



Sananda Maitreya – In defiance of the gods

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This is an abridged version of the full article that will appear in MÜ8 in February 2023.

“Life is the lake of existence. It is as turbulent as you make it. As calm as you allow it to be. It forms around you and your thoughts about yourself. Therefore, make sure your thoughts about yourself are consistent with the life you wish to live.”

Sananda Maitreya

On July 8th, 2022, Sananda Maitreya celebrated the 35th anniversary of *Introducing The Hardline*, his iconic, timeless and intensely seductive debut album that sold 1 million copies in the first 3 days of its release and rocketed him to international success. Following a very public schism from the music industry and the sacrificial altar upon which he argues he had been placed, Sananda has flourished as a multi-instrumentalist, songwriter and writer.

His creativity is reflective of his expansive, curious and questioning mind, an untamed soul that is free from shackles and restraints that are imposed on us. It is his mind to own. The rules are his own. Imagine how powerful that must feel....

I wanted us to have a conversation about the here and now and where we go from here. We acknowledge and talk about the past, but in a way that informs us. So, what follows is a fascinating and unique conversation to explore the world view of one of the most talented artists of our generation with a majestic voice that can – quite literally – stop you in your tracks.

Giles Sibbald

You've done a lot of writing over the years. How do you see that and your music contributing to this debate of how to get more people to think for themselves and stop this, let's say, not-so-creeping corporatization of our lives?

Sananda Maitreya

I don't really see separation as an artist, I see different departments and things that I have to do. I'm an artist, and I'm a



writer, whether you're writing Hallmark greeting cards, whether you're writing essays, whether you're writing novels, whether you're writing songs, writing is writing. And not everything fits into a song. It's the moment that tells me what avenue to pursue with a view towards following that train of thought. I'm a massive Beatles fan and the late, great maestro George Harrison. His song *Think for Yourself* 'Do what you wanna do. Go where you're going to go. But think for yourself because I won't be there for you'. It's beautiful. But it's the reason the Beatles only lasted 10 years. Somehow their situation was infiltrated. Things were introduced to keep those guys from making an even greater contribution to our life. I saw them as New Testament prophets – just like I saw Dylan as an Old Testament prophet – who came back to serve more time. Take some time off, come back, do some more work, because the work of humanity is never really finished. We're always on the move. And, you know, for me, Dylan always had this cadence of an Old Testament prophet and this sense of authority that he brought into our time. I actually saw The Beatles as modern day saints, spreading messages of love and peace and to think for yourself, don't just mindlessly do shit. They opposed the war in Vietnam. The British establishment created a monster. And at some point, they realised that that monster was having a greater influence than just selling Beatles wigs and amps and guitars and things with the Union Jack label slapped on it. But, they were promoted precisely because they were promoting Britain. I believe the Beatles were an example of one of the greatest soft weapons ever created. They had such an impact in countries that the British Government was able to move military and



industrial policy objectives in after The Beatles had opened the doors. I think at some point, they came to realise not only their power – clearly – but what was being done in their name. And John and Paul were both very, very uncomfortable with this idea and began to fidget and speak out about it. And I don't think that their eventual separation was just a matter of the guys getting tired of one another. I think it was a deliberate attempt to bring to a close something that was becoming a threat to the very establishment that had espoused its benefits. So they weren't allowed to grow beyond what they were becoming. Once they were denuded and no longer a political threat – you couldn't turn into any corner without being smacked in the head by some Beatles shit. It has become a religion. You shouldn't even say anything against the greatness of the Beatles – it has literally become a state religion. So now it's safe to make it a household brand. Conversely, I'm a massive Stones guy. And this is not an any level of criticism of the Stones...but, you notice that the reason they're still going is because at some point, they turned off all the politics. Mick is a very, very clever guy. And Keith is nothing if not a survivor, by definition. After those guys were thrown in jail in the 60s, it didn't take much for them to realise, 'okay, yeah, maybe we need to, like dial this shit back and just be the world's greatest rock and roll band.' So they spent their time as velvet revolutionaries. And that's why they're still here.

Giles

They blunted their own subversiveness for their own survival?

