



P E R F O R M E R S



# RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

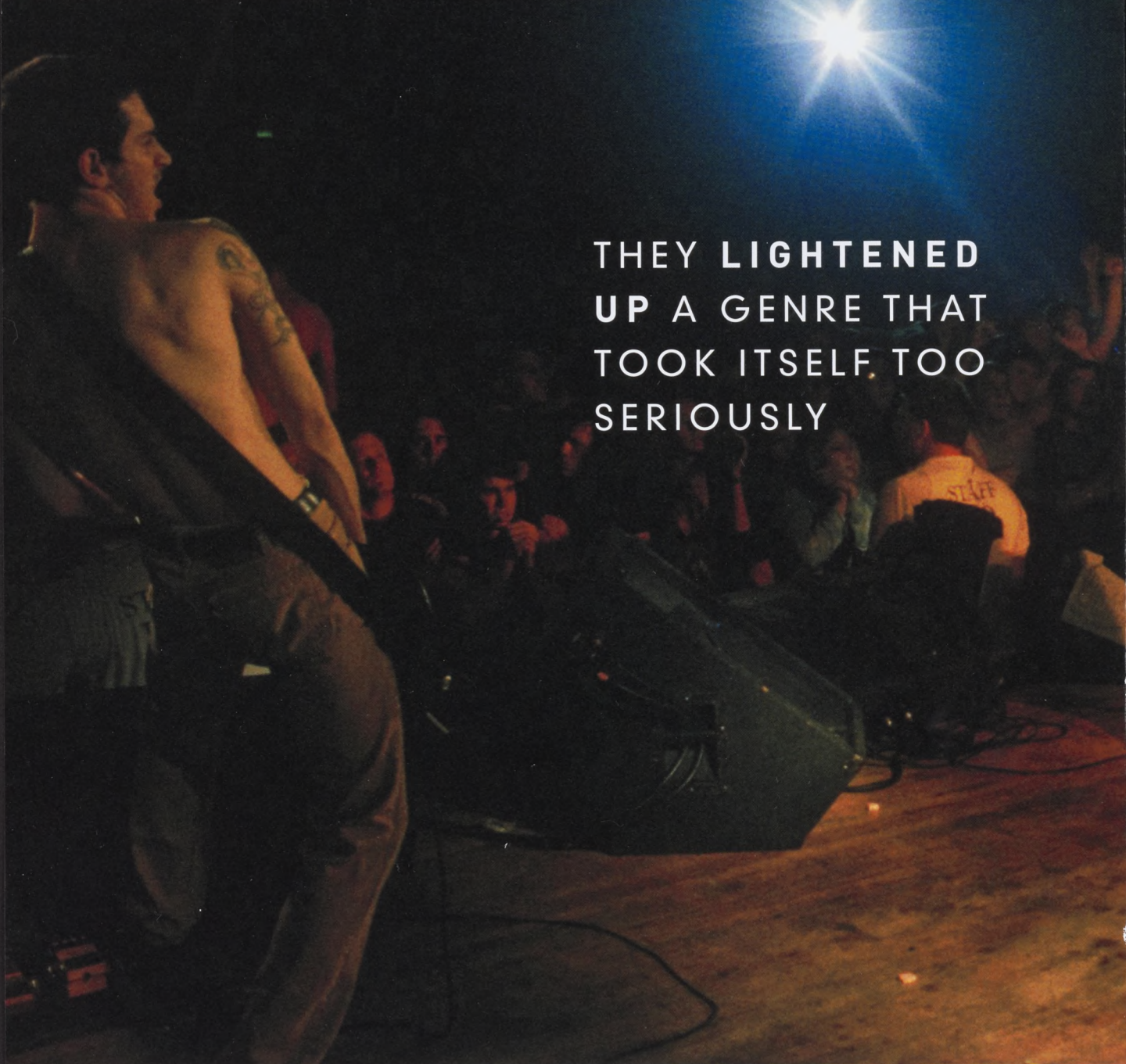
N I N A P E A R L M A N

## FUNKY JAMS, FLAMBOYANT GARB, AND STRATEGICALLY PLACED TUBE SOCKS

**T**he word *pioneers* is regularly used to describe the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and with good reason: The band—which today consists of Anthony Kiedis on vocals; Michael Balzary, long known to fans as Flea, on bass; Chad Smith on drums; and recent addition Josh Klinghoffer on guitar—birthed a blend of punk, funk, and hip-hop that has since influenced every group to marry rap and rock. The first of the early-nineties alternative bands to follow Nirvana into the upper echelons of the charts, the Chili Peppers injected a splash of color to that movement's oft-gray canvas, their funky jams and flamboyant garb (or lack thereof) providing relief from grunge's punk-metal sludge and flannel shirt uniform. And with lyrics that famously begged to “party on your pussy” and a stage act in which they encored nude save for strategically placed tube socks, they lightened up a genre that often took itself too seriously.

Pioneers, yes, but the Chili Peppers are something else besides: survivors, clocking in twenty-five years of near-continual recording and touring. The band has weathered numerous lineup changes (cycling through eight different guitarists and four drummers); the departure of a beloved bandmate and the death of another to a heroin overdose; and its surviving members' own debilitating drug