

ROB FITZPATRICK

Red Hot Chili Peppers

THE STORIES BEHIND EVERY SONG



the next album: "We'll start working on our next album in November. At the moment, it's just shapes and colours in our heads, but it will be real music in a couple of months."

John had to wait a little longer before he could get his new teeth (literally – expensive dental work had repaired the damage done by his years of drug abuse) into the next Chili Peppers record. But with the success of the reunion, he could wait. All the work and the faith they placed in each other had paid dividends. *Californication* was heading towards 13 million sales.

CALIFORNICATION

It's a gift that's incredibly rare in bands, but it's one the Red Hot Chili Peppers have in spades – that of simply getting better and better and better. Fifteen years after the release of their debut album, four long years after the release of the darkly troubled *One Hot Minute* and with wild years, drug problems and tragic deaths thankfully behind them, the Chilis released probably the best album of their career to date. *Californication* was an amazing return to form. The Red Hot Chili Peppers won the 2000 Grammy Award for "Scar Tissue" and *Californication* also received nominations for Best Rock Album. This was now a band that could not be stopped.

AROUND THE WORLD

Allowing Flea to kick off the album with a monstrous bass blast was always going to be a good idea and as "Around The World" growls with renewed fury you can sense the band mentally limbering up for the fight of their lives. With "... World", they win.

"I try not to whine / but I must warn ya / 'Bout the motherfuckin' girls / From California," Anthony exclaims, sounding fresher, stronger, sharper and more focused than he has done since 1991's *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*. Flea's bass leaps from bar to bar like a steroid-fuelled gazelle; John keeps things supremely simple, with edgy garage-funk riffs and noisome explosions after each chorus; Chad feeds in percussive flavours between his beats; but it's Anthony who stands out, his voice rich and warm, his vocals as nonsensical, and as heartfelt, as ever. On the last chorus he abandons

words altogether and breaks into a string of ludicrous growls and yelps – and it still works, the band still sound on top of their game. Or as Anthony says – “Around the world / I feel dutiful / Take a wife / ‘Cos life is beautiful”.

PARALLEL UNIVERSE

As in so much of *Californication*, “Parallel Universe” is deeply in debt to John’s hugely inventive, powerful guitar work. Here he sets up a wriggling, twisting riff and only loosens his grip when the song launches into its exultant chorus. Sounding angrier and yet more disciplined than ever before, Flea and Chad keep things simple, only allowing themselves to go over the edge when John’s guitar takes a long, slow and phased leap into the solo. As he does, Flea takes up the twisting riff himself, allowing odd echoes of Iron Maiden’s taut Eighties metal to shine through.

Anthony, after slipping almost unnoticed into a British accent at the end of the first verse (“It’s getting harder and harder / To tell what came first”), assumes the mantle of “A sidewinder / I’m a California King” in the chorus as he muses on elemental questions such as the intricacies of a solar system that could fit in your eye, the stars in our minds, or how none of us really, *really* dies. We’ve come a long way from “Catholic School Girls Rule”, and no mistake.

SCAR TISSUE

A huge US hit, “Scar Tissue” is another of Anthony’s tales of innocence lost, of drugs and separation and hurt. He is, of course, free of his own drug problems now, but just as in “Under The Bridge” – a track “Scar Tissue” resembles more than just lyrically – his elevated, solitary position of freedom from chemical dependency is a freedom that ends up feeling very similar to loneliness.

A million miles from the funk-ed-up, skate-punk fury of so much of the band’s work, this track introduces John’s take on jazz and soul into the Chili Peppers mix and the result is a piece that floats above the rest of the album, weightless and driven by its own immediately memorable melody.

“Scar tissue that I wish you saw / Sarcastic Mister know-it-all”, sings Anthony and he’s never sounded so raw, so open. “Push me up against the wall / Young Kentucky girl in a push-up bra” or “Blood loss in a bathroom

...MUSCANTÉ
...THE BAND:
...INDUSTRY
...BLADES FOR
...BEST
...YET



stall / Southern girl with a scarlet drawl" – these are dreams and flashes from Anthony's past life, memories of a time when everything was different to the way it looks and feels now.

WITH FRUSCIANTE
BACK IN THE BAND,
THE CHILIS RECEIVE
MUSIC INDUSTRY
ACCOLADES FOR
THEIR BEST
ALBUM YET.

OTHERSIDE

Another huge US hit, this time spending in excess of 20 weeks on the Modern Rock chart and becoming a massive live favourite, "Otherside" is immensely dark fare for the Chili Peppers.



