

REVIEWS: DAVE MATTHEWS BAND ASWAD
BILL FRISELL QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE
Q&A: ART GARFUNKEL ETTA JAMES

**ALL PRAISE
SOLOMON BURKE**

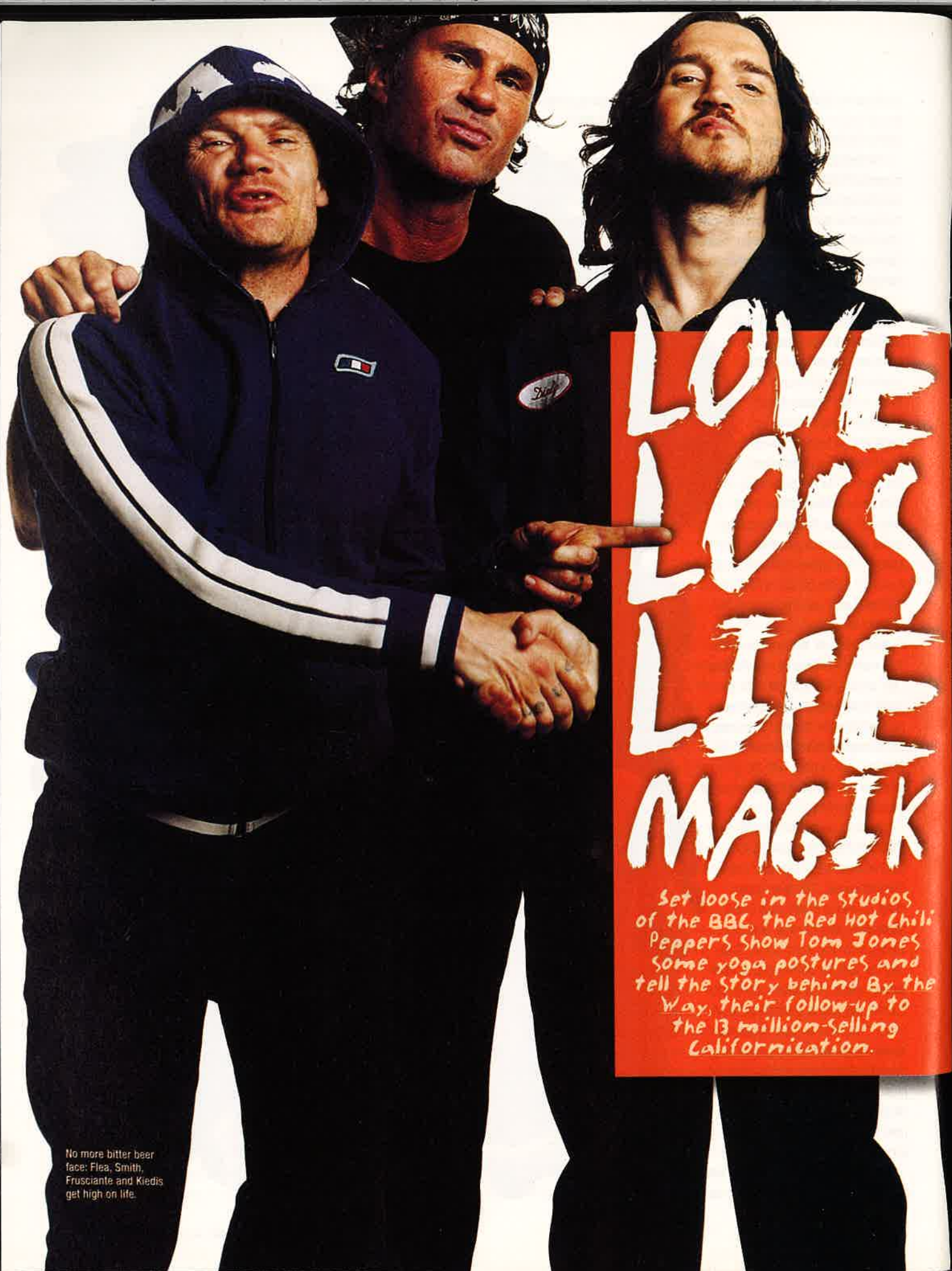
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DIVULSION



Red
Hot
Chili
Peppers

SONIC YOUTH SWEDISH ROCK FLAMING LIPS



LOVE LOSS LIFE MAGIK

Set loose in the studios of the BBC, the Red Hot Chili Peppers show Tom Jones, some yoga postures and tell the story behind *By the Way*, their follow-up to the 13 million-selling *Californication*.

