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# RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS



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THE UNAUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHICAL MAGAZINE



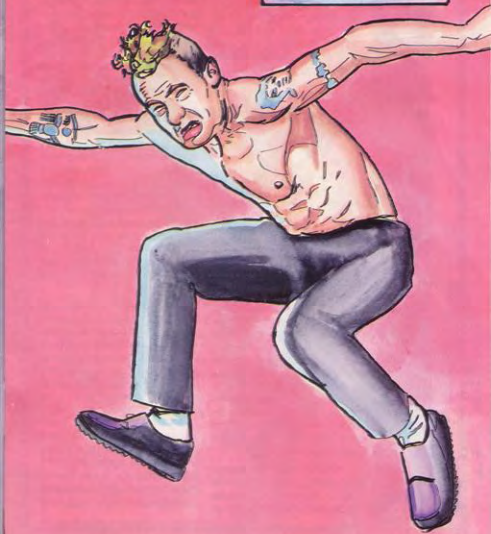
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## White Punks on Funk

"Oh, I love the Red Hot Chili Peppers!" So says "Jack," a recent convert to the pagan faith of Pepperism. Until recently, the only pepper Jack would touch was the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper*. But lately he has broadened his musical horizons to include The Pogues, Bongwater, and now, the Chills. One listen to the pulsing, funk-inflected single "Give It Away" was all it took. The young, British-accented acting aspirant was hooked. Now the Peppers are just about *all* he listens to (in between wine coolers that is).

just view life in a different way. Then, eventually, time passes and you either become an addict or you don't." Kledis and Slovak became prime candidates to enter the co-dependency club. They escalated their usage to the point where friends and family became concerned for their safety. But the supremely confident Slovak managed to convince those around him that he had his habits under control.



## OVER TIME, THE DIFFERING CHOICE IN LIFESTYLE TENDED TO ISOLATE ANTHONY AND HILLEL FROM THE REST OF THE GROUP, NOT TO MENTION THE REST OF HUMANITY.

This characteristic becomes tragically ironic in light of his eventual death.

As for Flea, well, as Kiedis reports it, "(he) never really lost it to drugs. He had his experimental phase, realized he couldn't handle it, and then put them away." Over time, the differing choice in lifestyle tended to isolate Anthony and Hillel from the rest of the group, not to mention the rest of humanity. But during high school it was merely a shared pastime that bound them together.

Fairfax High's "Unholy Three" decided to form a band together. Unfortunately, they as yet had no one to play drums or bass. So they formed Los Faces, a dadaesque situational troupe devoted to sitting around the lunch table talking in bizarre Cheech and Chong voices. When this routine failed to draw a crowd, Slovak established the progressive-rock band Anthem. He taught Balzary how to play bass, recruited him along with drummer Jack Irons as the rhythm section. Kiedis took on the unforgiving task of providing jivey rap introductions on stage. Needless to say, that particular Chills manifestation went nowhere fast.

Around that time Balzary was getting more and more heavily into the Los Angeles hardcore punk scene. Bands

like X, Black Flag, and Fear were adapting the lightning-fast overloaded guitars and gob-in-your-face social stances of British groups like the Sex Pistols and The Buzzcocks to their own nihilistic ends. Balzary was impressed by their attitude, if not always by the reaction they engendered. At one Black Flag show he attended, "people were getting the shit kicked out of them for having long hair and people were being carried away in ambulances—a bloody, violent thing. It really made me sick and scared. Punk rock was awful." Then, about a year later, he caught a Fear show while tripping on acid and found the experience revelatory. "They were really tight, fast and aggressive and blew my mind." A week later, Fear found itself without a bass player, and Balzary found himself in a new band. He was 18.

Meanwhile, Slovak was bopping around L.A. in a series of west coast no-wave bands, while Kiedis got more and more interested in the burgeoning rap scene. When Balzary's short tenure in Fear ended (that group would self-destruct soon after their legendary *Saturday Night Live* appearance), all three friends and timekeeper Jack Irons were hanging around Hollywood once again with nothing in particular to do. Then a friend named Gary Allen invited them all to come onstage for a



"weird cabaret lip-synch freaky dance costume thing" he was organizing at an area club. He meant it as a joke, and the group took it as such. They had no songs, little experience playing together, and a lot of still-undeveloped talent. What did they have? "I had a funky bass line and Anthony had a poem," says Flea. Despite Kiedis' trepidations about being the front man, the group took the stage that night and performed "Out in L.A.," the song they still open with to this day. They were an instant hit with the crowd, earning an invitation to perform again the following week. This time they



added another number, and in no time at all they were the city's hottest band. Thus the Red Hot Chili Peppers were born, under the most auspicious of stars.

