

When Brother J.T. (a.k.a. John Terlesky of The Original Sins) settled down to talk to Carrie Hourihan on her radio show in San Francisco in December 1995, the Terrascope was first in the queue for transcription rights...

You've been with The Original Sins since 1987, or was it before that?

I started doing things with various people in '85, but it wasn't a formal unit until 1987 when I branched off of The Creatures.

So The Creatures was your first band?

Not really my first but probably the primary band at the time for me. I was playing guitar and I wrote most of the

songs too. I was probably with them for two years on and off. Prior to that I'd been in little pick-up bands that only played a few gigs here and there.

Do you have anything on tape by the Creatures?

Oh, yeah - The Creatures still exist in fact. They prefer now to be called 'The Creatures of The Golden Dawn'. There's a great deal of enmity between us - they just put out a CD on 'Collectibles' of the stuff I did with them. We did a bunch of recordings, I think it was about 20 tracks. At least 3/4 of the tracks we did I play on and wrote for them. I have a copy of the CD but I haven't listened to it yet, because that was then and this is now.

Moving along to

The Original Sins, there was one record - 'Move' - that you stepped down from producing and handed over to Peter Buck, and I was kind of curious as to why?

That was set up by our manager. At that time, right after the Bar None release, we had a manager for about 5 years. He said "hey, you guys can do better than this, I'll get you on a major label..." and being the callow youths we were we believed him! Approaches were made and Peter said "yeah, I'll do it" and he did it for nothing. He didn't do a whole lot, but he lent his name for which we were really grateful. He helped shape the sound and I got to play his guitars but it was really John Keen who produced that more than Pete. It's

John Keen's studios in Athens, Georgia where they do their demos and I think Pete was being very generous. He was just recording the 'Out Of Time' album at the time and he was kinda in a hurry and I'm not even sure he was there for some of the final mixing. I can see where people would think it's an incongruous pairing and at first I didn't really like it, but looking back I like the way it sounds, clean and kinda different to the other records.

With all the solo work you're doing, The Original Sins is still a high priority with you - you're going to put out a new record soon?

Yeah, it's still my baby. The solo stuff came as a result of lack of busyness with the Sins, y'know? It used to be a lot busier. When the manager's contract ran out I was forced to become the manager hence our bookings suddenly dwindled to a precious few because I'm just not a manager at all. Useless! I just can't bring myself to ingratiate myself with people so I ended up thinking about other roads, because the Sins weren't panning out anyway. We had gone to a dead end and we either had to change drastically or keep on beating our heads against the wall. I think we have changed



Brother JT photo: April Bartholemew

a bit in response to that but then also I started to do this solo stuff as well, and since I don't work I'm able to keep myself fairly busy being in three different bands, none of which play that much. The combination of the three adds up to being enough for me.

Bar None is putting out The Original Sins record in '96. Is it similar sounding?

No, it's a complete departure from anything we've done before. We just mixed it down last weekend, it was done in a small studio in Melville, New Jersey by a fellow named Roy Ketchum, who I think is the drummer in The Melting Hopefuls. It's a total departure, very laid-back and introspective; there's 14 cuts and maybe 10 of them could be classified as ballads, but not your sappy kind of ballad - these are kinda desperate ballads. I was aiming for an album like 'The Basement Tapes' or something like that, and there's a couple that are complete wig-outs too, just thrown in. It's supposed to come out as two separate CDs released as one package, one called 'Bethlehem - My Home Town' and the other one called 'Turn You On'. I'm gonna try to make it a spectacular event as opposed to just another CD. We're gonna give you two totally differ-

ent CDs in one package for the price of one. I'd rather do one CD, but that's their ball-game.

In 1991 you made your first solo departure, 'Fuzzface', and you did an E.P. that was only released in Australia on the Dogmeat label. Since that's so rare (500 copies), is it ever likely to be re-released?

I kinda doubt it. It was just the result of the fellow at Dogmeat, Dave Laing, asking if I wanted to do something. They'd put out a single of ours ['Nowhere To Go From Here But Down'/'Can't Get Over You' (Freewheelin' J.T. version)] and we did the Troggs double tribute LP ['Groin Thunder'] and he asked if I wanted to do a poetry album. I got it together and sent it to him and he said he didn't think we ought to do this, did I want to do some other album? It was really an impromptu kinda thing with guys that I never worked with again, an old friend from one of my first bands and a fellow from a band called The Crack Babies who are still around Bethlehem (Pennsylvania) and a guy who played sax, Dave Smith. It was like we never really practised, we just went in and did what I consider wretched songs. I was trying to be as obnoxious as possible

and bring out the very worst instincts in myself just to see what it would look like, and they made it into a record. I guess I was aiming at the lowest common denominator.

The Fuzzface LP was a one-shot deal?

