

The Foot Patrol Story, a Tale of Two Feet  
By Hung Nguyen

I met TJ when he was a fourteen year old student at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. At that point he had been at the school for a few years already and had established a reputation as a gifted child prodigy. He frequently entertained the staff and students during holiday events. One of the most memorable performances was when he sat in with the Sun Ra Arkestra. We both were heavily into Prince and I made some cassette mix tapes of various b-sides and bootleg recordings for him. Fortunately he had a dorm manager who whole heartedly supported the students' artistic endeavors. He bought a decent midi keyboard and a four-track recorder for them to explore. He specifically wanted TJ to have the opportunity to play a nice keyboard. TJ immediately took to it and we started recording songs together, covers (mostly Prince) and originals, some death metal, and gangster rap that he was into at the time. And of course, I noticed right away that he had a peculiar affinity for feet.

I worked the weekend shifts, which meant we had the freedom to record all kinds of different material. He was happy to have an outlet for his frustrations and a release valve for dealing with all the expectations his elders put on him. He does owe a great deal of gratitude to his piano instructor for teaching him proper technique. However, as a teenager, TJ wasn't interested in jazz or classical music, unless it was scary or haunting. He wanted to do gangster rap and death metal songs because that was what spoke to him and his teenage angst. We managed to record about 200 songs in two years, using a 4 track minidisc recorder that we still use to this day.

After TJ had turned 16, his family decided to move to Houston. He didn't have a decent keyboard at home, so I thought of the idea to record an album of video game music; the classic ones that the kids all know and recognize. It was a fundraiser with the goal of providing him a decent keyboard to take with him. The staff would let their kids listen to the CD and they really loved it because they had never heard that music out of the context of a video game. The project was a success and we raised enough money for TJ to get the keyboard.

Fast forward a couple of years. TJ had just graduated from high school, and started working with one of the members of the successful R&B group, Tony Toni Tone. When TJ appeared on B.E.T. we all assumed he would go on to become a successful musician or star, but apparently they did not know how to maximize his talent. He auditioned for several major labels, met luminaries such as Jamie Foxx, Ice Cube, LA Reid, Babyface, etc. It was a failure because they were trying to get him to do music he didn't like. He always had an uncanny sense of integrity.

Once that all fell through he was basically wasting away at home in Killeen, TX with nothing to do. Somehow he managed to keep track of me despite not having talked to me for a few years. His mother was concerned about TJ's well being, so she solicited my help. I arranged a solo show for him at the Cactus Cafe in Austin with the generous help of our future drummer, Jeff Hoskins. A friend at the show suggested that I start a band with him and that just seemed unrealistic. But it wasn't...

TJ enrolled in a training facility for blind adults in Austin and we started doing Terroristic (a hardcore metal/experimental rock thing) and MC Terroristic (a hardcore rap outfit). We just simply picked up from where we had left off several years ago at the school. The songs came easily and quickly. We did a few shows with just me and TJ and a CD of the drum tracks. I happened to have a poster of Mick Jagger laying around, so I put that behind a snare drum and made him our drummer. He was a very good drummer indeed, albeit a little stiff. Eventually I got tired of playing to small audiences and I didn't want TJ's talent to go to waste. At that time Ghostland Observatory was just breaking out and it inspired me to start Foot Patrol. If those two guys can do it, why can't we? At first TJ was very reluctant to do funk music because to him that was "sell-out music." He wanted to stay true to the hardcore aesthetic. When I

explained to him that we would write funky songs exclusively about feet and that he was going to get some, he eventually came around. Our shared interest in Prince had come full circle with the advent of Foot Patrol.

We sat down and came up with our first song "Freeze" in about ten minutes, "Footography" that same day and recorded the first album *Toetry In Motion* in two weeks time. While we continued to write and record hardcore songs I knew that Foot Patrol had a better chance of catching on. We did a CD release show with almost five albums worth of material at once! The *Chrissy EP* was one of these and introduced TJ's alter-ego; a bitchy, snobby and often inebriated blond bimbo named Chrissy.

And catching on it did indeed. Right off the bat, we had a very positive response. It was just me and TJ and a drum machine at that time. We didn't need Mr. Jagger's services any longer. Our first show was at the Chain Drive, an infamous gay bear bar tucked away in a dark corner of Waller Creek. I figured a foot fetish band should debut at a place like that. Soon Austin Schell joined as the guitarist of the band, and we became a trio. A couple of successful shows later, we added Jeff Hoskins as the drummer. And who could forget Eduardo, the male topless belly dancer who did a few of the early shows as well.

We were now starting to sound like a real band and a year later we added a horn section and christened them the Shoe Horns. Modern Dance artist Mari Akita loved the music and wanted to add some choreography. Foot Patrol evolved into a must-see funk band with sexy, androgynous dancers and a unique sound and look. There was nothing like it in Austin. We were all really amazed at how quickly it caught on. I'll always remember the first time I noticed the audience singing along to the lyrics of some really absurd songs about feet. Could it be that my life-long dream of subverting the masses was actually coming to fruition? The dream lives on and the story continues.