They still regarded themselves as something of a goof, however. Slovak in particular viewed himself as something of a funk avatar, preferring to keep his comical Chili Pepper activities as something of a sideline. So, as the Chills were on the verge of signing their first recording contract, the guitarist abruptly left them to form the band What Is This. Drummer Jack Irons joined him, leaving the Chills in limbo.

The group went on to record its debut LP with session players filling in on guitar and drums. The self-titled effort was produced by Andy Gill, founding member of the Marxist Anglo punk band Gang of Four. Unfortunately, though the songs ("True Men Don't Kill Coyotes," "Baby Appeal," "Get Up and Jump") were clever and danceable, the production sucked, and the band just didn't sound the

same stripped of two important members. "Our natural, spontaneous thing wasn't there," Flea observes (he had by this time won the nickname Flea thanks to his uncanny ability to leap, mite-like, high off the stage while playing his bass). "If we'd had that original lineup on the first record, I think we would have been a lot more popular a lot sooner. We would have gotten the real thing, hard-core,





IN 1988, EVEN AS THE BEATLES' RECORD CATALOG WAS SOLEMNLY BEING RELEASED ON CD, THE BAND RELEASED ITS ABBEY ROAD EP, A FOUR-TRACK RE-PACKAGE OF PREVIOUSLY-RELEASED MATERIAL THAT WAS NOTABLE ONLY FOR ITS COVER: A PHOTO OF FOUR BUTT-NAKED CHILL PEPPERS STROLLING THE FAMED CROSSWALK AT ABBEY ROAD STUDIOS WITH TUBE SOCKS DANGLING OFF THEIR SCHLONGS.

down on record. We were so explosive at that time—and it's not an explosive record."

Meanwhile, What Is This was recording an EP (*Squeezed*) that was so ideologically pure as to be almost totally inaccessible. Song titles were excruciatingly arch ("Mind My Have Still I") and the music—an ur-funk blend of George Clinton and the Bush Tetras—was appealing only to the already-converted. Slovak and Irons promptly departed. They were back in the fold in time for the second Chills LP, the first real Red Hot Chili Peppers album, 1985's *Freaky Styley*.

Produced by freakishly-coiffed funk god George Clinton, the record was a dead-on reproduction of the Peppers' live sound. From its ga-ga cover to the profane delirium of tracks like "Thirty Dirty Birds," "Catholic School Girls Rule," and "Blackeyed Blonde," this was pure, dirty-minded fun of the lowest order. The Chills even included a disarmingly faithful cover of Sly Stone's "If You Want Me To Stay," the first in a line of fried re-dos of past classics. A musical adaptation of the Dr. Seuss classic *Yertle The Turtle* rounded out the package. A must-have disc for fans and dilettantes alike.

1987's *The Uplift Mofa Party Plan* offered more of the same. This time, more of a punk in-

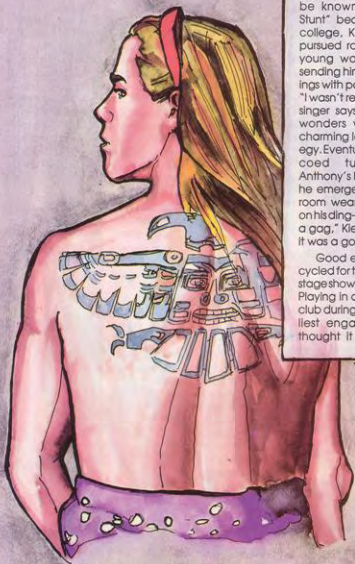
flection was evident, with songs like "No Chump Love Sucker" and "Fight Like A Brave" going particularly heavy on the guitars. The Chills' characteristic sense of humour cropped up on a dizzying cover version of Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues," while their raunchy side surfaced in the "Special Secret Song" advertised on the cover, better known as "Party on Your Pussy." ("A specific love song," Anthony Kiedis said of that number, "one about sex—not degrading in any way. And we're by no means sexist.")

The Chills were not finished tweaking their noses at the leg-ends of rock. In 1988, even as The Beatles' record catalog was solemnly being released on CD, the band released its *Abbey Road EP*, a four-track re-package of previously-released material that was notable only for its cover: a photo of four butt-naked Chili Peppers strolling the famed crosswalk at Abbey Road studios with tube socks dangling off their schlongs. The very dead John Lennon, who had pioneered the practice of exhibitionism in rock when he unsheathed his John Thomas (or "me prick" as he liked to call it) for the cover of his 1969 novelty record *Two Virgins*, must have been laughing in his grave at that one. No word yet on the reactions of the other three Beatles.





