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# Spearheading social activism

Spearhead's lead singer Michael Franti talks candidly about his life, tour and music

By Aaron Shakra  
 Pulse Editor

Michael Franti and his band Spearhead have been touring across the country in support of "Everyone Deserves Music"; their fourth album. The recording, released on the band's independent label Boo Boo Wax, includes songs such as "Bomb The World" and "We Don't Stop." Franti's lyrics address social injustice and responsibility with music that might loosely be considered a blend of funk, folk and hip-hop styles. Last Thursday, the band played a 180-minute set of music at the McDonald Theatre. Before the show, Franti took time to talk to the Emerald about his music, lyrics, and activism.

Emerald: On songs such as "Rock The Nation," you call for a takedown of corporate media-controlled systems. Do you view the band's music as a direct action in itself or a means to something greater?

Michael Franti: We do it directly for people, so it is a direct action. Often a direct action isn't really direct. And often things that appear to be indirect

have direct effects. I practice yoga. We always say in yoga: 'We practice yoga on our mat, but we live our yoga in our life.' It's the same thing with direct action. Sometimes we think of things like going to raise our voice, like the World Trade Organization and some protests. But that's just one moment in time — when it's our practice for the rest of our lives.

Emerald: It seems like many aspire to inspire others but often this seems to fall into a dichotomy of "telling" and "listening." How would you encourage listeners to take action beyond buying albums and trying to put themselves in the spotlight?

MF: The greatest respect that anybody can show anyone else is being listened to. So many of us grew up in families and in schools and in communities where we were never listened to. So the rest of our lives we go through trying to be heard. Inspiration is something you never know where it's going to come from. To inspire, I don't know if there's a formula for it or not, except to have good intentions behind what you do, to plant your seeds in fertile soil — like well-crafted music, well-crafted painting and well-crafted words. Then, close your eyes, say a gentle prayer with it,

and let it go.

Emerald: Saul Williams once said in an interview: "I describe myself as a student and I consider myself an artist. I think that an artist is a vessel and that it's our duty to cleanse and make ourselves as open as possible so that things can enter us and we can filter them out." Could you comment on this?

MF: Well, I love Saul, and I love that description. I feel the same way. I believe that you have to remain a student of music in order to hold your creativity. I'm always trying to do new things — right now my latest thing is to learn to play the acoustic guitar. Like Saul was saying, try to stay cleansed and open to the creative spirit. I believe there is one creative force in the world. No creation actually comes from us. It comes from this one force, this one beautiful birth and energy. And so when we allow ourselves to be still, and when allow ourselves to feel whatever we're feeling — to be tired, or angry, or lonely or hungry — that's when we have this sense coming through.

Emerald: I was reading your Web site and noticed that you started learning how to play guitar around the time "Stay Human" was released in 2001. How have you progressed on that, and how has it affected your music?

MF: It's affected my music a lot because when I first started writing music I would just write rhymes and just say whatever I want to say. There was no real form or structure to it — it was just rhyming, rhyming, rhyming. But a more concise way to communicate with people is to have a form. I always start with the hook of the song or the chorus and work backwards from that. I'm always saving hooks and writing verses around that. And the bridge of the song; I want it to be uplifting. I want it to be like, "Okay I told you what the problem is in the verse, here's the hook," which is again me restating the problem. And then when we come to the bridge I want it to be like, "Everything's going to be okay. There is a reason for resolution. There is a there is a possibility of resolution." So that's how I write. And the guitar has helped me with that because now I work with chords and melody and not just rhythm and words.

Emerald: There's a lyric from your album "Home": "A piece of peace for you / a piece of peace for me / but I won't act peaceful if you're not that way to me." How does this compare to your later songs, such as "Everyone Deserves Music," which calls for compassion toward enemies?

MF: That's good that you mention that because that's a song that I haven't done for a long time. It doesn't speak to where I'm at today. I look at it as a historical reference as where I have been. There was a time when I was that way, and I felt like I chose it. I was going out into the street and I was at protests, and I would look at cops with disdain and hatred — as much hatred as they would look at me. Or in any situation where someone was hostile to me, I felt like it was my right to be

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Today's crossword solution

B	I	C	S	F	A	B	E	R	B	Y	E	S
A	B	L	E	A	B	E	L	E	R	E	B	A
R	I	O	T	I	B	E	A	M	A	T	O	M
D	S	C	S	L	O	T	M	A	C	H	I	N
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T	E	S	D	E	N	T	S	V	E	R	Y	

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