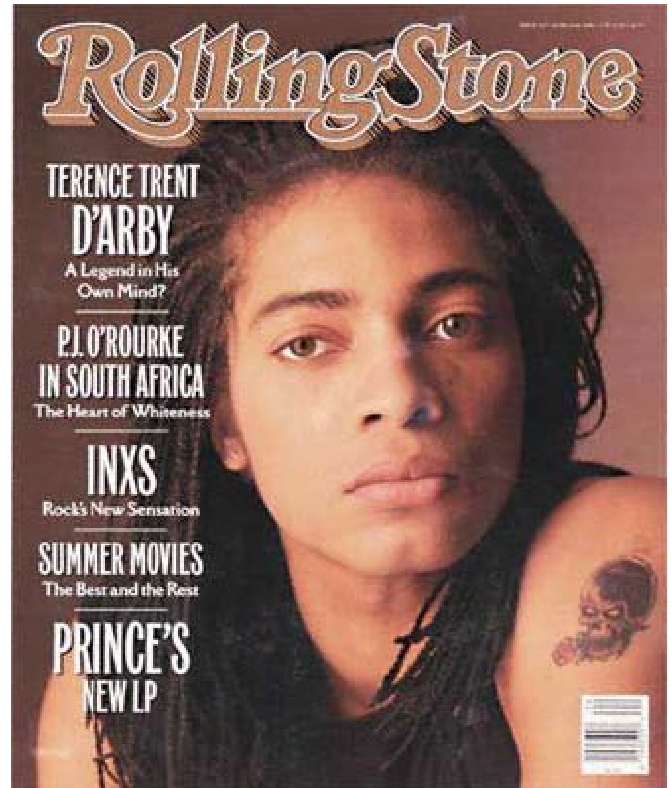


It's three in the morning, and Terence Trent D'Arby - the prettiest, most provocative pop star of the day - is seated in his dimly lighted hotel suite, high above New York City. He is busy studying the floor between his feet, pulling idly at a hammer-and-sickle bauble dangling from his left ear.§ "I just want to go on record," he says, measuring his tone for full effect, "That this is positively the last interview I will give anyone for at least another five years." § He pauses for a moment, then looks up and flashes a roguish smile - and for a good reason. This is a fairly unexpected revelation for such an up-and-coming pop legend - especially considering that this is also the first lengthy interview that the British-based singer has ever granted in America.

The question, of course, is why. Why would any right-thinking, fast-breaking rock star cut himself off from the press - and, to some extent, from his audience - before anybody really has a change to figure out who he is? "Because I've been there," D'Arby says. "I've already done all this in England, and I'm bored with it. But, you know, we made a deal: Give me a fucking cover and I'll talk. That's the way it is."

D'Arby laughs playfully at his own bravado, then continues. "Besides, what do we end up saying? We don't want to talk about sex, do we? Or about drugs or politics, right? We *will* talk about our record company, will we? In other words, we won't talk about anything that might possibly offend one person who won't go into the next Sam Goody's, or whatever store, and buy our record. So we wind up saying nothing.

"I know there will be people who say 'How *dare* he say this,' who will want to slap me down, as if I don't have a right to speak my mind because I make records. For too long we've been fed the illusion of the rock artist as someone who only makes records - as someone who is merely an entertainer."

Abruptly a sad but obstinate look crosses D'Arby's face. "There are people who make me feel like I'm the most arrogant person to ever walk the face of the planet earth because I'm *passionate*. When I feel things, I feel them passionately. And, for better or worse, what makes me the artis that I am - and the artist that I want to be - is that passion.

"If I let people take that way from me, I'm afraid that is

going to be the mechanization of Terence Trent D'Arby. And I don't want that. I intend to resist that with everything I have."