No more bitter beer face: Flea, Smith, Frusciante and Kiedis get high on life.



JEFFREY BENDER



BY CHRIS CHANDAR An air of skittish anticipation surrounds the Red Hot Chili Peppers backstage at London's famed BBC studios. In their dressing rooms before a scheduled performance on *The Jonathon Ross Show*, the band members have caught wind of the evening's featured guest. Drummer Chad Smith walks up with a noticeably mischievous grin. "Did you bring your panties?" he queries, in pseudo-proper English. "Tom Jones is here," he explains, firing a gigantic, imaginary slingshot. Clearly amused, he proceeds down the hallway, grabbing the band's tour manager by the shoulders. "Tom Jones! Panties!" he pleads. "We need more panties!" In years past, that kind of backstage request could have yielded enough undergarments to engulf the Welsh superstar, but tonight, the pickings are slim. The once

debauchery-filled and devil-may-care lifestyle of the Red Hot Chili Peppers has given way to a decidedly quiet, and panty-free, pre-performance atmosphere. In his dressing room, Anthony Kiedis sips tea before performing his vocal exercises, emitting a series of loud, guttural "Yang, yang, yang's" heard throughout the hallway. In an adjacent room, guitarist John Frusciante is taking advantage of the provided stereo by blasting an eclectic mix, ranging from Mars Volta's "Cut that City" to Sam Cooke's "You Send Me," increasing the volume on the latter and turning to fellow band-member Flea. "This is a great song," he notes, as he sits intently in front of the speakers, closing his eyes and concentrating on each note as if it contained some cosmic secret. Flea listens, and then smiles as he watches Frusciante sway his lithe body back and forth.

Earlier in the day at their hotel, Kiedis perches on the edge of his seat, dressed in faded, black jeans and Moscow emblazoned T-shirt and permeated with an energy he describes as "relief, accomplishment and satisfaction." Moments before, the band heard the final mixes for "Can't Stop" and "Don't Forget Me," the last two songs for its new album, *By the Way* (Warner Bros.). Vocals for the songs were laid the prior week during a pit stop in New York, en route from L.A. to Rome, pushing their deadline to the absolute last minute. The album's completion marks the end of a long and exhausting road for Kiedis and company. "Basically, I have been focused on this every day of my life for about 400 days," he explains while calmly lowering his cup of green tea. "And it came out more beautifully than I could have ever expected."

The culmination of 14 months of dedicated work has resulted in the Red Hot Chili Pepper's eighth studio album (its fourth with its current lineup), and its most majestic and progressive offering. *By the Way* finds the band toying with a host of influences—everything from Latin to ska to the Phil Spector and Brian Wilson vocal styling of yesteryear. Listen closely and you'll hear Flea's trumpet playing, Frusciante's impromptu Wurliitzer chord changes, ambient and sparse electronic backdrops and plenty of warm string orchestration. The pioneering champions of today's unavoidable and wildly popular rap/rock/pop/punk/funk-sound have once again evolved. This, of course, should come as no surprise to fans who own the band's first record (which features a rendition of Hank Williams Sr.'s "Why Don't You Love Me") and have followed them since. Change, it seems, has been good to the band. "It's always been a part of who we are," explains Kiedis. "Multi-faceted, no boundaries as to what we can play. We feel comfortable playing anything in this band, which is a blessing."

Guitarist Flea, decked in full L.A. Lakers regalia and sporting bright blue hair, agrees. "We're always changing. I feel like just by being who we are and by playing the type of music that we play, we've never tried to do anything but what we are at a certain time. And I think that's why

people connect with us, because they know it's not contrived. People like that realness in music."

