

Chilis rock crowd with energetic antics

By Britt Robson

Two years ago at First Avenue, the members of the Red Hot Chili Peppers strode onstage wearing nothing more than their instruments and their underpants — or a strategically placed tube sock. The Chilis then proceeded with the sort of tirelessly athletic and musically charged performance that along with their outrageousness has generated a sizable cult following for the band.

Since then, the Chilis have reached the masses with a couple of well-produced videos that capture the band's manic energy. And they have recorded "Blood Sugar Sex Magik," which contains a sprawling stylistic diversity that is an almost inevitable phase in the life of a maturing rock band. Consequently, instead of playing in a club Saturday night, the Chilis were at St. Paul's Roy Wilkins Auditorium, a much larger venue with more seats.

But it wasn't long before dozens of folding chairs were tossed in a pile off to the side and Chili fanatics turned the main floor into a "mosh pit," doing an amiable variation of slam dancing and passing each other overhead through the crowd. Over the course of their 90-minute set, the Chilis hewed to the hyperkinetic

A review

The Red Hot Chili Peppers

Opening acts: Pearl Jam and Smashing Pumpkins

Review: The energetic, outrageous funk-punk band relied on hyperkinetic stage antics and a limited bag of funk riffs to galvanize a capacity crowd at the Roy Wilkins Auditorium in St. Paul. Seattle's Pearl Jam was the better of the two opening acts.

punk-funk that is their stylistic franchise, although this time around they kept their pants on.

Most of the band's first six songs were older, mid-'80s material, dominated by vocalist Anthony Kiedis, who delivered rapid-fire rap-song on "Love Trilogy" and broadened his tuneful holler into the mock-sinister tone of a gangster/lecher on "Organic Anti-Beatbox" and "Suck My Kiss."

The evening's highlight came relatively early, beginning with a churn-

ing riff from guitarist John Frusciante to launch "Give It Away," a rollicking, sexy song that was given a much fuller treatment than its recorded version. It culminated with Kiedis dramatically doffing his cap as he danced, his hair flailing past his tattooed shoulders to the middle of his back as the crowd roared.

Then Flea, the dynamo bassist who had been relatively quiet up to this point, erupted into the funk equivalent of a speed-metal riff, popping his notes like fusion jazz great Stanley Clarke on overdrive to kick off "Nobody Weird Like Me." The Chilis lathered the song's intensity with their inimitable flourishes; as Flea twirled and kicked his way around the stage, Frusciante layered in a psychedelic jam and Kiedis stood on his hands.

Other memorable moments included a sultry, funky rendition of "Blood Sugar Sex Magik" with the band bathed in red speckled lights, and the group's hit cover of Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground," a solid but unspectacular crowd-pleaser to close the pre-encore portion of the show.

As always, the Chilis got a lot of mileage and energy out of a handful of funk riffs in concert, a musical limitation that gets buried by the

spectacle. Yet when the group attempted a standard pop ballad, on "I Could Have Lied," those limitations were more painfully obvious than on record. And as their meandering encore demonstrated, even homages to their mentor/heroes George Clinton ("Cosmic Slop") and Jimi Hendrix ("Crosstown Traffic," to conclude the concert) cannot sustain the Chili Peppers' tunes without a tight focus on sex, sweat and musical simplicity.

The better of the two opening acts was Pearl Jam, a metal-inflected band from Seattle's fertile underground scene, which blended the traditional arena ingredients of lusty vocals and steamroller guitar chords to deliver its message. The other band, Smashing Pumpkins, continually resorted to abrupt shifts in tempo and washes of guitar feedback, a combination that usually sounded pretentious. As if to prove the point, the band's lead singer bickered with the audience throughout the set.

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