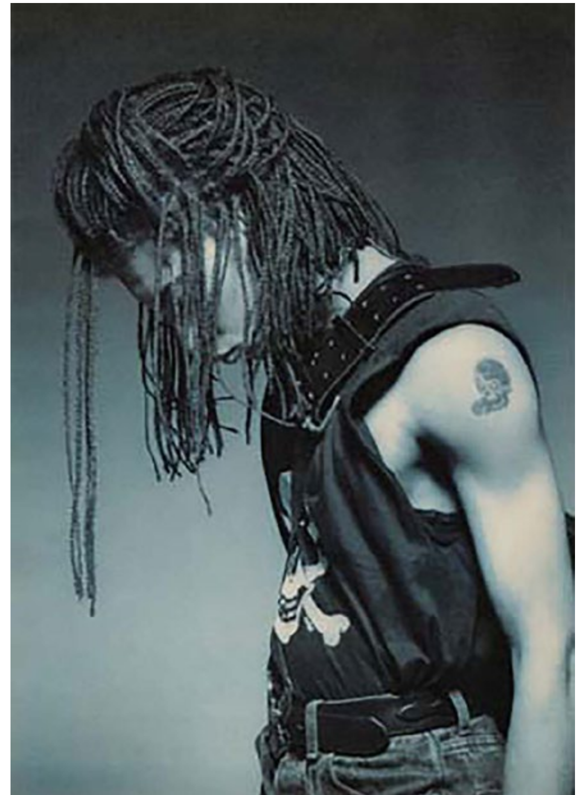
TO HEAR SOME PEOPLE TELL IT, TERENCE TRENT D'ARBY
is either the brightest new promise that pop music has yielded since the ascent of Bruce Springsteen and Prince or simply the latest grand entry in a long line of hyped-up rock & roll jobs. To hear D'Arby himself tell it, you begin to suspect that the truth might lie in both directions at once.

At the very least, D'Arby is the hottest and smartest luminary that the trend-fixated British pop scene has witnessed all decade: a magnificent and rousing vocalist who can combine the sensual graininess of Sam Cooke and Otis Redding with the tonal dexterity of Marvin Gaye, Al Green and Smokey Robinson - and a guilefully moody and provocative character who has clear ambitions of someday being ranked alongside such enduring mystique-meisters as Bob Dylan, David Bowie and Prince, among others.

Indeed, as far as the British press is concerned, D'Arby - who is an American expatriate - has already achieved modern heroic status. As the critic Charles Shaar Murray put it, "D'Arby seems like something invented by three rock critics on the 'phone. Young black American, pretty.... Highly articulate, enormously well-read and gifted with an awesome knack for self-promotion....*Perfect.*"

It is not surprising, then, given all this media push, that D'Arby's CBS debut album, *Introducing the Hardline According to Terence Trent D'Arby*, proved to be one of the most eventful British releases of last year. In its first three days of release, it topped the album chart in the pop-music weekly *New Musical Express* - an unprecedented achievement for the première work of a new artist. In addition, D'Arby, who is presently on his first major tour of his forsaken homeland, is enjoying perhaps the largest, most carefully orchestrated publicity blitz that Columbia Records has ever afforded a new artist in the United States. The aim is for D'Arby to achieve the same impact in America as he has in his adopted England - and considering that his current American single, "Wishing Well," has recently topped *Billboard's* Hot 100 chart, that goal may be within reach.

There's only one hitch in all this. D'Arby may posses a tremendous reserve of talent, ambition and good looks, but he also possesses a penchant for playing the role of an outspoken and unpredictable bad boy. In his most



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creative moments, he can make this conceit work for him in brilliant and uproarious ways. By example, D'Arby began one *NME* interview by telling the writer, "I think I'm a genius. Point fucking blank." He followed that comment by describing *The Hardline* as "the most brilliant debut album from any artist this decade." On another occasion he declared the record a better work than *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Boasting is not a thing of the past for D'Arby. He is already considering his place in rock's pantheon. "I think that just from a fan's point of view, I will be quite interesting to watch develop," he says. "I see it this way: I see Michael Jackson as the Elvis of our era, Bruce Springsteen as Chuck Berry and Prince as Little Richard. Okay that's fine, but damn it, I want to be the Jerry Lee motherfucking Lewis of our time.

"Jerry Lee was even more an embodiment of what white Southeners feared than the blacks were, because he was the white man gone bad: he was the devil incarnate to a lot of white Southeners. At the same time, he was a devil with shiny patent-leather shoes, a brilliant jacket, and he could tear up a fucking piano. This man was living what Dean and Brando were trying to live on film. And if those other roles are already taken in my generation, that's definately the one I would rather assume than anything else. He was wicked, in both the good as bad sense, and that captures my imagination far more then being Elvis."

