

Jerry Cantrell

Jerry Cantrell - vocals / guitar

Robert Trujillo - bass

Mike Bordin - drums

From the lyrically and sonically mournful “Psychotic Break” to when the mental and musical exorcism of Jerry Cantrell's nearly 73-minute aural *Degradation Trip* concludes with the lovely, somnolent, bluesy strains of “Gone,” the singer/guitarist's Roadrunner debut is a sundry and sometimes scary journey to the center of a psyche. It may not always be a pretty trip, but it's a close-to-the-bone excursion that haunts both its creator and its listeners.

As the multi-faceted artist relates, “In '98, I locked myself in my house, went out of my mind and wrote 25 songs,” says the then-fully-bearded Cantrell. “I rarely bathed during that period of writing; I sent out for food, I didn't really venture out of my house in three or four months. It was a hell of an experience. The album is an overview of birth to now. That's all,” he grins, though the visceral and haunting songs, by turns soaring and raw, do reflect that often-naked and sometimes-grim truth. “*Boggy Depot* [his 1998 solo bow] is like Kindergarten compared to this,” he furthers. “The massive sonic growth from *Boggy Depot* to *Degradation Trip* is comparable to the difference between our work in the Alice In Chains albums *Facelift* to *Dirt*, which was also a tremendous leap.”

And all of Cantrell's 25 prolifically penned songs will see the light of day by 2003. *Degradation Trip*, which will be released June 18, is comprised of 14 songs from the personal, transcendent writing marathon that inspired such self-searching cuts as “Bargain Basement Howard Hughes,” “Hellbound,” and “Profalse Idol.” The second batch of songs—“as sad and brutal as *Degradation Trip*” —Cantrell promises, are due out on Roadrunner 2003. Given Cantrell's introspective, on-the-edge mindset, it's no surprise then, that the melodic, ultra-heavy riff rocker “Anger Rising,” is *Degradation Trip*'s first single and video. Or those songs like “Mother's Spinning in Her Grave (Glass Dick Jones)” and “Solitude,” (which contains the lyrics which gives the album its title) are pointed, pained and forceful. Yet there's the softer side to the often wry and sarcastic singer/songwriter/guitarist, evinced by Cantrell in the romantic “She Was My Girl,” and the unforgettable chorus of the wistful “Angel Eyes.” A more countrified vibe runs through the acoustic-influenced toe-tapper “Give It A Name,” which also boasts beautiful, angelic vocals.

Though Cantrell prefers to remain mum on how autobiographical any of his songs might be, it's clear that the writer of such Alice In Chains hits as “Rooster,” “Them Bones,” and “Would?” certainly composes whereof he knows, and his pain and experience bleeds through on *Degradation Trip*. The literate, visual lyrics match the edgy, soaring and layered musicality, provided on the disc by bassist Robert Trujillo (Suicidal Tendencies, Ozzy Osbourne) and drummer Mike Bordin (Faith No More, Ozzy Osbourne), who may tour with Cantrell when not otherwise occupied with Osbourne, with another guitarist also added to that mix.

Cantrell's current touring band consists of members from Atlanta lineup Comes With the Fall, friends and former tour openers. While ex-Queensryche guitarist Chris DeGarmo plays on

“Anger Rising,” and Cantrell himself can be found onstage guesting with bands and friends ranging from Stone Temple Pilots to labelmates Nickelback to Metallica, Cantrell preferred to buck the trend of making *Degradation Trip* a guest-heavy all-star album.

With a wildly successful show at the 2002 SXSW conference in Austin giving a preview of what's to come, it will certainly be a joy for Cantrell to have the dark musings on *Degradation Trip* see the light of day on tour. Given its purging power, the CD should have provided its creator with catharsis shortly after its completion.

But Cantrell's emotional liberation is just coming with the CD's 2002 release. “Psychotic Break' is a great place to start the album, because that's where I was at the time,” relates Cantrell of the last few years before and during *Degradation Trip's* completion at several Los Angeles-area studios, including the legendary A&M, with co-producer/engineer/ mixer Jeff Tomei. “Writing these songs, I was about ready to lose my mind. It's a lot for any person to exist in this business anyway....” Cantrell begins. “But I was writing this record to be released by my former label, and we didn't see eye to eye in the middle of the process. They pulled the funding, and I mortgaged my house to continue on. And I produced it myself to boot. It was a tough time to have it go on, but I was focused fully on making a record. I didn't even have a manager at the time. It's something I don't want to do again, but I'm proud I did it and it all worked out.”

What Cantrell needed, and found in Roadrunner, was “a company with balls enough to deal with me and my music. There's a lot of milque-toast crap that is really successful. It was such a massive project - 25 songs, two discs, for my debut on a new label. Roadrunner, though, agreed with my commitment and that this was essentially a double album released in two parts.”

Cantrell, who sold 11 million albums with Alice In Chains, has come into his own as a solo artist on *Degradation Trip*, though he's still a part of and happy to connect himself with the band he formed in the early halcyon days of the 'Seattle Scene.' “I didn't associate myself with Alice on *Boggy Depot*,” he recalls. “I was stepping away from the band, so there was a consciousness of not sounding like Alice. But people's awareness fades,” he realizes. “An Alice fan would know my name, but some guy who just likes the Alice tunes may not know me. I found that when people saw the Alice In Chains MTV Unplugged show, they realized how much I sang, and how many of the songs I'd written in Alice. I realized how much Alice was and is a part of me and how proud I am of that band. And with *Degradation Trip*, you know who it is when you listen to the record,” Cantrell acknowledges.

“I've had people say, 'it sounds so much like Alice,’” which, of course, is a nice complement, as well as a given. That said, “it's completely different being a full-time lead singer. A lot more pressure,” he admits. “I loved what I did on *Boggy Depot*, but I'm growing, I'm much more confident and you can tell, vocally. You can hear the growth between the two records. I think it was because of all the shit I was going through, I was so fucking angry, and I had a lot of emotions that weren't very pretty, and it came out of me on this record.”

He kept that edge from start to finish, beginning with the demo process in his Seattle-area home, where the tunes were laid down on a four-track, all on the same guitar, “It's my white guitar with all the burn marks on it, my Gibson Les Paul. I actually broke the headstock off halfway through

the writing, but somehow it stayed in tune! I didn't record the demos very well, just guitar lines and vocals, because sometimes you lose the magic when you try to re-record it. So I get it workable, to where there's still stuff to be explored. And Mike and Robert were big sticklers on me to staying true to the demos. I gave them a lot of respect, and they gave it back. I was real touched by them. They went through it all with me. They bled for it just as much as I did, and it all comes out on the record. This record was a hard, dark journey," concludes Cantrell.

"*Degradation Trip* is an apt title. There's nothing better to describe the songs and experience than that phrase. I think you gotta be a little bit crazy to do this. And the guys who are usually really crazy are usually the better ones. It's a fine line to walk." And as the dark, dangerous beauty that is *Degradation Trip* makes very clear, no one does a better job of teetering on that edge than Cantrell.

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