"Mrs. Britain" did have something to say about the lewd cover, however. Concerned about how two old pepperpots might be reacting to the early-morning Abbey Road photo shoot, Flea approached them gingerly, with sock fixed firmly in place. The old folks were unfazed. "Oh, I've seen more butts in my time than you'll ever see!" said one. The Chills knew they had a hit on their hands.



The story of the development of what has come to be known as "The Sock Stunt" bears repeating. In college, Kiedis was being pursued romantically by a young woman who kept sending him raunchy greetings with pop-out phalluses. "I wasn't really into her," the singer says drily, and one wonders why, given this charming lovemaking strategy. Eventually, the lovesick coed turned up at Anthony's house. On a lark, he emerged from his bedroom wearing only a sock on his ding-a-ling. "It was just a gag," Kiedis recalls. "And it was a good gag."

Good enough to be recycled for the Chili Peppers' stage show a few years later. Playing in a Hollywood strip club during one of their earliest engagements, they thought it appropriate to



come out for an encore wearing only the socks. It was a strip club, after all. They emerged from their dressing room "levitating with nervous energy," and with crazed looks in their eyes. They pounded through their encore while an audience member filmed the entire spectacle. After the set, the club manager accosted the band for violating the establishment's decency code. "No pubes! I told you guys no pubes!" he roared. The band was run out of town on a rail.

From that moment on, strategically-placed socks became a Chills' trademark, as well as a cornerstone of their aesthetic. As Flea describes the group's early living arrangements, "people would come over, we'd hang out, smoke pot and drink beer, put socks on our

dicks and run around." It was a far cry from the Our Gang clubhouse, but it was still, in the bassist's words, "kids living together, having fun."

Fearing persecution by the authorities, the Chills have begun scaling back their hosiery use in recent years, limiting the Sock Stunt to select cities on certain nights (they recently avoided arrest in Canada by convincing the police the socks were affixed with piano wire). As an entirely inadequate substitute, they have recently taken to appearing on stage in their underwear. Fans still clamour for a return to the wild days of the band's youth.

With *Uplift Mofo* out a year and *Abbey Road* merely filling the product gap, the Chills felt pumped to make a new record. They had all been



**HOW POPULAR DOES A BAND HAVE TO GET BEFORE THE INEVITABLE CRIES OF "SELL-OUT! SELL-OUT!" STOP BEING THE RANT OF THE CHRONICALLY DISCONTENT AND START BEING AN ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF ARTISTIC STATUS?**

The Chills have added a lot of fans like Jack over the last couple of years. Guys and gals who wouldn't go within a football field's length of alternative music when it was just Johnny Rotten screaming at his record company now find it the perfect complement to buzz cuts and artfully-shredded jeans. Most of these late-coming "fans" are little more than bourgeois poseurs who should have been gassed by the state in infancy. Some of them have been found to possess brains. But that's really neither here nor there. The real point is it's getting harder and harder for the rest of us, the free-thinking, class-liberated children of light, to tell good music from bad. How popular does a band have to get before the inevitable cries of "Sell-out! Sell-out!" stop being the rant of the chronically discontent and start being an accurate assessment of artistic status? Are REM sell-outs because their last two albums sucked and sold like the devil and they whored themselves out to MTV (the short answer: yes)? Did Nirvana traduce their fans by releasing a great record that inexplicably went to #1 (the answer: no)? Should we all fall to our knees and worship Bob Mould and Paul Westerberg (you bet your sweet ass we should)?

And whither the Chills? Save perhaps Nirvana's, their baffling post-modern success story has been as curious as anyone's. Who would have thought that the group that recorded "Party on Your Pussy" would be setting the toes of America a-tapping with the radio-friendly ballad "Under The Bridge"? Frontman Anthony Kiedis formulates the quandary this way: "Take a group of Kansas housewives who turn on the radio and say: 'Oh, I like that sweet, sentimental song. Honey, would you go out and get me this record?' They get the record, and there's 'Sir Psycho Sexy' and 'The Power of Equality.' They are going to have their little world turned upside down." Not to mention the fact that "Under The Bridge's" own subject matter belies its sweet-as-peach-pie arrangement (it's about Kiedis' agonizing struggle with heroin addiction).

The proof, as they say, is in the pudding. Or as the Bible puts it, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Those too blind to see a critical difference between the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Ugly Kid Joe need to check out of the MTV Hotel. While it could be argued that all rock and roll is fundamentally, primally compromised (to the extent that the first aim of every band is to sell a lot of records), the discerning fan is obliged, starting from that point

## SO THE CHILIS ARE TO BE JUDGED, ULTIMATELY, NOT ON THE QUALITY OF THEIR FANS, BUT ON THE QUALITY OF THEIR MUSIC.

of departure, to make distinctions among the various performers as to their level of artistic integrity. The only other abiding truism to keep in mind is that the masses never know what's good and what isn't. Disregard all that public relations blather about "the people finally catching up to our sound." The people are sheep, at the mercy of large, manipulative entities like Music Television who are interested only in steering them, like a carnival barker, from one sideshow attraction to another. That the Replacements and Soul Asylum languished for years in ghettoized obscurity while Nirvana sold a trillion records is inexplicable by any equitable calculus.

