

John Lurie and The Lounge Lizards

John Lurie the sax player, the actor, the painter and the fisherman. Though this might sound like a schizophrenic portrait it's simply the truth. All these different personalities suit in the same physical body.

Born in Worcester, Massachusetts on December 14 1952, he's mostly known as the founder of *The Lounge Lizards*, a modern jazz ensemble featuring a bunch of hipsters of the New York Downtown scene. Along with his brother Evan on piano there were Arto Lindsay (guitar), Anton Fier (drums) and Steve Piccolo (bass). This is the band playing inside "*The Lounge Lizards*" (EEG, 1981), their first official album, although the band was already active at the end of the seventies.

The ensemble underwent a few changes over the years: Arto Lindsay was later replaced by Marc Ribot on guitar and more elements were added until the band expanded into an octet, sometimes even a nonet, maintaining however their typical unsettling, ironic, often sharp, sound.



John Lurie in New York 1987

The Lounge Lizards perfectly embodied the Downtown noir-like atmosphere surrounding the artists in New York at the beginning of the eighties. "*No pain for cakes*" (Island, 1987), "*Voice of Chunk*" (Strange & Beautiful Music, 1990), "*Queen of all ears*" (Strange & Beautiful Music, 1998) plus a bunch of live recordings followed their self-titled debut release and are the overall output of the band. Not too much of an output considering when the band was formed, but John used the stage to refine, rearrange and shape the tunes over and over. He also toured alone (1989-90) playing his reeds (alto and soprano sax) accompanied by a young black kid obsessed with drumming on a plastic bucket while sat on a fruit chest!

Music wasn't his only interest. John was carrying on his own career as an actor for underground film-maker Jim Jarmush who casted him for "*Stranger than paradise*" (1984) and later joined Tom Waits and Roberto Benigni in "*Down by law*" (1986), a movie which thrust him, as well as its director Jim Jarmush, into stardom, though a niche one:-)

After these little exploits John drew the attention of a larger audience and was called to act into movies as well as write music for them. So here they are his guest appearances in Martin Scorsese's "*The last temptation of Christ*" (1988), Roberto Benigni's "*Piccolo Diavolo*" (1990) and more recently even in the jail-based tv series "*Oz*" (2001-2003) among many others. He scored soundtracks for major production movies like "*Get Shorty*" (1995) but also for some of the lower budget productions he starred in.

John Lurie the fisherman. Yep, in the early 90's John found the money (and time) to put up a special tv program focusing on fishing (1991). Thanks to some famous friends of his (Jim Jarmush, Tom Waits and actors Dennis Hopper, Willem Dafoe and Matt Dillon) who joined him in the project and most of whom didn't even know (like John anyway:-) how to handle a fishing rod,

the program quickly became an underground hit and was later released on dvd ("[Fishing with John](#)", The Criterion Collection, 1999). No need to say that John provided the score for it.



The Lounge Lizards

Last musical effort was "*The legendary Marvin Pontiac – Greatest hits*" (Strange & Beautiful Music, 1999) where John pretended to be this weird character, an african-jewish bluesman died in a bus accident few years before named Marvin Pontiac who of course was a total fake: Marvin never lived. Why last one? John was diagnosed "Lyme disease" therefore no stress and no physical strain were allowed anymore. Unfortunately both his musical and acting careers had to quit abruptly.

So John returned to his first passion: painting. When he was very young (and happened to know Basquiat, Vincent Gallo and other figures of the art establishment) he loved drawing. You can check his works out at <http://www.johnlurieart.com/art/> ; a couple of catalogues are available too. Just like the names for the Lounge Lizards tunes, the titles of his paintings reflect that typical humor he brought on stage: quirky, sharp and witty.

If you're also curious to explore John Lurie's musical endeavors, here is his official website: <http://www.strangeandbeautiful.com>. Enjoy!