

R.E.M.'s popularity continues to rise with 'Green'

By DOUG EDMUNDS
Staff Writer

Green — R.E.M.

Ah, yes — R.E.M. Those three letters have come to mean quite a lot in the 1980s music scene. What started as a sloppy bar band in Athens, Ga., has become, after a few years as the most highly worshipped group from the rock 'n' roll underground, a regular honest-to-goodness Top 40 act. Who would have thought that the men who brought us *Chronic Town* and *Murmur* would later be sandwiched in Billboard's Hot 100 between the likes of George Michael and the Bangles? Stranger things have happened, but this does prove that justice still exists in today's pop music world.

It is not for me to say whether R.E.M.'s increasing success had changed its approach to making music. But it is true that as its popularity has surged, so has its sound become more direct, up front and confrontational. Beginning with *Life's Rich Pageant*, this trend can be attributed in part to a noticeable change in production technique, with the drums and especially the vocals being

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brought out in the mix, making them louder and clearer.

But more interesting is the change that has evolved in the songs themselves. Not only are we hearing fewer chiming arpeggios from Peter Buck's guitar and more crunching bar chords, but also the enigmatic Mr. Stipe is singing coherent, well-enunciated lyrics more than ever before. The man who once mumbled something about "Sitting Still" is now shouting at us to "Stand" and listen up.

Such changes in sound and style are crucial to any good band's vitality and longevity. At the same time, they don't necessarily guarantee that the music will be better or even as good as earlier work, or that the band will continue to be popular.

Green, R.E.M.'s seventh record of all-new material, is perhaps the culmination of the changes it's

been making in the past few years. Lyrically, this is by far the group's most straightforward album to date. Never before has Michael Stipe sounded so eager and willing to share his messages with us. Nearly every word can be understood, and the meaning behind these words, in most cases, is more decipherable, less obscure than in earlier songs.

The band even did the unthinkable — printed the lyrics to one song on the inner sleeve! To any long-time fan of the group this comes as a major surprise.

This effect is both good and bad. On the one hand, in songs like "World Leader Pretend" and "Get Up," the clarity adds to the overall effect and makes for enjoyable listening. On the other hand, in tunes like "Orange Crush" or the LP's worst piece, "Stand," a little bit of mumbled obscurity would

have been more than welcome to hide Stipe's no-longer-self-conscious philosophizing. In the end it's a pretty even trade-off, with some of the mystery being lost but a good deal of insight into the band members' sentiments being gained. Indeed, one of the album's most affecting songs is "The Wrong Child," a quiet tune sung convincingly from the viewpoint of a confused, outcast boy. Here Stipe reveals more of his character than he was ever willing to in the past, and the result is almost frightening.

Musically, the record is an extension of last year's *Document*. The guitars are loud and full, Buck pulling out some ripping open-chord patterns and a "wah-wah" lead in addition to the usual interesting riffs. The main riff of "Orange Crush" recalls the hook of "The One I Love," while the heavy,

throbbing drive of "Turn You Inside-Out" sounds similar to "Finest Worksong." The three acoustic numbers on the record are a pleasant change pace and fit in well. Mike Mills' outstanding bass playing just keeps getting better, and Bill Berry sounds as strong and in control as ever on drums. The back-up vocals, as always, flow in and out of the lead voice in beautiful fashion and add greatly to the arrangement.

Well, I've managed to ramble on here without really saying what I think of this LP as a whole. My first impression was one of considerable disappointment, but after several careful listenings I'm starting to warm up to it. It's certainly not a landmark achievement like *Murmur*, but it's also not a throwaway. With so many bands imitating the "old" R.E.M. sound, it's important to recognize the fact that this band continues to grow and explore new musical fields. Its music is no longer as vital and immediately pleasing as it once was, but R.E.M. has again demonstrated craft and intelligence on *Green*. We can't count it out of this fast, rise and fall business quite yet.

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Mailbag

Joe Bob, Joe Bob!!!!

We, too wish to belong to a group totally and eternally vigilant to neanderthals, cretins, interlopers and dorks bent on destroying the last vestiges of true culture.

Douglas Higgins and Mike Palmer
Instructors, Math Dept.
Center High School
North Highlands, Calif.