This fact was never more evident for the Peppers than with the overwhelmingly positive reaction received from 1999's *Californication*. Filled largely with contemplative and dirge-like ballads, the album surprised many when it went on to sell over 13 million copies worldwide. For the band, the album's success reaffirmed and solidified a band chemistry that was glaringly absent on 1995's darkly distorted *One Hot Minute*. The departure of former Jane's Addiction guitarist Dave Navarro opened the door for the return of a sober and rejuvenated John Frusciante, and the result was immediate.

"I pity the fool who is in a band that doesn't realize the value of chemistry," declares Kiedis. "Because I've been through a number of band changes and I know that beyond a shadow of a doubt, that is the single most important thing to a band, the way you affect one another creatively."

The return of Frusciante may have restored the band's chemistry, paving the way for the success of *Californication*, but Kiedis maintains that Navarro was not to blame for the poor reaction to *One Hot Minute*. "We just can't do what we do with anyone else other than the four [current] members in this band. And that was evidenced one more time when John left the band. We did our best to maintain, but we didn't have that chemistry. That's no fault of Dave Navarro's. It's just a matter of God-given chemistry."

For Frusciante, the success of *Californication* was a reward less satisfying than knowing that his place in the band was one of great importance. "I'm glad they noticed that," he says. "I'm glad that we're together and jamming and just getting along again."

While the band basked in the glory of the biggest album in its then-

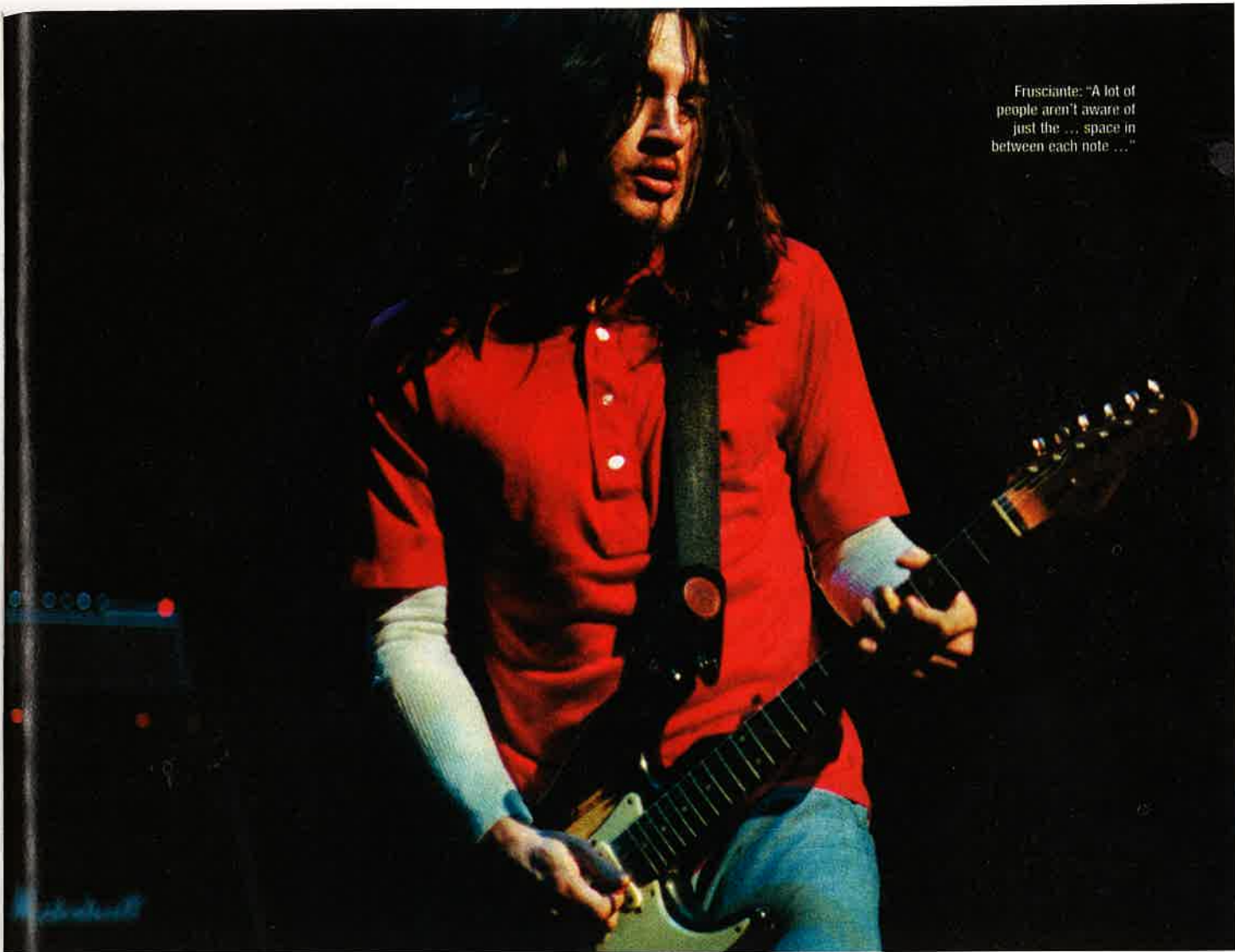
17-year career, for Flea the reward was bitter-sweet. "I couldn't really understand it," he says of the album's initial success. "I was too wrapped up in my own shit to see what was happening." Dealing with a difficult romantic break-up left Flea in an almost catatonic state, as he "zombied around from show to show." When he finally woke up, he realized the band was reaching heights not seen since the release of 1991's groundbreaking and career-launching *BloodSugarSexMagik*. That album's success, however, owed a lot to the youth-driven pop-culture upheavals that periodically send acts like Alanis Morissette soaring into the stratosphere only to return them at equal speed.