addictions. The group has also outlived the movement it helped start, which in the late nineties was eclipsed by rap-metal bands aping the sound the Chili Peppers created. That the Chili Peppers have done so with the greatest successes of their career—their ninth studio album, 2006's *Stadium Arcadium*, was their first to go to Number One—makes that feat all the more impressive.

The glue that's held them together is a deep and lasting friendship among band members—for Kiedis and Flea, reaching back to their early teens. The two met in



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1977, a month into the tenth grade at Hollywood's Fairfax High School. Both were transplants to Los Angeles: at 11, Kiedis had moved from Michigan to live full-time with his father, an actor and hard-partying ladies' man; Flea, born in Australia, grew up in New York and moved to L.A. with his family—also when he was 11. Schooled in jazz by his musician stepfather, Flea was already a virtuoso on trumpet, sitting first chair in L.A.'s Jr. Philharmonic Orchestra by the time he met Kiedis.

It was the Israeli-born Hillel Slovak, Fairfax classmate and guitarist in the classic-rock-influenced Anthym, who introduced Flea to the bass, the instrument for which he's now best known (Slovak secretly taught Flea so he could replace Anthym's existing bassist). The three became inseparable, forging a close connection—"soul mates," Kiedis has called them—that endured beyond graduation, when all three remained in the L.A. area, haunting the city's punk clubs.

