

Red Hot Chili Peppers - The Red Hot Chili Peppers Wipe The Slate Clean

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The tattoos of Red Hot Chili Peppers bassist Flea are - like most who have had body etchings over an extended period of time - a record of his life. He has one for his precious daughter, Clara, who just turned 10. At the other end of the scale he has another that was done by a friend who died last year. That same real life and just as real death polarity is precisely what makes the Chili Peppers' musical body clock tick.

That device is now keeping perfect time once again. The band that singer Anthony Kiedis once referred to as being "sacred" is back as one original soul core. The official double-headed announcements came fairly quietly in April last year. First up, the departure of inky dark lord guitarist Dave Navarro was confirmed. Just over three weeks later it was announced that John Frusciante, who left the outfit during a pre-Australian tour trip to Japan in 1992, was back in the Chili fold. And he's returned in classy, soulful style with the Rick Rubin-produced *Californication*.

"The Dave [Navarro] thing just wasn't working out," explains 36-year-old Flea -- a.k.a. Michael Balzary -- between sips of herbal tea. His hair has grown out to the size of small Afro. "Not his fault, not our fault; it just wasn't working chemically. It wasn't a tangible thing where I can say we did this or he did that; it just wasn't working, and we parted ways with him. We'd been pretty inactive for about a year. Dave and I had been in Jane's Addiction, and then I asked John if he wanted to come back to the band, and he said, 'Yes.' We started working with him, and it was just like boom! right away. We started writing songs, and then we cut the record. It was very easy, very fluid, very creative.

"It just feels like a rebirth. Right now we're in a really good place. There's a great feeling. I don't like to say the word 'rebirth' because I don't feel like we've gone anywhere; we've always been a band. But having [Frusciante] back ... I just think he's the best guitar player in the world, and so it's a real exciting thing for us."

CDNOW: Some people are meant to play in certain musical situations. Frusciante in the Chilis seems to be a perfect example.

Flea: He really is. He's so focused and so dedicated; he's inspiring to me. He just plays all the time. He gets up, gets out of bed, grabs the guitar, and starts playing. We were doing 12-hour days when we were recording, and we'd leave the studio, and John would go home and just write music [laughs]. Everyone else would be like [snoring noise]. "What did you do last night? I slept." [Answers as John] "Well, I wrote three songs." I just love playing with him so much. We have such an easy telepathic connection with music it's like we don't need to talk. We just pick it up and start doing it.

The Chilis have their dark places, but overall they're a strong uplifting force. Navarro, on the other hand, has made a career out of being anything but bright and shiny. Did that have something to do with the lineup reshuffle?

I can't say that because I feel like everyone has a dark and light side. Dave romances the darkness, and he finds that attractive and dresses all in black. He's like that. So I don't particularly see him as darker than the next person.

I can't really say why it didn't work out. Maybe you might understand it better than me, I don't know. I just know it's a lot easier to play with John. It's naturally easy, and with Dave, I know both of us always had to really kind of work to get into a place where we could create as opposed to "OK, let's play and go do it." It was never a flowing, natural thing. It had its moments, and I think there are parts of *One Hot Minute* that are great, but it came from different places and different ideas.

The new album feels and sounds as if you've wiped the slate clean and started afresh.

If you eliminated *One Hot Minute* and made another record after *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, it would be this record. This record picked up right where we left off with *Blood Sugar*, and I think we've grown a lot. It's a much more dynamic record. It's got a much more diverse array of sounds and feelings. It's just a very happy thing for us.

We wrote the record in my garage in my house in L.A. The beginning of last summer we got in the garage and started writing for about three or four months. Then we went and cut the record, and it took us just over three weeks to cut the whole record. The last record took us a year, through no-one's fault; we just weren't together. It's funny because it seems so simple and easy. You get together and write the music and record it, and that's how it went this time. It was just simple and easy, the way it should be. I feel like it's the best record we've ever made.

Tell me about the album's title.

At first I was a little hesitant about the title because I feel like we always get pegged as these California sex guys, but the song "*Californication*" is pretty much about the pervasive influence of Hollywood on the world and the sickness of it. Really, it's not about us guys being macho California studs at all. That's the last thing it's about. I was a little worried about it being misinterpreted in that way, but then you look at the cover, and it has the sort of Californian dream of having a swimming pool. Then it's all upside down, and the sky is in the pool, and the ocean is in the sky. I like it. It's an interesting sounding word.

One of the most noticeable aspects of *Californication* is that it's a band effort. It's fully integrated musically. There's no individual musical hero and no lead bass.

Definitely. As I grow as a musician I become less and less concerned with being a show off. I'm not saying one is better than the other; it's just where I'm at now. I'm less concerned with playing the coolest bass line that anyone's ever heard. I really

want to serve the song and do what's right for the song. I think we all have that attitude. It's a very balanced approach to the music.

Were there any great surprises in the final playback?

No, I knew what we were doing. The first week that we started recording we had an engineer, and we just didn't like the way it was sounding at all. We were all kind of scratching our heads going, "What the hell?" It sounded so good in the rehearsal room, and we were hearing it back and it just didn't sound right. We were like, "Are we fooling ourselves? Is this not great? What's the matter?" Then we got a new engineer and all of a sudden it sounded great. It was the first week we were kind of freaking out, so we scratched the first week.

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