At times, D'Arby's vanity can seem tiring. As far back last autumn - about the time *The Hardline* was released in the United States - he insisted he would not sit for an interview with **Rolling Stone** unless the magazine would agree to put him on its cover. "I only intend to tell my store once," he said at the time, "and it's worth all the attention it can get."

Sometimes, though, this strategy has backfired. For example, on the day that D'Arby arrived in New York for a highly anticipated concert at the Upper West Side's Beacon Theater, he was met with a *Village Voice* cover story that portrayed him as an egoistical, shorttempered, manipulative "jerk" - in short, a con man who fearfully guards the true facts of a hyperbolized, invented past and who is also something of a musical opportunist. (D'Arby refused to comment on the story except to say, "Jesus, I wish the press would at least let me build up my myth before they tear it down.")

That same night, at the Beacon concert, D'Arby - who is a sometimes iffy, sometimes brilliant stage performer - turned in a decidedly lackluster show, during which he virtually had to badger the audience to get on its feet and cheer him. Later that evening he attributed his own impaired performance to a flulike condition that had been vexing him for days, but he blamed Columbia Records for creating the lukewarm crowd response by filling the house with too many of its own employees and guests. "I'm tired of these people coming to check out whether I'm the next big thing", he said. "I already proved that last year".

Tonight, though, a day after the show at the Beacon, D'Arby is in a much better mood despite his lingering viral infection. Earlier this evening he redeemed last night's debacle with a vitalizing performance at an old dance hall called Roseland - one of those periodic shows that make plain just how superbly he can take a wide range of rock and soul history and make it all his own. Indeed, as he sits here in the predawn hours, picking his way slowly through a plate of oysters and playing tapes featuring some of his favorite musical models of the moment (including Dylan, Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly, the Drifters and the Beatles), D'Arby seems a far cry from the blusterer who has been endlessly championed by the British press or the mean-tempered *enfant terrible* depicted in *The Village Voice*.

"A lot of people," he says, "have taken his whole thing about the 'mysterious Terence Trent D'Arby' a bit too seriously. The simple truth is I had to do my best to ensure that my album was going to win massive attention. I had to make sure that would happen, by hook or crook.
"And as a former journalism student, I have some idea of what makes good copy and what doesn't. I knew that when I boasted that *The Hardline* was the best debut album by a male solo act in this century that the reporter would be sure to quote that. Jesus Christ, can you not see that that was a statement *dying* to be put into headlines?"

But didn't D'Arby foresee that all this swaggering could backfire and create a hostile public or a media image of him as a self-smitten hype artist?
"I know that some people view me as a bit manufactured," says D'Arby with a shrug of resignation. "But I can't be Whitney Houston: somebody who is polite and perfect and appeals to your mother and your grandfather. Actually, I *do* have a bit of a chip on my shoulder. But so what? After all, rock & roll was founded by people who had chips on their shoulders. So yeah, I was ready to be knocked about a bit - especially since I speak out a lot. I figure that makes me a rather irresistible target."

D'Arby leans forward. He seems to be warming up to his subject a bit, and whenever he gets a bit excited, his soft, ghostly voice takes on the quality of a British accent tinged oddly with the vestiges of a Southern twang.
"The reason I got into a band was I wanted attention, I wanted to get laid, and I wanted to *pose*," he says. "I wanted to be up on that stage, in effect saying to people, 'You're looking and you're listening to me now. What do you think of *this*?" And no matter what anybody says, that's no different from the reason that Bob Dylan or Keith Richards or Pete Townshend got into this: they wanted to play guitar because it looked cool, and that's what rock & roll is about. Rock & roll was built around posers and boasters."

He pauses for a second and strains to

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hear the music that is playing in the other room. It is the voice of Leadbelly, the black folk singer of the Thirties and Forties who, for some historians, was as notable for his titanic pride as for his songwriting.
“People try to criticize artists for having an ego and arrogance”, D’Arby says after a few moments. “But if you want to get to the place where I want to get to, you better have some ego, mate, or you’ll be crushed like a grapefruit seed. There’s no way in the world you’re going to be a Bob Dylan without having that insurmountable ego that tells you that you deserve to be there. There must be that insurmountable belief inside you that you deserve this attention. To be able to walk onstage in front of thousands of people, you better have an ego. Either that or you better run and hide right now.”