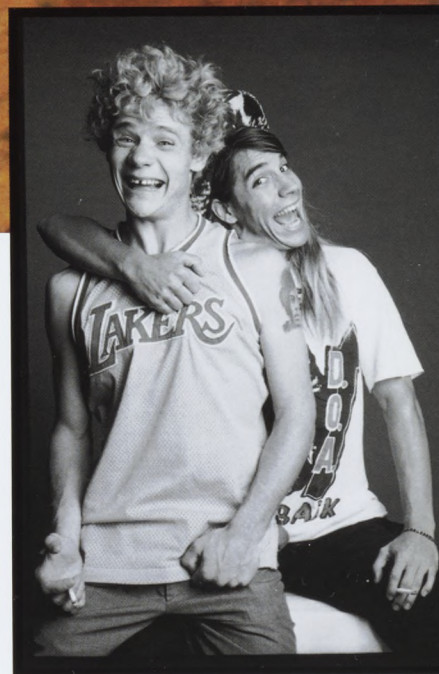
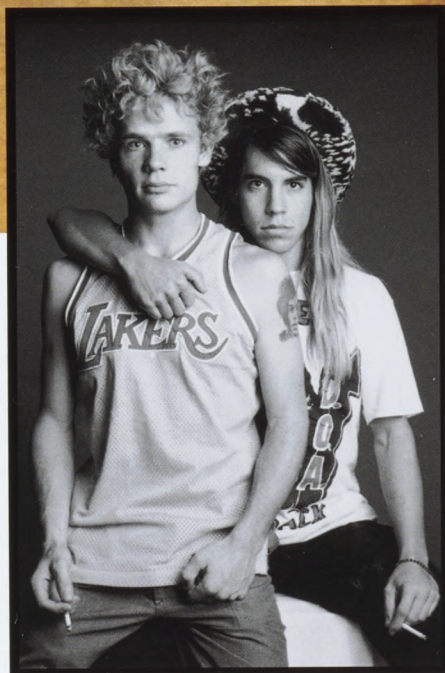
In February 1983, a friend in that club scene, Gary Allen, got the idea that Kiedis, Flea, and Slovak should play a one-off opening set for his band, Neighbor's Voices. Never mind that Slovak was still playing with Anthym, which now went by the name What Is This, or that Flea had joined famed L.A. punk band Fear. Or that Kiedis, who'd often MC'd for What Is This with a little comedy shtick, had never sung a note in his life.

Inspired by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's hit "The Message," Kiedis wrote a rap about the colorful characters he and his friends ran with in the clubs. The trio recruited What Is This drummer Jack Irons—whom they'd known at Fairfax High—and worked the lyrics into a song inspired in parts by heroes Gang of Four, Jimi Hendrix, and the avant-garde punk-funk-jazz band Defunkt. The song, "Out in L.A.," comprised the entirety of the set they played that night, under the name Tony Flow and the



Miraculously Majestic Masters of Mayhem. They were such a hit they were immediately asked back—this time to play two songs.

Even as they continued to perform around the L.A. circuit, the band, now named the Red Hot Chili Peppers, remained a for-fun, part-time gig—so much so that, when they were signed to EMI later that year, Slovak and Irons weren't on the contract, having just signed their own deal for *What Is This*. Cliff Martinez, a friend of Flea's who'd drummed for such artists as Captain Beefheart and L.A. punkers the Dickies and the Weirdos, sat behind the kit for the band's first two funk-punk mashups, 1984's *The Red Hot Chili Peppers* and 1985's George Clinton-produced



**OPENING PAGE** Classic lineup, normal wardrobe: Chad Smith, Anthony Kiedis, Flea (Michael Balzary), and John Frusciante (from left). **OPPOSITE PAGE** Red Hots rock the Palladium, Hollywood, 1992. **THIS PAGE** Friends from the start: Flea and Kiedis, 1986



## THE GLUE THAT'S HELD THEM TOGETHER IS A DEEP AND LASTING FRIENDSHIP

*Freaky Styley*. Slovak came back into the fold for *Freaky Styley*, replacing guitarist Jack Sherman, who'd recorded the band's debut and was ousted after its first tour. Irons reunited the original lineup on 1987's *The Uplift Mofo Party Plan*, stepping in for the departing Martinez.

But the reunion wouldn't last long. Slovak and Kiedis had been struggling with heroin addictions, cleaning up (usually at the band's insistence) only to relapse. When the Chili Peppers returned from a European tour behind *Uplift*, Slovak tragically overdosed, on June 25, 1988, at the age of 26. Irons, distraught by Slovak's death and fed up with Kiedis' own troubles, quit the band soon after. (Kiedis continued to wrestle with his addiction, with bouts of rehab and sobriety, over the next decade; he has been clean since 2000.)