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Sounding quite unlike anything else on the record, the track is supported by Flea's rumbling bass and John's gentle guitar flurries. Anthony tells another sobriety story, this time about a departed friend who speaks to him through a photograph – the smart money's on Hillel Slovak – and how, now he knows he can never use alcohol or drugs ever again, he has to take his own personal battle on to death – to the "otherside".

One of the Chili Peppers' most adult and affecting songs, Anthony's hurt and frustration are all over the track. "I yell and tell it that / It's not my friend / I tear it down and tear it down / And then it's born again". Remarkably powerful.

GET ON TOP

But let's not forget who's made this album – this is still the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and in tribute to their immense capacity for lurid sexuality and ridiculous, libidinous funk, here comes "Get On Top". Immediately reminiscent of *BSSM*, lines such as "Go-rilla cunt-illa / I'm an ass killer / You're ill but I'm iller" are prime Chili Peppers. Flea sounds particularly happy here, his bass-playing running freely from slap-heavy funk to more punked-out fire. John's jazz persona gets a little showcase, but it's jazz in the light-fingered Hendrix sense rather than the weighty, serious sense. The Chilis sound better here than they did a decade earlier.

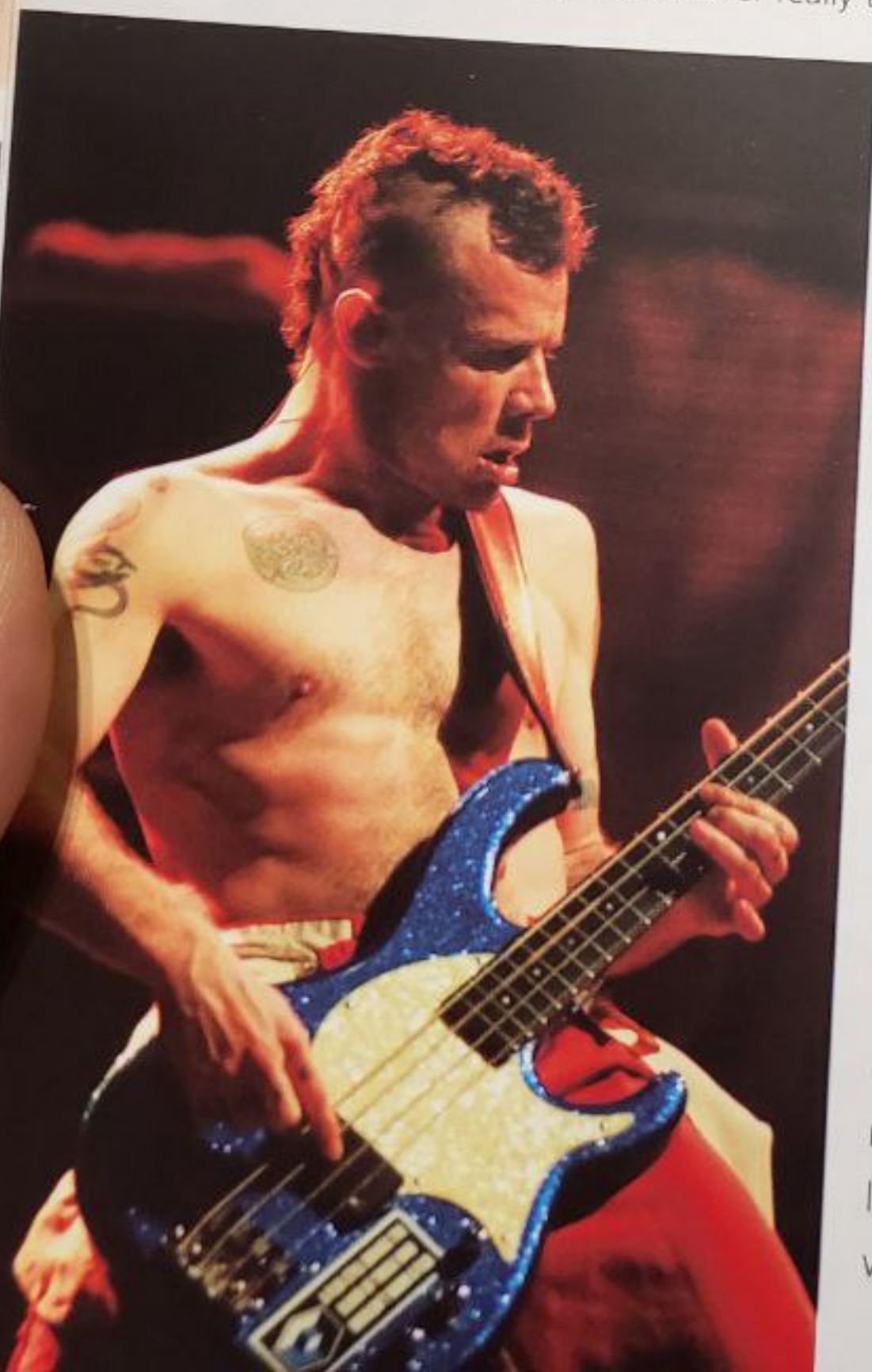
CALIFORNICATION

One of the gentlest moments on the album, "Californication" is structured in a way that the band have never really tried before: out go the funk, the

punk and the metal and in come Bob Dylan-like analogy, namechecking, the ascending and descending chord patterns of The Beatles and, at its heart, the endless round of love/hate/love/hate battles that Anthony has with his adopted state.

Hollywood and the lies and fantasies it peddles makes up much of the theme behind "Californication"; its silver-screen dreams draw in everyone from "Psychic spies from China" to "Little girls from Sweden". The town is located on the most extreme edge of "Western civilization", which rather neatly means it's the setting sun's final location every day of every week of every year.

FLEA'S GUITAR
MATCHED
THE COLOUR
SCHEME FOR THE
CALIFORNICATION
ALBUM COVER.



JOHN
BACK

CALIFORNICATION

Anthony sounds at once both horrified ("Celebrity skin is this your chin") and amused ("Space may be the final frontier / But it's made in a Hollywood basement") by California and its impact on the world around him. But while he rails against a "teenage bride with a baby inside / who gets high off information" and wonders if his dead friend Kurt Cobain can hear "The spheres / Singing songs off Station To Station", he knows that California is, thanks to its unique geological faults, locked in a cycle of renewal and rebirth – and if there's one thing Kiedis likes, it's rebirth. "Destruction is a very rough road / But it also breeds creation / And earthquakes are to a girl's guitar / They're just another good vibration".

Ultimately, he can't resist Californication any more than the rest of the world can.