A LITTLE LATER IN THE MORNING, AS THE CONVERSation turns to questions of D’Arby’s personal history, his exuberance fades. “The truth is,” he says, “I don’t *really* want to talk about it, but whatever you want to ask, ask it. I just reserve the right to say whether I want to talk about it.”
D’Arby sighs, settles back into his chair and begins his chronicle. He was born twenty-six years ago in Manhattan, he says, the first child of the Reverend James Benjamin Darby - a man who, in his younger years, had played guitar and displayed a fondness for the early rock & roll of Elvis Presley and Little Richard but who shumned such wordly distractions when he became a minister with the Pentecostal Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

After D’Arby’s father received his calling, the family moved around a bit - from New York to New Yersey to Chicago - before settling into DeLand, Florida, a semi-isolated, college-dominated burg north of Orlando. D’Arby’s mother, Frances Darby, found work in Florida as teacher and counselor, but her first love, according to her son, was gospel singing. “That’s all she wants,” he says, “is to sing in church. I mean, it’s no secret that the reason black church has produced the overwhelming majority of decent black singers is because that form of singing is about expression, about being moved by the Spirit. But I can’t say I any longer claim fondness for it. In fact, it’s one of my least favorite forms of music.”

In part, D’Arby’s disaffection for gospel was a byproduct of an early disenchantment with the Pentecostal religion - a misgiving that has created some misunderstanding between the singer and his parents. “I respect my parents for what they believe,” says D’Arby, “and I know that my father is a sincere man: he’s not like Jimmy Swaggart. My father has always practiced what he has preached. But I think the unfortunate thing is how the Bible has been used to just bash a lot of people over the head and keep the races and various cultures down - perpetuating and justifying wars and death, the Holocaust and apartheid.

“But the last thing I want to do is hurt my father, because I love and respect him. That’s the life he chose to lead, and I’m on my own personal spiritual quest. Maybe one day our paths will meet up. Maybe they won’t. But he’s still my father, and I’m still his son.”
As a result of his fathers convictions, D’Arby was prohibited from hearing secular forms of music, such as rock & roll and soul, and from owning his own stereo or radio. “I was always afraid,” he says, “that I would get caught with this little transistor that I borrowed from my friend across the street. I think that’s where my natural musical curiousity came from. But I think things worked out for the best. If I’d been allowed to listen to the same music at the same times that my peers were listening to it, I wouldn’t be the artist that I am now.”

One contemplary musical force did make an immediate and lasting impression on D’Arby. “I remember one time playing in the yard by myself,” he says, “when I heard this record playing from across the street, and I was galvanized. I ran across the street and said,’Who is that?’ It happened to be ‘I Want You Back’, from the Jackson 5. It was one of those occassions when you feel one chapter in your life close and another open. It’s weird, because Jackson doesn’t look much older than I do now, and he doesn’t come across much older. But he *is* a childhood idol, and it’s really hard to shake an influence like that. It’s like your first kiss: you can never, never forget your first girlfriend.”

Around the same time that he first heard Michael Jackson, D’Arby had to contend with another transformation in his world - and in the world around him. “I can remember in kindergarten and the first grade,” he says, “being in an all-black school, then suddenly I was in school with lots of white kids. To tell you the truth, I didn’t see much difference, because when I was in all-black schools, I got beaten up because I wasn’t really ‘black’ - I was much lighter skinned than I am now. And then in white schools you get the same hard time because you’re not white. I was an equal-opportunity victim. So I didn’t particularly rush to claim either side. Consequently, I was a bit of a loner.

“But there were other ways I didn’t fit in. I was usually the smartest kid in school, but I had a lot of white teachers who hadn’t learned to deal with teaching black kids. And

sometimes, to my detriment, I was able to perceive things that other kids would just miss. Let's say I was sitting next to my white friend Johnny when I was in school: we could be identical in character, but Johnny was always described as being outspoken and possesing leadership potential, while I was described as being obnoxious and disruptive in class. So you learn quickly what the real score is. When I was a child, I could feel how much less those teachers wanted me to succeed, as opposed to the white youngsters."