After a few failed attempts with bandmates that didn't quite fit, Kiedis and Flea finally found a rejuvenated lineup in the form of John Frusciante on guitar and Chad

Smith on drums. Born in New York and raised in the San Fernando Valley, Frusciante was a massive Chili Peppers fan and all of 18 years old when he was introduced to Kiedis and Flea through their drummer at the time, D.H. Peligro; after watching the guitarist audition for another local band, the duo snatched him up for themselves. Smith, who grew up in the Midwest and had been drumming since the age of 7, auditioned for the group at the prompting of another friend, and blew the Chili Peppers away with an energy and aggression that matched theirs note for note. The new lineup rewarded the band with its first Gold record: 1989's *Mother's Milk*.

Greater success followed with 1991's *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* (the band's first for Warner Bros.), as did another fortuitous partnership that would endure: with producer Rick Rubin. Rubin, who'd worked magic for RUN DMC and the Beastie Boys, distilled the Chili Peppers' busy, expansive punk-funk raps into tight, spare, yet propulsive grooves like "Give It Away" (the album's first single) and "Suck My Kiss"

(its third). He also teased a softer side out of the group, evident in the melody-driven "Breaking the Girl."

Rubin gave the band its breakthrough hit with another quieter track, encouraging Kiedis to share a soul-baring poem he'd penned in private with the rest of the group. The words detailed his struggles with addiction and the loneliness he'd felt since Slovak's death and, when set to a sparse, melancholy guitar line from Frusciante and uncharacteristically understated bass work from Flea, became something very un-Chili Peppers-like: a ballad with Kiedis singing rather than rapping. Titled "Under the Bridge" and released as the second single off *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, the track shot to Number Two. It also set a precedent for much of the band's future music, in which their funk leanings were tempered by hummable pop melodies, with Kiedis' vocals becoming as much an identifiable element of their sound as Flea's finger-plucked bass. The album itself climbed to Number Three and stayed in the Top Ten throughout the summer of 1992, while the band headlined Lollapalooza, then in its second year.

The next few years would once again present the band with challenges: Frusciante's burnout and abrupt departure during the *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* tour; a followup, 1995's *One Hot Minute*, recorded with guitarist Dave Navarro (late of Jane's Addiction), which received mixed reviews and sold half as much as its predecessor; Kiedis' relapse and Frusciante's own descent into a heroin addiction that nearly killed him. The band had almost ground to a halt by 1998 when Flea, on the verge of quitting himself, invited a newly clean Frusciante to rejoin.

What followed was a rebirth that, over the course of eleven years, gave the Chili Peppers a run of hits: 1999's *Californication*, which went five-times platinum, peaked at Number Three, and produced two Top Fifteen singles, "Otherside" and "Scar Tissue"; 2002's *By the Way*, two-times platinum, which climbed the charts to Number Two, and featured the smashes "By the Way" and "Can't Stop." Even another four-year hiatus between albums did nothing to impact their popularity: 2006's double album, *Stadium Arcadium*, debuted at Number One, won the band two Grammy Awards, and produced hits like "Snow (Hey Oh)," "Hump de Bump,"

and "Dani California," which also scored two Grammys.

In 2009, Frusciante left the band again. Ever the survivors, the remaining members soldiered on, replacing their funk brother with the 30-year-old Klinghoffer, friend of Frusciante and a gifted guitarist who'd previously worked with Beck, PJ Harvey, and Gnarls Barkley, among others. If the band's latest release, last year's *I'm With You*, is any indication, this latest incarnation will prove just as fruitful and successful as those that came before: The album debuted at Number Two.

"I think it would be cool as fuck to be doing music at age 45 with the Red Hot Chili Peppers," Kiedis told *Rolling Stone* in 1994. Now 49 years old, the singer has seen this wish come true. The group has weathered ups and downs that would have broken a lesser band. For this, and for the sonic legacy it has created, we celebrate the Red Hot Chili Peppers' induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

**OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP** In 1985: Flea, Cliff Martinez, Hillel Slovak, and Kiedis (from left); in 1987: Flea, Slovak, Kiedis, and Jack Irons (from left). **THIS PAGE** The current lineup, with new guitarist Josh Klinghoffer (top left).