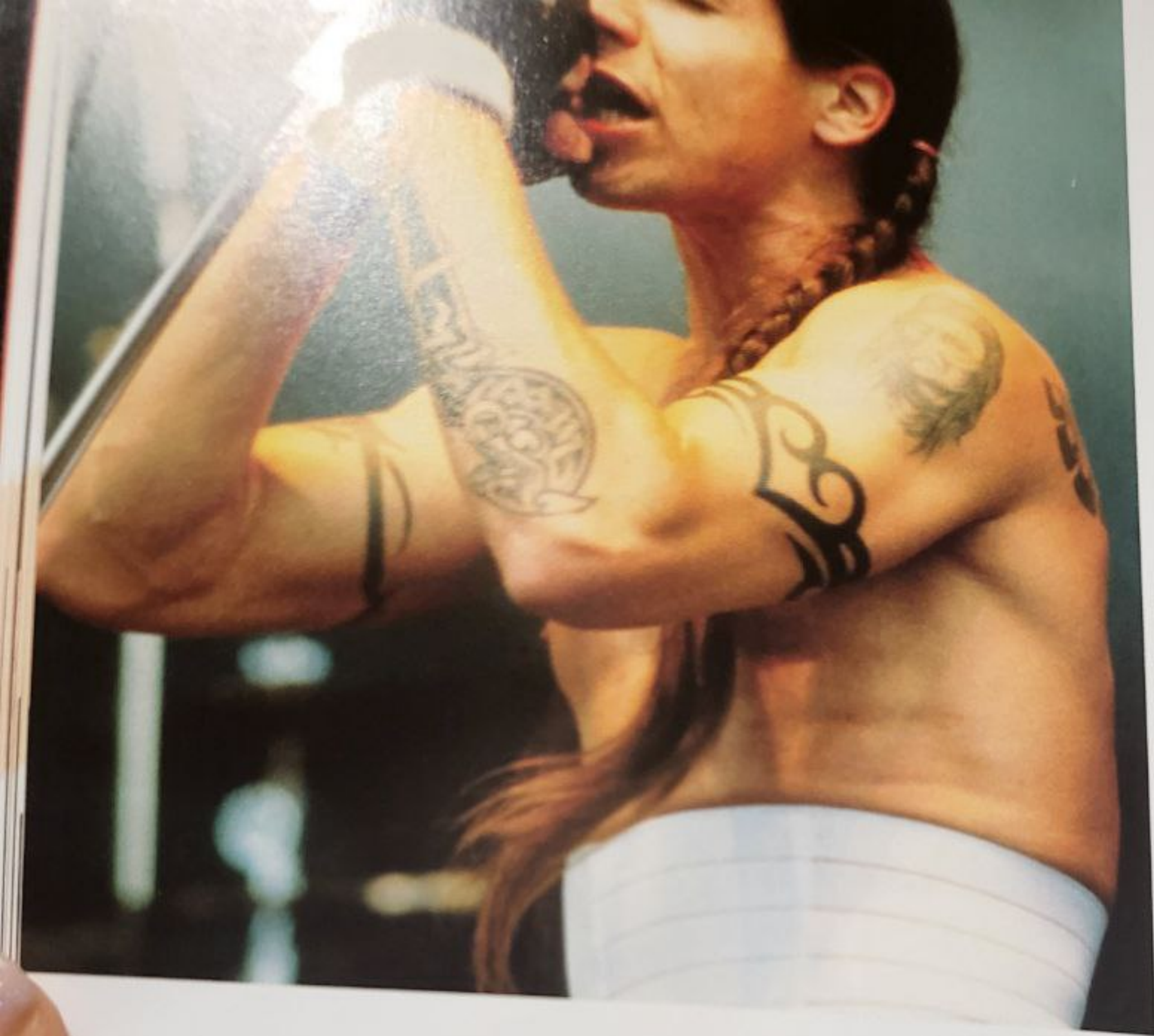
EASILY

One of the crucial tracks that makes *Californication* the album it is, "Easily" is a showcase for one of Anthony's most oblique lyrics as well as one of John Frusciante's most beautiful guitar solos. The band and producer Rick

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JOHN FRUSCIANTE:
BACK FROM HELL.





YET ANOTHER BOLD
NEW LOOK FOR
KIEDIS.

Rubin have cooked up a garage-band sound reminiscent of their early demos, but there's all the weight and depth here that those tracks could never achieve.

Anthony's lyrics touch on the futility of war, the teachings of Shao Lin, the empty uselessness of celebrity. Also, in a heartwarming move after stories of loneliness and remorse such as "Scar Tissue", Anthony's growing love and commitment to his girlfriend Yohanna – who insisted in a *Rolling Stone* interview that Anthony's most rock-star characteristic was his amazingly shiny teeth – was beginning to emerge in a few tracks on the album.

"Easily let's get carried away / Easily let's get married today" he sings, clearly aware of how brief and painful life can be. "Calling calling for something in the air / Calling calling I know you must be there".

PORCELAIN

The closest the Chili Peppers will ever come to sounding like a soul band, "Porcelain" is drenched in a soporific jazz flavour; much of the track appears to be wrapped in cotton wool which, bearing in mind the opiate flow of the lyrics, is most appropriate. Another track that's not so much anti-heroin as pointing out the hopelessness of its regular use, lyrics such as "Are you wasting away in your skin?" and "Can you bear not to share with your child?" suggest someone in a progressed pregnant state who is still using. "Drifting and floating and fading away," Anthony sings. "Nodding and melting and fading away". There's no redemption at the end, no sense of change or hope. A bleak, bleak track.

