

Red Hot Chili Peppers - Chili Peppers Dish Up Bare Bravado

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Anthony Kiedis still remembers the first time the Red Hot Chili Peppers performed naked.

"We were playing at the Kit Kat Klub," the hyperkinetic singer said this week, recalling the band's early days on the L.A. rock circuit. "I stepped out and everybody else (in the band) had their guitars in front of them, and I just had a mike cord. I've looked at footage that somebody shot, and I can see that I am on another plateau.

"You really do step into a state of hypnotic transcendental meditation situation. It's all about freedom. It's like being in heaven for a little while."

The Peppers' penchant for stripped-down display is just one manifestation of the uninhibited, over-the-top approach that propelled the quartet to the top of the L.A. rock heap. From there, it was a short step to a major-label contract with EMI-America Records, and the combination clicked like the Christians and Muslims in Beirut.

"Conflicts," summarized Kiedis, who leads the Chili Peppers into battle tonight at the Palace and Friday at Fender's Ballroom. Their major complaint at the moment is that the company didn't finance a video from the second album, "Freaky Styley," because of a disagreement with the band over which song to release as a single.

More generally, said Kiedis, 23, "They want us to fit into AOR (album-oriented radio) or adult contemporary or pop radio or whatever. . . . They're pressuring us to write something more accessible, something that fits into a category, and I think we're incapable of doing anything other than what we do exactly."

This combo might be crude and comical, but it backs its bravado with a searing funk-rock sound that bears traces of punk energy and attitude. It was good enough to convince funk avatar George Clinton to produce "Freaky Styley," which came out last fall.

The punk comes from "the fact that we've been on the streets of Hollywood for the last 13 years," and from the presence of bassist Michael (Flea) Balzary, who was a long-time member of L.A. hardcore kingpins Fear.

Flea, Kiedis and guitarist Hillel Slovak were all pals at Fairfax High, and while Balzary and Slovak were playing music (they were both in What Is This before Flea jumped to Fear), Kiedis was studying writing at UCLA and following in the footsteps of his father, actor Blackie Dammett ("He wasted Dutch Schultz's gang in 'The Cotton Club,' " said Kiedis, citing one of his dad's recent credits).

Kiedis segued into the music scene by introducing his friends' bands at shows and by rapping his poetry to the funkier riffs Balzary and Slovak could devise (former Weirido Cliff Martinez completes the current lineup). They dubbed their sideline the Chili Peppers and started playing local clubs, where their outrageous antics made them a prime attraction. As a major-label band, they've continued to rely on heavy touring to spread the word.

Said Kiedis: "You can put music down on vinyl and have it distributed and put on the radio as much as possible, but that doesn't really capture the essence of this particular band. I think that whe

n people see us live they're really genuinely moved in a serious way and see what we're really about." EMI-America executives got a firsthand look at what the Chili Peppers are about shortly after the group came to the label.

"They still hadn't introduced us to the president or vice-presidents -- they were a little afraid of introducing us," Kiedis recalled. "We'd show up every now and then and we were becoming the house favorites among the secretaries and janitors there, but nobody would introduce us to the bigwigs.

"They had a big board meeting of their international heads or whatever, people from Chicago, New York, Miami, London. They were all sitting around this big giant oak table, they had their briefcases out. Michael and I went into the office right next door and took off all our clothes including our shoes and ran into the meeting and did a freaky styley (dance) and tap-danced across the table and basically put everybody into rigor mortis for about five minutes.

"We ran out of there as fast as we could and we sat in the park . . . and we thought for a while that we might be excommunicated from our record label, but we called up our manager and he said everything was still cool. They didn't know how to react. They didn't have enough guts to fire us. They were in shock. But at least we got to see them and meet them."

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