

Chili Peppers fire up daredevils in Ames

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Ames, Ia. — Shirtless, tattooed and clearly having eaten their Wheaties, the Red Hot Chili Peppers presided over the introduction of stage-diving to the respectable confines of C.Y. Stephens Auditorium here Saturday night.

When you get 2,309 fun-starved kids and one of the hardest, funkier bands around together, these kinds of things can happen: The Chili Peppers play a hyperenergetic, crowd-pleasing set; fans show their appreciation by jumping up on stage and hurling themselves onto the heads of strangers.

But it's a kind of release, and that's what the Chili Peppers are all about. That and, of course, sex. They combine rap and funk with metallic ferocity and are more than eager to make fools out of themselves in the name of putting on a good show.

And a good show it was. There were plenty of songs from their new record, "Blood Sugar Sex Magik." And although it is a curious, dare we say occasionally subdued album, the band stuck to the stomps. Bassist Flea once threatened to play a quiet one, then the band tore into "Nobody Weird Like Me," a song from the "Mother's Milk" album delivered so fast and hard I think I lost a filling.

"Funky Crime" and a number of other tunes showed what a terrific bassist Flea really is, no matter how hard he tries to look and act like an idiot. "Crime" and "Give It Away," the current single, turned up in a one-two punch on the set list near the beginning of the show. It was a high point.

There also was a reading of Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground," the song partially responsible for band's success, as well as the title track to the new record. By comparison, parts of the latter song are relatively subdued, but both the band and the crowd were so far gone by that late in the show it didn't matter.

Singer Anthony Kiedis has the energy and arrogance of a born frontman. He's good-looking and cocky and well aware of it. He's got the energy of a football team. John Frusciante, a relatively recent addition to the band, plays like he was born to be a Pepper. And drummer Chad Smith and Flea make up a rhythm section that can negotiate curves that might trip up other bands.

All in all, it was good clean fun. Except, of course, for the cuts and bruises.

Pearl Jam, a Seattle band that sounds perfectly at home in a city that spawned Soundgarden and Mudhoney, opened the show. They were — get this — even more energetic and bent on working up the crowd than were the headliners. The middle band, Smashing Pumpkins, turned out a rather tedious set of paisley thrash.