EMIT REMMUS

Perfect – on an album named in tribute to the debilitating effects of American popular culture, a track that names more London sights than The Kinks' "Waterloo Sunset" as it tells the tale of Anthony's brief liaison with former Sporty Spice Mel C. Sound unlikely? Well, that's what everyone else thought, but the evidence is there, in main from the two people themselves.

"The California flower is a poppy child," Anthony sings, referring to himself. But who's the "Felony" who sends him "all the gold" in her smile? Could the felony be Melanie (C)? After all, Sporty Spice certainly had a protracted gold-tooth phase. Is Emit Remmus about Sporty Spice, Mel C was asked by fans on her website. "I don't know, you'd have to ask Anthony Kiedis," she replied, rather noncommittally. "It would be nice if it was though, wouldn't it!"

Kiedis himself said, "I started writing the lyrics for 'Emit Remmus' before I ever met Sporty, but I finished them after I'd known her for a bit, so you figure it out..."

Whatever the truth is, the track itself is a fiery burst of noise with a huge, bass-heavy chorus from Flea and one of John's finest solos.

I LIKE DIRT

One of Anthony's finest "Hello trees! Hello sky!" moments, "I Like Dirt" has the same back-to-nature sentiments as "The Righteous & The Wicked" from *BSSM* and "Green Heaven" from *RHCP* but the simple message of the power of Mother Earth is tied up with an overtly sexual message in the lyrics.

