

Translation of the "Il Mucchio Selvaggio" interview

You left the band in 1992 because of a premonition. Can you explain to us what it was about and if it was the same kind of premonition that made you come back?

While we were finishing the BSSM sessions I started to hear some voices in my head that told me: "You won't make it during the tour, you have to go now. Don't defy the destiny forcing your life to take a direction you don't have the need to go to." Often the most important choices in life regard things you don't need to do, but that contain a certain sensation pertaining to the future. These are choices which require courage, because everything – from an economic point of view or because that's what you always wanted to do in your life – pushes you towards these decisions.

In your opinion, what would have happened if you didn't hear those voices?

Actually I ignored them for a long time and it was the biggest mistake of my life. I waited a lot of time before I left the band. I went on tour even if I didn't know what being a musician on tour with a rock band meant. At home I had developed a very creative lifestyle. My world was made of Captain Beefheart, colours, paintbrushes, crayons, and no books. I used to relax, smoke weed and drink wine. My life was this semi-imaginary world that I had built for myself. When you're on tour you have to face a brutal reality and you must accept it. You can be creative, but not 24/7, like at home. Most of the time you have to relax and listen to music. On tour I write lots of songs, but it takes me only a couple of hours a week. If you write two or three songs a week it's a lot, but it takes only a few hours, you get me?

Has there ever been a time with the RHCP, at least at the beginning, when you liked to go on tour? Has there ever been a day when you felt good?

When I was 18/19 I was fine. I have grown up reading artists' interviews stating that they hated to go on tour. For example, Frank Zappa didn't like to travel. So I wasn't expecting a bloomed garden, it was absolutely easier than what I thought. But during the BSSM era, apart from the fact that I was in a band which was starting to have a good success, what I needed the most was the chance to change what I have been and what I had just discovered almost at random: I was a songwriter and a guitarist. I needed to take a direction, but when I left the band at the end, I felt like my life was over, even though I was only 22. It may seem very stupid now, but then I felt like I couldn't write music or play guitar anymore. I would have never thought to do that again in the future.

During those years of pause, when you took drugs, you released interesting truths. Not everybody has that kind of insight in times like that, and not everybody can use it in real life when they are sober and clean again. In that time you learnt important things that influenced your current life.

That's true. I didn't forget anything of what I experienced in that time. After all, when I left the band and decided to become a drug addict, I believe I made the right choice. It was what I needed then. Inside me I was completely there and I needed to isolate myself from that frenetic rhythm of the world.

From being an ordinary man you played in huge venues. When you joined the RHCP did you feel like you were sacrificing your inner life?

Yeah. At that time I had a good inner life that brought me to see and understand lots of things better. Now I can easily accept that things go like they go. Before that experience I would have never said a thing like that.

What would you have changed? What provoked those voices in your head? A block you could get over only with heroin?

When people hear some voices in their head, it means that their personal sphere is broken.

Do you mean their landmarks?

Yeah, the sphere that everyone has around him/herself. I'm glad it happened in that time, but it was a confusing time. What was the question?

What did you have to face constantly that you couldn't manage and that pushed you to look for a solution in drugs?

Before that time? There were things that I didn't understand. A sensation that floated in my head, that told me what to play my guitar. I felt like there were big waves in my brain. At the end I understood they were big waves of subconscious thinking. It took me a long time, but then I realized how much music influenced these things. I understood that every time a movie had something about death, or something that symbolized that, the same thing was happening in my mind. If I heard beautiful music and I played it repeatedly, my mind began to do the same thing in the same order.

Was it like a chord was being touched or a light was being lit? Did you feel you had to concentrate on that thing?

Yeah, so I played my guitar and wrote music. Those were the sensations, and I called them "colours and shapes in my head". They told me when to play guitar, how to write songs. I needed them to play. At the same time I thought a lot about things like sex, child abuse, sexual molestations endured by children. I realized that thoughts were an important process to me to comprehend those confusing questions that I asked myself about death, sex, about why music makes people feel a certain way, and why it always had a certain effect on me.

