



# ALBUMISM™

## Sananda Maitreya's Debut Album 'Introducing the Hardline According to...' Turns 35 | Anniversary Retrospective



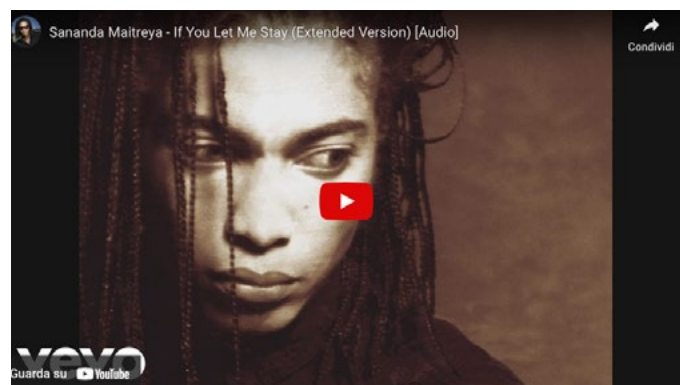
July 10, 2022

By [Patrick Corcoran](#)

Happy 35th Anniversary to Sananda Maitreya's debut album *Introducing the Hardline According to...*, originally released July 13, 1987.

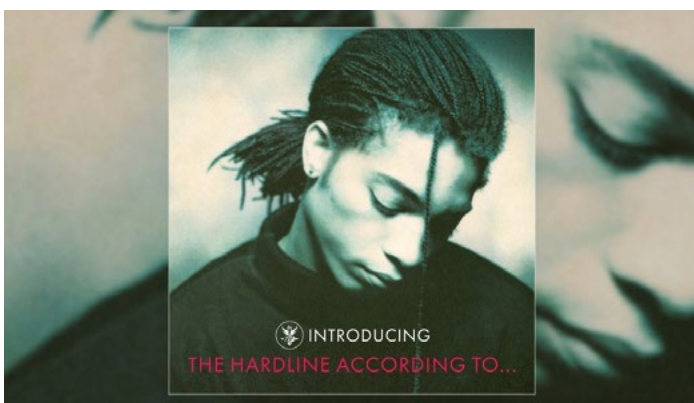
The sweet science of pugilism demands certain key characteristics. Speed of mind and body. The ability to punch powerfully and accurately. An impenetrable defensive setup. Conditioning to survive twelve brutal rounds of battle. Discipline to devote the prime years of your life to a monk-like existence. And the courage to take that long walk from changing room to ring.

None of which count for a thing without confidence—staring your opponent in the eye and knowing beyond all knowing that you have the beating of your nemesis mere inches away, no matter how intimidating he or she may look. For the winner of the Florida State Golden Gloves Lightweight title of 1980, confidence was never an issue—even when he abandoned boxing and a career in the army to become a musician. After all you don't call your debut album the most important record since Sgt. Pepper's if you're the shy and retiring type.



Born Terence Trent Howard in Manhattan in 1962, July 1987 saw the supernova arrival of Sananda Maitreya (formerly known as Terence Trent D'Arby) and his extravagantly monikered debut album *Introducing the Hardline According to Terence Trent D'Arby*. Within just three days of its release, it had sold a million copies, establishing him as a nascent superstar to battle with the global behemoths (Prince, MJ and Madonna) that bestrode the music world.

That arrival though was fueled by his residence in the UK, rather than his homeland. Just as Jimi Hendrix and other artists in the past had left their home shores behind to taste success, so TTD did the same. Seemingly taking refuge on legendary music show *The Tube* (and dating host Paula Yates for a year), he launched his own brand of soul, pop and funk (with the help and guidance of Martin Ware of pop denizens *Heaven 17*) to a world unsure of where to place him in the musical climate of the moment. Europe seemed a more natural home for his prodigious talents, as he didn't neatly pigeonhole himself alongside the trends taking root in the US. There was decidedly





nothing of the newly birthed New Jack Swing sound and the awakening giant of hip-hop received no shrift either. So what could America make of this throwback with his Sam Cooke vocals, Elvis Presley lip curl and James Brown moves?