Still, D'Arby apparently did well enough in high school to win a journalism scholarship to his father's former college, though at first, he says, he wanted to decline the offer. A year earlier, over his mother's protests, D'Arby had started to train as a boxer twice weekly at a gym in Orlando.
By the time he graduated from high school, D'Arby had won the regional Golden Gloves lightweight championship, and a short time later an army recruiter offered to send him to boxing school in the military.

D'Arby's father, however, prevailed on him to attend college instead. Less than a year later, shortly after his eighteenth birthday, D'Arby quit the University of central Florida and enlisted in the U.S. Army. "I had to get away from home," he says. "Also, boxing seemed to offer a kind of stardom. Eventualy, once my ego was gratified, I realized that it was all a bit stupid, trying to punch another man as hard as you can to try to keep him from doing the same thing."

For a short time, D'Arby was posted at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and then was shipped overseas to Elvis Presley's old outfit: the Third Armored Division, near Frankfurt, Germany. "I found it odd that I felt more comfortable in Germany than in the States," he says, "but when you find your niche, you know it. Some cultures are more freethinking than others."

It was in the atmosphere of German night life, says D'Arby, that his interest in singing became rekindled. At the time, jazz fusion and rock-funk bands were the vogue in Frankfurt and Munich, and in his free time away from the post, D'Arby began frequenting Frankfurt music stores. In a short time he found a job singing for a slightly popular nine-piece funk-rock aggregation called the Touch ("We sounded like Earth, Wind and Fire meets the Who," claims D'Arby).

According to some reports, D'Arby - who had been listening hard to Michael Jackson's newly released *Thriller* and had started winning comparisons to the American singer from a few fans - gave the band a focus it had previously lacked. Things went so well for a time that D'Arby left the army - although without the army's sanction. "I wanted out," he says, "but they wouldn't let me out." According to D'Arby, he went AWOL on a permanent basis, hiding out in friends' homes during the day, playing the local clubs at night.

One day during this period, while shopping a demo tape of Touch, D'Arby met Klaus Pieter Schleinitz, a press officer for the European label Ariola International and also a man with a strong passion for soul, jazz and international pop-ethnic musical styles. Schleinitz (who is referred to by D'Arby as K.P.) liked what he heard in D'Arby's voice, but more important, he also saw the young American as an eager and moldable talent. K.P. spent several months escorting D'Arby through a wide-ranging history of pop music, from the early rumblings of the Memphis Sun records scene to the numerous manifestations of the British Invasion. For D'Arby it all had the force of a new discovery.

In time K.P. became D'Arby's manager, and Touch began to negotiate for a major-label deal. D'Arby, though, still had the problem of the U.S. Army to cope with. "I realized, 'Hey, Terence, these motherfuckers are serious. They want to throw you in jail for a long, long time.' And then something deep down inside me told me that if I would just go back and face the music, everything would be all right."

What happened next is subject to some dispute. According to the account D'Arby has given in previous interviews, the army court-martialed him with the aim of imprisoning him for up to five years, and only the clever and compassionate defense of a New York lawyer saved him. According to the *Village Voice* story, which was written by Daisann McLane, there is no record that D'Arby was ever tried; instead, he probably received an "administrative reprimand".

D'Arby was discharged from the army in April 1983. "To this day, my mom doesn't like it when I tell people I was kicked out. But, Mom, it's the truth - and besides, it sounds more rock & roll." D'Arby went back home, got processed out, gave Mom and Dad a kiss and went back to Germany and hit the road with the band.

Within a few months, Touch disintegrated, and D'Arby's manager left Germany for London. "There was a lot of jealousy in the band," says D'Arby. "I was the frontman,

and to be honest, I just wanted to be a star - I wanted a fast car and fast women. I just wanted to shake my butt onstage and get laid."

D'Arby sounds irritable as he shares this last quip. He runs his fingers through his locks and leans back in his chair. "To be honest with you," he says, "the more we talk about this stuff, the more I get monumentally bored with it." It is a little wonder that D'Arby is tired. It is now 6:oo a.m. and sunlight is beginning to illuminate the room. In a few hours the singer will have to be in Washington, D.C., where he is scheduled for another concert. "We can talk more about all this tomorrow," D'Arby says. "If I don't get some sleep, I'm not going to have any energy for this fucking gig."

