

Red Hot Chili Peppers - Peppers Are A Motley Crew

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Yes, we live in strange times. Imagine 400 otherwise normal people going crazy over an Australian-American-Israeli white funk band doing the ``African Ghost Dance" and calling themselves the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Oh Dem Freaky Styley boys, dese white boys on funk and currently out of Hollywood, are just about the silliest bunch of rascals this side of Pluto, but they cemented their strong Houston following Wednesday night at Rockefeller's with enough flash and trash to send a standing-room crowd home into the cold drizzle happy as loons.

This was their third-to-last show on a two-month tour, so the Peppers were perhaps more wrinkled than usual. Nevertheless, as bassist ``Flea" told me in a recent phone conversation, we are to take their music, if not their antics, ``seriously."

A drum roll please, for background: Flea, of aboriginal descent, was born in Australia and moved to Southern California at the proverbial young age. ``Long Daddy Slow" Slovak, the guitarist, was born in Israel. Drummer Cliff ``Sloeman Dog Style" Martinez and lead vocalist Anthony Kiedis, who looked like some mad surf warrior Wednesday night, are of the American Midwest.

A couple of years ago the boys, all in other Southern California bands, took up a friend's offer to do a 15-minute outrageous shtick at the friend's Los Angeles nightclub. Whadaya know, the shtick stuck. People started talking, the boys dumped their other projects, and a band was born.

They cut a self-titled debut album produced by Andy Gill (Gang of Four) that they were totally unhappy with. Seems Gill wanted them to be some sort of Gang-style avant-heavy deep thinking punk-funksters.

Enter George Clinton, the supreme funkmaster himself behind all those Parliament/Funkadelic projects. He was impressed with these Chili boys, liked their groove. He wound up producing the new LP, ``Freaky Styley", capturing the funk but freeing the fun.

Aware that sex sells, the Red Hots developed a show full of intense sleaze and tease. Forewarned of their wild ways, Rockefeller's served cocktails in plastic cups Wednesday, a nod to proletarianism for this swanky joint. Whether it was to protect the band or the crowd we're not sure.

Aware also that looks are important these days, the Peppers came out bare-chested. No hairy guys need apply.

The music, seriously now, was heavy-handed trouble funk and a little rapping relying pretty much on the same beat through the one-hour set. Kiedis projected a nifty vocal range that dropped occasionally to that low honk of Omar Dykes of Austin's Omar & The Howlers. Slovak squealed out some heavy metal-cum-Hendrix riffs.

The music had a definite groove, the show was entertaining, but the boys have their limitations. After a while, it all sounded the same.

But that's their style. Seriously.

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