



### About John Sinclair

## SINCLAIR GUITAR ARMY BIO

Author, poet and activist John Sinclair (born October 2, 1941 in Flint, Michigan) mutated from small-town rock & roll fanatic and teenage disc jockey to cultural revolutionary, pioneer of marijuana activism, radical leader and political prisoner by the end of the 1960s.

In 1966-67 the jazz poet, *downbeat* correspondent, founder of the Detroit Artists Workshop and underground journalist joined the front ranks of the hippie revolution, managing the “avant-rock” MC5 and organizing countless free concerts in the parks, White Panther rallies and radical benefits. Working closely with lead singer and songwriter Rob Tyner and the members of the band, Sinclair brought the MC5 to local fame, national attention and a contract with Elektra Records.

The first MC5 album, recorded “live” at Detroit’s Grande Ballroom in the fall of 1968, exploded onto the scene like a bomb through a courtroom window, accompanied by a declaration that Sinclair, the band members and selected compatriots had formed the White Panther Party to oppose the U.S. government and support the Black Panther Party.

Closely allied with the Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Ed Sanders and the Yippies, the White Panther Party spearheaded the short-lived “rock & roll revolution” of 1968-69, and Sinclair’s writings for the underground press both chronicled and analyzed the revolutionary events of the day in the light of the WPP’s focus on “Total Assault on the Culture” by any means necessary, including “Rock & Roll, Dope, & Fucking in the Streets.”

Theory and practice were fiercely united in the White Panthers, the only American political party ever formed by a rock & roll band. The White Panthers not only preached revolution, they lived the revolution in communes and tightly-knit conclaves of long-haired revolutionaries who lived, worked, fucked, smoked dope and dropped acid together while they carried out their radical political and cultural organizing and educational work among their fellow hippies.

Sinclair’s antagonistic rhetoric coupled with the incendiary performances of the MC5 inflamed ever-growing crowds of rebellious youth throughout Michigan and the Midwest. In 1970 the FBI referred to the White Panthers as “potentially the largest and most dangerous of revolutionary organizations in the United States.” By this time Sinclair had been railroaded off to prison on a 9-1/2 to ten year sentence for giving away two joints to an undercover policewoman.

While he was in prison, Sinclair wrote the books *Guitar Army: Street Writings/Prison Writings*, a collection of his writings for the underground press between 1968-71, and *Music & Politics*, co-written with Robert Levin. His legal appeal challenged the constitutionality of Michigan's draconian marijuana laws, and he continued to lead and direct the activities of the White Panther Party from his cells in Marquette and Jackson Prison through its conversion to the Rainbow Peoples Party (RPP), his release from prison, the success of his appeal in the Michigan Supreme Court and the consequent overthrow of the marijuana laws.

Sinclair was released from Jackson Prison when the 29-month campaign to gain his freedom climaxed in the mammoth "John Sinclair Freedom Rally" at Crisler Arena in Ann Arbor, Michigan on December 10, 1971, where John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Stevie Wonder, Allen Ginsberg, Phil Ochs, Bobby Seale and others performed and spoke at the eight-hour long event in front of 15,000 people. Lennon wrote and performed his song, "John Sinclair," later released on his *Some Time in New York City* album. Three days after the concert, the Michigan Supreme Court released Sinclair, and later overturned his conviction.

Following his release from prison, Sinclair got back into music management and promotion through the Rainbow Multi Media Corporation, managed Mitch Ryder & Detroit and several Ann Arbor bands, and produced the historic Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals while serving as Chairman of the RPP (Rainbow People Party) and directing its political organizing work in Ann Arbor. He hosted popular radio shows on WNRZ and WCBN, founded the People's Ballroom, the Free Concerts in the Park program, and the Ann Arbor Tribal Council, and played a leading role in the success of the local Human Rights Party that resulted in the election of two City Council members and the institution of the legendary \$5 fine for marijuana possession in Ann Arbor.

In 1975, following the resignation of Spiro Agnew and Richard M. Nixon and the termination of the War in Vietnam, the mass movement dried up and America went back to business as usual. Sinclair disbanded the RPP and moved back to Detroit to return to life as a poet, journalist and urban cultural activist. For the next 15 years he raised his family in Detroit and worked as editor of the *Detroit Sun* newspaper, founder and director of the Detroit Jazz Center, adjunct professor of popular music history at Wayne State University, artists manager and concert producer, freelance journalist, WDET-FM program host, director of the City Arts Gallery for the Detroit Council of the Arts and editor of *City Arts Quarterly*.