"We were a phenomenon back then," remembers Flea. "I mean, we were HUGE! Then, by the time we put out *Californication*, we weren't *that* at all. You know, Limp Bizkit were that. And whoever those bands are—Limp Bizkit or *N Sync, whoever. And for us to sell so many records [with *Californication*] at that time—it was really just on the strength of our

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Frusciante: "A lot of people aren't aware of just the ... space in between each note ..."

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music and who we were as human beings ... I could see so clearly that people were connecting with who we are—disconnected from just a bunch of rock-star-business trappings. It was a great feeling, a really good feeling. Now I just want to reciprocate and give the best that I can. And we want to give the best that we can as a band."

Last spring, the band began recording material in a Sunset Boulevard studio—an old Hollywood haunt nestled between film companies where "The Three Stooges" and other classics were once filmed. Fitted with a drum room the size of a gymnasium, the band took advantage of the available vintage analog equipment and, with the help of returning producer Rick Rubin, soon recorded over 30 basic tracks. Their spacious digs however, turned out to be a bit too spacious, as modern technology allowed for a Pro Tools computer, compression devices and microphone to occupy only a small portion of the room.

"We thought, 'What's the point in staying in this huge expensive place,'" explains Kiedis, "'when we could just move into a hotel room that we're comfortable at, that we could decorate to our liking, and spend the next month doing vocals there?' And so we moved to the Chateau Marmot, which is probably the nicest hotel in L.A. It was built in 1931—just beautiful architecture, beautiful vibe, warm, artistic flow to it. Lots of interesting people—pretty girls coming and going. And John was living there at that time, so he was down the hall. If I had a question, if I had a melody to run by him, show him a lyric, he was already there. It