So the Chills are to be judged, ultimately, not on the quality of their fans, but on the quality of their music. So far, they have passed that test. They made a record (*Blood Sugar Sex Magik*) that managed to be accessible without retreating into conventionality. Unlike, say, REM, they did not offer themselves up as poster children for MTV's faux-progressive ideological indoctrination campaign. The Chills have maintained a distance from the corporate puppet masters of popular music, a distance that allows them to exhibit their customary aesthetic concerns in front of the maximum possible audience. Such a distancing is one possible strategy for coping in a post-Marxist

world. Outright defiance is the other.

"America is tilted in the middle," observed the author Saul Bellow. "Anything that isn't screwed down tends to roll to California." In the late 1970's, the inexorable forces of gravity brought three founding Chill Peppers to Los Angeles.

Anthony Kiedis was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His father, a full-time rake and womanizer, divorced his mother and moved to Hollywood with 11-year-old Anthony in tow. Adopting the stage name "Blackie Dammett," Mr. Kiedis embarked upon an acting career, periodically interrupting his professional pursuits to bed down with a young starlet. As Anthony puts it, "My father had a constant turnover of girlfriends. It wasn't that he was this cold-hearted user of people. He just had this insatiable desire to meet all of the beautiful girls in the world." That left Anthony with the unique opportunity to learn how to manipulate females into the sack. The randy Mr. Kiedis was also "very supportive of my personal education and my creative development," reflects Anthony. But as far as the more formalized father-son kinds of activities went, they basically didn't. Life with father for the future chief executive Pepper was, in Kiedis' words, "anarchy on a plate."



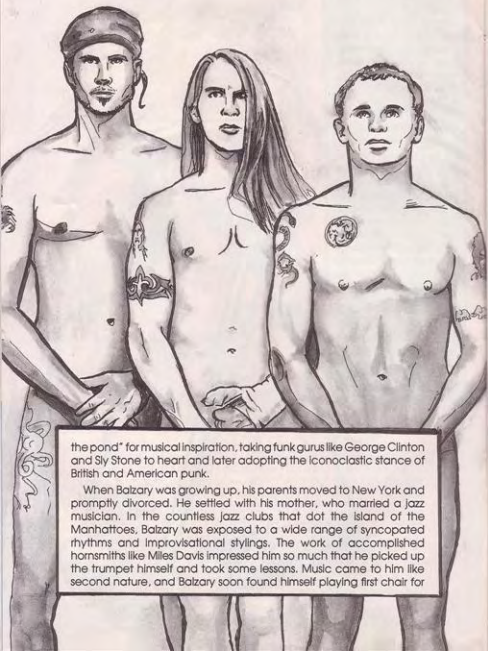
It did breed in him a fondness for beautiful women, however, and the accompanying nerve to do something about it. Dad's constant parade of babes left Anthony respectful of but less-than-flabbergasted by feminine sexuality. He resolved to lay even more ladies than his old man. "I thought it was the greatest thing in the world to have all these beautiful women come into my house and not be uptight about me hanging out with them and having sex with them," he says. But he was more than just a chronically-engorged Priapus. He had a moony, sensitive side, and was capable of sustaining a relationship beyond a one-night stand. He fell in love with one girl at a young age and went with her for three years. Still, the life of the cocksman



called, and from then until now Kiedis has been the Chills' resident ladies' man. Today, his posterized puss probably adorns more high school girls' walls than such titans as David Cassidy and Parker Stevenson did in their time. The world has indeed changed in the last ten years.

While Kiedis was still in training for his future life as a rock and roll sex machine, Michael Balzary was adjusting to life in a totally new environment. The Man Who Would Be Flea was an Australian national, born in Melbourne. Luckily, he didn't share that island continent's appalling taste in music. Men At Work and Inxs thankfully exerted no influence on Balzary whatsoever. From early in life he looked "across





the pond" for musical inspiration, taking funk gurus like George Clinton and Sly Stone to heart and later adopting the iconoclastic stance of British and American punk.

