



Record Reviews



U2 *Rattle and Hum* Island

by Mike Spindloe

By now, of course, U2 have long since entered the pantheon of rock gods, the handful of bands that can sell out a football stadium, face north, fart three times and leave audience and critics alike gasping in adulatory amazement. This is mostly the result of the success of *The Joshua Tree*, which catapulted the band from the hockey arenas into said football stadiums of the world. ("Yes, I think we can still maintain an intimate atmosphere," says Bono.)

Besides selling a lot of records, *The Joshua Tree* also set in motion a giant hype machine, which U2 have chosen to feed by releasing the dreaded post-smash-album concert movie, with soundtrack.

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Flying in the face of media overkill factor (refer to Bruce Springsteen for details) is a risky business these days (refer to Michael Jackson for details), but U2 do so fearlessly with *Rattle and Hum*.

The album is a slightly uneven but mostly well worthy collection of six live tracks recorded on the last tour, nine new songs and a couple of odd snippets: "The Star-Spangled Banner," which introduces "Bullet the Blue Sky," and a couple of streetcorner Harlem singers doing something called "Freedom For My People." Overall, *Rattle and Hum* is so good that I believe U2 have actually erred on the side of caution. There ends up being almost a studio album's worth of new material interspersed with the live tracks, a format that doesn't exactly inspire visions of continuity. As it turns out, things could be

worse, because there are a bunch of great songs here that more than compensate for the ill-conceived format.

First, the live stuff. There are cover versions of "Helter Skelter" (blistering) and "All Along the Watchtower" (redundantly average). "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" acquires an entirely suitable gospel-style chorus courtesy of the vocal group New Voices of Freedom. "Silver and Gold," originally from the *Sun City* album and later a single B-side, is presented in the best version yet. The last live song, "Bullet the Blue Sky," explains the caution idea; if this is the cream of the live material, then the rest would have made a superb *all* live disc.

In the studio, U2 show that acquiring obscene amounts of money hasn't interfered with their ability to write good songs. Ironically, "Desire," released as the first single, is among the weakest of the bunch, relying on a Bo Diddley beat that merely sounds bombastic. Others are excellent: "When Love Comes To Town" (with B.B. King), "Angel of Harlem," "Van Dieman's Land" and "Love Rescue Me" all qualify as instant U2 classics. A small issue with "Van Dieman's Land": the song fades out awkwardly, at a point which feels more like halfway than the end. Once again, U2 have given us almost enough new songs to justify an all-studio LP: perhaps they felt that two new albums would have been severe overkill.

U2 are sitting, as they deserve to be, on top of the rock world. Their music packs a strong emotional punch, a timely social conscience and a range of expression encompassing acoustic balladry to raunch and roll. Expectations for *Rattle and Hum* were high, and U2, to their credit, have delivered an album that lives up to its title.



Lloyd Cole and the Commotions *Mainstream* Capitol/EMI

by Greg Pohl

I've been waiting a long time for this one to come out domestically. *Mainstream*, this band's third album, was released over a year ago in Britain, but I was hesitant to lay out \$17 on an import copy. Lloyd Cole and the Commotions are known for quirky, moody pop songs about destructive behavior and failing relationships, about wallowing in depression, savoring it, rejoicing in it even. They are a sort of more approachable Smiths, for people who haven't quite been weaned from radio fluff yet.

So, my first reaction to this album was disgust; here was Lloyd doing all that fluff that I try to avoid. The first four songs on *Mainstream* are half-hearted remakes of cuts from *Rattlesnakes* and *Easy Pieces*, the first two Lloyd Cole albums. Instead of having ideas to communicate to the listener, these songs seem driven by a quest for the almighty dollar. And since inspiration was lacking, the band simply figured out what it was that worked previously, and repeated the formula. No surprise that the singles for British airplay came out of these first

four songs.

With that said, the rest of the album still has some fine moments. Some interesting things are added to that trademark guitar twang, such as violin on "Jennifer She Said", trumpet on "Big Snake", and harmonica on "Sean Penn Blues". Yes, the latter is all about that angry young man and his uncontrolled lifestyle. Tracey Thorn of Everything But the Girl adds backup vocals to the aforementioned "Big Snake", a song about clashing expectations in a relationship. My personal favorite on the LP is "Hey Rusty". This cut is about realizing that life is going nowhere, and wishing that we could abort the mission and go back to simpler times.