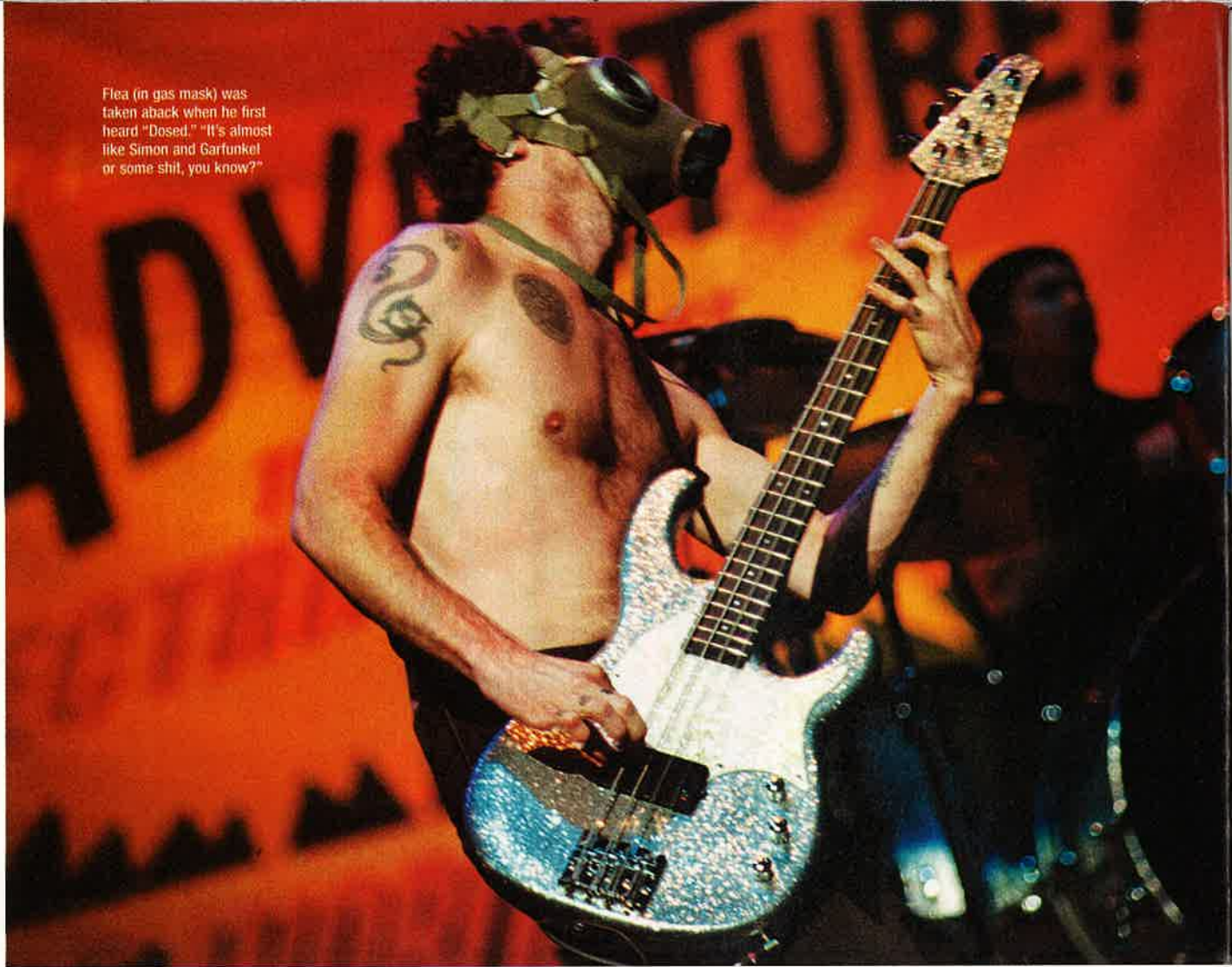
just made sense. It seemed like a cool approach. I set up my mic in the bedroom of this hotel suite, decorated it with my vintage movie posters. I had an Andy Warhol painting on the wall—I just kind of got into it."

In fact, during the recording of *Californication*, it was Kiedis who had lived at the Marmot, which became infamous as the last stop for a drug-addled John Belushi. The hotel's exotically morbid history, however, was the last thing on the band's mind. They were spared from the pestered haunting of any existing ghosts—even their own. "We moved there because it was a convenient and comfortable environment to be in," explains drummer Chad Smith. "It was like being in a bedroom and recording, instead of a studio, which tends to be a bit sterile." For Kiedis, the familiar and comfortable setting may have rooted itself in the album somewhere. "We were, for the most part, totally at ease there and that's probably reflected in the sound."