When Balzary was growing up, his parents moved to New York and promptly divorced. He settled with his mother, who married a jazz musician. In the countless jazz clubs that dot the island of the Manhattoes, Balzary was exposed to a wide range of syncopated rhythms and improvisational stylings. The work of accomplished hornsmiths like Miles Davis impressed him so much that he picked up the trumpet himself and took some lessons. Music came to him like second nature, and Balzary soon found himself playing first chair for

## A GLORIOUS FUTURE SPENT PLAYING "HOLD THAT TIGER" WITH SMALL BRASS COMBOS AT WEDDING RECEPTIONS SEEMED TO AWAIT HIM BY THE TIME HE ENTERED HIGH SCHOOL.

the Los Angeles Junior Philharmonic. A glorious future spent playing "Hold That Tiger" with small brass combos at wedding receptions seemed to await him by the time he entered high school.

Where he first encountered Hillel Slovak, a hard-partying Israeli expatriate who was destined to become the Chills' founding guitar player. Slovak had moved to L.A. from Haifa (and just how many people can make that claim?) and he still retained a great deal of allegiance to that besieged state squeezed between Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. A reedy, thin, goofy-looking guy with thick lips and a curiously-shaped cranium, Slovak even at that age exhibited a wild sense of humour that would play a formative role in the shaping of the Chills' aesthetic. He also exhibited the seeds of his own self-destruction. "Before he got carried away with the drugs, he was a lot of fun," observed Flea. But Slovak could never resist the lure of controlled substances. From the time he first got hooked to the inevitable endgame, his life was little more than a loaded gun, waiting to go off. The Chills' steadily-growing success merely extended that game of Russian Roulette into impossibly advanced rounds.

The three societal misfits met each other in high school. Though the closest bond devel-

oped between Anthony and Hillel, Kleidis and Balzary also had something in common. "I didn't have any friends and he didn't either," Flea recalls. They headed off on a ski trip together, one of those lost excursions that helps a band of friends really meld together into a unit. They had no money, and even less social acceptance among the other high school skiers, so they slept in a laundry room at the lodge and pumped quarters into the dryer for heat. Flea got arrested for stealing won ton skins from a local grocery store. He spent a night in jail harassed by sodomites, and came out resolved never to steal again.

Another time Flea and Anthony hitchhiked up the coast to San Francisco to get mohawks together. They snuck onto a train but spent so much time swiping drinks from the bar car that they were promptly kicked off. Stranded briefly in Santa Barbara, they thumbed a ride with a transvestite and finally made their destination. After spending "an insane weekend of sleeping on people's porches, covered in newspapers, being woken by cops prodding us with sticks," they had their new do's and were ready to head back. They hopped a freight train carrying beets and hid themselves in the piles, proud of their ingenuity. But when they



reached the beet factory, they had to disembark once more. This time, their ride came from a Mexican fugitive, "with a big tattoo on his neck that said 'Los Venos Chicos,'" says Flea. "When we got to L.A., he said, 'Hey, you guys can have the car. I stole it.'" The frightened kids drove it for a while, then abandoned it.

As the three friends grew closer, they began to share all their passions—as well as their vices. They exposed one another to various musical influences, from Ornette Coleman to the Meters to Parliament Funkadelic. And they shared their burgeoning experimentation with drugs. Anthony catalogues the controlled substances: "We took LSD, we did cocaine, we did heroin, smoked a lot of pot and did a lot of alcohols and different combinations of barbiturates. But it was all in good fun: we weren't slaves to the drugs. As kids, we considered these mind-expanding situations to

## THE CHILIS WERE DETERMINED TO EXPAND THEIR AUDIENCE AND GAIN SOME RESPECT AT THE SAME TIME. THEN, TRAGEDY STRUCK.

disappointed in the public reception to *Uplift Mofo*. Mainstream radio, predictably, ignored it, as did black stations. College radio played it, but often dismissed it as a pornographic novelty. The Chills were determined to expand their audience and gain some respect at the same time. Then, tragedy struck.

Hillel Slovak died of an overdose in June of 1988. The lanky, fun-loving guitarist had resisted all of Anthony's pleas to get him into a dependency rehabilitation programme. "I would write him letters, 'cause it was real hard for me to tell him to his face how much I loved him," Anthony explains. He urged Hillel to join him in kicking the habit. "We would both clean up, and then we'd both start using again...Hillel thought he had power over the dark side." On a trip to England in May of '88, Slovak went into withdrawal. But even this miserable ordeal wasn't enough to convince him to start respecting himself. "He didn't seem to have compassion for his life or consider that he wasn't beyond death or humiliation because of drugs." When the band returned to L.A., Hillel immediately started shooting up again. Within a couple of weeks, he was dead.

The tragedy sent Kiedis into a guilt-ridden tailspin. "it should have been me," he says, even today. "My propensity for over-

the-edge indulgences was more renowned than his." Anthony still believes he could have saved Slovak if he had been around that final fateful week. But like the rest of the Peppers he had all-but-abandoned his friend to drug addiction and was not around when he slipped away. Kiedis immediately retreated to Mexico for a week of grieving and drying out. He stayed in a small fishing village, living in a tiny hut on the beach. When he came back to L.A. he checked himself into a hospital for formal detoxification. He claims he's been clean ever since.