I've used the name again when we did the Hawkwind thing ['Urban Guerilla' on 'Assassins of Silence'] - I think the guy had suggested I use the name and I had to use the actual box, I have an original 'Fuzzface' which my brother gave me in the '60s and it's almost not workable, you can pick up radio signals, but that was the idea - just be as obnoxious as possible.

So what inspired you to go solo after The Original Sins and Fuzzface?

Well, what happened was I had been corresponding with Byron Coley for a while, I'd been sending him tapes and one tape I sent him was this thing of guitar feedback I'd done called 'Descent', a response to John Coltrane's 'Ascension'. He liked it to the extent of saying he wanted to put it out in a very limited quantity and make it look as anonymous as possible - hence the name 'Brother J.T.'. I guess they could have made it a bit more anonymous than that,

but that's where that came from. The other side was this poem and I think he sensed that it was like the ramblings of a de-frocked monk, so verifying Brother J.T. Then Twisted Village said "let's do another one" so we did the 'Meshes In The Afternoon' LP. Jimmy Johnson of Forced Exposure suggested that I start putting them out on my own, that it would get them out faster. Twisted Village were just doing me a favour, y'know? It was great just to have someone interested enough to put the stuff out. I had no idea that the mail order market was so big for this kinda stuff and I was glad to get involved in it. That helped me make ends meet for a while. The two albums I put out and the Vibraltex album were really cheap for me to make, we didn't go the usual route of having the company do covers - we got blank covers and silk-screened them. It makes them unique and also it's a lot cheaper.

How about Suffacox, do you guys play out much in Pennsylvania?

Yeah, lately. I just play guitar in that band, and I wrote a few songs. It's really Wayne Hamilton's band, the guy who did the silk-screens for all those records for me.

I've heard we're going to play some dates with Seven Year Bitch in the future, out of state hopefully. There's a new single ['Pumpkin Girl'/'Nazi Mother'] and we have hopes to do an LP, but I don't know when that would be. There's also talk right now of doing a very limited edition CD of local groups including Suffacox, The Original Sins and The Crack Babies.

How about 'Crush Nova', why did you choose to use this pseudonym for 'Ice Cream Cone' and 'I Love You Moon Pie'?

I don't know off-hand. I was thinking at the time that it would be really dumb to call this Brother J.T. because it sounds more like a group, if I'm going to play live it's not just going to be me, it's gonna be two other people there also. The name came from walking around my home town in Pennsylvania, there's this island in the river where the hippies used to go and smoke their pot back in the 60s and they had written up in big white chalk 'Crush Nova'. It was just one of those things that stuck in my head from childhood. Actually, what I'm going to do is fit the 'Descent', 'Meshes' and that single onto CD so that there's a decent representation

of them. I wanted to do that this Winter but it's just expenses at the moment. I definitely plan to do that sometime.

On your own label 'Bedlam' you have The Original Sins and the two Brother J.T. records, are you planning on using bedlam for any other artists?

No, it's just an in-name-only label. Whenever I can get stuff out I will, but I don't have enough capital. I'd love to have a real label but I just don't have the inclination to get that big.

The two solo records, 'Vibrallux' and 'Holy Ghost Stories'. I don't know how to describe them apart from a kind of sex crazed death theme. Is that accurate?

Particularly with 'Holy Ghost Stories' I'd been thinking a lot about the idea of going back into your psyche to find where you get to your lowest possible urges and bringing it back, almost like channelling - under the influence of whatever. It got scary at times because I found myself singing in a voice that didn't seem to be my own - I wouldn't be saying these things normally, it was almost like automatic writing. Maybe through that I was trying to get

to the original reason as to why people make music, as opposed to meeting girls or making money, being famous or something. Being like a pure form of expression without all the structure, and I think in some instances we got pretty close y'know? Feelings I wouldn't ordinarily have were revealed. It's hard to say what it means to other people. I think it means a lot to me because I know vaguely where these things are coming from, but I'm not sure, maybe other people think it's weird.

You credit as one of your influences a book called 'Secret & Suppressed' by Jim Keith (Feral House Publishing) can you tell me something about the book?

It was passed to me by a friend who mentioned that there's a chapter about the Moravians, who founded Bethlehem (PA) which is where I live.

That's the Freemasons, sort of?

Well, they won't say that. Their main leader, Count Nicholas Von Zinzendorf, was a kind of free spirit. I did some research on him and he was completely overtaken by his religious fervour, getting into the realm of using sexual symbolism to represent the idea

of making union with Christ. Being raised a Catholic, it had a lot of resonance for me. I thought that the fact that it was where I was living was something to base the record around.

So they won't admit to being Freemasons?