In spite of the acoustic instrumentation, the album has a synthesized sound. Gone are the accordion and piano which gave previous works a sense of immediacy which was easy to relate to. The overall feeling of *Mainstream* is that of a hospital; synthetic smells, diffused lightning, and only a few interesting objects in the sanitized surroundings. This album just isn't powerful enough to satisfy the cravings of a long-time Lloyd Cole fan. If you're really curious about this band, go out and buy *Rattlesnakes* or *Easy Pieces* instead.

REM *Eponymous* IRS/MCA

by Rodney Gitzel

Well, a new REM album. Or, so he thought until he heard it.

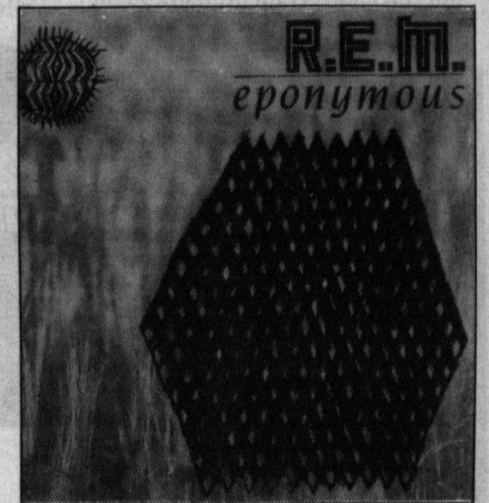
No, really, it is a new album — it's just the songs that are old. Yes, *Eponymous* is a greatest hits album (if that makes any sense); or actually, it's more of a retrospective. Apparently REM have left IRS for WEA, so IRS has put this thing together to make more money. There are songs from every album on this thing, some remixed, and even a tune from an obscure soundtrack.

If you aren't familiar with much of REM's stuff, this album would be a safe investment — it gives you an overview of the changes the band's gone through without forcing you to buy five or six records. It's worth a look.

But, what about all us silly people who like REM? Well, unless you can get it cheap, don't bother. *Eponymous* is far from ideal as a compilation (it doesn't

even include "Pretty Persuasion", and it could do without "Fall on Me"); and aside from the original version of "Radio Free Europe", the remixes (ie. "Finest Work-song") don't generate any excitement.

However, whether you buy it or not, at least go to some store and check out the back of the record sleeve. A reliable source, upon seeing the sleeve, said "that's very silly." I agree. It'll make your day.



be.

It's not like these boys don't have anything to say either. Anthrax attacks the televangelist, telling him to "tell me your killing joke." They attack racism by claiming "prejudice is an unnatural thought." And finally, in the song "Now it's Dark," they give us an horrific description of the inner workings of an insane mind, like the one belonging to Dennis Hopper in the film *Blue Velvet*.

All ranting and raving aside, Anthrax are still human. No, this album is not perfect. They still tend to fall into the "typical rebel" syndrome, bitching about things just to upset the apple cart. This tedium is evident in a song like "Finale," which tiresomely attacks the institution of marriage. A line like "I drank three six-packs just so I could look at your face" is disappointing to hear, and only lessens the importance of their other strong statements. Still, Anthrax maintains that this is their best album, although it's not clear where they improve over their previous full-length LP "Among the Living," which also had much to say. The main difference is that the music on this record is more thoughtful and structured, while maintaining its original vitality.

In the final analysis, you still have to like metal to like Anthrax, but you don't have to like it to respect them.

Anthrax *State of Euphoria* Island

by Ron Kuipers

Music for metalheads, or metal music for people who have heads? The distinction is crucial. Far too often metal music gets tossed aside without consideration, but as with all genres of rock and roll, metal music has its good and its bad. Anthrax definitely belongs to the former category. These boys put a vast amount of thought into their work, and it shows on their latest effort, *State of Euphoria*.

Dressing in T-shirts, jams and sneakers, Anthrax throws out all former metal conventions except one — straightforward power. This is definitely one chunk of wax that could turn the entire house upside down. The double-bass drumming is rampant, yet thoughtfully placed. The guitar playing is sheer aggression, but in no way isolated or without support from the rest of the music. No, everything does not stop for the sacred guitar solo with Anthrax, which is one of the things that gives their music its runaway energy. That killer bass manages to work its way through the auditory barrage as well. Nothing is wasted here. Everything is rock solid, as it should