

Malibu-Magazine

Interviewer: Jordan Tappis

I had the privilege of sitting down with Anthony Kiedis, chief lyricist and lead vocalist of The Red Hot Chili Peppers. Within minutes of beginning our cyber discussion, I became hyperaware that I was in the presence of a changed man, that is, an individual whose experimental struggle for survival has crystallized his personal evolution. Kiedis possesses a unique blend of honesty and eloquence I have never before encountered in the interview setting. One gets the sense that he has nothing to hide, that somewhere along the road of perseverance, most of the walls that separate humans from one another had been knocked down. He seemed completely unafraid to expose himself regardless of the outcome - a rather bold position given his professional status. I was especially impressed by Kiedis' candor as we discussed the ups and downs of his enigmatic music career, his acclaimed autobiography *Scar Tissue*, the joys of becoming a father, his much publicized struggle with drugs and alcohol, and the forced humility that comes with beginning something new. Enjoy.

Jordan Tappis: How are you today, sir?

Anthony Kiedis: I'm a little sore in the back and shoulders from yesterday's long-board session. It was a super easy, family-style break, so I know the ache will pass by the time I'm sippin' my second cup. My 3-month-old son, who was cuddled under my arm, woke up before I did today, so I got to come to to the sounds of his "coos" and "cahs." His smile hits me in the eyes like little cupid arrows. I can't complain. Looking out the window I see the North Shore of Oahu with an unobstructed view of Pipeline. This has to be one of nature's best winter water shows on earth, and it puts me in a mood of humbled promise. I'd better say a prayer and meditate on being a more patient and loving boyfriend today. Yesterday, I was a bit of a jerk.

JT: What were your childhood dreams / aspirations?

AK:In some ways, my childhood is still tapering, so the dreams and aspirations keep coming. I do remember returning home to Michigan from a father/visit/trip to 1969's Los Angeles and telling my best friend, Joe, that it was only a matter of time before I would be moving to California to fulfill my destiny as a movie star. It was a sign of many fruitless shortcuts to come -- skip the whole learning-a-craft bit and get right into the movie star role. A few years later, I tapped into the science of life and thought I could become an adventurous marine biologist who would work with all sorts of nature's underwater creations. At the genius age of 11, I had gone to a low budget marine institute on the island of Bimini in the Bahamas. Seeing sawfish, sharks and dolphins had a heavy impact on my imagination. Next came the "I think I want to be a singer" dream when I was about 13 years old. Driving around with my psychedelic dad in his '61 Austin Heely, I would get right into it with the radio and sing along with the likes of Barry Manilow and Carl Douglas(*Kung-Fu fighting*). I also had occasion to witness Iggy Pop on stage at The Whiskey in the early/mid-'70s, as well as shows by Blondie, The Psycho Sluts, Deep Purple and The Turtles. Oddly enough, that dream completely faded. I didn't rehash it again for another five years or so, which at that point was a quarter of my life span. As for my aspirations, I think they changed with the wind. I really wasn't into aspiring. I liked skateboarding, but mainly because the was the most fun way of getting places. I liked the company of older women for the same reason I liked skateboarding. I suppose if I get more thoughtful about this question, there are some other things that come up. I aspired to see that my father was safe and successful. I aspired to roam the world doing things my way and not to get caught. We can revisit this later if you like.

JT: What experience /artist sparked your intitial love of music and how did it manifest?

AK: Inspiration is a weird thing. People expect music to be inspired by other music. Sometimes it is and sometimes it's 101 other things that turn you on to the magic of creating song and sound out of thin air--thin air, which is actually rich in spirit, rhythms, feelings, melodies, and possibly even preexisting tunes from other dimensions.

For the record, I just realized I misread the question--"initial love of music." My mom played music in the house on Paris Street in Grand Rapids, Mich., from 1969 to 1973. She wasn't spinning the cutting edge of the era, but as she cleaned the house, we would hear Carly Simon, Rod Stewart and Carole King. It wasn't enough to turn my interest toward playing music, but it did soothe my heart. A.M. radio of that same era got me pretty pumped up singing along to *Long Cool Woman in a Black Dress* and *Brandy*, but I think it was hearing *Frankenstein* by Edgar Winter in the middle of the night that kind of revved my little engine into a realm of inspiration. Still, there was no definitive connection with the artist that made me want to craft a jam.