The other Chills were deeply affected by the tragedy as well. Flea felt bad that Hillel's bandmates weren't around in his time of need. His own wife was pregnant at the time of Slovak's death, providing the bassist with a new outlook on life and a respect for the sanctity of existence. As for drummer Jack Irons, he found the death made continued music-making intolerable. He quit the band as his own way of dealing with his grief.

The group moved quickly to get back in the ring, but early efforts at assembling a new line-up didn't pan out. They added an ex-Parliament Funkadelic member, the wonderfully-named Blackbird McKnight, on guitar. Kiedis



called him "a totally inspirational guitar player." Former Dead Kennedys drummer D.H. Pellgro, "a hyper, spastic human energy machine" replaced Jack Irons. Things seemed to be in place. "I think this may be the best line-up we've ever had," declared Kiedis, and from a musical standpoint he may have been right. But the chemistry wasn't quite right. McKnight left to rejoin George



Clinton, and Peligro was summarily sacked. At the turn of the New Year in 1989, the Chills found themselves back at square one.

Fortunately, a new guitarist was close at hand. John Frusciante was a 19-year-old guitar prodigy from the San Fernando Valley. A self-taught master of music theory, he had moved up to Hollywood at the age of 16 in order to apply his talents more practically. "I was a little too obsessed with the technical aspects of music," he says. "I had to do like many of the great jazz musicians have done:



## AN MTV VIDEO FOR THE SONG HOOKED THE PEPPERS UP FOR THE FIRST TIME WITH AMERICA'S SLACK-JAWED, BRAIN-DEAD YOUTH.

learn everything and then forget everything." Frusciante had spent his entire adolescence worshipping the Chili Peppers. He knew all their songs by heart, and attended their live shows religiously, even buying tickets for his friends. He also boasted a huge octopus tattoo on his right shoulder, a definite advantage in a band where body painting is *de rigueur*. He bumped into Flea, and the two struck up a friendship. The diminutive bassist set John up with an audition for Thelonus Monster, an L.A.-based garage band. Frusciante got the gig, but so impressed Anthony and Flea that they offered him a spot in the Peppers. His frenetic playing brought a whole new dimension to the Chillis' music, but his shy, befuddled personal manner seemed strangely unsuited to the life of fame and fast-living. In a couple of years, it would all catch up with him.

The Peppers auditioned thirty drummers before they settled on Chad Smith, a beefy journeyman who had never even heard of his new band before he auditioned for them. Smith did not impress on first appearance, according to Flea: "Chad came in and he had a bandana and hair sticking out and we were like, 'Oh, God. Next. Let's get this over with.' And he started playing

and we all burst into laughter because he started screaming at the top of his lungs—'RRRAAAAHHH!' hitting drums as hard as he could BARUMP PAH PAM TSHII! We couldn't cope. We weren't sure if he was good or not—it was just hilarious—all of a sudden we thought, 'This guy is playing his ass off,' and everything else went by the wayside." Smith was in. It was the first time he'd ever visited L.A.

The new line-up wasted no time getting back into the studio. It had been almost two years since the last album, and the record company was clamouring for more product. This time, the mix was right. They emerged with an album, *Mother's Milk*, that was both a progression from what had come before and a bold new point of departure. Its thirteen songs were alternately catchy ("Good Time Boys"), goofy ("Magic Johnson") and poignant (the Hillel Slovak tribute "Knock Me Down"). A pulsing cover of Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground," driven to the point of exhaustion by Flea's frenetically-slapped bass, proved first a college-radio and then a mainstream hit. An MTV video for the song hooked the Peppers up for the first time with America's slack-jawed, brain-dead youth. What was more, the video channel's expansion into European markets (where



slack-jawed, brain-dead youth have been a post-World War Two tradition) meant that whole new continent could learn to "Party on Your Pussy." *Mother's Milk* sold over half a million records and made the Chills prime candidates for ascent into the top ranks of rock.

But with success came the usual "rock star" trappings. The Chills' propensity for uncirking their willies began to catch up with them. Anthony Kledis, in particular, began to take a little too much inspiration from Jim Morrison. In one incident, following a concert at George Mason University in Virginia, "The Swan"—as he had taken to calling himself—exposed his Johnson to the wrong woman and found himself on the business end of a misdemeanor charge of sexual battery and indecent exposure. After two trials, Kledis was found guilty and slapped with two separate \$1000 fines.

