

Records

R.E.M. Fables of the Reconstruction (or Reconstruction of the Fables) Epic

It is the third album, and by now R.E.M.'s idiosyncracies have begun to solidify into characteristic ways of approaching songs. Various whoops and hollers from Michael Stipe, guitar licks from Peter Buck and near-melodic touches from rhythm section Bill Berry and Mike Mills have their counterparts on the band's previous two long players. But another trademark is that each album sounds rather like the last — until you give it a few listens, by which time differences become clear.

And *Fables ...* is different. It's R.E.M.'s most open album yet, with clearer, crisper instrumentation and production. The element of mystery is carried through mainly in Stipe's warm, blustery voice — the effect is rather like finger-painting on etchings. The roles of each player are clearer here; the bass supporting the melody while Buck restlessly always plays something, rather than simply playing. He sounds like someone with an intuitive idea of what sounds good, as opposed to someone with an intuitive feel for playing guitar.

The album's first three songs are R.E.M. gems: 'Feeling Gravity's Pull' prowls along on a lean, nervous riff with dreamlike effect before rolling into a string climax. 'Maps and Legends' has a certain strength and a great chorus, getting along in easy strides on its bass line and 'Driver 8' has a real sense of the distance Stipe sings about. Perhaps the most interesting song is 'Can't Get There From Here,' a soul stomp that actually works, with Stipe going low and throaty for the verses and managing a godhonest soul scream go-



R.E.M. (L-R): Mike Mills, Michael Stipe, Peter Buck, Bill Berry.



The Hoodoo Gurus (L-R): Mark Kingsmill, Brad Shepherd, Dave Faulkner, Clyde Bramsley.

ing into each chorus. The stylistic experiment succeeds because the band doesn't have to leave its ground to get there. All the stylistic variations here are bound with an essence means every song sounds like R.E.M. — it's a strength that perhaps could become a weakness in the future. Perhaps.

Of the others, the intense 'Auctioneer' is the most obvious example of the apparent commentary on the 20th Century American legend (hence the title) and 'Good Advices' is judgement day stuff: "Who are you going to call for? What do you have to say?" 'Wendell Gee' is the album's beautiful ballad, but it's quite different from 'Perfect Circle' or 'Camera,' reflecting the more trad country feel that's present. R.E.M. probably aren't a "new wave" band any more, whatever that means.

There are flatter songs here too, like 'Green Grow the Rushes' and 'Old Man Kensey,' but there's not really anything wrong with them, they just don't stand out. Given the quality of the strong songs, they're eminently forgivable — I'll probably even end up liking them as much. R.E.M. spring quiet surprises, not loud ones, and make another great record.

Russell Brown

Dukes Of Stratosphear 25 O'Clock Virgin

1985, it was a big night for Sir John Johns and his band, the Dukes Of Stratosphear, leaders of a psychedelic revival destined to sweep Swindon. For years (ever since 1968 in fact) Sir John's Swami, Pinut Buttaja, had been prophesying the return of flower power.

Earlier that day Sir John had scoured the boutiques of Swindon for the right paisley jacket to complement his exploding technicolour long Johns. Mission accomplished, he admired his botanical presence in shop windows on his way to the Imploding Banana.

The club was packed and the air heavy with Peruvian mango weed as the Dukes took the stage. Immediately they soared into '25 O'Clock,' a homage to the laxative powers of the Electric Prunes starring the stunning mellotron of Lord

Cornelius Plum. The ghost of Syd Barrett's Pink Floyd was activated by the jolly 'Bike Ride To the Moon,' and the delightful 'Mole From the Ministry' rekindled memories of the Beatles' 'I Am the Walrus.'

As they band launched into their encore, 'What In the World,' a man in the crowd, some said he used to lead a band called XTC, nodded with approval and wondered why he hadn't thought of a psychedelic revival.

George Kay

Hoodoo Gurus Mars Needs Guitars Bigtime

Scenario One: As the Hoodoo Gurus trek between the campuses and small bars of the USA, Dave Faulkner calls a halt in any no-account town big enough to have a used record store or even a junk shop and excitedly leafs through battered, scratched records, plucking out on spec anything that might be a forgotten gem. He sorts them out later.

Scenario Two: The Hoodoo Gurus take a bunch of Dave Faulkner's songs into Sydney's Trafalgar Studios, have them produced by Charles Fisher and mixed at Studio 301 and call it *Mars Needs Guitars*.

The first of the above paragraphs is sheer speculation; the second is the facts. Together they kind of fit this album. As it was with the Gurus' live sound here last year, there's a certain Orztralian delicacy about the production here — the "bottom end" features prominently and guitars growl where sometimes they should chime. That said, it's a very sophisticated production, but perhaps that's a part of the problem. Faulkner and the Gurus are taking a non-naive approach to music that has naivete at its core.

Which would matter not a bit if this album were full of devastating songs, but it's not. As a parade through some classic riffs, melodies and styles it's impressive but it doesn't really reach out. The glowing exception is the lovely 'Death Defying,' which incorporates an apparently heartfelt philosophy on death and dying with some corn and a scoop of romance. Every second line in the verses is "Ooh wee" — wow! The tendency in our household has been to play

that and the one which follows it and closes Side One, 'Like Wow — Wipeout,' which kicks off with the great lines:

*I kiss the ground on which you walk
I kiss the lips through which you talk*

*I kissed the city of New York
The day that I met you*
Elsewhere, the single, 'Bittersweet' has a lovely melody and a great simple riff but loses the impact it could have had through a pretty distanced production. 'Show Some Emotion' has a really neat bubblegum hookline, but again suffers from the production blues. 'Mars Needs Guitars' starts off sounding like the Cramps with day jobs and gets psychedelic — okay, but not mean. A lot of the rest is a bit ordinary.

This might make a great party album and it's not really bad in its own right, but maybe the Hoodoo Gurus' real problem is that they don't often take Faulkner's melodic aptitude anywhere very startling. Again, 'Death Defying' is the major exception. That joins 'My Girl' and 'I Want You Back' as the great songs the Gurus have popped up. Maybe Dave should've grown up in Brockville ...

Russell Brown

The Armoury Show Waiting For the Floods EMI

Legendary old punks never die. They just become actors and poets, then get homesick for sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll so go and find others of their ilk to form new super-bands. Richard Jobson, once of the Skids, once poet, once actor, joins with old Skids bassist Russell Webb, Magazine drummer John Doyle and John McGeoch, a legendary figure of Magazine and Banshees fame (legendary guitar in one hand, bottle of scotch in the other). The Armoury Show — pedigree, huh?

Together less than a year, the old guys blast out *Waiting For the Floods* in monumental style. Given volume, McGeoch's guitar engulfs you and Jobson's poetry wails full-force, creating an engaging slab of powerpop. At times it veers towards Simple Minds or Echo and the Bunnymen (even the Banshees in 'Jungle Of Cities'), but the album's first track and single, 'Cas-



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