

On The Road With The Flaming Lips

By Michael Israel Gorelic



The Flaming Lips are at it again. Back on the road after a short hiatus, but according to Michael Ivins, the bassist providing the hypnotic rhythm for the band, it never feels like a big tour. The Lips keep their tours short, going out usually for only six weeks at a pop. And since they all live in the middle of the country they're accessible to both coasts and every white picket fenced town in-between. Making it feel even shorter when they're out on the road. Keeping with an abridged tour schedule allows the band to feel more connected to who they really are, not the rock stars the common listener pays good money to see. Being at home and not on the road, they're able to feel like normal productive members of society, blending into the landscape as their success of the past 20 plus years washes off their back and disappears into the closet for another day on the road. I spoke to Ivins as the Lips embarked on their latest tour, they had just played Athens, Georgia the night before and they were on the bus to Orlando when we talked. The show in Georgia went well for their first one of the tour. Michael spoke of how the first few shows are usually testing grounds to see how things work, and they adjust accordingly for the rest of the tour: audiences becoming focus groups. What is the world coming to? While this tour isn't going to be anything completely different from what they have already been doing, Ivins mentioned they really enjoy adding layers of mayhem to their shows. They'll play some new songs, some old songs and some songs never heard. I'm guessing the tour will take on a different look and feel but still, in the end, it will smell and taste like a Flaming Lips concert.

The Flaming Lips have a special sound not found in other bands. And in that, it has become increasingly difficult to compare them to anyone, or to even talk of others who are doing the same thing. So when it comes to finding opening acts that are suitable for their tours it's anyone's guess how they find the line-up? This time it's a little different. The opening band, The White Dwarves, boasts one of Wayne Coyne's relative's. The lead singer is Wayne's nephew. They worked as crew for the Lips on many of their tours, it just made sense to have them play, they already worked well together, and so it became a family thing. At least that's the way Michael Ivins describes it. In the background I could hear the loud rumbling of band mates and family members horsing around, it sounded like a fun bus. The crackling of the phone and the loud ruckus from the buses motor coupled with the horse playing made Ivins barely audible. But what did come through loud and clear was the feeling of the road. The cities you never get to know, the people you get to know all too well, the bond, the music, the smell, the asphalt under foot, under rubber tires. Whisking you away to the next venue, another place, another time, another set. A little tin canister pushing along with the momentum of an alternative band: life on the road sang in through my tiny cell phone mic, but it rang loud and true. And when talking about how or when this musical journey will end, Michael made it sound

like the Flaming Lips would play on forever. Saying, "it's really the only thing we know how to do." Thank God for that.

When they aren't touring, they spend time weaving their unique blend of music into soundtracks for movies. They have worked on a number films. They even continue crafting their own long awaited feature length movie, "Christmas on Mars." The film is in the can, apparently they're just putting the finishing touches on it now and it should reach the rabid fan within this millennium. All hope aside, the Flaming Lips seem to keep busy and keep up with the world around them. Their politically charged album "At War With The Mystics" fueled with interviews where they lash out at the current government has made them a target for some overly nationalistic people, and a beacon of hope for more meaningful rock from the rest of the population. When asked whether music today evokes a passion and change in people like it did in the 60's Ivins said music didn't start revolutions, music happened because a revolution started, it helped give it a voice. But it wasn't the reason change happened. He likened jazz music of the 20's and 30's to pop music of today. He questioned whether music stopped the Vietnam War, or if it was the unpopular support for the war? He made a good point on all fronts, yet still with his viewpoint I was left a little confused when you think of the context of their latest album.

With a driving sense of perseverance and a do-it-yourself attitude, it seems that the Flaming Lips may in fact keep rocking for a long time, but it's certain that when the music does stop, the memories of the shows will fuel the fire and mysticism of the Flaming Lips forever. And that sounds like music to my ears.