And this was good for you, right?

Yeah. They were sensations that I always had while growing up, but I didn't know where they came from. I had questions about the voices I heard in my mind and about each of those questions and were given an answer to them by myself, one by one.

By the voices?

You can call them my guardian angel, if you want. Every time I understood a thing, I felt like I had completed something. At the same time my mind lost a bit of its power about those big waves I was talking about.

At the end did it reveal itself as a positive thing?

Yes, it did. At that time I thought that if I had lost it I would have never been able to play guitar and write songs anymore. When I was 22, my head was emptied. Maybe it was left only some sensitivity. I felt really empty, do you get me? Now my head is still empty, but I'm way happier than before. I write much more music and I'm more concentrated.

You're much more coherent too, or at least your lyrics are. Even if your head is emptied, the lyrics make much more sense. By the way, what do the numbers that appear in three song titles of the record mean? For example Negative 00 Ghost 27, Failure 33 Object and 23 Go Into End?

I needed titles for instrumental tracks and I wrote them on my block-notes. I thought about the titles that Autechre and Aphex Twins use; people who write a lot of instrumentals with meaningless titles that often contain numbers and letters without any intercourse between them. I wrote on my block-notes those numbers that seemed right. The strange thing is that after I wrote Failure 33 Object I realized that I am 33 and Josh Klinghoffer (The Bicycle Thief), whom I made the record with, at that time was 23. But when I gave the titles to the songs I wasn't aware of it. So I believe that often when I do things like that it's my subconscious that commands me.

Our task is to characterize schemes, leave them and go from the usual roads and back again.

Yeah, at this point to me it's important to be sure I can do it, because I know that my task is an organizational one. If you let your subconscious run you find yourself with a ton of aimless notes.

It's up to you to group them, piece them together...

Of course, because the subconscious can't organize them, nor be concise.

In SCWP you did a good organizational job.

That's what we have to do with our "conscious I". The most important step I made in the past 5 years was to get to take the reins. I have a lot of block-notes going back to the time in which what I wrote made sense only to me and no body else could have understood a thing.

During your drug-addiction phase, did you have a girlfriend?

I didn't care about sex. I had a girlfriend, Toni, for about a year before I became drug-addicted, but our relationship gradually grew into friendship. We're still friends. To be engaged didn't make sense as we didn't have sex.

When you quit drugs, did you feel like having sex again?

Yes, I did. I go through phases. Now I'm very well without it.

Why does this allow you a major clarity?

I know that now I couldn't be happier than I am. Sex often distracts me from my job. I don't want to find myself in a relationship unless I can coordinate it with my job, without letting it influence my musical self.

It's hard to write music if you argued with your girlfriend...

I couldn't allow it, it must not happen. I feel too much responsibility to do the best work because I am John Frusciante. I hate it when something prevents the realization of my will.

In your opinion what's your mission? Why have you been created?

I have already had this revelation, but now I don't think too much about it. I remember that, when it was revealed to me, I needed to hear that because I had such a low opinion of myself that I would have never believed I had to do something creative. I'm talking about when I was about 27.

That's the other song with the number on your last album.

You're right, 27 has been important. It was the hardest year of my life and at the same time, the beginning. My life began again and now I'm myself again.

You were talking about your mission...

At that time I really needed something that made me feel better, that convinced me that I had a reason to exist. Then I had the revelation and since that moment I didn't do anything but continue the "legs' game". There's no need to be aware of the last aim, of the final results of the work I did in my life. It's only important that I can write and record all the music I want. I try to impose in my life a state of continuous changing and maximum creativity. I must stay concentrated on what I do and don't let anything distract me. I want to do as many things as possible and of the best quality. I know there are important reasons for me to do it, but I can't remember them because now I don't think about that anymore. Now I have enough gratifications. When I was 27 I needed to hear that there was a reason to be alive, now I don't need to be convinced anymore. I no longer hear the voices because I'm doing what they want.

