

SPOTLIGHT FEATURE : RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

Sequestered at Detroit's Hotel Atheneum the morning after a performance at Pontiac, Michigan's Clutch Cargo, the Red Hot Chili Peppers have gathered to discuss their first record in four years. Californication marks the return of one-time boy-wonder guitarist John Frusciante. A life-long fan, Frusciante was 18 when he joined the Chili Peppers in 1989, following founding guitarist Hillel Slovak's death from a heroin overdose. Influenced and inspired not only by Slovak, but Jimi Hendrix, Frank Zappa and numerous other musicians, Frusciante seemed like the ideal replacement, and his work on Mother's Milk signaled a creative high point in the group's career. But the young guitarist battled with stress as the Peppers' touring obligations skyrocketed, and in May, 1992 he abruptly left the group. Upon returning to Los Angeles, Frusciante began his own battle with heroin addiction, while the Chili Peppers persevered with several other guitarists, most notably Jane's Addiction's Dave Navarro. Frusciante's eventual triumph over the grip of heroin addiction - he's been clean since 1997 - is well-documented musically on two solo albums (Niandra Ladies and Usually Just A T-shirt and Smile From The Streets You Hold). But the residual effects still show. Now 29, the lanky guitarist looks older, if not exactly haggard. Shy and a little prone to rambling, he speaks in a spacey, but sincere, surfer-esque drawl. Frusciante's new daily regimen includes practicing yoga and lengthy guitar workouts. He's clean, sober, and his return to form as a guitarist - both on Californication and live - is truly remarkable and affecting. An avid record and CD collector, Frusciante awakened early to prowling the local shops before joining vocalist Anthony Kiedis for the following conversation.

Anthony Kiedis : John's idea of a night on the town is to go out and hit the record store. He gets all dressed up...

John Frusciante : (Laughs).

Kiedis : He's been getting the Who collection right now.

Guitar.com : John, what's your favorite record ?

Frusciante : Y'know, the Live At Leeds [reissue] CD they have now is very good, with the full-length concert. And that's very different from Quadrophenia, which I love equally as much. That's a magical album. Who's Next is very, very good.

Guitar.com : I wanted to get some perspective on your relationship with L.A., with Hollywood. "Californication" kind of deals with the "plastic" society and the pursuit of beauty, of the tension between internal and external beauty.

Frusciante : L.A.'s the place where we have to be to do the things with our lives that we do. Like, we could entertain the idea of living other places, but for some reason for us to exercise the parts of ourselves that we do in order to make the music that we make, it's really being in L.A. where that happens. There was a time when I wasn't in the band and I just found it impossible to really stay away from Los Angeles. I've been in Los Angeles since I was a little kid. I like New York a lot, too, but I'm just in synch with Los Angeles. I've had the sense, being in a place like New York, of being sort of squeezed out of it, and I feel like there's always a space for me in Los Angeles.

Kiedis : [supportively] And there is.

Frusciante : Also, the inspiration from our music doesn't come just from a physical place or anything. I draw more inspiration myself from outer space and from places outside this dimension. That's where I feel our music comes from. In a lot of ways, it has nothing to do with the physical place I'm at. That's how I think of music. Not everybody in the band thinks of music like that, but it's a part of us as well.

Kiedis : I actually agree. I don't know if John does consider me one of the people in the band who connects with outer space or doesn't, but I also just get just as much information from a different dimension than the dimension that we consider where we live.

Frusciante : I feel that everything everybody does, not just music, comes from those places.

Guitar.com : I give you props for not putting a Millennium-themed song on the record. But did you write one and not include it on the final set ?

Frusciante : We're not mischievous like that. We write songs that come about naturally. We don't write them specifically for any effect other than what the other guys in the band are gonna feel about it. The only kind of response I'm looking for when I write a song is the one I'm gonna get right when I show the songs to the band, or show the guitar part to the band. Or, if we come up with a jam as a band, what Anthony's gonna think about it. Even though I feel the audience is as important a part of the music as we are, I don't connect myself directly to their response because it's too far in the future.

Guitar.com : The Chili Peppers are often pigeonholed as the originators of punk-funk. Your thoughts ?

Frusciante : "Punk-funk" was something that journalists would use to describe the band, but personally, coming from the standpoint of a fan of the band's before I was in the band, and while I was in the band, I just don't think of it that way. I saw it as being a combination of a bunch of kinds of music, many of which are of no interest to making public slogans. Like, even though I hadn't read anything concerning it, and I didn't know him at the time, I just felt, based on the way Flea played bass, that jazz was a huge part of his upbringing, y'know ? And I turned out to be right about that. He started out on trumpet, and to me that's a huge part of the sound of

the band. And it's a part that people don't rip off because you can't rip it off without having a solid foundation in that kind of music, y'know ? You can't just rip it off and be like [*he imitates the sound of slap-bass*]. It's like, Flea has a sensitivity and a sense of rhythm that a person doesn't have unless they really love that kind of music and understand that kind of music on a deep level. Being a person who also loves that kind of music, I connected with that element of it and saw them as being the only band I knew of who had made that a part of a conglomeration of styles that was really magical to me. But to me, it could go many different directions. That's why when I joined the band, and once I solidified myself in the band and then after we made one record, and we started writing *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, I just had a few different kinds of direction that seemed to me to make just as much sense for the band. As you can see by our new album, we've never let any sort of idea that we should be a punk-funk band dictate anything. It's one of the directions that we go and one of the influences we have in our music. But we do whatever we wanna do and we have a good time doing it. Punk and funk are a big part of the music we play, but it's a genuine thing and we're inspired by a lot of different kinds of music. Those are probably the two big ones that were consciously on the band's mind when the band started. But the number-one important thing is that we try to stay true, try to stay close to the spiritual makeup of the band's beginning.