

## ROCKPILE, FEVRIER 96

**THE FLEA INTERVIEW** by André Calilhanna

**Flea, the infamous bassist of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, hardly needs much of an introduction. Having defined the criteria by which modern slap and pop rock bass is measured, he is something of an icon in the halls of rock and roll. With a new album, and another new guitarist in Dave Navarro, The Red Hot Chili Peppers have embarked on another leg in their dynamic and often troubled careers. Rockpile's André Calilhanna had the opportunity to talk with Flea about life, the universe and everything just as the Chilis ready themselves for a tour of the United States.**

***With (Dave) Navarro joining the band, things have changed a lot, I'm assuming, in the way you guys were writing. I mean, you've got another writer in the mix right now...***

**FLEA:** Yeah, well, he's more of a reactor than he is a writer. He's a different kind of creator. He's more a reactor than someone who'll say, 'here I've got this part...'

***Yeah, there are certain parts of the album where I guess I understand because it was more in the solos and in parts that are sort of over the core of the music that I thought I could hear his influence, over top something that was more of a Chili Peppers' sound. What was it like working with him? Was it easy ? Was it tough ? I mean, I know you guys had been courting him for a little while.***

**FLEA:** Yeah. In the beginning it was really tough. And as time went by it became easier. It was, well in the beginning we couldn't relate that well, and as time went by we sort of hit upon something. Particularly he and I, we hit upon something musically where we were like, "OK, this is a really cool sound where I'm not just doing something to try and please you and you're not doing something to try and please me." You know, it was natural, it was a new sound. And once we hit upon that we just whipped out the music, boom, no problem.

***I've been hearing a lot of different things about the album. Some people think this is kind of like side three and four of BloodSugarSexMagik. I don't necessarily agree with that, but I'm interested to know what sort of input you've been getting from other people and what do you think about it.***

**FLEA:** Well, it would have to be sides five and six, because BloodSugarSexMagik was a double album...

***I've got the disc over here...***

**FLEA:** I don't know. What people say? I mean, my friends like it. Some of them have parts they don't like. But I don't know because very rarely am I dealing with people who are coming from a fan's perspective who are going to tell me they don't like it, you know what I mean ? I mean usually it's like, "Hey, you're the greatest. Can I have your autograph ?" So I don't really know. But what really matters to me is being proud of what I've done, and I'm proud of it. I think it's a good record.

***What about the song, "Pea" ? Was there a story behind that tune ?***

**FLEA:** Um, I can tell you what it means to me.

***Yeah, great. That's basically what I'm trying to get at.***

**FLEA:** What it means to me is, when I'm happiest in life is when I'm little, when I'm small, when I'm content to be the insignificant little speck of shit that I am. That's what makes me a happy person.

***Is that where the name Flea came from ?***

**FLEA:** No, but in that way it's fitting. But that's when I'm happy, when I'm in nature, when I'm very small and I'm dealing with things that are very significant like sky and rocks and dirt and water, as opposed to when I'm in the city dealing with things like power and money and material possessions and stuff like that. I think that when people are dealing with things like power and money and material possessions people feel that they are an important person because they control the fate of all these things, but it's really not what makes me happy. I don't think that really makes anybody happy. So it's about that, and it's also kind of about when I got the shit kicked out of me one time at the Mayfair market on Franklin and Bronson by these redneck guys.

**Yeah, there are obvious allusions to that in the lyrics.**

**FLEA:** Yeah, they kind of go hand in hand.

**There was a issue of Guitar for the Practicing Musician that had a cover of you kissing Navarro and that issue was pulled from the stands, I'm assuming because of the cover. Who was responsible for that and what did you think of that whole thing ?**

**FLEA:** Who was responsible for the pulling? I guess the places that wouldn't stock it. They didn't pull it everywhere, only in the places they were offended, I guess, by us kissing. They should have seen the pictures of us butt fucking !