The voices are your subconscious or do you believe there are others beings who communicate with you from the outside?

Both of those things. I believe in the existence of other beings whom we're actually a single thing with. I don't know if it's right to say "other beings" because every one of us – beyond being the result of memories and experiences – contain in him/herself other personalities with an individual

existence in another dimension. But since this dimension doesn't have a linear time, they can't disclose their individuality. They can do it only to someone who lives in a continuum linear time. It's like if through us they can make us do something eternal: a record, a painting, a book. They're as part of what I do as I am part of it. I would rather believe they're a bigger part than I, but with this I don't want to lessen my importance. Let's say we're all a single thing.

The funny thing is that in a song like Carvel Cakes you seem living in a dimension, but in another one you're very prosaic. In an interview you once talked about the quantity in grams of fats contained in a cracker. It's strange to hear you talking about fats and at the same time about other dimensions. Are they the same thing for you?

Yes, they're the same thing. Everything that happens here is the reflex of what happens in the 4th dimension. When I began to think about these things, I thought that only music was the reflex of another dimension, but it's not true: businessmen, assholes, yuppies... everything is the reflex of something that happens elsewhere. But it's not a dimension where everything is beautiful, pleasant and colourful. Sometimes it can be ugly and disgusting.

Let's change topic. How do you keep fit?

I do gymnastics. I run almost everyday, I follow a sane diet, I eat only genuine foods. No packaged food, bread and sugar. I eat lots of green stuff, eggs, fish, meat. It's the best diet I have ever tried and it lets me eat a lot. The aim is to have an efficient body. If you're disciplined, you wish only things that are good for you.

Today you seem very Zen. Is there anything that makes you angry?

It's hard to answer, because I don't get angry often. I don't like the ones who run ahead of you, but I can't tell it really bothers me. I just look at them shocked. If you asked me that when I was 22, then I would have made you a long list. One of the things I learned is that if someone is made a certain way, it means that he must be that way. You can't do anything to change him. You should change the past, but that's impossible. So if someone behaves in an irrational, ambitious or selfish way – if he acts unpleasant to me – it means that something has happened in his childhood that pushes him to act in that way because it makes him feel good, even if he's hurting someone else or deleting a whole race from this Earth. It's destiny that makes him act that way because of what he endured when he was 4 maybe. So it's hard for me to get angry with someone because I know he endured something bad from people maltreated themselves. It's a cycle. I like how the world is made. As many bad examples there could be about that kind of thing, I would have never recorded any of my records if we haven't endured something bad when we were kids, if we didn't have hard problems that we can't fix, if we didn't feel feelings which we don't understand the source of. Everything becomes beautiful music, so I love it.

Is good music born from pain's elaboration?

Yeah, even if sometimes it is born from the temporary liberation from it.

Sometimes you try a drug that is all right for you and in that case it's wonderful. I feel in Heaven even if I'm only making music with a friend of mine. But you can't try an experience like that, to feel free and independent from the corporeal weight, without having experienced what physical pain really means.

Lots of your lyrics talk about this. It's like you needed positive and negative together. It's one of the themes of the album.

I tried to use contradictions to put together opposite ideas, divergent energy's forces and segments of reality that I could never conciliate. I used lots of lies to demonstrate the truth through music: everything that appears to us as a single thing actually is also its opposite. I believe that every event that happens has its exact opposite somewhere else that compensates for it.

You were working at your solo record everyday after the RHCP sessions, except on Wednesday because you went to dance. Do you still go there, and which kind of music do you dance to?

Then, it was especially drum'n'bass and jungle. Very fast, energetic, exaggerated and intense techno music. I quit going there because the club I went to has closed down. Actually it moved and began to play even hip-hop beyond drum'n'bass. But I don't like hip-hop. The way to dance it's completely different, there are those who do break-dance. I like losing myself instead, jumping everywhere.