It wasn't until after moving to West Hollywood in 1973, into the bungalow dwelling of my father, where the world's most interesting artists and streetniks would actually gather, that I started identifying with the sparks that would later come to life in my own musical experience. Even then I remained more driven to skate, alter my mind, dream about girls and run roughshod with my amigos. Going to shows with my dad was enlightening, but it didn't yet click. Going to see Black Flag and Devo, and Echo and the Bunnymen was as mind expanding as a newborn baby taking his first steps, but it wasn't until I fell in love with a band called Defunkt at age 19 that I finally connected the dots to the point where I knew I wanted to make other people feel the way this band was making me feel. At that same time, I was living with Flea, who was playing music in a band called What Is This. We discovered a flood of new music that drove us into elation nightly. Then I got a hold of a Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five cassette tape and I know that my career path had been paved--paved with what and whom, I had no idea. Anyway, it was a combination of everything that worked its way into why I would eventually start rhyiming and thinking in terms of song. Living on the streets, a love for my comic heroes at that time (the Marx Brothers, Woody Allen, Richard Pryor and The Three Stooges), my fascination with the spiritual electricity caused by dancing, and even the colors of the Hollywood sunrises. A tightknit brotherhood was a defining factor as well. My friends Flea, Jack Irons and Hillel Slovak being right by my side was huge, as in eventually I caught the bug by proxy, osmosis and a contagious blend of lucky stars. I know that this answer is all over the place, but that's life.

JT: Do you have any notable career highlights?

AK: Career highlights ...they come when you least expect them and often when no one is looking--well, no one except your Maker. Show No. 1 at the Rhythm Lounge was highlight No. 1. We played one song because we had only one song. The club promoter asked us back the next week and humbly requested that we bring two songs. We obliged. Highlight No. 2 was recording a five-song demo tape for \$300 produced by Spit Sticks (the drummer of Fear). We haven't topped that recording yet.

The staggering amount of highlights and lowlights that came to pass over the next 25 years was astronomical--life, death, resurrection and everything in between. Eventually, I came to realize that the ultimate highlights took place when we were in our funky little North Hollywood rehearsal space called The Alley. The highlights were, in fact, the moment that creation took place. Sometimes that would happen on my end when I was alone driving and the right words came to me, or the emotionally correct melody to rub righteously across John's inventive chord would make itself known. They happened when Flea would plug in and begin to play a bass line that he had been mining the night before, and we all knew what to do. Those are the highlights where you feel as if you actually got a smile out of God.

The other weird highlights were fun, too, but not nearly as long-lasting. You can get a soulful rush out of being part of live performances where everybody becomes a carpet of connected energy. Sometimes watching songs take on lives of their own all across the lands can feel exhilarating. For me, even something as transient as selling records can be

a highlight-at least for a moment. I know what the real highlights are. I feel fortunate that I don't have to feel compromised regardless of commercial success. My abilities and options as singer/songwriter are limited to the inspiration I am able to find. I am not versatile enough to be able to create something for the wrong reasons. I also feel like by the time we all have our say with a song it has been protected by musical democracy. My band loves the oneness with creation. I can tell when we're all in that moment when we're strolling down the path of highlights. I believe the option exists for our finest highlights still to come.

Other more listable career highlights:

- *Patti Smith joining us on stage for a show in London
- *The moment we bonded with Rick Rubin as our producer
- *John Frusciante returning to the band in early 1999
- *Singing with George Clinton on stage at The Palladium
- *Living with George Clinton in Detroit in 1984-85 as he produced our second record *Freaky Styley*
- *Jack Irons returning to the band for *Uplift Mofo Party Plan*
- *Finding Chad Smith in a sea of drummers

JT: The RHCP have been very successful for more than two decades, but *Californication* seemed to have taken your band to a whole other level globally speaking. Since then, RHCP have been one of the most successful rock bands on the planet. In your eyes, why was *Californication* so well received and how have your guys been able to maintain this level of success despite the difficulties of the record industry?

AK: Strange question. First of all, everybody has their own weird understanding of what success is. I'm pretty sure it is a much broader and more mysterious concept than we tend to give it credit for. This may sound cavalier to say, but I thought we were on top of the world in 1983 when we were headlining the Kit Kat Klub on Santa Monica Boulevard. I felt so positive about our approach to generating music and performance that I was certain we would continue to win the world over as we marched onward and upward. It wasn't, however, to win the favor of the world that excited me about being in our band. It didn't repel me either. I never felt compromised by doing well commercially. It seemed to me that we were given a certain connection to the stars that made our chemistry magical, and what we did was compelled to come from an authentic place regardless of our earthly egos. Anyway, let it rain double-edged swords and two-sided coins-it's all part of the bargain.