Dear Doug and Mike:

As mathematicians, I'm sure you'll appreciate this experiment. I'm publishing this letter to see if you'll will get fired.

Dear Joe Bob,

I'm your biggest fan in Yama-

gata, Japan. You know how short the Japanese are.

Anyhow, I'm such a big fan, I'm almost an air conditioner. Do you like bad jokes? Nobody here understands humor in English, good or bad. Thanks for keeping me in touch with my language and cultural roots.

Speaking of diseases, check out teddy-bear lace-curtain cuteness 25-year-old adolescent virgins, deadly junior high school uniform ancestor magic kung fu, books on TV, 10 percent public wearing doctors' face masks, talking vending machines, choking-cat-being-castrated singing syrup, English that nobody reads or understands being printed on everything, fashion food, musical crosswalks, lifesized plastic policemen.

Mark Anthony
Yamagata, Japan

Dear Mark:

You're right. I've always wanted to go to Vegas and see those things.

Dear Joe Bob:

I have doubted the sincerity of your support for the Right Reverends Swaggert, Bakker, Roberts and Falwell. Now you malign the intentions of Her Majesty Queen Nancy.

If it wasn't for your stereotypical bravado, I would doubt that you even hail from that great God-fearing patriotic nation south of the Oklahoma holy land.

Sincerely,
George W. Steffner
Moraga, Calif.

Dear George,

I love Nancy. I would buy Mary Kay Cosmetics from Nancy. In fact,

I no longer think she looks like a lipstick lizard whose face has been freeze-dried. I think she looks like a piece of discount furniture that's been left out in the sun for six weeks.

Graffiti

(who is 6'1" and weighs in at 371½ pounds), and the "Byrd" Man, Byrd Wilson (6'3" at 235 pounds).

Be sure to look for "Super Bad" Billy Ivory (6'1", 317 pounds), "Psycho" Michael Waddell (6', 160 pounds), Chester "The Molester" Beck (6'1", 220 pounds) and "Boilerhouse Byrdman" Wilson (6'3", 235 pounds).

Not to be outdone (and barely outweighed) or chauvinistic, there's a "Toughwoman Contest," too. If you go, be sure to say hello to "Little" Betty Hogg (4'2", 261

Dear Joe Bob —

Is fu what I think it is???????

Elizabeth Stell
Arlington, Texas

Dear Liz:

Absolutely NOT!

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pounds), "Sexy" Sherri Gardner (5'2", 120 pounds), Emily "Stompet" Stirewart (5'4", 120 pounds) and "Big Mama" Spinks (5'6", 312 and a half pounds).

I'm sure you're all now ready to rush over for this grand occasion, so. Tickets are \$11 for ringside, \$9 reserved or \$8 for general admission. And you can call promoter Jim Morris at 373-7400 for more information.

Before you go, be sure you can answer these questions: "How tough are you?" and, if you're pretty tough, "CAN YOU SURVIVE?!"

THE FARMERS' MARKET



Open Until December 17
Saturday, 7 am-12 noon
Roberson St. in Carrboro

On sale will be broccoli, spinach, lettuce, beets, radishes, turnips, sweet potatoes, vegetables in season, organic vegetables, baked goods, cheese, eggs, herb vinegars, honey, periwinkle ground cover, compost, baskets, garden art and other crafts! All products are locally grown and made by participating vendors.

So visit the Farmers' Market to buy or browse. Bring a friend or meet a new one.

RAIN OR SHINE

GREAT AMERICAN SMOKEOUT

TAKE A BREATH

Join the Great American Smokeout on Thursday, November 17. Millions of smokers across the country will take a break and try not to smoke for 24 hours. How about you? Or, if you don't smoke, adopt a smoker for the day and promise to help that friend get through the day without a cigarette!

.85-7MM-Rev. 3/88-No. 5680-LE



PYEWACKET
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A FEW QUIT TIPS

- Hide all ashtrays, matches, etc.
- Lay in a supply of sugarless gum, carrot sticks, etc.
- Drink lots of liquids, but pass up coffee & alcohol.
- Tell everyone you're quitting for the day.
- When the urge to smoke hits, take a deep breath, hold it for 10 seconds, & release it slowly.
- Exercise to relieve the tension.
- Try the "buddy system," and ask a friend to quit too.