Usually drummers like dancing, not solo guitarists.

I like dancing very much. I started to find myself again thanks to dance. When I quit drugs, the hardest thing was to act as a normal person without drugs. The body and the mind are used to them and when you quit you feel boring, meaningless, useless. For nine months I felt like I wasn't worthy to be called John Frusciante. When I began to feel like myself again, I found myself in a better perspective, because now I feel the responsibility of being who I am. But at that time if someone told me "I like your record", it didn't seem to me I was the John Frusciante who made it and didn't take credit for something that wasn't due me. My past life seemed to be lived by another guy. This means that I was spiritually empty. I didn't even let anyone help me, because I couldn't do anything.

So you were proud of the first part of your life when you were John Frusciante, while when you were a junkie you were not proud anymore?

It's when I quit drugs that I didn't feel I was John Frusciante. Towards the end of the drug-addiction era, I felt I didn't express anything of what John Frusciante's life should have been. In that moment the only form of expression that I had was dancing. I used to have a rather big living-room and I didn't do anything but dance all day long with the music I liked – Black Sabbath, Cure and others, but not dance music. I interpreted music through dance, I translated music or lyrics in a visual way. Not in a banal way, but in a way that made sense to me. Still now my reactions are not what one would expect, but kind of the opposite: for example, what makes

others sad makes me happy. For three months I didn't do anything but dance and at the end I felt myself again, I rallied the spirits and I felt taken from something.

A ritual of evocation?

Yeah, I used to spin myself around so fast that everything around me became blurry. I spun as fast as a dancer, but without turning my head as they do. I got to do that for a long time without feeling sick. In this way I felt I was hastening my relationship with fate and saw that spirits that had helped me to achieve my life's work came back to me. In those 3 months even if I wasn't taking heavy drugs, I was smoking weed and drinking, but at some point I decided to quit everything and tried my best to be alive.

I thought you went to a rehabilitation clinic to get rid of heroin.

No, I didn't for physical problems, because after those 3 months of continuous dance I didn't have any addiction. I went to the clinic to start a new chapter of my life and because I didn't have money, I didn't have any other place to go to. Some people made me go in the hospital and it has been good for me. The first days they gave me some tablets because they thought I was still addicted, but I wasn't, so I didn't take them.

What's your greatest fear?

I don't fear anything.

You surely don't fear death. When you took drugs you were about to die many times.

I don't fear death, as a result everything in life that represents death doesn't scare me: the thought that someone could shoot me, the idea of being nothing, of losing someone who's close to me. Anyway things go, it's ok with me.

Where do we go when we die?

Everyone goes to a different place. There's a relationship between the image of yourself that you have in the moment you're dying, and what yourself is after the death. If you become the image of yourself, this could be terribly distorted and it could be everything: someone with huge elephant's ears, a monster, a robot. As for the place where we go, it depends on how much progress you did in this life, that is the use you made of your time to change, to grow, to learn. Someone who lives his life without making any effort to learn will find himself in a place where he'll get a hard reprimand. You get a hard reprimand even if death arrives when you're still running away from something instead of facing it. You can end up in a very bad place. You have to be honest with yourself and be able to face yourself. I believe in what Leonardo Da Vinci said: "Like a day spent well brings a night of serene rest, so a life spent well brings a serene death".

Back to premonitions, how did you know it was right to come back with the RHCP?