Californication came from a great pool of tragic misadventures. Our band was in an unplanned freefall. We had no guitar player, there had been talk of calling it quits and I was roaming the limbos of relapse. Then Flea came to me and said, "I think John might want to come back to the band." A month later we were hunkered down in Flea's Los Feliz garage hammering out songs both hard and soft. We were a badly injured animal that had to rely on each other to survive, and the effect was true love in the music-a rare wave of resurrection that would sail us to new places 'round the world. At this time, we also took on some new managers, Cliff Burnstein and Peter Mensch, who were ready to make some shit happen. I'm pretty sure when people heard *Californication*, whether they knew it or not, they were connecting with that feeling of a near-death experience. It was the joy of making it through tough times to dance once more in the light of nature's majesty-or the first time in our "bandscape" we became embraced on new levels in places like England, Italy and Scandinavia-places unlike America where they tend to stick by your side for life. Anyway, it was a kind of juggernaut that we rode-right into the writing of our next record, *By the Way*. Round 2 of being back was a completely different experience, a more difficult one, and the process of which I enjoyed just as much. As for the music industry, I'm not really the right guy to ask. This amount of self-analysis is already a bit beyond my limit. I don't think our survival is contingent on the business as much as it is on our willingness to grow and change artistically. That combined with working to keep the ego in a healthy place and anything is possible.

JT: Among other things, *Scar Tissue* was a book that addressed your addiction to drugs and alcohol. Was this a therapeutic experience for you? Was that part of your intention?

AK: Like so many things, it started out to be one thing and rather turned out to be something else. *Scar Tissue*, the book, took on a life of its own, that was in some ways beyond what I could have planned for. The initial idea was to tell my story. Everybody has one. I had been telling mine piecemeal to a friend until one day he said, "Why don't you write a book?" I liked the idea capturing my colorful upbringing in West Hollywood's 1970's, a kind of renegade father/son story that would blossom into an artistic explosion of highs and lows. I knew from the get-go that I would have to tell the whole truth as best as I was capable of and that certainly included my experience with drugs and alcohol. I would also attempt to bring light to the condition that welcomed self-destruction into my life: a sneaky brand of mental illness, commonly referred to as alcoholism.

Telling the truth about yourself is always therapeutic. That wasn't really my intention though. I had already been through telling the darkest side of my story to other people who shared my desire to stop drinking and using. That is something that contributed to my ability to do almost anything productive including the writing of *Scar Tissue*. What I didn't foresee was just how much people would end up relating to the struggle side of my story. I thought people would find my child's-eye perspective of the 70's and 80's to be the fascinating aspect of the book, but the majority of comments I hear are from people who are either in the process of dealing with addiction or are close to someone who is. *Scar Tissue* seems to be the often-preferred reading for rehabs these days. So, the long-term worth of my autobiography will probably turn out better than my original intentions, and for that I am thankful.

JT: Did you ever imagine it would be as well received as it was?

AK: There were a few surprises in store. One was that I forgot to envision that people would actually read this thing and end up knowing way too much about me, my friends and some of our situations. When a stranger comes up to me on the street and says, "Hey, I just read your book," I immediately feel like they know too much—certainly more than I know about them. It wasn't until I realized it had been found its place in the institutions of recovery that I felt it had served a more interesting and meaningful purpose. I generally suggest that my friends and family do not read *Scar Tissue*.

JT: As an adult, you seem to focus a lot of your time and energy helping kids and other adults understand their various addictions. Do you feel a human responsibility to help others who have found themselves in a similar position that you were in?

AK: Among other things, I make myself available to kids or anyone else who wants to deal with their addiction because someone had done the same for me. I am not on any kind of a crusade. There were people who helped me to get sober and to become open-minded to the idea of developing a spiritual lifestyle as a way of maintaining that sobriety. These people also explained to me that it was by helping me that they maintained their own sobriety.

JT: What has sobriety meant for you personally?

AK: Drugs and alcohol were an exciting shortcut to a false sense of well-being. They were like medicine to my spiritually deficient existence that stopped working and left me with an even bigger void. So, basically I loved them, but they didn't love me back. Most people can't relate to being powerless over mind-altering substances, so even some close friends give me the blank stare when I explain that I don't drink or use at all. I totally understand that reaction because I can't relate to what it might feel like to be schizophrenic or have manic depression. As for being in the stride of change, I love the recovery path. We all have a path and this one just happened to speak to me.

JT: Tell me a little about getting married and finding love. Were you looking for it when it happened?