"The earth is made of dirt and wood / And I'd be water if I could," Anthony sings, the lyrics touched with a strong rap inflection as Flea rolls out one of his most boogie-heavy bass lines and John peels off a series of stabbing guitar runs.

"Some come up and some come young / Live to love and give good tongue" – now that does sound familiar, doesn't it?

THIS VELVET GLOVE

Another one of *Californication's* love songs, "This Velvet Glove" is for Kiedis' girlfriend Yohanna ("Your solar eyes are like / Nothing I have ever

OLDER AND WISER,
SURE, BUT STILL JUST
AS CHEEKY.



seen / Somebody close / That I can see right through"), a reflection on his time spent in addictive behaviour ("It's such a waste to be wasted / In the first place") and a tribute to the grace of John, who rejoined the band to record this album after nearly killing himself with heroin ("John says to live above hell / My will is well"). Though the line does sound like one ex-user talking to another, Kiedis told *Juice* magazine that, yes, the John was John Frusciante, but added that he was not quoting him literally – the lyric was lifted from one of John's solo works.

"He was singing about living life above hell," Anthony said, "meaning whether from drugs or just state of mind. He'd sampled life living in hell, he thought better of it, got over it and was living in a more beautiful space. I was so deeply in love when I wrote it, and John was very much a part of my life during that time, creating good energy, so I wanted to mention it."

SAVIOR

Never before have the Chili Peppers sounded much like that other great but troubled Californian outfit The Beach Boys, but during "Savior"'s floatingly psychedelic chorus, Kiedis and company come close for the first time.

One of the more ponderous tracks on *Californication*, "Savior" has a truly wonderful Kiedis vocal, his voice a huge, rich beast utterly unlike the thin growl he experimented with for so long, but the time signatures shift uneasily and the is-he-or-isn't-he references to a God-like character make the track more than a little unwieldy. However, this being the Chili Peppers, the song couldn't be left totally alone in its po-faced religiosity, not when there are lyrics such as, "We are the Red Hots / And we're loving up the love me nots / The flowers in your flower pots / Are dancing on the table tops" on offer. What this has to do with Jesus and friends, no one knows.

PURPLE STAIN

While Anthony might not sound anything like he used to, while Rick Rubin's production might be ten times what anyone else managed, while John Frusciante might be clean and serene, some things in the Chili camp never change. And one of those things is the traditional

blatantly sexual track near the end of an album. "Party On Your Pussy", "Sexy Mexican Maid", "Sir Psycho Sexy" – the list, if not endless, is certainly fairly comprehensive. To this canon we must add "Purple Stain", *Californication's* only real throwback to the Chilis of old.

Almost – because "Purple Stain" just doesn't really cut it. While "To finger paint is not a sin / I put my middle finger in / Your monthly blood is what I win" is suitably graphic, and "Python power straight from Monty / Celluloid loves got a John Frusciante" is a neat line, the rest of the track seems to fall a little flat. Powerful production aside, "Purple Stain" could have come from *Freaky Styley* and backwards moves are never to be encouraged...

RIGHT ON TIME

... except when they're this cool. "Right On Time" is pure disco-punk-funk, never slacking off for a single second, Flea's bass barely able to keep up with the breakneck pace of the track. Though "Right..." is already several years old, it wouldn't sound out of place in many a DJ's electroclash set, so potent is its noisy, beat-driven fervour. Don't go looking for insight in the lyrics, though. "Holy cow bow wow wow / Now I'm here I'm nowhere now" is one of the more profound on offer.

ROAD TRIPPIN'

A wonderfully chilled end to the record, "Road Trippin'", featuring Patrick Warren on the swirling, circling Chamberlin organ, closes *Californication* on a sombre but uplifting note. A deeply romantic and simple tale of a road trip during which three friends escape the city and find a new and more enlightening life while busy getting lost on the byways of the USA, it's a farewell to the madness of fame and addiction. "These smiling eyes are just a mirror for the sun," Anthony sings; the endless California sunset, the one alluded to in the title track, is clearly audible in his voice. "Now let us check our heads / And let us check the surf / Staying high and dry's / More trouble than it's worth / In the sun".

The Chilis had returned triumphantly with *Californication*, but could they keep up the momentum? It would be three years before we got to find out.

ANTHONY'S LONG
STRAIGHT LOCKS...
THE ENVY OF
TEENAGE GIRLS
EVERYWHERE.