

BY WORM

Darren's musical roots go back to his father, who played drums for Chuck Berry and did studio work on many jazz albums. The vocalist/guitarist/songwriter for the Tampa band, A New Personality, picked up his first guitar at age 12, but he didn't get serious about music until a couple of years ago when he was in his first real band, the Straight Jackets. Some may remember them because they played at that ballroom in Hallandale before the fascists took it over and eliminated new wave night.

The Straight Jackets broke up and Darren, his brother Brent (on bass) and Steve (aka Fish, on drums) formed ANP a little over a year ago. In May 1981, they recorded a three-song single ("Eyes/What I Lost/Saturday"), which was released last August. They recorded three more songs in December and two of them are on compilation LPs -- "A Feeling" on Subpop #7 and "Waterfall" on the Open album of Florida ba.ds. "Why O Why" remains unreleased.

I talked to Darren in late May at the Tampa restaurant where he works. Situated in the penthouse of a downtown bank building, the Commerce Club seemed at first an unlikely setting for the interview. Tall, wooden doors led me into a spacious dining room with plush carpeting. This is where the elite businessmen of Tampa eat, I thought, not a place for a rebellious rock 'n' roller. Once I started talking to Darren, I realized he was at home here. Unlike so many Miami musicians, Darren is not a street kid. He's from an upper-middle-class suburban neighborhood and comfortable among the three-piece suiters at his job. The music Darren makes is also not like what is usually heard at new wave clubs in Miami that feature live bands.

ANP played Finder's Lounge in Hallandale June 18 and were surprisingly appreciated by a crowd that's used to two extremes -- punk from groups like the Eat and the Abusers and syntho-pop from Radio Berlin and Futurisk (Charlie Pickett being the rare exception). ANP is somewhere in-between, hard-driving but still melodic. Earlier, in the Tampa interview, Darren had told me why. "While everyone else around here was still stuck into listening to the Sex Pistols and trying to copy the Buzzcocks or trying to copy this or that, we already had been listening to Joy Division for a year," he said. "We were more influenced by that kind of music, without trying to be punk."

During the rest of our conversation we talked about the importance of how a band looks, the music scenes in Tampa and Miami and making it big.

WORM: Who does your hair?

DARREN: Some old friend of mine. His name's Ken. That's important to me. It's a mess right now, but our looks are pretty important to us.

WORM: Why is that?

DARREN: It helps. We dress up in clothes that might be different to some people. We just like to look good. It helps your music. I mean, come on, if a girl likes you, she's going to bring her friends to see you. You got to be careful. I get in trouble all the time because if someone likes me and I can't ... I'm basically monogamous. I'm not a rock 'n' roll groupie grabber or anything like that. I try to be nice to everyone even if I hate their guts because they're paying my bills.

WORM: How do you all dress on stage?

DARREN: We like to wear loose-fitting clothes. The first thing the writer for Suburban Relapse said about the Triple XXX Girls is they wear makeup. See, they wear makeup like girls makeup. We don't wear girls makeup at all, but I wear makeup all the time, not just on stage. But it would be barely noticeable. A lot of people think we're gay too. I hate to disappoint them.

WORM: Why do they think you're gay?

DARREN: Because of the way I act. I act that way good. You've got to build up a gay following too, I guess.

WORM: How's the situation for live shows in Tampa?

DARREN: It depends on your band. We could play in rock 'n' roll bars because we're not abusive punk. We may look a little strange, but basically we can just about play anywhere we want to without getting into too much trouble. But we don't like to wear ourselves thin. We don't want to play every week, every night. We try to play maybe two weekends out of the month at the most. We'd like to make it from here, if possible. We want to go play other places, but we really would like to set up our basic residence here. I don't want to take off and just move to Boston or move to New York or move to Los Angeles 'cause even though we're different, we'd get lost in the shuffle.

WORM: Would you consider going to Miami for a gig?

DARREN: We played there one time practically unannounced at the New Wave Lounge and it was the most awful experience of my life. The people in Miami really irked me more than anything. People down there seem to be into this LA hardcore and they can't

accept anything else.

WORM: Does that mean you don't want to go back there?

DARREN: I want to play there if there's a good place to play.

WORM: What's the music scene like here?

DARREN: It's basically pretty good. People have good taste as far as what they listen to. There's a few people into hardcore, but if they're into hardcore they're into it totally and they still don't think that they're so LA or so tough that they can't accept us. Our following is really conscious of English music. My biggest thing is I get so sick of playing to the same 100 or 200 people that come to the new wave bars. I like to play in the discos and the rock bars, where you have to really reach people. It means a lot if you can make a guy who sits there and listens to the FM radio all day long come up and say, "I really enjoyed you." That means a lot more than someone who's just being there to be cool.