AK: What makes you think I'm married? I've actually never been married. As for love, hmmm...I think I'm always looking for love. Love is a many-splendored thing. Being in love with life is part of my genome, and for that I thank my lucky stars. My rollercoaster of love with my baby's mama, Heather, hasn't been a smooth road to paradise, but clearly what I needed. We give each other the opportunity to learn and change all the time. Plus she's kinda cute. Our union took on a new and more selfless meaning when we became Mommy and Papi. Talk about a new frontier.

JT: How has becoming a father changed you?

AK: I am open for change. My whole life, I've been thinking in terms of how I can take care of myself-for better or worse. Before having the boy, it was explained to me that I needn't fear the responsibility of fatherhood, and that I would end up receiving way more freedom than I imagined I might be losing. It's true. Having a boy really helps to get me out of petty self-indulgences that I may slip into from day to day. Not to mention that it's pure fun. Waking up to the 10,000-watt smile is enough to fill my heart with baby light for the day. I guess it helps me to resolve all varieties of petty issues much quicker than in the past-less time for nonsense.

JT: Preparing for your son's birth must have been quite a process for you? Did you spend all of your days and nights studying the baby books or are you running on instinct?

AK: Running on instinct and a lifetime's worth of preparation. I got about two paragraphs into a parenting book and felt like it wasn't for me. People love to throw advice around and although I listen with an open mind, I don't always connect with it. My mom told me the coolest thing about how her dad was kind and patient. I'll take that to heart.

JT: I'm planning on sending my first son to ninja school at age 2, linguistic academy at 7, surf camp at 10 and then either the Peace Corps or the French Foreign Legion at 17. Do you have any preset plans for Everly or are you going to be a traditionalist and allow him to choose his own path?

AK: I don't know about traditionalist...I think I'll make it up as I go along. I'm sitting here with Cash and Edie, ages 11 and 7, who both said in unison, "Let him do whatever he wants to do." I want to provide a stress-free environment for Everly Bear to trip out and have fun in. He will get to choose his tools and I will get to offer him lots of options. My friend Shane accuses me of being the keeper of the Mogli heart. That is maybe one of the nicest things that anyone has ever said to me. I'd like to think that I will be able to share that spirit of adventure with my boy. So far, he seems like a real lover of life just like his papa. Smile.

JT: After numerous attempts, you've finally become a dedicated surfer. Having grown up in Southern California, how come it's taken you so long and what was it about this experience that made it stick? How big of a role does it play in your everyday life?

AK: That is a riddle wrapped in a mystery skewered by an enigma slathered with a travesty. Growing up in West Hollywood with a father from Michigan, the idea of getting interactive with the ocean just didn't enter the picture. Then I got into every other thing under the Hollywood sun and surfing wasn't even on my radar. In 1990, I took a small role in the movie *Point Break*, and for the first time got formally introduced to the waves. I felt like Jerry Lewis doing an impersonation of Chevy Chase-it just didn't click. For the next 17 years, I would try it once here, once there, and never get anywhere. It turns out that surfing requires a commitment at the very least.

Last year, I moved to Malibu and started to slowly but surely become friends with the Pacific Ocean. It started speaking to me and telling me to overcome my dislike for cold water and the unbridled energy of the waves. Then something magical happened: I got out of my own way and on a warlike day during the brushfires in early autumn of 2007, my friend Takuji gave me some much needed teaching, and took me out into a good size swell. It clicked. This old dog took up a new trick. I found the feeling in the water that I had been unable to find for almost 20 years. I was riding waves. I could go on forever about the beauty that surfing has brought into my life, but that may not translate. One of the coolest things about it has been the new friends who came with this blast of enthusiasm-your friend [artist] Sage Vaughn being one of them. Living the life of a touring musician can sometimes isolate you from the joy of brotherhood. Surfing is giving that back to me.

JT: You said that you recently moved to Malibu. How do you like it and what is the main difference between Malibu and everywhere else you've lived?

AK: Somewhere in the back of my heart I knew that I'd have to move to Malibu eventually. Of course, like so many newcomers to the northern rural areas of L.A. County, I thought I'd keep a place in the city as well. I sold my city house about a month after living in Malibu. I got a new pair of glasses to see the world with when I moved to The Point. I used to feel like such a visitor when I'd come to Malibu for a day or two. I couldn't even see the abundant magic of the place. It was like, well, gotta be home by 6 pm to do this and that. Now, I feel like I live in one of the cleanest, most enchanted neighborhoods in the USA. There are obvious holes in the landscape of living out here: good, healthy restaurant options, cultural variety and the lack of my urban-bound friends. It does, however, more than make up for the missing elements with dreamy energy that is always shifting. I don't get bored with nature.

JT: If you would be so kind, tell me something about yourself that nobody knows...

AK: I always wanted to make out with Dolly Parton