

Red Hot Chili Peppers - The Last Of The Mohicans

"Kerrang!" (26 Aout 2000) -

For the REDHOTCHILIPEPPERS, touring means herbal sex pills, plush tour buses and crowds of 20,000 people a night. It's a far cry from the days of socks on cocks, rampant drug abuse and crashing cars for fun..

ANTHONY KIEDIS leans back in his chair, closes his eyes and lets the electric razor run gently across the side of his scalp. A gentle buzzing sound echoes through the toilet-cum-shower room and into the softly-lit dressing room next door. The Red Hot Chili Peppers frontman is having his mohawk trimmed by tour manager Louis Matthieu. Kiedis' striking new coiffure is a relatively recent development. It's also one he shares with both his band mates and the rest of the Chilis' road crew.

"We were on tour in Australia," smiles the singer, tilting his head forward to allow Louis access to the nape of his neck. "Life was good and times were fun, and we were bonding as a band. One night, sitting around with Flea and John, we made a pact to get mohawks - to go 'hawk - when we were back in the States. So we did, and it just became contagious. Suddenly, 10 people in our crew had mohawks. It was just a pact we stayed true to."

As he speaks, bassist Flea wanders in from the dressing room wearing nothing but a pair of white briefs.

"Hey Louis," he barks, "do you know where the rest of my underwear is?"

"It was laundry day yesterday," replies Louis without looking up. "Go and ask production."

Flea bounces back out into the dressing room. A minute later, John Frusciante ambles quietly in. It's his turn to sit in the chair. The long hair of recent months is gone, replaced by a mohawk, and he's also sporting the merest hint of facial hair on his top lip. He gazes at the scene in front of him.

"Do you think I should have this shaved off?" he asks softly. "I don't know if moustaches and mohawks go together."

"I'll trim it off," replies Louis, looking up this time. Frusciante walks out, happy.

Ten minutes later, Kiedis' haircut is complete. He leans over a nearby washbasin and douses his head with water, rinsing off any remaining hair clippings. When he's finished, he shakes his head dry and gazes into the mirror that's in front of him.

"Yeah," he smiles, checking out his haircut from all angles, "that's pretty good."

ANTHONY KIEDIS has reason to smile. The last 12 months have been good for the Chili Peppers. The LA quartet's latest album, 'Californication', has sold eight million copies worldwide and spawned two hit singles in the shape of 'Scar Tissue' and the title track. Right now, the band are in the middle of the second leg of their US tour. The first, with the Foo Fighters in tow, saw them selling-out arenas in smaller, '8 List' cities from coast to coast. This time around, they're taking things up a step: audiences of 20,000 or more aren't uncommon. Granted, the added attraction of twin supports Fishbone and a reunited and rejuvenated Stone Temple Pilots hasn't done ticket sales any harm, but this is undeniably the Chilis' gig.

According to the ads, tonight's show is being held in Chicago. In reality, it's taking place at the New World Theater in Tinley Park, a good 45 miles out of town. It's like saying a band are playing Manchester when the gig's in Leeds.

It's unlikely that the Chilis notice the difference. They arrive at the venue in two tour buses and promptly retire to their dressing room. Decked out ambient style, it looks like a cross between a psychedelic boudoir and a retreat for wayward Tibetan monks. Soft, shaded lighting casts strange shadows on the walls, and the pungent scent of incense hangs in the air. In one corner, Flea runs through a set of finger exercises on his bass. In another corner, Fishbone's Angelo Moore rattles around Chad Smith's practice kit while the Chili Peppers' drummer chats amiably to his brother, John.

For Anthony Kiedis, the best way to kill time before a show is to simply kick back and relax.

"I need to relax more, because relaxation is the key to life," he says in his soft tones. "Everything works better when you're relaxed. I haven't mastered it yet. I just want to distract myself with every little thing under the sun."

Kerrang!: What are the upsides and downsides to touring?

Anthony: "Probably the main downside is that you lose the element of routine in your life. There's something to be said for routine. It can be comforting. That goes out of the window. The upside is that it can be the greatest time of your life - you get to go out there and play to thousands of people every night under these big summer skies. That's not a bad job."

Kerrang!: How do you cope from being away from your girlfriend?