Sinclair moved to New Orleans in 1991 and joined the volunteer staff of WWOZ radio, winning *OffBeat* magazine's reader's poll as the city's most popular DJ five years in a row (1999-2003). In 1992 he formed his band, the Blues Scholars (founded in Detroit 10 years earlier), recorded his first CD in 1994 and began to tour the United States as a performance artist backed by jazz, blues and rock ensembles. He has collaborated with musicians from Archie Shepp and Walter "Wolfman" Washington to the New Orleans Jazz Vipers, Rashied Ali, Daniel Carter, Afrissippi and the Dutch rappers Langefrans & Baas B.

Sinclair has published several collections of his poetry along with his major work in verse, *Fattening Frogs For Snakes: Delta Sound Suite*, an investigation in verse of the Delta blues and the world that produced it. He has released more than 15 CDs of his work with music & verse, including Volumes 1 & 2 of *Fattening Frogs For Snakes: Delta Sound Suite*, *Full Circle* and *White Buffalo Prayer* with Wayne Kramer, *criss cross* with Rotterdam guitarist Mark Ritsema, *It's All Good: John Sinclair in Holland* and *No Money Down: John Sinclair's Greatest Hits, Volume 1*.

Sinclair first visited Amsterdam in 1998 as High Priest of the Cannabis Cup and, in the fall of

2003, John Sinclair moved to The Netherlands. One of the pioneers of podcasting, his weekly internet program, "**The John Sinclair Radio Show**," is the flagship of [www.RadioFreeAmsterdam.com](http://www.RadioFreeAmsterdam.com). He continues to tour and record with the Blues Scholars, half the year in Europe and the other half in the States. His latest book, *Va Tutto Bene / It's All Good*, was published in Italy by Stampa Alternativa in September 2006. It contains some of Sinclair's best poetry, as well as provocative essays in both the original American and translated into Italian.

Sinclair is prominently featured in the recently released documentary film *U.S. vs. John Lennon* and can be seen in several other recent releases, including *Punk/attitude* and *Sun Ra: Brother from Another Planet* by Don Letts, *Charles Olson: Polis Is This* by Henry Ferrini, and *MC5: A True Testimonial*. His own documentary, *20 TO LIFE: The Life & Times of John Sinclair*, a film by Steve Gebhardt, is scheduled for 2007 release.

### **RECORDINGS**

**Fattening Frogs For Snakes, Volume 3: Don't Start Me To Talking**  
(Big Chief/Electric Catfish Records, 2007)  
**It's All Good: John Sinclair in Holland** (Big Chief Records, 2007)  
**criss cross** with Mark Ritsema (Big Chief Records, 2006)  
**Fattening Frogs For Snakes, Volume 2: Country Blues** (No Cover Records, 2005)  
**No Money Down: John Sinclair's Greatest Hits, Volume 1** (Big Chief Records, 2004)  
**PeyoteMind** with Monster Island (BookBeat, 2003)  
**Knock Out** with Lange Frans & Baas B (420 Café, 2002)  
**Fattening Frogs For Snakes, Volume 1: The Delta Sound** (Okra-Tone Records, 2002)  
**It's All Good** with Fluxedo Junction (Fluxedo, 2000)  
**Underground Issues** (SpyBoy Records, 2000)  
**White Buffalo Prayer** with Wayne Kramer & the Blues Scholars (SpyBoy, 2000)  
**Full Circle** with Wayne Kramer & the Blues Scholars (Alive Records, 1996)  
**thelonious: a book of monk—volume one** (New Alliance Records, 1996)  
**If I Could Be With You**—John Sinclair & Ed Moss with the Society Jazz Orchestra (Schoolkids Records, 1996)  
**Full Moon Night** —John Sinclair & His Blues Scholars (Total Energy Records, 1995)  
**"fly right"—a monk suite**, with pianist Ed Moss (1991, unissued)

### **BOOKS & PUBLICATIONS**

**criss cross** (Big Chief Texts, 2007)  
**Va Tutto Bene / It's All Good** (Stampa Alternativa, 2006)  
**i mean you: a book for penny** (Palomar Press, 2005)  
**PeyoteMind** (BookBeat, 2003)  
**Fattening Frogs For Snakes: Delta Sound Suite** (Surregional Press, 2002)  
**Full Circle** (Minimal Press, 1997)  
**"fly right"—a monk suite** (1991, unpublished)  
**"We Just Change The Beat": Selected Poems** (Ridgeway Press, 1988)  
**thelonious: a book of monk—volume one** (1985, unpublished)  
**Guitar Army: Street Writings/Prison Writings**, Douglas/World, 1972  
**Music & Politics** (with Robert Levin), Jazz & Pop/World, 1971  
**Meditations: A Suite For John Coltrane** (Artists Workshop Press, 1967)  
**The Poem For Warner Stringfellow** (Artists Workshop Press, 1966)  
**FIRE MUSIC: a record** (Artists Workshop Press, 1966)  
**This Is Our Music** (Artists Workshop Press, 1965)