In March of 1990, Flea faced his own indecency charges, when the yearly Festival of Fraternity Fascism known as MTV Spring Break took an unexpected turn. The video giant had

asked the Chills to lip-synch on stage in front of the aggressively-partying undergrads. But the band, which abhors lip-synching, decided to cause a ruckus in mid-set. Flea dove into the audience and holsted a female spring-breaker over his shoulders for a good-natured spanking. Then he dumped her on the ground and started spewing obscenities at her. The Man was quickly on hand to slap the mercurial bassist with one charge of disorderly conduct and one charge of "solicitation to





commit an unnatural and lascivious act." The arguable pride one must feel to be charged under such an arcane and adorably-titled statute was sadly overshadowed by the hassle the incident engendered. "They totally tried to make an example of us," grouched Chad Smith. "I'm not trying to blame anybody else. But the way it came out was that it was a real malicious thing, that we tried to beat this girl up."

Flea admitted that verbally abusing the girl was wrong, but decied any attempt to paint him as a sex offender. "It had

## LIKE A KIND OF B-BOY BRIAN ENO, RUBIN WAS FULL OF UNORTHODOX IDEAS ABOUT RECORDING.

nothing to do with sex," he said. But *L'Affaire Flea* put a taint on the band and made it harder for them to get live gigs. They knew they were beginning to get a reputation as a group of sexist goof-offs, and that in the age of "Political Correctness" (read: embryonic Nazism), that could jeopardize their popularity. They resolved to be more careful about their public image in the future.

By 1991, things had cooled down sufficiently for the band to sign with a major label, Warner Brothers, and to begin the task of recording a new LP. They wrote and rehearsed for six months before engaging Rick Rubin as producer. The mercurial Rubin, known as "the Bearded Wonder," had founded Def Jam Records out of his dorm room at New York University and overseen its growth into rap's premier label. He had roots both in black music and traditional white boy rock'n' roll. In recent years, he had tweaked the knobs for acts as diverse as The Cult, Slayer, and Run-DMC, and he helped turn the Beastie Boys' *License To Ill* into a post-modern Bad Company album. He seemed the perfect man to capture the Chills' eclectic mix of funk and fuzz.

Like a kind of B-Boy Brian Eno, Rubin was full of unorthodox ideas about recording. His

first suggestion for the Peppers was that they make the record in a house instead of a studio. For the Chills, who had always loathed the myriad distractions and factory-like atmosphere of the modern recording space, it was a stroke of mad genius. "We were totally gung-ho," raved Kiedis. The house they chose, a huge mansion in the Hollywood hills, had a long and bizarre history that suited its inhabitants' tastes. "It had been owned by gangster," Anthony reports. "The Beatles had taken LSD there as a foursome, Jimi Hendrix had stayed there, people were born and died there." He and the other Chills quickly noticed the place was full of ghosts. Band photographer (and *Drugstore Cowboy* director) Gus Van Zant, managed to capture some of the pixies on film. "They came out on about four of the photos we took for an album cover session," says Kiedis, "these floating, nebulous shapes."

Despite the presence of these otherworldly spectres, the house was refreshingly free of the "negative energy" which usually plagued the Chills in the studio. The group concentrated solely on making music, letting lackeys attend to day-to-day chores and even hiring an in-house chef to cook for them. "When you go to a house like that you can create your own environment," explains Flea.

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"You can make it whatever you want...living, working, eating, having sex, all in the same place, untouched by the outside forces of the world."

Rubin helped nurture the general air of close-knit chumminess. The Chills had initially been wary of the producer's notorious dark side, but they were pleasantly surprised when he turned out to be "a completely open-minded, free-flowing, comforting spirit." Or, as Anthony phrased it in one of his characteristically absurdist formulations, "If Baron Von Munchausen were to ejaculate the Red Hot Chili Peppers onto a chess board, Rick Rubin would be the perfect player for that game."

The Peppers also benefitted from experience gained in the past two years. *Mother's Milk* had been recorded before the new line-up had really gotten a chance to know each other musically. This time, as Anthony put it, "we were able to develop a fluh sounding record" that sounded, according to Flea, like four guys playing music. "When I hear it, I get a picture of a hand hitting a guitar, a string vibrating."

They dedicated the project to Mike Watt, the bass player for FIREHOSE and a founding member of the seminal early-80's punk band The Minutemen (pick up their brilliant double

album *Double Nickels on the Dime* for a representative dose of their idiosyncratic brand of rock). The Chills have always respected Watt's unselfish, music-for-music's sake approach to his art.