**That will be in the upcoming issue of something else I guess.**

**FLEA:** That's in the next Guitar Player. You know, it's just silly. We took a bunch of pictures, and there was one with us kissing, and it's not even that we're kissing, we're just touching lips. I mean, it's just silly. I don't even know what to say about it. And it's kind of sad that people are so stupid, that they would worry about something like that.

**I read an article, I don't know if it was the same issue or not, but it was something that was written during the recording of this album. At the time of the writing of the article, the music had been completed, but Anthony Kiedis had not put anything down...**

**FLEA:** Yeah, it was a while before he did. It was a year.

**Was it a year ?**

**FLEA:** Yeah.

**Wow. The article referred to him having a severe case of writer's block and I read later that he was in rehab and I was curious to know if you would comment on that situation.**

**FLEA:** Well, as far as his own personal situation, it's really not my place to comment on what he was going through. But I can say he was going through a very difficult time in his life and he needed to go through what he went through before he was ready to be on the record, before he was ready to deal with life in general. I think that everybody has problems. Some are more severe than others. Everyone has psychological demons, and sometimes confronting them can be very difficult and very painful, and I think anyone who has looked inside themselves and tried to confront their problems knows that. And he needed to do that before being on the record. I needed to do it, too. It's just that my problems manifest themselves differently than his do.

**Drugs have definitely played a major part in the rise and fall of the band...**

**FLEA:** What do you mean "fall" ?

**Well, the ups and downs, how's that ?**

**FLEA:** The dynamic career.

**Exactly, that's a good way of putting it. So why is it so difficult for you guys to just get beyond all that ?**

**FLEA:** Um, I don't know. I can't answer that question. We come from a place where we're brought up with drugs, and it's weird. It seems like everywhere I look I see people in Hollywood who are sober, you know, 12-step sober, or strung out and fucked up really bad, but there's no in between. There's no one who is just cool with it, you know what I mean ? Like, everyone has had a major problem, everyone I know. And sometimes it's hard. I just want to get away from it. I just want to go live in Australia on the beach and not even think about it. And it's not just the members of my band, it's all the people that I love and care about. And it's sad, you know. It's hard to see so many people hurting. That's what the song "My Friends" is about.

**That's funny, I was just about to say that, that's the entire song of "My Friends".**

**FLEA:** That's what the song is about. You know, I'm not a psychologist. My understanding runs as deep as it runs, and I just know I have to love and support my friends, just like I have to love and support myself, through whatever tragedies occur.

**All right. Over the course of time, you guys have gone from playing nude and getting arrested in smaller venues to being a mega arena band. Are the shows as much fun as they used to be for you? Are they as intense ?**

**FLEA:** Yep. Yep, I love them. We rock. There's nothing like it.

**You're playing Philadelphia when ?**

**FLEA:** It's our first show. February 6.

**And you're playing the Spectrum, the CoreStates Spectrum, whatever they call it now ?**

**FLEA:** The Mega Dome. I have to wait in the lobby for my limo...

**So they are as intense ? This is your first show with Navarro...**

**FLEA:** In America, well, we did play Woodstock. We just did a European tour. You know, I love playing these big shows. There's this thing, everyone always says it's much better to play the smaller clubs. I've played the small clubs. I've played the small clubs, the medium clubs, the junior clubs, you know. I've played everything, and I love playing the big shows. I have a blast. I come out and I feel a rush and adrenaline coursing through my veins, and I rock my fucking ass off as hard as I can, and I love it.

**So mainstream success hasn't taken the edge off of you at all ?**

**FLEA:** No. It's more difficult in a lot of ways. I think sometimes, wrestling with that part of it where it's like "are we playing this music to play it because it means something to us or are we playing it to support this huge corporation?" And it's weird like that, but I know we're playing the music because we love it.