For the band, the crafting of new songs is always a natural progression—the result of days of jamming, improvising and playing with new sounds. Their initial concept was to further the experimentation with harmony that began on *Californication*. Frusciante describes how producer Rick Rubin came to him during that album's post-production with a devilish 3 a.m. grin. "Rick was like, 'John! John! What would it sound like if we put a vocal harmony on this chorus?'" remembers Frusciante. "I was like 'Well, I don't know. Let's try it.'" The band eventually liked it enough to try them on a few of the songs, namely "Around the World"

Flea (in gas mask) was taken aback when he first heard "Dosed." "It's almost like Simon and Garfunkel or some shit, you know?"

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and "Other Side." "On this record, it was something we actually knew we were going to do before we went into the studio. We started plotting and scheming on those parts in the rehearsal period, and obviously took it to a whole different level," Kiedis says.

An entirely different sound can be heard on the songs "Universally Speaking," "Venice Queen" and "Tear," as Frusciante's vocals are pushed to the forefront with a surprising emphasis on pop standards from the '50s and '60s. "John is one of my favorite singers in the world," explains Kiedis. "He's got such a unique and extraordinary voice. It seemed like a real shame and a waste not to use it whenever possible in our own recording." On the song "Dosed," the two share vocal responsibilities, resulting in a bittersweet duet. "I think we sound good together—we have an innate sense for phrasing and tone that works well together." Flea was taken aback when he first heard the song. "It's almost like Simon and Garfunkel or some shit, you know?" he laughs. "The two of them are really going for it and it's a beautiful thing."

Elsewhere, their voices complement each other to arrive at an even more overtly antiquated sound. "'Tear' is a definite wall of Beach Boys-esque harmonies," confesses Kiedis. "The funny thing is that John and I have been listening to a lot of doo-wop for the past 3 1/2 years. I'd been listening to it even earlier than that, and I'm really just moved by the melodies and the whole vocal styling."

Frusciante became enamored as well, devoting hours to studying

doo-wop, vintage Beach Boys and such girl groups as the Ronettes and the Crystals. "John took it upon himself to become a student of vocal harmony and listened to all these harmonies . . . he went back and started studying the Beach Boys and kind of found the joy of their harmonizing."

"He's always exploring new kinds of music and getting in there deep," confirms Smith. "Not like listening for pleasure, he really is a student of music."

For Frusciante, it's a labor of love. "I really started to pay close attention to the songs and the harmonies. Because a lot of people aren't aware of just the . . . space in between each note," he pauses to use grand hand gestures to explain his point.

Clearly at ease with their surroundings and each other's company, the Peppers complemented their musical evolution with unequivocally honest lyrics, which often concern love, an approach Flea admits is "usually the scariest route to take." An obviously growing sentimentality is at the heart of "I Would Die for You," "Dosed" and "The Zephyr Song." Take, for example, the chorus to the latter: "*Fly away on my zephyr! I feel it more than ever! And in this perfect weather! We'll find a place together.*" The song comes across as a surprisingly heartfelt overture to not only romantic love, but to love in general.

"There is a lot of love in general on this album," agrees Kiedis. "The funny thing is that there seems to be a point which love in general—

you know, love for life, love for air, love for God, love for just being—kind of intersects with romantic love. Because I think, sometimes, when you tap into the universal love, you're able to really blossom into a romantic love. And really, they become kind of intertwined. The more love you're conducting as this vessel, the more you can kind of give it to those around you. And there was definitely a love prism happening, in and amongst a lot of changing times in the world. It dawned on me that this is not the end of the world, but merely an opportunity to up the love in a big way. I mean, that was kind of my take on this whole year of people being afraid and bummed out about everything. It just seemed like one big opportunity for change, for positive change."