*Blood Sugar Sex Magik* appeared in late 1991 to mixed critical reception. Some found its selection of 17 songs in a wide variety of styles simply too dizzying to handle. They were put off by the LP's mix of hard funk ("Give It Away"), loopy waltz ("Breaking The Girl") and traditional Chills kitsch ("Sir Psycho Sexy," "The Power of Equality"). And they couldn't understand where the band got off recording a tune as radio friendly as "Under The Bridge," which actually featured (horror of horrors!) a choir of female back-up singers. But to the Peppers themselves, the smorgasbord atmosphere was one of *Blood Sugar's* most endearing attributes. "I have this wonderful image of this lady washing the dishes in her little home in Kansas with her little tape deck," chuckled Kiedis, "popping this in and taking off her clothing, running into the back yard and getting loosened up a bit."

Ultimately, that's just about what happened. Despite the lukewarm reviews, *Blood Sugar* attracted a steady stream of listeners, largely thanks to MTV



**THE FOLLOW-UP SINGLE, "UNDER THE BRIDGE," SHOULD BE FAMILIAR AS CHRISTMAS TO EVERYONE IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE BY NOW.**

exposure. The gonzo "Give It Away" video, which featured all four Peppers gyrating for the cameras while covered in silver metallic paint, became an almost hourly staple (not surprisingly, it had been a bitch to film; in order to avoid asphyxiation, the Chills had to keep only the tiniest area under their armpits free of paint. The same trick was used to create the illusion of a "golden girl" in the 1964 James Bond classic *Goldfinger*). Viewers were captivated and baffled by the unique look of the clip, as well as the perverse poetry of rapid-fire lines like these: "Bob Marley, poet and a prophet/ Bob Marley taught me how to off it/ Bob Marley walk it like he talk it/ Goodness me, can't you see I'm gonna cough it." The single featured some of the funkier playing by a white band in years, and boasted a hypnotic Frippesque backwards guitar solo to boot. An essential 45 for every collection.

The follow-up single, "Under The Bridge," should be familiar as Christmas to everyone in the Western hemisphere by now. It rocketed to the top of the charts on the strength of a much more conventional video, and got a lot of people wondering whether the Chills had sold out. But a single cannot be held hostage to the fans who make it a hit. "Under

The Bridge" is a fundamentally decent song about a serious subject, Anthony Kiedis' days as a heroin addict. It did suffer from incessant airplay, however, and now, like REM's "Losing My Religion," is all-but-unlistenable. It remains only one song on a 17-track album, though, and should not be the ultimate measure by which the group is judged.

While a few listeners outside the band were having problems with the Chills newfound success, one man inside it was just about fed up. Guitarist John Frusciante quit the band abruptly just as it was beginning a massive Far East tour. He blamed stress, fatigue, and dissatisfaction with the vicissitudes of fame. In interviews, Frusciante had always appeared a shy, withdrawn, spacy type of character. In the end, he found the problems that went with being a touring rock star more trouble than they were worth. His departure surprised and saddened Flea and Anthony. The Chills had been dealt a major blow at just their moment of greatest triumph.

They had planned an ambitious schedule for 1992. A swing through the far east, New Zealand, and Australia was to be followed by a spot headlining the '92 Lollapalooza Tour. But though they were forced to sacrifice some of their own tour dates, the Chills resolved not to



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miss Perry Farrell's travelling carnival freak show/rock festival. They quickly recruited guitarist Ark Marshall to replace Frusciante, and went on with Lollapalooza as planned. The massive rock event, which featured the likes of Ice Cube, Soundgarden, and Ministry on the bill under the Peppers, proved an enormous hit with concertgoers. The Chills further solidified their standing with the MTV crowd by putting in an appearance on the video colossus' annual awards programme. While Nirvana was causing a small ruckus by refusing to play "Smells Like Teen Spirit" as their video masters had demanded, the Chills calmly strode out in their BVD's for a live go at "Give It Away." They also accepted statuettes for Best Concept For a Video ("Give It Away") and the People's Choice Award for "Under The Bridge." Deservedly, perhaps, but in a year when Teenage Fanclub released the epiphanic *Bandwagonesque* and didn't get so much as a nomination, it had to raise some serious questions.

There can be no doubt that the Red Hot Chili Peppers have "arrived" in the conventional sense of the term. But the time is rapidly coming for a radical redefinition of the concept of "making it" as we have heretofore known it. Time was that a band's artistic integrity was inversely relational to its chart suc-

cess. If a group had a hit, it sucked. *Quod erat demonstratum.* But in today's topsy-turvy musical world, where MTV meddling and Soundscan technology have muddied the waters of sanctimonious moral judgment, it is becoming harder and harder to apply such an easy test to artists in the public eye. We must therefore all sharpen our critical skills, remaining ever vigilant, on the lookout for that one fatal slip-up, that one crippling concession an act makes that commits it forever to the dustbin of hackery. So far, the Chili Peppers have not made that crucial error. But we who have appointed ourselves the guardians of the revolution, will be watching closely from here on in.

THE END