**That's part of what I was wondering about. The whole thing about motivation.**

**FLEA:** It gets weird when there's a lot of money involved. It gets fucking weird sometimes, you know, because there are a lot of people who stand to make a lot of money. There are a lot of people who work for us. So there's this whole rigmarole. It's not just like going out, sticking up some amps and playing. So it's weird like that. It's "Oh! Oh! The TOUR! It's gotta be a BIG DEAL!" It's like, let's just go play some fucking gigs.

**This is kind of a tangent. I wasn't expecting to bring this up, but this makes me think of Kurt Cobain. I felt that was the reason he was given the chance to kill himself. Because he was making so much money for so many other people, they didn't want to help him out, because they figured if he wasn't still producing, they were going to lose a lot of money.**

**FLEA:** Yeah well, I'm sure there was a lot of pressure like that on him. Whether or not that's why he killed himself...

**I'm just saying it must have been a factor. I mean, once you're making money for somebody else, it just enters into a whole other realm.**

**FLEA:** It's a weird thing. It's a weird thing to be involved with. 'Cause you take advances from people and shit, and you owe them.' You know ? It's weird. You sign contracts. It's not you're playing because you want to. You get locked into doing things, and it's something you have to grow into, and I'm sure that it was difficult for him. It's hard, you know. Fuck, man, I don't know.

**It's just the whole mega corporation...**

**FLEA:** It's hard. I think it's something you can adjust to and learn to understand and put into perspective. You know, for what it really is. It's different. It's a different way of dealing with things.

**At the same time you're still playing your instrument to earn your living, and you still get to express and live through it.**

**FLEA:** Yeah, like for me, I grew up fucking hating rich people, you know what I mean? Where I was from there were definitely the "haves" and the "have nots." And I definitely grew up as a "have not." And it was always, "these rich fucks, who do they think they are?" And all of a sudden, it was like, I'm one. Dude, you know, you have two houses, three cars, you know, money, all this shit. It's weird adjusting to all that.

***You're not a "have not" anymore.***

**FLEA:** No! And it's hard. I didn't realize until recently that I had a big problem with that. And I realize that there are rich and poor assholes. The ratio is... economics doesn't change the amount of people who are compassionate, kind people and the amount of people who are full of shit.

***Right. And now that we're on this, and I'm not necessarily thinking about Warner Bros. or anybody you're dealing with in particular, but do you think the record industry is pretty jaded and pretty out for itself, or have you found a lot of people in the community who are really doing this for the right reasons ?***

**FLEA:** I would say that the majority of record company people that I have known were interested in making money. I would say there are pockets of people who are interested in creativity and art and have a sincere love for music, and those are the people who I like. Obviously there are a lot of people hawking product, and they might as well be selling shampoo or belt buckles. But there are pockets of people.

***You guys have always been quick to praise your peers and influences over the years. How does it feel to be on the other end of that ? A lot of people are emulating you guys. How does that feel ?***

**FLEA:** Um, I don't know. It's cool. Sometimes, when I don't feel like I'm on top of my game, if I haven't been practicing, and someone comes up to me and says "you're the greatest," I'll feel like a phony. But sometimes it's great. Sometimes it's good for my ego. Like I feel like I'm impressing a girl or something. I feel lucky that people appreciate what we do, but I know a lot of it has to do with pop culture, and not to do with the art. But some of it is based on art.

***Well it is. It has to stem from there in the first place. Where it goes from there... well I guess it's got a lot of places it can go these days.***

**FLEA:** It just gets weird.

***So what's next for the Chili Peppers ?***

**FLEA:** Well, we'll be touring and trying to stay sane, and we're shooting a video this week, and we'll just take it as it goes at this point.

***Well, I'm all out of questions.***

**FLEA:** That's cool with me.

***I appreciate your time.***

**FLEA:** What's your name again ?

***André.***

**FLEA:** Thanks, André.

***I'll probably see your show when you come up here.***

**FLEA:** In Philly ?

***Yeah.***

**FLEA:** Well, come say "hi".

***I will.***