

As an avid Last.FM user, I was disappointed when I had to find out via Laura Jellum from co-signcollective that DJ Shadow and Pigeon John were going to be making the final stop of their tour in Salt Lake City. Normally it's really good at matching what I listen to what I want to see in concert. No matter.

I was, for the first time, presented with the opportunity to do an interview with an artist. I was tentative, telling Laura that I'd never done it before, but she made all the arrangements with Adam, Pigeon John's manager, to have some time before his sound check to sit down and run a few things past him. No pressure.

The night of the show, November 22, 2010 was forecast to be a snowy one. The show was being held at The Depot, which is literally part of the Union Station, one of the components in the Gateway complex. I had no choice but to brave the snow and predictions of horrible road conditions. An interview and two performances were awaiting us. Oh, and I have snow tires.

The snow began falling almost immediately after we parked the car just next to the Energy Solutions Center, home of the Utah Jazz. The staff at The Depot let us come in and wait for Adam and John, as we were well before the time of doors opening. They fielded a constant barrage of calls about the status of the show while we commented on the intensity of the famous Utah powder collecting outside.

Adam arrived first, then John not long after. As he brushed his shoulders of snow, and got oriented, I was introduced and he excused himself for a few minutes while taking care of some arrangements. Shortly after, I met Pigeon John for the first time.

John is, at a glance, an ordinary guy with a reddish hoodie underneath a black leather coat. As he was craving a cigarette, we made our way outside into the snow. We chatted a little bit, breaking the ice with some amused talk about snow and what got him to this point.

I chuckled to myself as I realized I was asking him questions I'd only earlier that day printed out on paper in a quick brainstorming session. No use thinking too hard about it, because I certainly didn't want to give him a stereotypical rundown of what any old interview with a hip-hop musician might include. So I didn't.

Pigeon John's fourth solo album, *Dragon Slayer*, was going to be the bulk of his 50-minute set, with all but three tracks coming from his latest Quannum release.

Sated, we decided to head up into the venue and found a dark café table where we spent the next 25 minutes or so chatting and having a genuinely good time. My nervousness was present, but John is a bit disarming and not without his own sense of uncertainty. He admitted as much, as you will see.

Nerd Show: "Flat Cadillac...Is it mythical"

John: "It's just an old Cadillac, sixties, how it's just whssssh," as he moves his hands apart, palms down, making a line in space. "Flat."

Nerd Show: "Is this a car that you owned?"

John: "I owned it, a 69. Black leather, I miss it. Had to sell it when I became a family man because it used to break down a lot. Then I got a Volkswagen Bug."

Nerd Show: Laughs

John: "Then I updated to a Tahoe, which I use as my tour van. I'm hoping, once I get enough scrilla, to get another one, but it has to be a side car."

Nerd Show: "So, are the buttersoft seats in the Tahoe?"

John: "Mmmm, that was the new truck when it was new. They're all cracked up now. It was nice, that new car smell."

Nerd Show: "You mention a Casio calculator wristwatch."

John: "Yes"

Nerd Show: "How much of a nerd are you?"

John: "Well, I would kinda have to leave that up to other people, you know? I think I'm a nerd in how I socially act, how I fit in. But I used to rock the calcies a lot, a lot, but I got over it. I do have a white one that I saved out of all of them."

Nerd Show: "I'm pretty sure I still have one in the drawer somewhere also."

John: "I'm not one of those techie nerds. It's a cultural thing, everyone's moving fast...and it scares me to death."

Nerd Show: "So...MacOS, Windows, or Linux?"

John: "Mac. See, I lost my cred now."

Nerd Show: "Nah, you're good, trust me. I use a MacBook Pro and I have an iPod Touch for music. Lots of people are using them now, it's no big deal."

John: "They use Dell, Shadow's crew."

Nerd Show: "Well, maybe they're sponsored or the software they use either doesn't work as well on a Mac or simply isn't available."

John: "Yeah."

Nerd Show: "So, you started your career at an open mic event. What artist, which track, made you want to go out to see how good you could be?"

John: "I would say, De La Soul's Jenifa Taught Me, from Three Feet High and Rising. That one song. It's the way they rap, it wasn't necessarily the skill of it, but it's because they were doing it like no one else. It was the idea that you could do whatever you want, put it down, and it's gonna be great. It freed me up, because I was already thinking that way, but it was a good open door."

