

R.E.M.: Rockin', energetic music

Perhaps it was not a religious experience, but the 27-song show R.E.M. performed Tuesday night in Duke's Page Auditorium left the capacity crowd singing praise.

The band from Athens, Ga. stuck mostly to the unique, murky-sounding pop-rock originals from its albums. The two encores included some curious covers.

After an almost intentionally sloppy version of R.E.M.'s frenzied hit "Radio Free Europe," the show opened up like some unexpected, unnameable flower.

Dynamically attractive to watch, lead singer Michael Stipe sang with emotional intensity. He moaned on "Gardening at Night," howled on "Pilgrimage" and sang earnestly on "So. Central Rain."

Guitarist Peter Buck generally leapt about like a leprechaun, plucking out brilliant lead guitar lines all the while.

Drummer Bill Berry pounded out steady, sometimes driving beats all night long, even adding some piercing back-up vocals.

R.E.M.'s loose feeling but united sound seemed to be orchestrated by bassist Mike Mills, who provided striking, almost guitar-speed bass licks. His backing or intermittent vocals of contrasting lyrics added depth to the songs as Stipe played off them, singing lead.

Many in the audience passed up their seats to crowd into the orchestra pit or against the front rails as R.E.M. played a consistently strong though somewhat unclimatic regular set. The climax came with the two encores.

R.E.M. opened its first encore with a pretty version of "The Mamas" and the Papas' "California Dreaming." Mills and Berry added rich harmonies to Stipe's singing. An unrecorded song and "1,000,000" ended the set as Stipe's shouts exploded like violent fireworks through the walls of speakers.

Brought back for a second encore, R.E.M. played a most eclectic set.

Stipe entered the darkened stage alone and began singing in a surpris-

Louis Corrigan

Review

ingly bare, honest voice. Mills and then Berry joined in as well on this beautiful acapella version of the standard "Moon River." The audience met the song with stillness and silence interrupted by occasional screams and, finally, tremendous applause.

Buck then came back on stage for the rocking "Second Guessing," which was followed by a country medley led by Stipe. The band's own country-tinted "(Don't Go to) Rockville," which again found Mills and Berry in strong harmony with Stipe, followed.

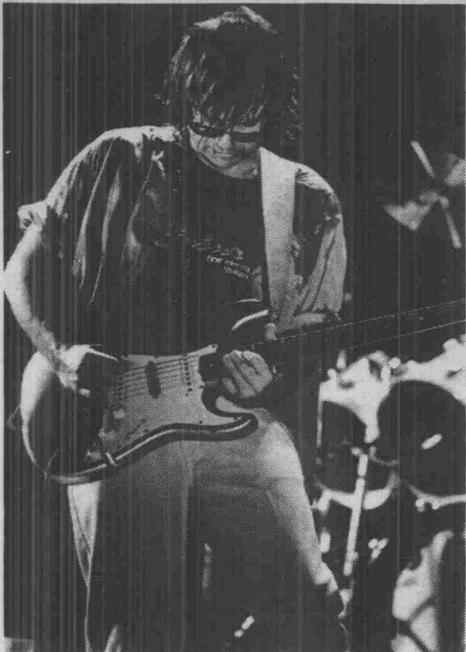
When the song ended, Stipe immediately hummed some more and would not stop until the other band members acquiesced and played the innocent-sounding "We Walk." Stipe gingerly swayed his shoulders to the music.

Peter Holsapple, lead singer for the dB's, then joined R.E.M. on guitar for the song the audience had screamed for all night — the all-out, rocking "Box Cars (Carnival of Sorts)." As a finale, R.E.M. jammed out a rambling 15-minute, punk-influenced version of Fleetwood Mac's "Tusk" that sent Stipe absolutely loose.

Funky bass riffs and generally skeletal guitar lines backdropped Stipe's harmonica licks. The relative quiet of the song climbed emotionally as Buck thrust at his guitar strings and Stipe let out screams that evoked images of tortured souls and demons.

As the song kept going, Stipe fell to the floor, his back against the front speaker monitors, and ad libbed lines about "sheltering your daughter." The whole scene was reminiscent of Jim Morrison.

At the show's end, a sense of wonder prevailed in the audience. A murmur lingered in the air.



Peter Holsapple, lead singer of dB's, performs.

dB's live act lacks excitement

Eddie Huffman

Review

There has been a great deal of talk lately about New Southern Pop, a generic label used to describe bands as different as the B-52s and Jason and the Scorchers. The dB's, purveyors of the form since before the term existed, returned home to North Carolina Tuesday Night as they opened for R.E.M. at Duke's Page Auditorium.

The dB's play pop music in the best sense of the term. Their songs are infectious, built around simple guitar riffs and loaded with hooks. On record, they combine the eclecticism of the Beatles with the raucous good spirit of the Monkees.

Live, however, the dB's are harder to grasp. They have never had a very good reputation as a live act, and Tuesday night's show displayed the band as tight and well-intentioned but less than transcendent.

Part of the problem was the absence of founding member Chris Stamey, who left the band for a solo career last year. Peter Holsapple was left to carry the entire weight of the dB's live show. Holsapple performed well, but the band was never exciting; they spent most of the evening standing in one place. In addition, the quirky experimentalism of Stamey's songs like "Happenstance" and "I'm in Love" were sorely missed.

However, Stamey's absence did have some positive effects. The dB's were more emotionally direct and less abstract than on record. They explored some exciting, straightforward rock 'n' roll ideas that probably would have been left untouched had Stamey remained in the band.

Highlights of the dB's eleven-song set included "Neverland," a fast rocker with great harmony provided by the band's new bass player (former bassist Gene Holder now plays lead guitar); "Bad Reputation," a scathing song from the dB's first album; and "Black and White," which featured R.E.M.'s Peter Buck as guest guitarist.

After a lackluster rendition of "Amplifier," the dB's seemed a dead issue. The band was only in the middle of its set, but the crowd began calling for R.E.M. Peter Holsapple proceeded to unleash the evening's biggest surprise: a thrilling version of Elvis Presley's "Suspicious Minds," perhaps the King's finest song. The dB's carried the song off surprisingly well, lacking only back-up singing to push the song over the top.

The dB's followed "Suspicious Minds" with "Rendezvous," an excellent new song about a trip to Elvis' grave in Memphis, Tenn. and probably the dB's best song since 1982's "Happenstance."

Holsapple closed the dB's show with a resounding "It's great to be home!" The group may not have had its best show ever Tuesday night, but the musicians were definitely interesting and certainly welcome home.

THEIR 10 YEAR OLD DAUGHTER IS SUING THEM FOR DIVORCE.

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