THE FOLLOWING AFTERNOON, AN ASSOCIATE OF D'AR-
by's calls from Washingtom, D.C., to say that D'Arby won't be able to continue the interview that day and also won't be able to keep an appointment for a photo session for this article. Reportedly his flu condition has worsened and is causing temporary deafness in his left ear, and the marathon talk session the night before probably didn't help matters. Though D'Arby will go ahead with that evening's concert in Washington, he will cancel two other concerts in the days that follow. According to one source, he is so ill that a physician has advised him to scrap the rest of the tour and enter a hospital, but D'Arby refuses to do so.

Two weeks after the postponed D.C. meeting, D'Arby is ready to resume the interview. Once again it is the postmidnight hour, and the setting is a faintly lighted hotel room - this time in Memphis, Tennessee, where D'Arby is to perform the next evening at the Memphis Ballroom, in the Peabody Hotel. As he settles into a small sofa, another tape plays continuously on a nearby cassette player, featuring the music of Nat "King" Cole, Sam Cooke, the Four Freshmen and D'Arby's current daily obsession (as well as a reported influence on his music), the Beach Boys.

D'Arby seems friendlier and healthier than he did during his hectic New York visit, but at the moment he also appears a bit agitated. In the interim between this converstaion and the last, he has sent along a letter expressing concern about how his music would be described in this article, and tonight he is anxious to elaborate on what he wrote. He says his concern was precipitated by a lukewarm *New York Times* review, in which he was described primairly as a singer working in the soul tradition.

"I have *never* said I was a soul singer," says D'Arby, reaching over and running down the volume on his cassette player. "There seems to be this automatic thing that if you are a black singer - even if you sing pop - you are called a soul or R&B singer. I feel like people are anticipating that I want to assume this mantle, and of course whenever you find yourself being mentioned in the same breath as people like Wilson Pickett, that's a flattering thing. But it isn't altogether accurate. Why is it if I go onstage and do songs by both Sam Cooke and the Rolling Stones, I'm cited only as being derivative of Cooke but not as an emulator of, say, Keith Richards or Mick Jagger?

"Maybe it's easier to hear how Sam Cooke has influenced me because of the way I sing, but it's also true that I am aping Pete Townshend at certain moments in my show, and I get slightly paranoid when people ignore that just to concentrate on one aspect of my musical character. I also wonder why it is that we constantly invent terms to keep black artists from being considered rock & roll artists."

Clearly this is a topic that D'Arby feels strongly about. And yet it wasn't until after his German band fell apart and he joined his manager in London, says D'Arby, that he realized that black and white and rock and R&B forms could still interact in liberal and productive ways. Indeed, it was a fortunious time: D'Arby had arrived in London with a new, exuberant and still developing sense of rock & roll and soul history, only to discover a young, comparatively integrated pop scene that was also busy trying to make sense of numerous pop and R&B traditions. At the same time, it was trying to update these legacies in the context of modern social realities and newer pop sounds.

The impact of that scene, as well as his reflections on his American past, combined to fuel the songs on *Introducing the Hardline According to Terence Trent D'Arby*: a record that offers a wider command of musical styles - and a broader knowledge of rock and pop and soul history - than perhaps any other recent debut. Yet for all its ambition, and for all D'Arby's cockiness, *The Hardline* is not exactly a self-involved work. If anything, it's an album about the necessity of finding romantic love and social connection in the face of grim social realities.

"I think the reason people respond to me," says D'Arby, "is that I'm obviously tapping into some emotional void

that's been left for too long. There's room in pop music to start touching people again, instead of just doing whatever the record company tells you people want to hear. You know, we go through so much shit in our lives that we want to be reminded that, yes, other people feel the same way, too. I have no time for those who say that nobody wants to hear happy things. By and large, I think people just want to hear some confirmation that you understand how it feels to be alive and have fears and doubts."

But does D'Arby think he can stay in touch with these concerns? After all, he is already a big pop star - a star who, to some degree, is already living in the increasingly secluded conditions that most pop artists must invariably cope with. What's more, he clearly wants to become an even bigger star. Can he do that and also grow in ways that will remain compelling and convincing for his audience, in the manner, say, that Springsteen has done?