It was kind of a guild. You can look it up in a dictionary of Freemasonry and you'll see 'The Order Of The Grain of the Mustard Seed' which was this loose organisation and I guess to an extent it was a secret organisation, but I don't think they were technically Freemasons. At the time there were so many secret societies, it's really fascinating to read about it. In the book they were comparing it to Cagliostro, they claimed there was this blue cabinet that young newly-weds would go in and they'd be instructed on how to do it so as to achieve the real meaning of Christ.

That's the 'Blue Cabinet' reference on the Vibrallux LP, right?

Yeah. Maybe the best thing is to find the book and have a look. There's a lot of other fascinating things in there: conspiracy theories, the J.F.K. assassination, there being other Jim Morrisons, secrets of the vatican - just a great book!

I must ask you about

two of the tracks on 'Holy Ghost Stories', 'Succubus' and 'Baby's Coffin'.

'Baby's Coffin': I'm Ukranian by descent and half Irish and I just feel that in me somewhere is this really mournful person, nothing really terrible has happened to me and I don't know if it's a race memory or what but I have this impression of being a poor old Ukranian woman whose baby just died and being incredibly angry at God or incredibly angry at the world. I was just trying to get at this really creepy sense of grieving I had in me. 'Succubus' was the idea of dreams where you can't move, a hypnagogic state or something where you're paralysed. Your eyes are open and things are happening and you can't move or do anything about it. I was trying to be scary and also spiritual.

Siltbreeze Records are releasing the newest Brother J.T. record, is that going to be as terrifying to listen to?

I can see where under the right circumstances they might be scary, but this is the band we took to calling Vibralux, because Wayne and I (the main guitarists) use Vibralux amps. Then we found out there's another band called Vibralux, so we said let's

go with Brother J.T. for this one. Maybe eventually we can call it Vibralux. So what we did was go in with a bunch of Philadelphia guys and recorded; there's this one 20 minute track that's called 'The Comet Will Come' which gets pretty scary. Sort of like fusing Sun Ra, Howling Wolf and a bunch of white guys with no future at all. Then there's mel-lower kinds of songs like 'Music For The Other Hand', but I think it's mainly for 'Comet' that people will remember this.

Do you have a preference for any of the groups you play with?

It's hard to say because I've played with the 'Sins' so much and I know we can do something really heavy and then come back and do 'I Must Be In Love' by The Rutles and sort of keep the balance. That's what I like about it, but unfortunately I think it's that that's kept us back in that we refuse to do one thing or another. People say "Oh yeah, Original Sins - 60s band", but if you listen to our stuff there's a lot more to it than that.

What do the other Original Sins think of your solo records?

Well I can honestly say that I don't think the

drummer has ever heard them. I've played them a little bit but it's not to their tastes. We don't really associate that much, we get together for the gigs and that's kind of enough. They all have their different tastes in music and we really don't share that much. We're all kinda good musicians - we like to rock.

Interview by Carrie Hourihan, transcription by Simon Magus (aka Steve Pescott) © Ptolemaic Terrascope, 1996

Discography

ORIGINAL SINS

7"

Just 14/Sugar Sugar 1987

Bar/None

Coca Cola/Juicy Fruit 1990
Psonik

Alice D./Dizzie 1990 Get
Hip

Nowhere to Go/Can't Get
Over You 1990 Dog Meat

Afternoon Jam Session 1993
Radiation

Get You There/C'mon Up
1993 Chaos

LPs/CDs

Big Soul 1987 Bar/None

Hardest Way 1989 Psonik

Party's Over 1990 Dog Meat

Self Destruct 1990 Psonik/
Skyclad

Move 1992 Psonik

Out There 1992

Psonik/Skyclad

Acidbubblepunk 1994

Psonik/Skyclad

Turn You On 1995 Bedlam
Bethlehem 1996 Bar/
None

JT / BROTHER JT

Descent 1991 Twisted Vil-
lage

Meshes of the Afternoon 1992
Twisted Village

Vibrolux 1994 Bedlam

Holy Ghost Stories 1994
Bedlam

Music for the Other Head
1996 Siltbreeze

Rainy Day/Come on Down
1996 Drunken Fish

CRUSH NOVA

Ice Cream Cone/Moon Pie
1993 Mind Cure

FUZZFACE

Bad Thoughts EP 1991 Dog
Meat

OTHER STUFF WITH JT

Creatures of the Golden Dawn
1992 Collectables

Suffacox - "Psychedozer" 7
inch 1993 Mind Cure

Suffacox - "Pumpkin Girl/
Nazi Mother" 7" 1995 Com-
pulsiv

Various- 'Assassins of Silence'
- Fuzzface ("Urban Guerilla")
1995 Ceres

Various - 'Deep Funnels of
Entry' JT ("God is Red" from
'Meshes') 1993 Shock

PUBLICATIONS

Coca Cola and Extended
Thought

Tab, a Tragic Book

Golf My Way, a Guide to
Life