Anthony: "Well, I miss my girlfriend like a motherf**ker. I'm flying from here to meet her, and I'm all jacked up on herbal sexual enhancers. I call her every day, same as I call my mom and dad and my sisters. If I had a kid, I would go crazy. I love it when (Flea's daughter) Clara comes out with us. She's like a stabilising influence; a purifier for the road."

Kerrang!: Have you ever gone completely insane on tour?

Anthony: "Insanity, for me, has a number of definitions. I haven't ever gone thoroughly insane since the '80's, when I was getting f**ked-up and losing my conscious contact with the universe. I don't really go insane. I get lonely and tired and depressed."

Kerrang!: Your past problems with drugs have been well documented. Does being on the road make it difficult to keep on the straight and narrow?

Anthony: "No. It's actually the easiest place for me to keep clean. It's when I have idle time that my demons get to conniving against me."

Kerrang!: Do you ever get sick of touring?

Anthony: "No. If I ever do get sick, then it's over."

THE RED Hot Chili Peppers have a pre-show ritual that they call the Soul Circle. It involves all four members holding hands and singing songs with each other ("Campfire classics", laughs Chad Smith by way of explanation). Superstition also dictates that John Frusciante has to be the first to take the stage.

It's at 9:10pm precisely tonight that Frusciante walks out in front of the audience at the New World Theater, to be greeted by a resounding cheer that stretches from the covered seats in front of the stage to the steep grass verges at the back of the auditorium.

The Chillis' current set isn't radically different to the one they've been playing for the past year. The bulk of the numbers come from 'Californication', with the largest eruption of noise saved for new crowd favourite 'Scar Tissue'. Kiedis teases the crowd about local basketball hero Ron Jeffrey, who the Chicago Bulls recently sold to the LA Lakers, before it all crashes to a close with a cover of the Stooges' 'Search And Destroy'.

As the rest of the band take a bow and troop offstage, John Frusciante hangs his guitar from an amp and sits in front of his pedal board, listening to the feedback crackling out over the heads of the audience. After five minutes, he too gets up and departs.

"This is such a contrast to the way things used to be," says Anthony Kiedis, towelling himself off and preparing for the long drive to Cincinnati, the location of tomorrow evening's gig. "People always think that we're more satisfied with the whole touring experience now, but in reality we were so amazed with our place in life back then. Going on the road in a blue Chevy van, having people waiting for us outside clubs... it was new and explosive and one of the most beautiful times we ever had."

Kerrang!: Where did you play your first show?

Anthony: "Our very first show was at the Café De Grand, which was on Melrose in LA. We played one song."

Kerrang!: What was your first tour like?

Anthony: "We were crammed into that blue Chevy van, and it was a month after our first record came out. We just smoked tons of pot and drove around the country."

Kerrang!: Did you feel like a gang back then?

Anthony: "Not really, because we had temporarily lost Hillel (Slovak, original guitarist) and Jack (Irons, original drummer). When we were with them, we were a gang. We were the four motherf**kers from Fairfax."

Kerrang!: How much did you expect to get paid for a gig?

Anthony: "We got 50 dollars for our first show, but that quickly went up to 200 dollars by show four. I actually had to sit the promoter down in a urinal because he was trying to give me half. I was the bouncer, manager and debt collector. I always got the money. I would not take no for an answer."

Kerrang!: Where did the socks-on-cocks come from?

Anthony: "I used to do it to impress this girl when I was 17. I used to greet her at the door with a sock on my dick. It was a great image for performing. The first time we did it onstage was at the Kit Kat club, which was also a strip club."

Kerrang!: What was the maddest tour in terms of sheer hedonism?

Anthony: "Back in the day, when no one knew who the f**k we were. We were just these punk rock weirdos from LA ripping the shit up off the road. It was exciting and challenging to sleep with different girls in every town, breaking things and crashing cars."

Kerrang!: Did it ever get seriously out of control?

Anthony: "I think it was always out of control. A lot of beautiful order can come out of chaos. Sometimes, the inevitable tragedies smack you and catch your attention, and you think, 'Wow, that hurts, it doesn't feel good'. It's all lessons, and I thank God for the lessons."

CINCINNATI IS a moderate-sized town nestled in the south west corner of Ohio. The drive from Chicago takes the best part of seven hours. The Chilis spread themselves across two tour buses - one is nicknamed 'The Tofu Bus', the other is 'The Junk Food Bus'. John, Flea and Anthony hang out on the former, Chad and tour manager Louis on the latter.