Nerd Show: "Excellent. Now, you mention your wife frequently, which is unusual for a hip-hop artist. What does she think about it?"

John: "She loves it. I write things as they happen, so her bringing a sandwich into the studio, married life, stuff that's at the tip of my tongue. Also, if I need a backup vocalist, boom, she's there."

Nerd Show: "So the studio isn't a boy's club. What role do you have in the production?"

John: "On this album, it was Irve and myself, so most of the music I brought to him and then we both break down the songs and built them up together, choosing kicks or what synths to use. Just us two dudes in a garage."

Nerd Show: "So what's your favorite synth?"

John: "Right now it's the Juno 8. We did all of the horns on the record from that keyboard. The new one is great, but the old one is what I want, from the 80s. While the new one is more concise, the old one, well, you make a sound then that's it, you can't recreate it. You have to record it, it doesn't let you save it like the new one."

Nerd Show: "Nice. I had a Roland and a Korg many years ago, long gone. Lots of character but they were hard to work with."

Natalie: "I have a Concertina. A small accordion."

John: "Ooohh. She could wake you up with that!"

Nerd Show: "Ha ha. So, what's your favorite beer?"

John: "Budweiser. I like the taste, it tastes like America."

Nerd Show: "That's quotable right there, that's good. Wii, 360, or PS3?"

John: "360. I like the Assassin's Creed games, obviously Halo, Call of Duty. I haven't played much because I'm in the midst of moving, but I can't wait to get home, I guess, tomorrow, and settle in, play a game."

Nerd Show: "iPhone, or Android?"

John: "iPhone. My friend Davey Rocket has the Droid and swears by it. You can say "Wesley Snipes" into it and, boom. The iPhone, once again, kinda makes us into little monkeys, it's so simple. I love that you can go buy songs, anytime, and they're on there."

Nerd Show: "So, when you got noticed early on, how did that get you involved with Lyrics Born?"

John: "I met him on tour, and we toured for a month and a half. I was the opening act, so 15 minutes, right now, ten people in the room. But it was fun just to get into it."

Adam interjects with a notice that they're going to get some food from Benihana, but John declines. Turns out he would really rather go there after the show, for the show, which is why anyone goes to Benihana.

John: "At the end of the tour, he (Lyrics Born) asked for my CD. He enjoyed the show and we got along well. A month later he showed it to the dudes at Quannum. It's just five of them and they're really close knit, so if they agree then they'll give you a call. Next thing was getting to work on the record."

Natalie: "How many shows do you think you've done now?"

John: "Since 2003? Maybe...1500."

Natalie: "Does it still psych you out, you know, when you get on stage, the adrenaline?"

John: "A little punch, for sure. The show in Boston, on this tour, was kinda like that open mic night. I think I like this part because I do like creating music so much, so it never goes away. You know, if you love baseball, it's the same thing for a game."

Natalie: "Does it make you feel the same as when you were younger?"

John: "Yeah, it just snaps me back to being a kid and just lovin' and just doing the music. When you're performing or writing, you never think about the business or any work side, it's just the experience. Doing shows is great because it can't be downloaded, that experience. Going to a bar, seeing a band, having some drinks, having a good time, can't be recreated."

Nerd Show: "What do you do before the show?"

John: "Maybe go for a walk, reading books, crying, talking to you. It's weird, like a play, the whole setup."

The sound check starts as his two female cohorts are on stage playing the first few notes of The Bomb, one of the more stomping tracks from Dragon Slayer.

Interview concluded, we shook hands and sat around for another few minutes while John and the ladies went through sound check and did some bits of a few of his new and old tracks before wandering off into the blizzard to get some dinner.

While I admittedly wasn't sold on Pigeon John's album beforehand, his stage presence sold both Natalie and myself. As the show got rolling, and the first track jitters abated, we found ourselves impressed for the same reasons the guys he first toured with must have been. Adam came by and we conveyed to him just how much we really did enjoy the performance. He had the audience, without a doubt.

DJ Shadow, for what it's worth, put on what can only be called an event, but it certainly didn't keep me from getting one of any number of Pigeon John tracks stuck in my head for the rest of the Thanksgiving holiday weekend.