

stay in Tucson AZ. I am back in DC. I love music and meeting new people. If you want to talk, just drop me a line. I would love to talk to you! Write me at [sonicspacealien@yahoo.com](mailto:sonicspacealien@yahoo.com) Also, if you are a musician feel free to send me your music, I play a lot of artist submitted music on my station at <http://mansiononthehill.biz>

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### Jon Fritz

*A new and hopefully regular feature of the Mansion is the Producer's Corner, where a music producer talks about an artist or an issue that might be of interest to the listeners and readers of Mansion On The Hill. Today Wayne Mitzen talks about [Jon Fritz](#), a DC based performer, who coincidentally is in current rotation on the Mansion On The Hill radio stream. I will now give it over to Wayne to tell the story:*

Jon's one of those artists that I come across very rarely. Before I had a day job, I used to do live sound for national acts as they passed thru the Pittsburgh area. Everyone from Frankie Avalon to 2Live Crew. I designed a bunch of studios, ended up working in them, and traded my wage for hours, since opening a studio is sort of like opening a restaurant for the homeless... you better be into the music 'cause you ain't getting much else.

So I've probably done over 200 "local" bands, trying to be "stars". After living in an office building and taking showers in a stationary tub for a year I figure music ain't gonna feed me and my new wife so I move and start a company in New Hampshire in '94 designing hardware that reads utility meters. After my co-founder is accused of buying boob implants for his then-wife on the corp credit card, the company folds ( the day my first daughter is born) and move on...

I get hooked up with some guys that were friends of the coders that worked for me in NH. They had started a company in DC with some ex-NSA employees doing computer security. There's like 10 of us working in a basement in Leesburg, some of the best hackers I've ever seen. One of them is the guy that left all the crank calls on [Tsutomu Shimomura's](#) voice

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mail ([www.takedown.com](http://www.takedown.com) - evidence - voice messages), the guy that busted Mitnick. In the end, we get investment from Softbank (the VC that was involved with Etrade and Yahoo) and the company grows.

Turns out that the founder, is a drummer. Having left music a while back but still practicing my bass chops ( I still suck), I get convinced to join a cover band with him and a few of his bud's. So I'm back where I started, local band with ideas of gigs and maybe a bunch of us old farts recording some originals. Two of the guys in the band get some studio gear; and I remember thinking, this is as bad as cocaine - if I start this, my wife's gonna kill me. I do have to say that she works with me building the prototypes; hell our first date was wiring up a machine shop's CNC equipment. She a hopeless nerd like me but hot as hell.

So I'm watching these guys in my band struggle with the learning curve of audio recording, thinking to myself, damn, I remember doing that 20 years ago. Fuck I gotta either get out of this or re-mortgage my house and buy some equipment myself.

The singer in the cover band (Chris Hollis), tells me about this guy he met that has some connection to the old INXS guys and wants to record. I also meet a drummer/music grad that's in a metal band on Remedy Records. He's roomin' with our sound man. We start talking about things music and I find out he's a well rounded musician, with a good sense of the business side of things.

During the time I'm begging him to help me with this INXS-linked guy (sometime in March 04), I'm sitting in a bar near my day job, and these little 20 year waitresses tell me about this solo gig scheduled that night, this guy named Jon Fritz. So I hang around and meet him. I tell him that these girls told me he was worth talking to and the first thing out of his mouth is "Naw man, I suck". Wow, refreshing I think to myself. So I help him load in and hang for the first set. As he starts his first song, I'm standing in between the waitresses and the stage, looking back and forth, seeing their reaction. It was quite an eye opener. It was like they were mesmerized.

So I ask him if he'd like to just jam. He tells me he just rents a room from some blind lady; gave up his day job eight years earlier to re-pursue the dream he let go of back then (more on this later). So I invite him to my house.

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He comes over that weekend and we seemed to click. He gives me one of his previous releases. I listen to it (done in a palatial SSL room) and it sounds like dick. I listen to what he's playing live, listen to the other recordings (one done in Boston by the guy that worked with ex-Boston members) and they all fail to capture any of the emotion I'm getting and what I saw happen with those 20YO waitresses. I'm thinking WTF. I call my mortgage guy and scream CASH OUT.

So we had arranged for me to play a gig with him later that next week. I figure what the hell, I've made an ass out of myself on stage before so what's the diff. That day of the gig came up pretty quick so I get home from a hell day at work and fig I better practice some of those songs real quick; like in an hour or so.

I put on his solo CD thing (which I later found got rave reviews on smother.net) and recall this one tune he did called Somewhere in Her Eyes. I'm sittin' there with my bass playing along. It gets to the first chorus and I'm in tears. I'm thinking, geez, am I stoned or what? This should not be doing this to me.