"It's not that we don't like each other," laughs Kiedis, "but it's because we like to sprawl out, and we have these two pretty buses, which is good for long-ass drives through the night. We've pampered ourselves."

For Chad Smith, having two vehicles is a godsend. "The guys on the other bus have no wheat, no dairy, no taste," he cackles.

"They always come on our bus and go, 'This has got an uptight vibe'. Then I go on their bus, and I'm like, 'God, what have you got for lunch? Half a piece of cardboard? I'm going back to my bus to eat Doritos and watch 'Stink Finger!'."

The drummer is the most approachable member of the Chili Peppers. Where Anthony is warm and spiritual, Flea space before a show and John is totally focussed on his playing, Chad's the one you'd go out for a drink with.

This is his 12th year with the band. Things have, he says, changed beyond recognition.

"My first tour was in Florida," he recalls. "This was before 'Mother's Milk' came out. We rented a van and we hit all the hot-spots. I got laid a lot on that tour."

Kerrang!: What's your greatest memory from those days?

Chad: "We had a little more freedom. We could get away with more and we were closer to people. I like things to be a little more intimate. "

Kerrang!: What did you think of Anthony and Flea the first time you met them?

Chad: "That these guys were pretty short. Nah, I walked into the audition place, and introduced myself. Flea just looked at me and went, 'What are those cases? Are they your breakfast?'. I guess someone had told them that I ate drums for breakfast."

Kerrang!: How did they treat you in those days?

Chad: "I had long hair at the time, and they wanted me to shave my head. I didn't do it. They couldn't f**k with me, 'cos I would've beat them up."

Kerrang!: At that time, the Chilis had a reputation for playing naked. How did you feel about the prospect of stripping off in front of an audience?

Chad: "It didn't bother me. We did a photo shoot for 'Spin' magazine in early '89 and we were in Malibu in the rocks standing in the water with socks on our dicks. It didn't bother me."

Kerrang!: You always seemed to be the one who kept his head while everyone else was losing theirs. How accurate is that?

Chad: "I think it's part of my personality as a drummer. You're the one who keeps things grounded. I went through a divorce and personal shit, but I wouldn't say it was as severe as some of the other guys' problems. But you know the cool thing about our band is that we don't all have the same personality, and we've come to accept each other for what each guy is. You just have to realise your role and do the best you can."

Kerrang!: Do you ever get sick of touring?

Chad: "No. We've been out for 15 months, but we don't really do the 'kill yourself' stuff. We make sure we have at least two weeks off between legs. I never get sick of touring because I like playing."

Kerrang!: How do you keep things fresh on a personal level?

Chad (smiling): "I just try to keep a constant flow of women."

THE SHOW at Cincinnati's River Bend Theater - a 22,000-capacity venue set, unsurprisingly, on the banks of the picturesque Ohio River - is another complete sell out.

The set the Chilis play is virtually identical to last night's, with a cover of Bob Dylan's 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' replacing 'Skinny Sweaty Man'.

After the gig, the band spend 15 or 20 minutes winding down, before tour chef Jaime Laurite prepares the band members' individual meals (lamb stew for Flea, tofu lasagne for Anthony, bean salad for John and steak for Chad).

The final show of the 'Californication' tour will take place in Seattle on September 22. The band plan to take a short break immediately afterwards, before starting work on their next album.

According to Anthony Kiedis, the Red Hot Chili Peppers have never been healthier or happier than they are right now.

"There's plenty left for us to achieve," he states, gazing straight ahead. "There's music to be made, sounds to be invented. We are so excited about making another record. We don't feel like we have reached the levels we can."

"Sometimes it's frustrating," he continues. "Sometimes you get the occasional left-handed bout of depression or you aren't necessarily able to take care of your head. But f**k frustration. It's a great life and I should be kissing the ground every day I wake up."

FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD!

Jaime Laurite (above) is the Chilis' personal chef. Here's what he cooks the band every night...

FLEA

Carrot & ginger soup

Lamb & asparagus stew with saffron brown rice and steamed Vegetables

Frozen yogurt with fresh blueberries

ANTHONY

Tofu pesto lasagne

Live green sprout salad with saute spinach and garlic

Carob pudding

JOHN

Garlic soup

Grilled rabbit with rosemary and rice with raisins

Tofu parfait

CHAD

Absolutely anything.

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