"I can't say for sure," says D'Arby, "though I think I have what it takes to sustain my talent. At the same time, sometimes we sow the seeds of our own destruction, and while I'm less self-destructive than I used to be, I still have a strong streak in that regard sometimes. But the high wire is probably one of the most thrilling acts to watch, and that's what I intend to do: walk that wire."

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But what if all this doesn't happen? What if for some reason he fails to achieve all these dreams of stardom and consequence? Would he be able to handle that? D'Arby looks truly taken aback by the question. He sits quietly for several moments, shaking his head, trying to form a reply. "That...that's like saying what would happen if my dick fell off", he says finally. "I mean, no, I won't even accept that as a remote possibility, because I actually do believe in creative visualization. It seems that I'll be successful because I've always *believed* that I would be.

"But of course I'm human. What would I do if I fell on my face? If I fail as an artis, I'd go to the next logical place: I'd be an A&R man - what else? There, that should endear me to CBS."
D'Arby laughs and leans back, sprawling his arms along the back of the sofa. "Just wait, just *wait*, until you hear this next record. I think I'm going to make it a double album - I like the audacity of a new artist making his second record a double album. And then I'll come up with a really good quote for all the reporters. Next time the quote will be 'This album is better than *Beggars Banquet*.' Or, no, 'This album is better than *Exile on Main Street*.' That's it - that's the next one. They'll *love* that one."

DURING THE WEEK THAT THIS ARTICLE is being prepared, a feature story about D'Arby's American tour appears in *New Musical Express*. The story, by Dennis Campbell, is entitled "Bad Attitude." But the article also contains some interesting surprises. For example, *NME* claims that during the same afternoon that D'Arby was scheduled for a photo session with **Rolling Stone**, he was instead busy posing for photos for the *NME* article. "In the car on the way back [from the *NME* session]," writes Campbell, he asks Claudine [Martinet-Riley, one of D'Arby's publicists] about his guitar. "It's in Philadelphia,"
she replies. "Can you get it?" "Not in the time we've got. We've already postponed the session with **Rolling Stone** twice today so you could do one with *NME*."
"Right, I'm not doing the session then," Terence announces. He's got to have his black and chrome guitar or the session's off.

Later, according to Dennis Campbell article, the phone rings. It's [a Columbia Records publicist] looking for Terence. It seems the entire D'Arby camp is in turmoil over his refusal to do the **Rolling Stone** pictures. They've told the photographer that Terence is ill; they dare not tell...about his real reason - the missing black and chrome guitar.
"Tell them you haven't seen me," he asks. [The publicist] rings off, even more worried than before.

All in all, it's strange behavior from a man who has allowed buttons, posters and ads to be printed up bearing the slogan D'ARBY DON'T LIE.
A few days after the *NME* article appears in print, D'Arby calls from San Fransisco to give his side of the story. "I'm not going to pretend I'm completely innocent in this scenario," he says, "but the thing you have to keep in perspective is the whole environment in England, especially at a paper like *NME*. These are left-wing, underground boys. For guys like that, I embody this person who has come to big, capitalist America and said,'Fuck all of you bastards,' and that's made me more of a hero to them, because I'm seen as not playing the usual record-company industry-bullshit games. Finally somebody they've backed is doing the right thing. And for better or worse, I'm not going to disown *NME*, although they used me as a symbol of one-upman-ship, and they played that particular card a bit hard.

"As for that day that I didn't show up for ths session," D'Arby continues, "I was a very sick boy - no doubt about it. And because it's always been a dream of mine to be on the cover of **Rolling Stone**, I was not about to go into that photo session and have things not be right. It's true I didn't have the guitar I wanted, but had I had that guitar, I still wasn't going to do the session that day. I *was* ill. It wasn't any coincedence that the two gigs afterwards were blown off."