WORM: You don't try to relate closely to new wave?

DARREN: No. We're just music. I don't even know if we're music. We're just doing what we're doing. We're all punks. We're young. And we're influenced a lot just by the idea of doing what you want to. But you're not really doing what you want to when you go into a set bar with a set crowd and you can do anything you want to there without anybody getting mad or upset. But if you're going into, say, a rock bar where there's 200 people in AC-DC T-shirts and you get off that stage and people will compliment you, then you've done something. They know it's different than anything they've ever seen before. You've got to do something to reach these other people or you'll just be a cult band all your life. You're going to have a small following in Tampa.

WORM: So you have higher aspirations?

DARREN: Oh, yes.

WORM: Where would you like to be in a few years?

DARREN: We'd just like to be recognized for what we are without compromising our sound. We'd like to have a little bit more national popularity, which I feel isn't too far out of reach.

WORM: You're more influenced by the English bands, right?

DARREN: Oh, yes. Totally.

WORM: Who do you listen to?

DARREN: The only American stuff I listen to is the black radio. Right now, one of my favorite bands from England is ABC. We get slagged all the time for being a ripoff of Echo and the Bunnymen or the Teardrop Explodes or U2 or Joy Division or New Order. In fact, our music does sound almost exactly like it could be by any of those bands. That's just the way we are. All those bands are just copying old American bands like the Doors and the Velvet Underground. They're from England, so they have a slight disadvantage. Whereas, we're Americans.

WORM: You consider yourself to have a psychedelic influence?

DARREN: No, no. I don't know what that word means. None of us take acid. No matter how trendy people say it is for the Human League to be radio, the Human League being in the Top Ten excites me more than anything. Soft Cell, U2 acceptance on rock radio. Being accepted on the radio is what it's all about -- without changing.

WORM: Which is practically impossible.

DARREN: Which is practically impossible -- right. But it could be done. If U2 can make it on the radio playing their kind of music when people say our music is just like there's, wouldn't we have the slight edge being the Americans?

WORM: Would you do it tomorrow if you got an offer to make an album?

DARREN: If it was the right deal, yeah. I wouldn't be so fussy. I'm not so worried about money. I just want to be popular.

WORM: You aren't anything like Eddie O'Brien of the Eat who said in an interview that he just wants to be in Miami and have a weekend following. That makes him ecstatic, just to have that.

DARREN: No way ever. I've gone beyond that. I'm the biggest pop star around here and I can use more.

EDITOR'S NOTE: I don't usually like to editorialize after an interview-- the copy here speaks for itself and it should be up to the reader to make an individual judgement or conclusion. However, I'm going to make an exception this time and stick in my opinion. So you're "the biggest pop star around here"? Are you kidding? I hope so cause I'd hate to think you're serious. That's the kind of attitude that has made people like Rod Stewart what they are today. Fortunately there's a few of us who can dig beyond the bullshit rock n' roll star system that you're caught up in, in order to find something more credible and concrete. I'm afraid you live under a delusion but you're certainly entitled to your own beliefs and values. I hope you "make it" cause you've definitely got what it takes to do so.

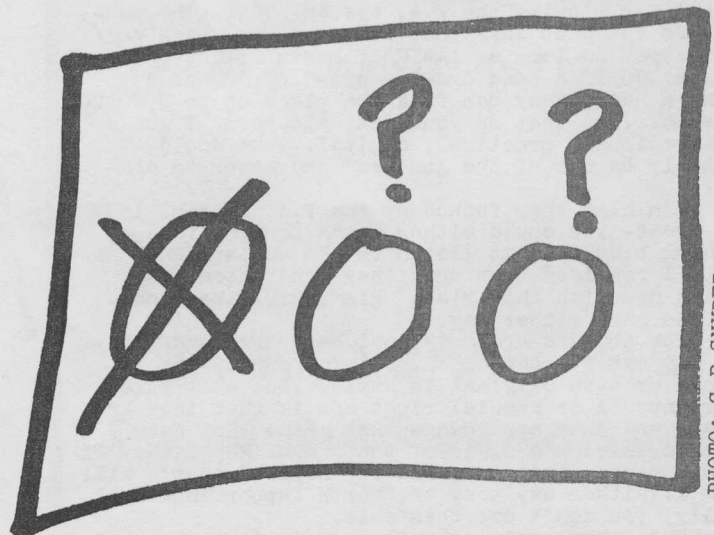


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