So after that night (when I learn the lady he's renting the room from is the typical blind person with really accute hearing and a bassist brother - talk about pressure) I ask if he'll open for our cover band. He says yea why not...

So he opens for us and the metal drummer, Marc's, there too, helping his roomy get the sound going. As soon as he hears Jon, he's like, "Dude I'll help with whatever, but I really want to play with that guy". I tell him the story bout my reaction to the solo CD. We set up a date to do both the INXS-linked guy and Jon's sessions, right as my equipment from Musician's Friend starts arriving. Jon comes over to my place a few days before to track the rhythm tracks so I can give it to Marc to learn. I fig he can just cut the drums over this so I don't have to bother Jon with it. The jist is, we never thought this would be much more than a cute little demo that might help Jon get more gigs. Jon basically sings for his dinner so gigs are his bread and butter. Unlike the rest of us that have day jobs...

So Marc and I set up at Kirby's Cat house (ie his roomates dining room) and start trying to cut drums over Jons guitar tracks. Hopeless failure. I immediately knew that the drums would have to lead not follow. I call Jon, tell him to get his ass over there with his guitar. When he arrives, my wife who's acting as the prod assistant, greets him at the door. Marc's playing

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along with the scratch tracks learning the changes so all you can hear is the drums.



#### A Bit of an Aside is Required Here:

All of Jon's other recordings sucked so bad cause the people involved tried to control it so much that they squashed it. I've seen so many producers and engineers lose sight of the true nature of the job: act as a photographer, let the art and emotion flow. It's never what you thought going in. That's what so many recordings lack, the emotion, the moment, that's well beyond the human experience.

I remember years ago working with a local band that was starting to make some noise in the local Pittsburgh music scene. We were doing a gig at the Graphitti, which at the time was the big showcase club in the area. It was one of the acts that I evolved from the typical local musician attitude, million takes, punch in a zillion parts, typical ego vs. lack of confidence battle, loose any sense of art. We'd gotten them to the point that they'd go in, nail it first take, overdub vocals without even listening to it back. It was one of the few tapes I sent out that actually got a "wow send more of this" response from Mark Eichner at BMG (they later blew up when they realized they could be "rock stars" with local papers talking about girls ripping their clothes off).

So I ask the owner at Graphitti, who like me worked with lot's of national acts, why some shit sounds so contrived and other stuff just rocks. He's real religious (unlike me) and he mentions something like " well you can tell things touched by hand of man and those things touched by the hand

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of God..." That reminded me of an interview in George Martin's book "Making Music" that Quincy Jones mentions something on the order of that no matter how much you do your homework, you have to leave enough room to let the Lord walk through...

Big "come to Jesus moment" for me... been there, felt that.



#### Back to the Story:

Jon walks in, hears just the drums and states, "Man, I hope that's his metal stuff he's playing..." My wife says "...uh no, that's Surrender..." on which he gives her a ghastly look. Remember, Jon's had nothing but typical controlling environments before, so this is a bit of a departure. But when he put the headphones on and started tracking it, it was an amazing moment. Here he is with a guy he's never played with before, only met him once and there they were, making his music sound like nothing any of us ever heard on any of his previous releases. That's how I work, fuck the typical engineer/producer ego crap - "I'm making a star/hit/whatever" bullshit. I'm just trying to get a good "shot" of the musical landscape, ya know. Anyone could friggin do this. The shit I sweat is the technical

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equipment crap. Not the "audiophile" technical shit just the "fuck I hope this works" stuff...

So here's the first installment in how we made this. The moral is similar to the Endino story out in the heyday of grunge - they never thought any of that would hit it big or be significant - just needed to be done. Jon's one of those artist that left the 2.3 kids house in the suburbs thing to live "the dream" ... and like Still Dreamin says "...back to the nightmare..." is more like it.

And it's so typical; here's a guy that knew he wasn't cut out for the corporate thing, his parents/siblings (most are men of the cloth) that almost disowned him for it, lives in his car but I can't tell you how many times he's said "... I can record after getting my daughter from soccer...", gives his wife as much of the meager earnings he gets playing in local DC clubs, were his main audience could give a fuck less as long as they can flirt and get laid by a new piece of ass on the side, spends every night volunteering at substance abuse places and occasional playing at daycares. He's mentioned to me so many times, "Man if this doesn't go anywhere, you gonna be bummin?" to which I state "fuck you" that's not why I'm doing this. This grew well out of anyones expectations and needs to be captured. I don't give a rat's ass if anything happens, shit I didn't want my name on it. No need, anyone that can run Cakewalk could have done this.

*Great stuff. If you are an artist, producer or listener and want to submit an article for inclusion on the site, feel free to at [sonicspacealien@yahoo.com](mailto:sonicspacealien@yahoo.com)*

posted by [Mark Johnson](#) @ [4:21 PM](#)

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