

## Scenery, March 2005

subQtaneous: some still despair in a prozac nation

**James Curcio** is a man of many aka's and a jack of all arts. Author, musician, producer, graphic designer, provocateur and mindflayer... the list goes on. First and foremost, Curcio is a stick of dynamite strapped to reality. His album is as much of a healthy mindfuck as his novel. We spoke to the Kingston-based artist about blowing up the status quo.

**Zac Shaw:** How did subQtaneous come to be?

**James Curcio:** Actually it came about as a side project for the band that we had together in L.A., Babalon... We started recording in the 'Abyss of Hallucinations,' a studio that we made in our house... we got all this bed padding, it really looked like a mental asylum. It did sound great in there, but people would come in -- you know, this was our living room -- and they'd be like 'what the hell is wrong with you people?' Musicians were coming in and out all the time and once in awhile we'd pull someone aside and say 'this is a project we're working on, hey you wanna record on it?' It came about organically. And they would record on it and they wouldn't remember what had happened the next day and be like, 'whoa I recorded that?' I wasn't planning on how we were going to releasing it or anything, it just kind of happened. Babalon was my conscious focus. And then Babalon broke up and that's a whole story right there, but I probably shouldn't go into. For the next year or so, I kind of dropped subQtaneous, then I started talking to Scott Landes again and met up with him at the Collide show in Philly at Dracula's Ball, and started talking to him more. There's some Babalon songs that were never released that are going on this album.

*So it's just like a round table of artists that you chair and direct?*

Yeah that's almost exactly it. There's an underlying myth to it. I'm working on my second novel now -- my first one was Join My Cult!, released through New Falcon -- I don't have a title for the second one yet... but Babalon released an album that went along with the first book and this one is kind of shaping up to go along with the second one. There are certain things you can touch on in writing that's very direct and literal, but the benefit of music is that it's more visceral. So there's definitely a theme, tying it all together, if you look into and hear it, it's there. It's pre-apocalyptic music as opposed to post-apocalyptic.

*Is the music a part of the narrative of the novel or is it just inspired by the book?*

I think it's inspired by it. I'm not sure what the difference is between the two really, I mean it's definitely a companion. You can get plenty out of the album listening to it on its own or out of the novel reading it on its own. They kind of work off of each other, because it's all based on the concept of building myths out of your life, it's there if you tap into it. I'm really kind of against making music in terms of one genre, like 'ok we're gonna make this kind of music, we're gonna make punk rock' and having a very limited scope 'alloweable.' There's stuff on this album that's kind of hip hop, spooky hip hop. There's electronic, rock... It's not based on genre, it's based on tone. It was probably influenced a lot by things I was listening to at the time -- Coil, Aesop Rock, Mr. Bungle, Estradasphere, Tool, Thelonus Monk, Coltrane, Natasha Atlas... That's eclectic, right?

*I guess you could call it a concept album. In any case, it's pretty progressive.*

I do listen to a lot of prog rock I have to admit, although I wouldn't call it a progressive rock album overall. It's an experience. Descent, the first album that we released in 2001... which went along with Join My Cult!... was specifically meant to inspire people to do their own work. Creative facilitation and trance induction. We were playing around with a lot of neurologic programming...

*Word Salad?*

Word Salad kind of came along by accident as well ... it's a format that allows a lot more people to be involved, working especially on the Internet. We have four installments out now and it's a show between 40 and 60 minutes long that mixes spoken word and music, submitted by people all over the country. The term word salad itself, is a term for a schizophrenic when they babble - a lot times they kind of string words together and there's an internal coherency to it all that itself kind of relates to the project.

The first Word Salad show came about, when I was in New York, I happened upon a person on my AOL instant messenger list - I didn't know who this person was, they just kind of showed up on my friends list, so I asked them, 'who are you?'

It turned out to be this guy Evan, from Orange County in California and he talked a little bit on a radio show out there. We talked, then we stopped talking and a couple of months later I ended up moving to Orange County to start Babalon and I met up with him and we ended up into the radio station and kind of took over.

He had a cold that night and said, if you guys want to take over it, just take the reigns tonight, go for it. So we took over the channel for an hour and a half and we proceeded to break every FCC rule. That was kind of a joke pretty much and afterwards - we just happened to be recording it - and I posted it on the Internet and a lot of people really seemed to enjoy it and told me to make more of it. I liked the spontaneity of it, but for the second show I wanted to have more control over it, so I had specific people over to have the discussion and which we recorded and we used snippets of it and people sent in music from all over the place, but at the time I was communicating with a group of people who were in the IOT, the chaos magic organization, and another organization at the time called the ZenseiderZ. We ended up meeting in the desert and Babalon played a show there, it was our last show, it was pretty intense.

I don't know what this has to do with your question. See, free association, you give me Word Salad, I give you Chaos Magick. It could have just as been skittles, or the smurfs.

*What's it like creating music with someone on another coast?*

I almost find it easier than working in the same location, because it's so hard to get people together anyway, even when they live five minutes apart. The first album that we worked on got started on with that going back and forth. Originally I was working with the guys from Evolving Media in a hunting lodge in Germantown that had been converted into a studio and Dave Resnick and I got together a couple of times and he recorded drum tracks to a click and I took those and built loops and songs out of it. I played on bass on top of that and then built the rhythms section with Scott. The Evolving Media audio facilities have since moved to Station Hill, by the way. ([www.stationhillstudios.com](http://www.stationhillstudios.com))

*I'm curious about what drew you to this location.*

What drew me back is really the question. I was first here because I went to Bard College, I graduated from there and co-founded Evolving Media with Dan, Dave and a couple other people out of college, so I was here kind of circumstantially, that's where I was. Then I went out to Orange County with Babalon. After that I traveled all over the country, a couple times actually, and I networked with a bunch of people and worked with artists all over the country. There's something about the Hudson Valley that called me back, it feels like home now and I don't know exactly what that means, but it felt like the right place to be. It was kind of like a bubble, but there's a variety of people. I don't want to slam any location, but I really did not like the predominant social scene in Orange County, or the vibe. It's really prefabricated, fake. One analogue that's kind interesting, is that if you open up the Chronogram, you see all these ads for yoga and things, and there's a magazine in Orange County, but all the advertisements are for plastic surgery. That pretty much nails it on the head what the difference are.

*Do you think artists are sometimes scared to put a diversity of sounds on their albums?*

Definitely, because it might be challenging to the audience, or even more importantly, it might be challenging to the record executives, where do we put it in the store, what do we call it, what genre is it? That's problematic. That really hits a lot of problems with the industry in general. Trying to make it easier limits possibilities. There are so many voices vying for attention, they all get drowned out.

*One of the many themes in your work is the effect of technology and communication on our culture. How do you think that will change the way we create music in the future?*

I don't think it will change too much in the way that people listen to music, but I think it will definitely affect how they make it. And there is the issue of dissemination... there's kind of an issue going on right now, is that there's a gatekeeper between the artist and the audience and that's the record industry. Unfortunately the artists are disenfranchised and have no money, so they feel like they have to go to the already established companies to help save them, but it doesn't work that way, usually if you get a record deal it's the beginning of the end.