

Interview with John D. Cronise from The Sword



What can you say about the metal genre that hasn't already been said? It's emphatic, triumphant and it'll give you a rush that few musical styles can. Usually that rush equates to banging your head, raising your fists in the air and acting like a crazed fun-loving lunatic. In a style with numerous sub-genres and different types of fans, there has been a good number of bands taking metal back to its roots. Add heavy fuzz, psychedelic aesthetics and raucous structure and you'll have a sound reminiscent of metal's glory days in the '70s when Black Sabbath, Thin Lizzy, Iron Maiden, Judas Priest and many others were hailed as kings. It's a movement happening in the post-everything age that many are welcoming with open arms.

One of those acts is The Sword, a band that started in the psych-rock capital of the world in Austin, Texas, and they have achieved a loyal following in the States and beyond. They'll be lighting up the ballroom at Fete Music Hall in Providence on May 19 for what will be a wild and crazy time. Ahead of the show I had the chance to talk to frontman John D. Cronise about his love for comics, the influences behind The Sword's latest release, *High Country*, and what the band's plans are for the summer.

Rob Duguay: Growing up your aspiration was to be a comic book artist until you started playing guitar at the age of 13. What made you want to make the transition from drawing to making music?

John D. Cronise: Comic book drawing seemed a little too difficult and it took a little too long, music was more immediate. You just plug in your guitar and sound just comes out so I preferred that.

RD: It makes a lot of sense, especially when you can adapt faster to playing guitar than drawing comics. Are you still a fan of comics? Do you have a favorite character?

JC: I don't really read anything actively, but I'd say Batman is probably my all-time favorite comic book character.

RD: Do you prefer Marvel or DC?

JC: When it comes to the comics themselves, I'll maybe lean more toward DC a little bit, but I recently

saw *Captain America: Civil War* the other day.

RD: Do you enjoy the movies and TV shows? Sometimes it can be hit or miss.

JC: I pay attention to that stuff. I'm kind of a nerd fanboy a little bit still. I at least keep abreast on what's coming out, but I may not get around to seeing it. We were on tour when *Batman vs. Superman* came out so we didn't get to see that in the theater and I heard it wasn't that good. There's a lot of that stuff out there these days and it's cool on one level in the sense that when I was growing up all that stuff was just talked about, like maybe one day this X-Men movie would come out or there will be this Daredevil TV show or something like that. It didn't seem like it was that close to happening and now everywhere you turn there's some comic book, science fiction or fantasy based movie or TV show. Of course anytime something like that happens with TV, movies or music and when somebody sees a winning formula everybody piles on and thinks they can make the same formula work. Then you're going to have a decline in quality at some point and you're going to have to sift through some shit to find the gem.

RD: You moved to Austin, Texas, from Richmond, Virginia, in 1999 and a few years later you started The Sword with drummer Trivett Wingo in 2003. There's been a lot of talk with a lot of major cities, especially Austin, of gentrification and the increase of the cost of living. In your opinion, how much has the city changed since you first arrived?

JC: Actually I lived there for 12 years but I haven't lived there for the last three kind of because of what you're talking about. When I left Austin it was unrecognizable from when I moved there and it's pretty much why I left. It wasn't really my bitterness necessarily, I just looked around and said to myself, "Wait a second, this isn't what I signed up for and this isn't where I want to live." The Austin of back then was where I wanted to live and that doesn't exist anymore so it was time for me to move on. I think it's just inevitable in a lot of places, for me it's just a matter of going with the flow and there are a lot of people who live in Austin and places like that where they feel it's changing too much and getting too crowded and they just sit and complain about it. To me the answer is if you don't like it then move.

RD: Do you still live in the Austin metro area or did you completely move out of there?

JC: I live totally far away, I live in North Carolina. Our guitarist Kyle Shutt lives in New York, our bass player Bryan Richie, speaking of gentrification and rising house prices and that sort of thing, he has a family and he bought a house outside of Austin in Taylor, Texas, because the houses are really expensive in Austin. We do pretty well as far as bands go but we're not rich by any means, we're pretty middle class when it comes to our income level. Where I live buying houses is a lot cheaper than it is in Austin.

RD: The Sword last August put out their fifth studio album *High Country*. I've listened to it a bunch and I definitely enjoy it. The band went down a lesser toned '70s hard rock route. It reminds me a lot of Thin Lizzy and even a bit of King Crimson, especially with the way the songs are structured. Were you listening to a lot of those bands while writing the material for the album or did it just come out that way?

JC: Well, I always listen to a lot of Thin Lizzy. That's just a given. With King Crimson, I like King Crimson but they're kind of musically beyond me as far as being an influence. I don't think in that outside the box, abstract way when it comes to writing songs. We just tried to make a classic album you could say. With our personal influences and our little nuances, we just want to write good songs. That's

really what the album strives to do, it shows that it doesn't have to be at full volume and just use distortion and bombast to get our point across. We can bring it back a little bit and still deliver quality material and that was kind of the idea.

RD: After the show at Fete, what are The Sword's plans for the summertime?

JC: On this tour that we're on now we're playing a couple of festivals, a couple rock festivals later in the tour. The summer we're pretty much going to be taking off, actually, and we're going to start touring again in September and October. We'll just be chilling for the summer and just working on new material.

Get tickets to The Sword @ Fete Music Hall on Thursday May 19:

ticketweb.com/t3/sale/SaleEventDetail?eventId=6478625&pl=fete&dispatch=loadSelectionData; The Sword's Website: theswordofficial.com