

Flea : Inside The Flea Circus

"Guitar Center " (2001)

With an apt moniker, ever-changing hair color and boundless energy, Flea has turned heads and burned ears with his high-octane approach to the bass guitar and the music of the Red Hot Chili Peppers and recently, Jane's Addiction. Following the hugely successful Californication album and tour, Guitar Center sat down with Flea to talk about what the future holds.

GC: Are you still touring behind Californication or has the band started writing and recording again?

Flea: We're getting ready to make a new record. The old record, that whole cycle is done.

GC: So, out with the old and in with the new?

Flea: That's right. We played last night and it feels like [songs from] Californication are oldies. It felt new for a long time, but now it's right in there with "Give It Away," and "Under The Bridge."

GC: How do the Chili Peppers write new material?

Flea: We just get together and start rocking. We get into a room, fire up the amps and start going for it. We jam, get crazy. We think of stuff at home too. We do homework. We'll jam, listen to the jam tapes, and find parts we like, especially John and I. We'll bring in chords, riffs, patterns and stuff and say, "Here, check this out!" Then we'll jam on it.

GC: Do you have a home studio or equipment you use for songwriting?

Flea: I have an ADAT, a Mackie 16-channel board, effects and stuff. A friend of mine set it up in a nice little rack with a little patch bay and it's cool. I also have an Akai MPC3000 sampler, a Nord Lead synthesizer and a Roland synthesizer module.

GC: What do you think of the bass set-up you have currently?

Flea: My set-up rocks! I play a Modulus bass. It's solid and even though sometimes I'd prefer the warm sound of wood, the graphite is good for me because I travel to so many different climates. Going from outdoor shows to indoor shows, the wood necks always warp. I know I can rely on [the Modulus bass]. It's the same every time I put it on. I can beat the hell out of it, which I do regularly, and it continues to rock. Plus, the people at Modulus are really nice to me. They get me nice basses I like. I'm just lucky to play such a good bass.

GC: What other basses have you used?

Flea: I was playing MusicMan basses for a long time, and I still think they're great basses, but Modulus approached me and it seemed like a good thing. I also have an old Fender bass, a '61, that I really like to play, as well. I think that once basses get to a certain quality of workmanship, they are all the same quality. I think it's really about who's playing it. I love a well-made bass as much as anyone. Something that can stand up. Something that you can play really violently and it can maintain its composure when you want to caress it with great sensitivity.

GC: What about amps and cabs?

Flea: I use Mesa Boogie cabinets, which I've always used, and I have a Gallien-Krueger amp head. I think it's the most powerful one. I'm not sure what the model number is or anything, but I like it. I've been using GK heads and Mesa Boogie cabinets for like, ten years now. I never tried anything better!

GC: What strings do you think hold up well?

Flea: I always used GHS Boomers when I used to buy strings at the store. But, I haven't had to buy strings in like, ten years, so I don't know what strings I use [currently]!

GC: Do you practice a lot on your own?

Flea: Yeah, I play every day.

GC: The Chili Peppers have had several different guitarists. How were they different to work with?

Flea: In the Chili Peppers, we've had two principal guitar players. One was Hillel Slovak who was with us when we started the band. We had a very close relationship and because of the intimacy of our relationship emotionally and spiritually, we were able to connect musically. We created a sound that was really unique, unto itself. Then, we had John Frusciante, who could relate to that sound from a place deep inside his soul. Getting together with him was a great stroke of fate. We managed to create with him a bunch of really beautiful music for the same reasons- the depth of our relationship, our earnest desire to take care with every note we play. Dave Navarro was the next. We did our One Hot Minute record with him. We didn't get as close emotionally and I feel because of that we didn't do as well as we could have musically. But, we made a record that I think is pretty good. As far as the other players, we had Arik Marshall, who is a terrific player who stepped in and rocked with us. We had Blackbird McKnight, who is an amazing funk player, just an amazing psychedelic wizard of the guitar. And, we had a guy, Jesse Tobias, for like, three seconds for a couple of good jams.

GC: So a good rapport with the person is pretty key?

Flea: Yeah, of course, especially in a band situation where you're with someone all the time. That's what it's all about. When you're with someone all the time, on a bus or in the studio, wherever you are, you have to love that person. You have to be able to live inside their energy and love it. Yeah, that's what it's about.

GC: We heard that Jane's Addiction will be playing at Coachella soon. What's it like to step into an existing band like that?

Flea: For me, it's just fun. I love Jane's Addiction music, and I can get in there and play music that I love with a band that I truly admire and respect. Don't get me wrong about Dave. It's not like he's not an incredible musician. It's just that we didn't hit the spark together consistently. It had to do with what sort of relationship we were able to manifest over time. But, this Jane's Addiction thing, it's going to be fun. I'm just going to step in and rock!

GC: Having been through the bowels of the music industry, what advice would you have for your daughter if she expressed a desire to start playing in a rock band?

Flea: I would just tell her to rock and to do her thing. Play her heart out. Let it all out. The music industry, I've never been concerned with. I've been very fortunate that it has taken care of me. Obviously, I try to have people around me that I trust and try not to get ripped off, but it's like any other business, as far as I can tell.

GC: A few years ago in an article you said that electronica was the musical genre of the future. Do you still think so?

Flea: I don't know what I said or how I was portrayed in the magazine, but I remember that's not exactly what I said. I think I said that the things that I found the most interesting happening in contemporary music were done with electronic music. Which doesn't mean that I think it's the music of the future, because it's not the music that I play and I think the music that I play is very contemporary, fresh sounding music. But I still feel that the most interesting music is happening with electronic music, where most people are pushing the boundaries, doing new stuff. But there's some new rock bands coming around, too. There's a band that I heard the other day- At The Drive-Thru, or Drive-By, or something, [At The Drive-In] and they sounded great. I just love all music. There's no kind of music that I don't like. It's a spiritual thing. I think that everyone's got something to say. Britney Spears... .

GC: Have you or do you shop at Guitar Center?

Flea: Yeah, I do. I always have. I was wondering if I could get my hands in the thing in front!

GC: You mean Rock Walk?

Flea: Yeah! I figured if we couldn't get a star on Hollywood Boulevard, maybe we could get that!

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