Times were getting tougher for those not following the aforementioned templates, even for established stars. 1987 saw the creative peak of Prince's work in the form of Sign O' the Times, but his commercial clout had dwindled post Purple Rain and wouldn't return until he himself gave in to following trends, rather than making them with 1991's Diamonds and Pearls. What place was there for a black man with a guitar and an incandescent charisma?

In 2015, Maitreya gave an [interview](#) to Kate Mossman (which was both revealing and utterly hilarious) for the New Statesman during which he alluded to that very question. He talked about Lenny Kravitz's success and the notion that only one achingly virile black rock star would be "allowed" by a music industry still seeped in racial prejudice. How accurate that is will depend on your perspective, and while it's not hard to imagine his ego-driven self-immolation of a sophomore album (1989's [Neither Fish Nor Flesh](#)) playing its role in hastening the premature ending of his mainstream career, it is also far easier to imagine him being right.



Pressing play 35 years later, his voice and style have lost none of their allure despite some dated sounding production. His attitude and style is best summed up by the spoken word intro that kicks off his paean to the restorative joy of music, "Dance Little Sister." Aply demonstrating the two sides of both his character and voice, it is a call to arms—the power of a heart and soul liberated on the dance floor: "Get up outta your rockin' chair grandma! / Or rather would you care to dance grandmother?"

The first refrain is delivered with a disrespectful sneer that would scandalize the grandma in question, while the second is delivered as eloquently and politely as an Edwardian gentleman. It serves as a metaphor for his voice—a voice capable of the growling ferocity of a testosterone fueled lion, but equally capable of a deft softness containing more romanticism than a Byron poem.

These vocal qualities lend themselves perfectly to a winning blend of uptempo soul and funk songs and a line in ballads that shames most other artists. Among the former are the standout singles that were released. "If You Let Me Stay" is as great a pop song as has ever been written, as it morphs from pleading a wronged lover to stay, to a defiant "You will regret it someday" sentiment. "Wishing Well" is a stately, snappy funk number of romantic tendencies that prowls like a tiger on the loose.



As for ballads, the worldwide smash that was "Sign Your Name" is an obvious highlight with its sublime drum patterns and barely contained eroticism. But better is its close cousin "Let's Go Forward" which sees Maitreya run the full gamut of his soul vocal stylings, from his warm and innocently cherubic mid range, through his peerless falsetto and onto his rumbling growl of desire. It is heavy on atmospheric and lust.



Elsewhere less feted songs sit comfortably alongside those classics. “As Yet Untitled” is a master class in the art of simplicity, replete with his amazing voice, exceptional performance and lyrics to shake your foundations: “Shall I tell my children if they ask of me / Did I surrender forth my right to be? / Y’see my daddy died to leave this haunting ground / And this same ground still haunts me.”

“Who’s Loving You” finds Maitreya channeling Sam Cooke and Jackie Wilson in his delivery of the Smokey Robinson classic. Album opener “If You All Get to Heaven” is a bizarre slice of slightly preposterous magic that defies accurate description, but succeeds due to his impeccable delivery and the sparkling, nimble keyboard lines of the verses.



In the months after his explosion into public consciousness, he won a GRAMMY award for Best Male R&B Vocal Performance in 1988 and the world was, seemingly, at his feet, and the stars seemed to augur that Maitreya was destined to become a leading light of the musical universe.

Then what might have seemed inevitable given his swift ascent to the rarefied heights happened: an equally swift drop to the depths of almost complete anonymity. The aforementioned sophomore album *Neither Fish Nor Flesh* spectacularly misfired and sent him packing for the next four years. Most gave up on him, but those that didn’t were rewarded with two albums of equally stellar quality in [Symphony or Damn](#) (1993) and [Vibrator](#) (1995), before D’Arby changed his name to Sananda Maitreya and taking up residence in Italy to raise a family and work independently, churning out album after album direct to those who want them.

None of this depressing tale should obscure the quality of his output though. He may have been a lightweight boxer, but he will forever be a heavyweight musician and artist.