

## Red Hot Chili Peppers - Assault & Peppers : Sex Is A Many Blended Thing

"Cream Vol2 #1" ( Juillet 1991) - Nina Malkin

Their reputation precedes them. Lyrics that would send Sinead running to the Iceman's arms for comfort. Arrests for indecent exposure and sexual battery. Those celebrated single-sock costumes. That's a nice girl like me...? Maybe because I'm from Brooklyn, the birthplace of obnoxious, I landed this most coveted assignment. Or perhaps it's due to my informal but extensive study of Suburban White Boy Syndrome, the peticular condition that turns middle-class males of certain age and ethnicity against their roots --- in this case, using any means possible not to be perceived as the Luke Warm Silly Peckers. Whatever, I am summoned. So I Come.

I set out to profile a hard-smirking funk & roll band. But I get more. Much, much more. Fortunately, penicillin proves remedial. But seriously folks, most of what I get from the Red Hot Chili Peppers dashes those preconceived notions. I hardly imagine such magnanimous generosity, for one thing. After all, it takes a very giving group to invite a writer into the studio while still in process of recording an album. Not just any album, but BloodSugarSexMagik, the multi-million dollar dealer, their first with Warner Bros. after blowing off long-time label EMI.

And this is no sterile, ordinary studio either, but a purportedly haunted house in L.A.'s Laurel Canyon. The spook nest known as Big House has been prepared for the Peppers with fresh-cut flowers, equipment and instruments (including a grand piano, a toy grand piano and a didgeridoo), Lakers posters and a respectfully thumbed copy of thier bible, Modern Primitives. Quite a nurturing environment, conducive not only to recording but big-time male bonding. As if any is necessary. Both Balley Boy guitarist John Frusciante, the die-hard fan who replaced the late Hillel Slovak, and Detroit drummer Chad Smith, who stomped in after Jack Irons dropped out as a way to deal with Slovak's lethal overdose in 1988, are born Peppers. Despite the former's marked resemblance to Bambi and the latter's to a bandannaed Saskwatch.

On the afternoon of my visit, producer Rick Rubin is not evidence, but a number of shuffling knob-twisters types are, plus the ubiquitous Brit with a video camera who's been filming the entire time ("But it's not going to be a Rockumentary", affirms front-Pepper Anthony Kiedis. "It's a cockumentary.") Before you start hurling accusations of misogyny, let me assure you there are ladies present. A bubbly, bustiered hair dresser. A silent, mini-skirted blonde who never raises her eyes and whose sole function seems to be ashtray emptying. A publisist with an eager smile and a smattering of braids. Most charming of all, a lovely, articulate young woman who keeps all the burners blazing in the kind of dream kitchen that would tent Graham Kerr's apron.

So why do the Chili Peppers let a journalist invade their idyll? "Because we're proud. We're proud of every note in every song" say Michael Balzary--- that's Flea to you. The bass player is buzzed close to the brain these days and sports one of those Mr.Ziffel chin shrubs that begs to be yanked. "We're tighter than a hemorrhoid on a mosquito's ass" adds Anthony for emphasis. The man that some see as a cross between Peter Pan and Killer Bob has dressed for this occasion. he's wearing pants.

But it's time to bring the noise. One of the aforementioned konb-twisters, who looks rather pleased after beating Chad at a heated bout pf ping-pong, twists some knobs. The Chili's have 25 tracks from which to choose for the LP. There are signature songs like "BloodSugarSexMagik," a pure Peppers slam job with an animal growl to the verse; the scratchy funk of "Give it Away"; the sonaztee "Sir Psycho Sexy" and "Suck My Kiss" (subtitled, Anthony tells me, "Lullaby in C Minor").

Interspersing and anticipated thrash-and-the-funk things are more novel numbers. These fellows have embraced modern musical eclecticism with a vengeance they allegedly reserve for Southern co-eds. "I Could Have Lied" must have hit them like gravity hit newton: It's---are you sitting down?---a power ballad, all pat prettiness and hard-over delicate guitar textures. Swoon, Swoon! The Moodier "Under the Bridge" is all about angst, a lonely L.A. love and loss song. Darn, and I left out my hankie in my other bra!

Coverwise, the Peppers perfect the Stooges' "Search & Destroy"; it's a blistering (though, unfortunately, left off the album) They laid down a couple of Hendrix tunes, too---look for them to pop up somewhere else, but also not on this disc. The oddest offering is the rip-roaring, foot-stomping version of Robert Johnson's "They're Red Hot," which was recorded outside on the ground of the Big House... until an irate neighbor came tearing down from an adjacent yard, spewing all manner of awful threats.