Sananda

Right. I was taken from my perch for the same reason. I was considered a political threat. This is the point. You don't have to be talking about politics to be considered a political threat. All they have to see is your capacity for bringing disparate peoples together that they've spent a fortune separating. I remember being told by a Sony executive that at that time, 'Michael Jackson might have sold more records than you up to this point, but your demographic is as wide as anybody in music.' They used to have all their boxes. And I ticked every single one of them: bikers, conservatives, liberals, grandmothers, children, boom. That's alarming for them. The revolution is not in what you're singing about, it's in the barriers that are being erased and the disparate people you're bringing together. And of course, my music has always had an element of nonconformity. It's not willing to be contained in anybody's convenient little box. Music is extremely convincing, even to the point where there's a reason why we push music with vocals more than we push instrumental music. Because instrumental music means a guy could be polish, a guy could be South African, he could be Nigerian. Without words to get in the way everybody can understand it. The moment you write in the language, you're already limited by that particular language. The MTV era was also a massive exercise in mind control to limit the perception



of what a song was about. That doesn't mean I don't appreciate the creative effect of videos as their own art form.

Giles

This is a very good point.

Sananda

The establishment prefers it if you're very political because you're easier to marginalize. 'We'll take this black nationalist band because we like the idea that they're trying to keep black consciousness away from our shit' or 'We like white nationalism, because it marginalises and it's easy to all know that that's white nationalism. We don't want that near our shit either.' So they actually encourage marginalisation exercises because it's then easier to pin you into a space.

I mean, I love the music of Rage Against the Machine, but as powerful as they are, the state prefers them being a very pointedly political exercise, because they can keep them walled off as exactly that.

**Giles**

Do other art forms, such as body art, marginalize? I've used it later in life as a self expression of how my life has changed. But is there a wider issue at play here?

Sananda

The bottom line is, what we're seeing with body art is entirely a projection and commensurate with the fact that we are going through phases of nationalism and phases of identity whereby we're resorting and reverting to tribalism. Because ultimately, race is a completely political construct. We're tribes – there is only the human race. There isn't a black race. Or a white race. We're tribes. The human race is comprised of various tribes. Even the way we talk about cultural appropriation is complete bullshit. Evolution has always been tribal, peaking over at other tribes to extract, diversify and upgrade their own experience. So, you know, when I hear people go on about cultural appropriation, I think 'So at what point do we only allow Japanese people to eat sushi?' Or 'only certain tribes of black people should have sweet yams'. By that logic, you can't say all black people can have sweet yams, because all black people didn't come from the same tribe.' Where do you draw the line? Highly ridiculous. It also shows the degree to which we've reverted to being mean spirited, stingy bitches who carry misery for allowing ourselves to be bunched into such a thing as 'I'm French because I grew up in France and I speak the French language because I've been colonised by language.' So, a lot of body armour is a return to tribal identification whereby we undertake to identify ourselves as belonging to a unique set of circumstances, that basically we're redefining ourselves. And then being forced into this sense of patriotism that says, right or wrong, this is my country where, quite frankly, most of us don't really have a genuine consciousness that extends much beyond our neighbourhood.

Giles

When does appropriation become exploitative?

Sananda

Humans have been exploiting the human experience from the beginning of the human experience. We exploit shit. It's who we are. The question is always 'have you stepped over a line for me?' But to say that a white guy can't dress in a sombrero and Mexican costume because it disrespects sensitive Mexicans is, again, part of the culture war that is being perpetuated by the system to continue to divide and conquer. Colonisers are really nervous because we keep showing evidence that we want to go beyond the smaller definitions of ourselves and our humanity to join into something greater. The point is, if I see a white person with cornrows, do I give a shit? And what right do I have to give

a shit to claim that 'Well, you're stealing from them'. Nobody's stealing from anyone. We're only looking at what inspires us, what moves us and what we wish to take upon ourselves. Especially when you consider that a white person might only be politically defined as a white person for a couple of generations. They may be blacker than me. They may have more black people in their past than I do. But in the last couple of generations, they might have bred white. So now they can join this white people's club, where they're now supposed to forego all of the ancestral knowledge within them, and pretend and act in a certain way, prescribed by people nervous of the idea that we interchange and exchange with one another and always have done. But that culture war makes us stingy and mean. When we're stingy people, we squint and when we squint, that narrows our vision. We see things much, much more selectively. We are living in an age of the politics of meanness which creates greater isolation. The truth is, the trick of colonialism is always to marginalise every group, but under the pretence that it's in fact trying to elevate it to a point of recognition. We need to talk about human rights, everything under that umbrella is a marginalization exercise, meant to divide us from the greater larger issue of simple human rights. Marginalizing, slicing and dicing means further control and manipulation and it puts a target on the backs of those communities. Marginalised people will be much more protected under the simple umbrella of human rights. Our right to self-determination is a human right.

The digitally remastered and spatial audio edition of *Introducing The Hardline*, overseen by original producer Martyn Ware, is out now.

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