

The Replacements reach musical maturity with new LP

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The Replacements — *Don't Tell a Soul*

In a recent interview in *Musician* magazine, Paul Westerberg was quoted as saying, "I've come to grips with the fact that I'm an artist." Coming from the lead singer and songwriter for a band as unpretentious and down-to-earth as the Replacements, a comment like this might very well signal the proverbial beginning of the end, the point at which self-image and attitude start to interfere with simply making great rock 'n' roll. Luckily, this interpretation couldn't be farther from the truth. The proof is in the platter, kiddos, the brand-new LP from the Replacements, that is. Ironically enough, it's called *Don't Tell a Soul*, which just might be a self-conscious allusion to Westerberg's new-found sense of identity and purpose. After all, their last album, released in early 1987, was called *Pleased to Meet Me*, and now that Westerberg and the rest of the band have come to know each other better, they've created what is without question the most ambitious, mature record of their career.

I'm not going to cultivate a common music critic cliché by saying that with this record, the Replacements have arrived. They got here a long time ago. Anyone who doesn't believe that need only pick up a copy of 1984's *Let It Be* or their major label review from the following year, *Tim*. These boys have been bashing away and honing their craft ever since they said "Sorry, Ma, forgot to take out the trash" back near the start of the decade. Each of their records has been characterized by raw energy, a musical eclecticism and an often self-deprecating sense of humor. The past three LPs have also exhibited the considerable songwriting talent of Paul Westerberg. *Don't Tell a Soul* offers all of the above and more. It's a big step for the group and, although there are a couple of moments where it seems like they might trip and fall, the overwhelming majority of the record proves otherwise.

The disc kicks off with a typical Replacements mid-tempo pop song, "Talent Show." Reminiscent of several upbeat, bouncy numbers from their past, this song is a perfect album opener, immediately catchy and recognizable as the 'Mats. "Back to Back," continues in a similar vein, though the production and arrangement are noticeably more dense here, with harmony backup vocals and some melodic lead guitar work filling out the sound. It's the third song, "We'll Inherit the Earth," that alerts the listener to something totally new coming from this band. An electrifying track both musically and lyrically, this number has as much passion and sweep as any U2 song, but without the extravagant vocal stylings or any sense of

messianic posturing. The singer sings about finding a note washed ashore that has these words written on the back: "We'll inherit the earth, but we don't want it/ It's been ours since birth, whatcha' doin' on it." In its vivid and powerful, unaffected delivery this is the album's most striking song, a centerpiece for everything else.

Next is the country-flavored "Achin' to Be," which features some of the band's best playing and some of Westerberg's best lyrics. Tommy Stinson, Chris Mars and Slim Dunlap sound like a genuine honkey-tonk backup band by laying down a perfect musical backdrop for Westerberg's portrait of a lonely misunderstood girl who wants to be loved. "Thought about, not understood, she's achin' to be," he sings and compares her to a poet "who finds it hard to

ask/The poems come out so slowly, like the colors down her cheek." Then in a nice twist at the end he turns it around: "Thought about and only loved she's achin' to be — just like me." Closing out side one, the band gives us a gentle '50s-style ballad called, "They're Blind," another brilliant lyric about another misunderstood soul.

Like "Bastards of Young," the first song on side two of *Tim*, "Anywhere's Better Than Here" starts off with a long scream and fades out with a repeated, thrashing tag line. Whether the parallel was intentional or coincidental is unimportant. What matters is that this tune keeps the momentum going and pulls the listener back into familiar Replacements territory. The funky "Asking Me lies" revolves around the biting accusatory line, "You're telling me

questions, asking me lies." Here the band sounds exactly like the Clash around the time of *Sandinista*, though Westerberg's voice sounds more like a raving Bono than a pissed-off Joe Strummer. This song is another attempt at something new, but this time the group comes up short.

For a taste of classic pop rock 'Mats style, check out "I'll Be You." Great music, great lyrics, great concept: two people so bored with themselves that one of them proposes they pretend to be each other. "I Won't" will warm the heart of any long-time Replacements fan with its pure crazed rock 'n' roll sound and classic Westerberg howling at a sentimental lover: "You want me to send a letter or a note — I wo-wo-won't!" "Rock 'n' roll Ghost" is a sad-eyed, confessional, haunting perfor-

mance by Westerberg, with tasteful low-key band accompaniment.

The record closes on a disappointing note: "Darlin' One" simply sounds like the band trying too hard to end with a majestic bang. This big arrangement just doesn't do justice to the subject matter. Fortunately, the previous 10 songs are more than enough to overpower this weak finale.

The group has obviously put a lot of effort and thoughtful consideration into arranging and producing these songs, a fact which isn't really true of their earlier recordings. Though many of the rough edges have been polished smooth, the album is more consistent and more cohesive than any previous LP. Don't miss a note of *Don't Tell A Soul*. Now I "can't hardly wait" for the tour to begin.



Just A Taste!

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