

Record Reviews

R.E.M.
Green
WEA

by Rodney Gitzel

"Hello. I saw you, I know you, I knew you. I think I can remember your name!"

And so opens the latest album from one of Athens' more seminal exports, R.E.M.. The band's sound, happily, is a progression following from *Document*, their last record (the greatest-hits package *Eponymous* doesn't count), and is thicker and richer than it's ever been (ignore the spaghetti-sauce connotations, please). Just what that really means is difficult to explain, but anyone who's heard any older R.E.M. along with anything from these two albums will understand.

The songs on the album are all quite good, from the afore-quoted Doors-esque "Pop Song 89" — and that quote was pretty much the entire lyrics! — to the brooding and disturbing "I Remember California," which ends the record.

In between those two, one finds some fairly hard-edged rock, with "Orange Crush" and "Turn You Inside-Out," as well as some of the more poppy rock usually associated with bands like R.E.M. ("Get Up" and "Stand" are suitable ex-

amples). However, heading-off in a completely different direction, one also finds acoustic songs, with no guitars and no drums! Songs like "You Are the Everything" and "Hairshirt" rely on mandolins, Hammond organs, and lyrics, and are not at all uninteresting or boring.

Speaking of lyrics, Michael Stipe's voice really is developing well, and he's sounding increasingly confident, both in his writing and his vocalizing. This is apparent especially in "World Leader Pretend," in which, after so many years of muffling, he is given almost unnerving prominence — and that's not a complaint. It's just that you get used to not being able to understand him, and then suddenly you can. (Strangely enough, "World Leader Pretend" is also the only R.E.M. song to ever have its lyrics published on an album sleeve.) Add to Stipe's confidence his convincing portrayal of a lonely invalid boy in "The Wrong Child," and you realize that Stipe is not going to be one to fade into insignificance as a singer and songsmith.

All told, this is an exceptionally satisfying album. A word of warning, however: if you're at all like me, listening to it straight-through will sometimes leave you feeling like an emotional milkshake, so get it on CD, if you can, and program appropriately. 'Nuff said.



R.E.M. from left to right: Peter Buck, Michael Stipe, Bob Berry and Mike Mills. *Green* is another solid LP from Athens' best-known export.

Lyle Mays
Street Dreams
Geffen

by Raj Nigam

Lyle Mays is probably best known for his work with the Pat Metheny Group. One might assume that an excursion out of the bounds of such a critically acclaimed (as well as commercially successful) group signalled a need to explore other avenues of expression; a need perhaps stifled within said confines. This obviously was not the case with the release of this second solo effort by Mays, who, although ably assisted by a stellar group of players, sadly managed only to fashion an album that is destined to be filed under the category "same shit, different day." Lest this assessment seem unduly harsh or unkind, let me assure fans of Mr. Mays that this album is at the same time in possession of myriad redeeming qualities.

All compositions and arrangements are of Mays' own invention, save "Possible Straight," on which he shares composing credit with Metheny. Bill Frisell, no slouch himself, is the lone axeman on duty throughout the album, while various bassists (including PM alumnus Steve Rodby), and drummers (Steve's Gadd and Jordan to name but two) rotate through the session. If nothing else, Mays' long time association with Metheny has made

him well connected, as is evidenced by a quick perusal of the album credits. The ballsy horn section employed for the session includes the likes of tenorman Bob Mintzer and trumpeter Randy Brecker, while drummer Peter Erskine does a turn on the introspective "Hangtime."

All of these cameo appearances by so many jazzheads led this listener to question just why Mr. Metheny himself didn't grace the album for even one track. Didn't he get invited? Or could he perhaps have been just a little uneasy at the prospect of appearing on something that so closely resembled his own work? The obvious question raised by this ugly specter of Methenesque autocracy, is if this album is any indication of operational procedure within the Metheny group, why then don't they rename themselves the Metheny/Mays group? I sense a grave injustice is being perpetrated upon our hapless hero, "low-key Lyle." Never mind any of that, though, because in fact most, (if not all) of what I've just mentioned is completely irrelevant to the issue at hand.

Mays' harmonic exploration, while always inventive, does on occasion drift beyond creativity into the realm of intemperance, but to quote half an age-old cliché: "Nothing ventured..." Considering that his is a background of improvisation, Mays' arrangements (especially those for the 30-piece chamber orchestra employed on 2 tracks) are well crafted, and lyrical. But what the hell else is new?



Lyle Mays didn't really need to leave the Pat Metheny Group to make his latest album, *Street Dreams*.

Sex Pistols
The Swindle Continues
Restless

by Dragos Ruiu

"Hey guy. How's it goin'."
"Well Vinnie baby, do I have a deal for you. I've got a really hot recording contract... are you sitting down... it's the Sex Pistols."

"No, it's not a joke. I know their bass player is dead."

"Relax Vinnie. Here let me set the scene for you:

"You remember how you started making money hand over fist cashing in on the retro-nostalgia kick of the eighties. Youse got all those braindead rap singers to redo disco hits, and then a couple of bimbo models to do it, and before you could say 'money', every teen was screaming about how Tiffany was their idol.

"So you probably remember what happened afterwards... Yeah, a couple of those other companies got singers, and even raisins, to rip off old fifties and sixties hits.

"So the way I figure, the next thing to do is to revive (snicker) the old music of the

late seventies, because everything else has been ripped off already.

"Listen, it's perfect. Everybody has heard of the Sex Pistols. They made all the papers, and they even had that movie made about dem. It's perfect, I tells ya.

"No tours, no expenses. Only a few royalties Vinnie, think about that. We just get some of their bigger songs, and some of their old out-takes and package them all nice. Hey, it worked wonders for Lennon, right?"

"After all, it's what the old Pistols used to do. They only had a handful of songs their entire career. They just kept re-recording them. So we can stay true to their original 'spirit' for the die-hards.

"Yeah, I know what you're going to say next, why include three versions of "Anarchy in the U.K." on one album. Well it's great, one is called "Sex on 45" and the other is a really wimpy Slim Whitman version with woodwinds and everything, and the other is the best version. It'll be just like the original *Rock and Roll Swindle* album.

"You remember how they did that song in French and then they did a disco version. Yeah, and I can just see the title of the album now: *The Swindle Continues...*"