As we sit there, listening, my editors and I, something happens. Something magical. And a little bit scary. The short hairs--- stand up. No, it's not the ghosts of Big House. It's what takes place when the Red Hot Chili Peppers assemble to revel in their glory. There's a snap in the air like the first rumble of a thunderstorm or a fart-lighting contest. Electric. Tribal. Mindless. Indefinable but undeniable. It's there as Chad whacks gleefully at air drums and grows more pungent when Flea goes into an impromptu kick-ass kizatzke. Suppressing a squirm, I eye the exit. As I do, the publicist pokes her head in and apologetically informs Flea that there is no salad. "Anything, something; never met a food I didn't like, tofu to pig butt" he responds. A bowl of bite-sized melon pieces appears instantly. The spell is broken.

The editors, engineers and fruit-bearers leave the room---hurriedly, it seems---and, alone with the Peppers, I find another suprising facet revealed: They have enormous civic pride. Oh, I know their songs about sprawling pinkopolis they call home and assume it's concern over the area's water shortage that makes them shun rudimentary personal hygiene practices. But when I express interest in migrating Angelward, I'm stuck on the emotion of Anthony's advice. "Don't. There are too may fuckin New Yorkers here. Are you Catholic? Well, if you move here you have to promise you'll use birth control. We don't want you to breed."

This love for Los Angeles, however doesn't extend to every 'hood. "The Valley is the worst fuckin place on the planet," says John with wide-eyed, earnest intensity and plaid shirt to Match. "Nothing but malls. Shopping is God. But I am glad I grew up there because I just locked myself in my room and played guitar". Inspired, Flea pipes up: "Yeah, this guy comes up to me the other day and goes "Dewd! Dew-ewd! Aren't you Flea from the Red Hot Chili Peppers? Hey, like, y'know, I went to high

school with John Frusciante! Yeah, and, like, everyone said he was pret-tee weird but I always knew - I knew he was cool!"

Approving snickers for Flea's convincing Valspeak quickly fade. The Peppers understand the importance of this interview. They know the indignation of a Dolly Parton, and other tabloid targets who want to be appreciated for thier art and not thier antics. Okay. Fine. Let's talk music. So what about their decision to work with Rick Rubin? Anthony explains it had nothing to do with changing record companies and that initally he had reservations "because he's a goat's-head worshipper---he's produced people like Slayer and Danzig. An aside on that: I happen to know that Glen Danzig has to get his parent's permission to drink goat's blood."

But he disgresses. Getting back to the topic at hand, he launches into a spiel about how the affection and respect the Peppers feel for each other feeds their music. Then to demonstrate these fundamental democratic principles, says without segue: "I'm going to let John expound upon the way we recorded the album."

\*Silence\*

"John! Expound!

"Oh. Um. Er..." John begins to reiterate the love-and-beauty rhetoric. Which is not what Anthony wants. With a somewhat weary sigh, he's forced to take the floor again. Eventually, I get the point. It was recorded live. Like they invented it, as the zealous tone entering Anthony's deadpan impiles. "Well, we used really old equipment," he enthuses. "Our Neve board is from the Fifties.

Not that they couldn't afford state-of-the-art, what with the major buck Warners happily forked over and a Nike "What is Cool?" commercial cameo that couldn't have come cheap. But Anthony is nothing if not modest; he won't give details. "We're wealthy," he says. "Emotionally and financially." Humility, in fact, is another unexpected side to the Chili Peppers. Flea gets all shy when Anthony brings up his thespianism in My Own Private Idaho, hipster director Gus Van Sant's new movie. They're equally reticent when it comes to discussing their sex-symbol status.

Physique-flaunting is a Pepper trademark; at least they could teach Jane Fonda a few new tricks. "Yeah, I've been working on being a little scrawny guy all my life," says Flea, demeanor demure as a seminary-student-cum-centerfold-model. Even Anthony needs coaxing when it comes to the etymology of his nickname, Swan. "It's because my cock is shaped like the neck of a Swan," he finally admits.

I haven't seen such coy evasive tactics since I spoke to Milli Vanilli. Gosh, I'm stymied. Forget about probing Anthony, the formerly pickeled Pepper, on how it feels to be substance-free. The prickly subject of which Peppers are wanted in what states, and the specifics of said funky crimes---I don't think so. Going for an easy one, I ask the band, an institution since 1984, to tell me about their fans. "I happen to know that the entire L.A. Lakers basketball team worships the ground we walk on" says Anthony. "And Public Enemy, Mick Jagger, Barbara Bush.....".

John interrupts with a giggle and describes what he'd like to do to the First Lady, an act that would require so many left-out letters (per the dictated style of this magazine) as to be unintelligible.

"But she's got a pearl necklace on," whines Chad.

"I'd like to give her a pearl necklace!" exclaims Flea.

To further throw the attention off themselves, Anthony asks me some questions about myself: "Are you a nasty girl? Do you liked to be spanked? Can you deep throat?". And he's not just interested in me personally, but professionally, too: "Are you a good editor? 'Cause you're not going to be able to use much of this".

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