As he speaks, it's clear that Kiedis has established a foundation that has enabled him to achieve an increasing serenity. Don't, however, assume that he's in a relationship. "You could, but you'd be wrong," he answers curtly. "Yeah," he finally sighs, "I was during the entire writing process. And a lot of the songs that are kind of romantically spiked were inspired by my girlfriend at that time, who I had been with for three years. And I was deeply and truly in love with her, and just feeling great about things. And then, about the time we were midway through the recording of the vocals, we went our separate ways—but never stopped loving each other. We just decided that maybe we wanted different things out of life. So the second rocket booster went off—the rocket booster of pain and sadness. Which is equally motivational, when you're singing, as being in love. So I kind of got the best of both worlds, as far as inspiration. It's funny the part girls can play in your whole writing and recording process."

Now, on the verge of sharing these songs with the public and gearing up to sing them in front of thousands, Kiedis insists they won't necessarily open any old wounds. "Not at all. I may have been inspired by her, about wanting to be with her, and go on adventures with her. But it was also coming from a larger source. And I still feel the sort of ecstasy of ... just being in love with life. You know, it's kind of an overtone to those songs."

The greater purpose of love is something the entire band now professes. The members are now sober, dedicated and adopting a humble goal of daily serenity. Flea maintains that this faithfulness resulted in a shared energy of love, which was the undeniable force behind the new album. "We toured for a year and a half on *Californication*, and instead of going and fucking off, we just started working on this record. It's just from wanting to give the most that we can. Everything that we're doing in this band comes from a place of giving. And if there's anything that I've learned from my years of being in this band ..." he pauses. "There have been times when it's great—we feel great and we're rocking out and everyone thinks we're cool and you think you're cool and you're making good music and everything's great and your ego's feeling good. But then

there are times when it's the most frustrating, miserable, lonely, fucked up thing. But the thing is, when I look through all of it, the parts that are frustrating, lonely and sad and the parts that are the greatest rock-star dream—I look at it all as an opportunity for me to give. It all balances out into one thing that I can have purpose and dedication to, which is being a giving person. And that has more meaning to me than anything else that I can be doing—is thinking that I'm being giving, and doing things with the intention of being giving."

Seated in the green room for *The Jonathan Ross Show*, the band awaits the arrival of Tom Jones and all eyes are on Smith. Hunched over a basket of fish and chips, he sadly shakes his head when asked how his earlier search has ended. Soon after, a heavily made-up Jones enters the room, breezing past the band and saying a quick hello before taking his seat next to an actress who immediately occupies his attention.

Frusciante watches, smiling and waiting for the inevitable exchange. It doesn't come. Instead, Jones exits to take his seat with the talk show host, leaving Frusciante to question, "Did he look at me?" Their manager assures him that Jones did indeed look his way, but John still looks dismayed. "I think he was looking at Chad." Smith observes Frusciante's annoyance with a bit of surprise. "You mean you like Tom Jones?" he asks.

Upon his return, Kiedis decides to strike up a conversation with Jones. "We might need you to play bass on this song," he jokingly asks. "Shit," laughs Jones, sipping his third pint. "I don't play bass." Tom seems to address only Kiedis and Smith (Flea is still in his dressing room), and Frusciante sinks deeper in his chair before leaping up to practice his other obsession—yoga. Sweetly oblivious to everyone around him, Frusciante briefly contorts and twists his body, while a slightly bewildered Jones looks on.

Before Tom leaves, he shakes hands with everyone, saying, "Hope to work with you someday." An enormous grin stretches across Frusciante's face. The group then takes the stage to perform an acoustic rendition of "Cabron," and despite having never heard the song, the crowd cheers as though it's a classic. A confused technician at the side of the stage scratches his head. "Doesn't 'cabron' mean 'asshole?'" he wonders out loud. ("Or 'mean motherfucker,'" Kiedis later clarifies.)

In the hallway leading back to their dressing rooms, pictures of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Dave Clark 5 and even Tom Jones decorate the walls—a sort of musical BBC hall of fame. Perhaps one day, the Chili Peppers will grace these same walls. "I don't know what's gonna happen," Smith says of the band's future. "This band has had a lot of peaks and valleys, and you make mistakes and you learn from them. No matter what happens with this record, I feel really good about it. We all do. And we're gonna play some concerts and hang out and make more music, because that's what we do." ♦

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