

Flea - Flea interview

"?" (14 Mars 2003)

Sportpaleis, march 14th, a few hours before the show. The Red Hot Chili Peppers are so clean and healthy nowadays that John Frusciante - for years on he 'who'll be next-list' sits backstage and worries about the calories in his cookie with his tea. The whole evening there will be no alcohol at all and smoking is only allowed in the hallway and in the Chad Smith room. The drummer is the only one who doesn't get addicted to anything.

In that sterile environment we wait for Flea, whose limo is stuck in the traffic on the way from Antwerp to Brussels. The Peppers celebrated their twentieth anniversary last month, and Flea and Anthony Kiedis - both 41 - are in the same group for the half of their lives.

When Flea arrives, 2 hours too late, with a cup of tea in his hand, the Mars Volta has already started to play and there wasn't much time left for the interview. Thankgod we ate all our questions out of nervousity.

- "You had a free day yesterday, what did you do?"

- Flea: "I got up late, took the plane from Manchester to Brussels, ordered roomservice, read the book 'Tears of the giraffe' from Alexander McCallSmith, watched 'Goodfellas' and tried to let my fucked-up stupidfuckin' asshole computer work again. That's it. I hate computers, but when you're on tour and you want to have contact with the world, you can't live without it. Long ago, me and Anthony once climbed in the mast in front of the FairFax Highschool, changed the letters of the information board into: 'Dandy Platt sucks cock'. Dandy Platt was a teacher of ours. Now they have replaced that information board by a computer-controlled one, and you have to be a hacker to make that kind of jokes."

- "Where is home?"

- Flea: "Malibu, California. A while ago, I left Hollywood, I found it too hostile. And I really needed some fresh air."

- "Are there things you need on tour to feel home?"

- Flea: "Not really, I have to make it with the music, those few hours a day on stage. The rest is survival, it still is."

- "Do you miss the drugs?"

- Flea: "No, I only miss the friends I lost because of the drugs. No drugs or alcohol for me anymore, I like to wake up as myself nowadays."

- "Which song do you play during the soundcheck to check that everything is okay?"

- Flea: "We don't soundcheck, the roadies do that, and if I may believe their T-shirts, I think they play metal: Jane's Addiction, Black Sabbath, ..."

- "Did you ever try out old peppersongs that don't seem to work anymore?"

- Flea: "No, in big places like these, it's important to play the hits. We only play songs from the John Frusciante-era: the albums BSSM, Californication and BTW.

To feel safe, we all have our rituals before a show. I meditate and play bass for 40 minutes - especially scales - to warm up."

- "As I can see when I look at the miserable shape of the cup you drink your tea from, it has an emotional value for you."

- Flea: "I got it from my daughter Clara, she painted it. I take it everywhere I go since five years now, but yesterday it fell, that's why I had to repair it with tape.

Cheers!" (he drinks)

- "How old is your daughter now?"

- Flea: "Fourteen."

- "The difficult age!"

- Flea: "There are some difficulties indeed, but those don't change what I feel when she's near me. She starts to find her way in music, she doesn't listen automatically to what I put on anymore. She likes Velvet Underground, Led Zeppelin, The White Stripes, The Beastie Boys and The Mars Volta, the most exciting band in the world at the moment. I'm a happy daddy!" (laughs)

- "When you were 20, you started playing with the Chili Peppers in local clubs. Now you're 41 and still a pepper."

- Flea: "I have never thought a lot about the future. This band just rolls, and I have no idea how long it will last. Looking back is kind of strange: my god, here we are now, 20 years later and we're one of the world's biggest bands. We're in the top 10 of popularity and record sales. Insane."

- "You have made 2 records since the return of John Frusciante. Will the next album be the hard third one?"

- Flea: "No idea. I don't want to think about it. We will do what seems the best to us."

- "Would the Peppers still exist if John hadn't returned?"

- Flea: "No. In 1997 we had reached a low point. We only were still together because we were one big money machine. The only thing that could save the group was the return of John. John was clean, but he and Anthony weren't on speaking terms anymore since his departure in 1992. Anthony also was convinced that John didn't feel like being a Peppers again at all, but I had a totally different feeling and I could convince him to go back and talk. They hugged and kissed and before we knew it, we were standing in the garage behind my house. John was nervous, because he hadn't touched a guitar for 5 years, but when we started to play it felt like the band got air again for the first time in seven years.

- "Do you still play in a Joy Division-coverband?"

- Flea: "No, we only performed once. It was exciting and we planned to go along with it, but it turned out different."

- "I thought that no one in the US knew Joy Division."

- Flea: "Joy Division was too early for its time. They didn't exist long enough to get big, but you don't find a lot of bands with such a big cultural and musical influence. It were all fantastic songwriters, and if they stayed together, they probably would have become one of the biggest bands of all time. Look at New Order, that was founded after the death of singer Ian Curtis. I

like New Order very much, but Joy Division is fantastic. And in that same department: Echo & the bunnymen."

- "Am I wrong or did you play a piece from 'Show of strength' from the bunnymen during a jam at Werchter 2002?"

- Flea: "At the end of 'Blood Sugar Sex Magik' we sometimes play that piece, indeed. You heard it well. Nowadays we play at the end of Can't Stop a little piece of 'The Wall', from the Bunnymen.

A wink or not, in the intro of Around the World, Flea plays a piece of Joy Divisions 'Last Control'. Thank you very much gentlemen.

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