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Chili Peppers reclaim funk

Reviews



"Blood Sugar Sex Magik"
The Red Hot Chili Peppers
Warner Brothers

Eight years after the release of their self-titled debut, it's probably fitting that the Red Hot Chili Peppers should reconquer the white-boy funk genre they helped build. The only surprising thing is how easily they have done it.

Though 1989's "Mother's Milk" produced the gems "Knock Me Down" and a righteous cover of Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground," the LP nevertheless had the Peppers sounding less like a band and more like four guys trying to recapture the potency of previous works.

Understandable, considering that the group's two previous projects, 1987's good time manifesto "The Uplift Mofo Party Plan" and the EP "Abbey Road in 1988," were followed by the untimely death of guitarist Hillel Slovak and subsequent departure of drummer Jack Irons.

By way of inspiration, the Peppers moved into a reportedly haunted mansion in the Hollywood Hills to record their sixth album, "Blood Sugar Sex Magik." There they secluded themselves from the outside distractions that had hindered them in the past. Whatever their reasoning, the idea worked.

More California cool than red hot, "Magik," the Peppers' second album with guitarist John Frusciante and drummer Chad Smith, finds the Peppers settling in nicely as kings of the funk hill.

Vocalist Anthony Kiedis is still half-rapping his way through familiar Chili Pepper territory. There's the sexual conquest of "Sir Psyche Sexy," and the James Brown stylings of "Mellowship Slinky in B Major," wherein Kiedis even grunts out a few "good Gods."

And as with previous albums that paid tribute to idols like Magic Johnson and Little Richard, the lyrics



The Red Hot Chili Peppers demonstrate all the elements of funk rock with their release "Blood Sugar Sex Magik."

to this one read like a who's who of pop culture. Robert Deniro, Marvin Gaye, Bob Marley and Charles Bukowski are just a few of those immortalized.

Above all, "Magik" is punctuated by the same elements that made the group college radio faves, namely, Flea's maniacal basslines and trademark Chili Pepper humor. Kiedis continues to preach the gospel of friendship, something that has clearly sustained the band through the '80s. And clearly the death of Slovak weighs heavily on them, as shown by "My Lovely Man," a touching tribute to "Slim."

"Just in case you never knew/I miss you," Kiedis laments. It's also appropriate that a song about Slovak

would not be a ballad.

And make no mistake, funk, as the Peppers once promised, is still their attitude. "Magik" contains some of the Peppers' best funk-driven tunes to date, especially the title cut and the first single, "Give it Away."

Still, acoustic tracks like "Under the Bridge" and "Breaking the Girl" stand out. The former, a wonderful ode to Los Angeles, is the best tune written about the "city of angels" since the Doors' "L.A. Woman."

The Peppers even tackle the love song with "I Could Have Lied," a tune that sounds so much like Elvis Costello, one nearly expects that little tramp Allison to pop up some where

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