

## NBA.com Blog: Flea



For someone who originally wanted to learn the intricacies of jazz, Michael Balzary sure made an about face. Growing up in California by way of Australia, Balzary traded in his trumpet for the bass after being introduced to the world of rock by high school friend Hillel Slovak, a guitarist himself. Balzary, rechristened Flea, would go on to form the Red Hot Chili Peppers, one of the most popular and critically acclaimed rock bands for the last 20-plus years. Along with band members Anthony Kiedis, John Frusciante and Chad Smith the Red Hot Chili Peppers have sold more than 40 million albums around the world.

Flea might be as passionate about basketball and the Lakers as he is about music. Right now, Flea and the Chili Peppers, whose two-disc "Stadium Arcadium" album drew some of the best reviews of their 23-year career and entered the national sales chart at No. 1 in May, are touring in support of the discs.

### Kareem & the Harlem Renaissance

Posted by Flea on [March 15, 2007, 9:00 p.m. ET](#)

ok.....go lakers.....beat denver tonight beat them crush them  
outsmart them and befuddle them  
now, something great happened in lakersland (sister country to lapland)  
kareem abdul jabbar has released a new book 'standing on the  
shoulders of giants'  
i just finished reading it and it was an outstanding experience  
i learned so much great stuff  
and it made me so happy  
because it happens to be written about my favorite things,  
literature, music, and sports.....  
and so many important gaps were filled in for me  
it was fun as hell to read  
and i am a better person for it  
the book is about the harlem renaissance  
which was a bold outburst of human creativity in the african american  
community that took place in harlem in the 20's and 30's  
that laid the foundation for the finest examples of african american  
art that exist today  
it is an unbelievable time, and a complex time, and a shining moment  
for humanity  
which kareem has laid out in a way that the pedestrian reader like  
myself can understand.....  
beyond being inspired about all the great art that happened and the  
stories of the artists  
i learned about the depth and complexities of the movement itself  
and what the heat was under the pressure cooker that brought about  
this beautiful explosion  
though, clearly, this book is about the african american experience  
in the united states  
it is a story that is an inspiration to all of us.....  
the tension and release of humanity  
how certain people are able to turn suffering and pain into something  
beautiful that uplifts us all  
as george clinton said "if there weren't any humps there wouldn't be

any getting over"

kareem is just so cool for staying focused and writing history books about exciting, monumental, and poignant things

about people who rose up to stunning heights to make history and create the most beautiful parts of our culture when the odds were really stacked against them

about people who accomplished complete magic is the face of a powerful and cunning opposition that was to committed to keeping them down

and how it all affected him on a deeply personal level, and that is something we can all relate to

i also, like many of i am sure, could relate to kareem's personal story, how he felt like an outcast at high school and he found solace on the basketball court where he could just let go of the world and do his thing

for me, i also felt like and outcast at school, for different reasons, but music gave me that place to let go of my uncomfortableness, a sense of community, and to just be in the moment and do my thing

for me that letting go is akin to a spiritual practice, something that puts you completely in the moment, where you do your best to be in touch with your highest self

even i, as a skinny little white boy, have been affected on a deeply personal level by the harlem renaissance as the music that was created at that time

is a music that is so sophisticated, so emotionally and spiritually profound, and so straight up viscerally ROCKING that it has given me something to aim for in my life

not to mention countless hours of pleasure, and a soothing of my soul the jazz music that grew out of that time is the great american art form and that music soars to the lofty heights of human achievement that i can only hope to reach one day

as i say, something to aim for

the most exciting part of the book for me was to read about the literary and activist heros of the time

w.e.b. dubois, who i knew practically nothing about

was an incredible guy, who worked tirelessly to, teach america that black people were the equal of white people

a simple truth that white america did not want to know about, and he never sacrificed his integrity while doing it

he wrote books, published magazines, all to showcase the intellectual part of the african american community

thinking that this would surely make it clear that black people were the equal of white....an uphill struggle for sure

this guy was a real dynamic character...in his 90's he was still totally rocking and the u.s. government came down on him because of his political views

and denied him a passport to go to ghana to do some work there, so he became citizen in ghana and lived his final days there! never gave in on his beliefs! in his 90's! cool dude!

after learning about him i am excited to go on out and get his books and read the magazine he published 'the crisis'

a great part of this book is that kareem was not afraid to show the faults of the artists of the time also

like the aforementioned w.e.b. dubois (and many of the other black

intellectuals of the time) dismissing jazz music because he said it did not promote the intellectual image of black people that he wanted to promote  
and putting down zora neale hurston, who is an unbelievably great writer, because he thought she was lampooning black southern black people  
which was not the case at all  
i personally love zora neal hurston and that part made me sad to learn about because though she never sacrificed her art, the negative criticism hurt her deeply  
he also even wrote about some questionable parts of zora's history.....complex characters one and all!  
kareem's book is great  
there were only two things that i did not agree with  
one is that kareem said that miles davis was the touchstone at the center of the be bop jazz movement  
now i love miles davis like crazy, and he changed the face of jazz 3 times and if i was stranded on a desert island 'kind of blue' is the record i would want with me  
however, charlie parker is the one and only dgr center of be bop, of this there is no question, and charlie parker is arguably the virtuoso musician of the century.....  
the other is that at one point in the book kareem speaks about the great writers of the harlem renaissance  
and says that his own accomplishments on the basketball court did nothing to change the world and that they pale in comparison to what these writers/activists/ thinkers did...  
and with that i disagree..... kareem's accomplishments on the basketball court have been a deep and long lasting inspiration to untold thousands of people  
his greatness at what he did and the dignity with which he has always carried himself has put as much good energy into the world as anyone basketball is as beautiful as literature  
in this time of our popular culture  
we are always hearing our celebrities going on about me me me me a never ending soap opera of the power and grandiosity of their fame and their personal lives  
and we hear them being lauded for their ability to work the system to make money.....  
and here we have kareem, one our most important sports figures who, since i was aware of who he was, have been told by the media that he is too aloof, too self involved  
that he is unfriendly and selfish with the media  
because he does not glad hand like a politician, give snappy little sound bites, and pose by a turkey each christmas time....  
the truth is....  
he is not wallowing in his fame  
he is the one of the most giving people  
he is the one who spends his time and energy focused on giving us something much more profound  
something that will stand the test of time as a document of the greatness human beings are are capable of  
and give kids a sense of self