When I came back to the real world after the hospital, I felt what everybody who quits drugs feels. Every day things are very boring. I was myself again, but I used to spend days watching movies with my friend Toni, 3 or 4 hours a day. I didn't have anything to do, I was looking for something that made me start again. For a moment I thought of playing with Perry Farrell, then we didn't do anything. When I was in the hospital I already felt that I'd come back with the RHCP. Anthony [Kiedis] used to visit me and when we were together I felt his energy. We were fine together again, and that's the reason why I had to stay in a band. We didn't talk about the past, we were synchronized again. We lived very different lives for a long time, and now we were at the same point. It's like when planets align. It wasn't an aware decision, it had to happen. After the movies period, I made some changes for myself. I moved in to a small apartment where I could be on my own, listen to my records, play. I began to write again. Everything started when I came back in the RHCP, because I had a reason to play guitar constantly. I didn't listen to music for personal pleasure anymore, but to develop and create a style for the album we were recording. I had a purpose again and as a side effect I found myself writing songs for me. Being with the RHCP has always been good for my creativity.

Is this the difference between the RHCP of then and the RHCP of now? The fact that you get on well now?

Yeah, now each of us appreciates the other. In the BSSM era everyone believed he was the most important member of the band, while now we are aware that individually we don't count. We know it's important to create together. We think the world is what others make, not what we make singularly.

It has not always been so. There was a time when you all emanated a negative energy. On stage your nudity was aggressive. Were you aware of it when you took off your clothes?

Yeah, it began to bother me too when I developed a certain artistic sensibility. I felt our appearance on stage was wrong. During the BSSM tour I often turned my back on the audience. I didn't take part in the athletic moves that Anthony and Flea made. I thought they were ugly, they were so masculine that they became gross.

Flea said in an interview that you always did the opposite of what they did. If they wanted to play soft, you played very hard.

It's true, but I also did some artistic games in my mind with music. I understood that often good things to listen to are those that combine the tough and the soft, kind sounds with rough ones, sometimes they mix soft and rough, kind and tough also. Anti-realistic combinations. Most of the people wouldn't dare to do that. If the band has a strong sound and the guitarist plays in a delicate way, it sounds freaky. But this is what I used to do then, and I still do now. The only difference is that they like it too now, because they know I don't hate them. So if they play hard, I play soft. If they play fast with small and short notes, I extend them and make them flow. In that way we get an artistic balance.

Do you write everyday?

If the song wants to come to me, I'm always ready to receive it, but I don't work at it. I always did it since I was a kid, so I learned very well to recognize when it's time to write and when I'm imposing it on myself.

How do you know when you have enough songs for a record?

There's always something inexplicable that holds the songs together. I have several of them written at the same time that are still demos: I didn't work on them in a studio because they didn't have that certain something that combines them with the others. Since I'm back with the RHCP I want my solo albums to sound like a single record from beginning to end. The first 2 albums were a bit dispersed, the songs were recorded at different times and weren't written to be together. But in the past years it became very important to have a clear idea of the concept that tie a song to another.

Is it true that your favourite guitarist is Jimmy Page?

I could answer this question many ways. He's my favourite among the rockstar-guitarists. To me, he isn't better than Keith Levine, or Matthew Ashman from Bow Wow Wow or John McGeoch of Siouxsie & The Bashness. Jimmy Page brought the guitar of the deafening-rock kind to a level that no one will be able to exceed. But to me the most influential guitarists of the last 30 years are not the possessed ones, that is not the ones who make solos, but those who give consistency to the sound. Today my way to play is more influenced by these kind of guitarists than by Jimmy Page. I think that way to play guitar has developed only between 1965-1975, then it became ridiculous. I loved Jimmy Page since I was 7, he's the reason why I began to play. My favorite way to practice is to learn all his solos and I can play "Since I have been loving you" from beginning to end.

Your style is unique, though.

It's a conscious choice. For By The Way I deliberately looked for a not-Jimmy Page sound. I listen to music and guitarists so different that in my style there is a bit of everything. That's why I play in a way that doesn't resemble anyone else.

Very often it even seems it's not you!

I want it to be that way, otherwise I didn't care about making records. I always want to do something different than what I did before. In my opinion this is the only way that is worth playing. I only do it for the pleasure it gives me. I don't like doing always the same things. The one who repeats himself doesn't like adventure and plays only because it's a job.