D'Arby pauses for a moment, then resumes in a quieter voice. "I don't know if I want you to think I'm *not* really a cocky bastard," he says, "but at first I thought you might cancel the cover over this, and I was quite disappointed. For me, that cover is a symbol of something. It's like sticking my tongue out at the kids I went to school with, who didn't think I was going to amount to shit. Today those people may not do much, but they *do* read **Rolling Stone**, and they do look at MTV, and they do know what might be the Number One song on the charts on any given week. And I was disappointed, because I wanted that as my revenge against that time when I did actually live here and grew up around people who didn't really give a shit about me one way or the other."

THE MORNING AFTER THE INTERVIEW
in Memphis, D'Arby loads his band, the Bojangles, and a few guests into a van and heads to the city's outskirts, to visit the church where the former pop singer Al Green now presides as a minister. As D'Arby said earlier, he is not much of a fan of gospel music, but he *is* fan of Green's high, breathy brand of vocalizing. Though Green has turned to religious music, he is still in superb voice and bears musical witness every Sunday morning for his congregation.

As it turns out, this is one of the rare Sundays that the Reverend Al Green will not make an appearance, though this won't become apparent until D'Arby and his entourage have sat through nearly an hour of nonstop testimony from Green's fifteen-voice gospel choir. To anybody who loves impulsive, soulful vocalizing - and who is not put off by the evangelical fervor of the music's content - this is an inspiring experience. The large choir and the small rhythm section interact feverishly, continuously spurring each other on to startling heights, and if either of them flags for a moment, the congregation itself takes over and keeps things spiraling.

But D'Arby, sitting in the back of the church, seems unmoved by the spectacle. When asked if this is what his childhood experience of gospel was like, he looks heartbreakingly sad and nods mutely. A few minutes later, when the acting minister invites him to pulpit to sing a guest vocal, D'Arby sits staring at the floor, looking frozen, and does not respond. It is hard to say what it is about this experience that disturbs him, that prehaps kicks up difficult old ghosts, but whatever it is, he isn't anxious to talk about it.

Later, though, when D'Arby takes the stage in the Peabody Hotel's ballroom, the sojourn is still on his mind. "We went to church this morning," he tell the audience of young black and white fans, "but I don't think any of us got saved. It's true what you've heard: sin and rock & roll go hand in hand." Then D'Arby launches into his own brand of testifying, delivering for the next two hours what is perhaps his most fervid and compelling performance on this American tour.

Propelled by the brawny backbeat of his tight-as-wire, tough-as-nails band, D'Arby delivers *The Hardline* tales of desire and apocalypse with a sense of hunger and urgency that he never mustered for his New York shows. In particular, his rendition of "If You All Get To Heaven" (about a sinner who mourns the waste and cruelty of the world around him) is stunning. D'Arby shatters the song's dark visions of death and war with a climatic, full-throated roar that is bright with anger and passion; like all the great yowls in the history of soul and rock & roll, it sounds like a cry of refusal and, at the same moment, of hope.

And yet as impressive as this instant is, in some ways D'Arby's covers of rock and soul classics prove even

more daring and stirring. In part, that's because, at least on this occasion, D'Arby is being true to his word: he is singing the Rolling Stones' "Jumpin' Jack Flash", James Brown's "Soul Power", Smokey Robinson's "Who's Loving You" and Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" as if they all derived from similar passions, as if they were diverse but inseparable links of the same tradition - which, of course, they are.

Yet even more audaciously - and inspiringly - he sings them as they were nothing so much as his *own* songs, as if somehow they were at work here to speak for him, to tell his own story: a complex story of past hurts and undying pride.
In his last gesture of the evening, D'Arby picks up a black Fender guitar and kneels on the floor in the posture of a rock & roll knight-errant, propping the guitar before him, and makes the sign of the cross. then he stands up, his big eyes glaring hard at the audience, and raises the guitar above his head. He swings it in a slow, smooth arc and smashes it's body hard on the floor, cracking it's neck with a loud, metallic snap.

It is, of course, a borrowed move, reminiscent of the temperament and ambition of numerous rock & roll swaggereres, from the piano-bashing Jerry Lee Lewis to Pete Townshend to the Clash. But the casual determination with which D'Arby pulls it off gives the act a personal twist. "In that moment," he says later, "I feel like I'm acknowledging my debts to the people who have inspired me, but I also feel like I'm claiming something for myself. It's like on that day when you finally enter your own house, you can break your own glass, because it's fucking *yours*, and you paid for it." ■