

# Records

## REM Life's Rich Pageant IRS

For their fourth album, the heroes of US collegiate and yuppie-dom have allowed themselves to be produced by Don Gehman (he of J Cougar Mellencamp fame). Big production job then. So what? Does that mean it's no longer "roots" music? Bollocks. These are songs that eat much of *Fables of the Reconstruction* for breakfast. So there.

Stipe. Stipe says he's not religious, but most of his lyrics are underwritten by the Sunday school sermons that his redneck parents no doubt forced him to attend. Inherently Calvinist images (and consequently themes in many places) abound: "Buy the sky and sell the sky and ask the sky what is it there for?" reflects the preoccupation with money and the frustration of pre-destination, the fruitless waiting for a signal to one's own salvation, also alluded to in "wait for dawn and dawn shall come" — Puritans were ever op-

timistic, and Stipe himself knows that he is "hope despite the times," he's gonna get there! But even when he covets a woman, she is a sneering "hyena head," "an ambassador from Eurgh!" — temptation and the devil are everywhere. The only "true" thing in puritanism is God's nature and His animals, and Stipe makes full use of images from that source. 'Swan Swan H' serves as a warning — selling your soul, a "40 pieces or three for one dollar (hey Captain, you wanna buy some ball and chains." Abstinence is the only safe way — "whiskey is water, the water is wine."

Rhythmically REM can teeter on the precipice of blandness, but the carefully layered icing of Peter Buck's guitar and plenty of use of magical organ is inspirational. Wonderfully choppy chords make 'Begin the Begin' and 'Hyena' on side one, whilst 'Cuyahoga', the tale of a dying river, is a grandiose southern drawl. Side two's run-in to the ecstatic burst of 'Superman' — sung by Mick Mills and itself a wonderful pop gem from 60s group the Clique — is best. 'What if We Give it Away' is succinctly understated, 'Just a Touch' wildly exuberant, and 'Swan Swan H' is REM of sinister proportions.



R.E.M.

In years to come, someone is gonna say "there were a million American bands in the Naked City ... REM were just one of them," and they'll probably be right. But REM are kinda special, cos the one "fer sure" thing about them is that REM are fucking good.

Paul McKessar

## Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds Kicking Against the Pricks WEA

On the cover Nick the Crooner peers over his shoulder at the devil that is almost at his coat-tails, with

a semblance to a demented preacher with hellfire on his lips and wiseblood in his veins. Turning to the devil he quotes some scripture, Acts 26:14 — "Why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

An album of preaching songs, tasting of bourbon and sin, but also the glory of redemption. Tales of total destruction by muddy water, murderers and lovers, demons and the Holy Ghost. Narcotic visions/versions of a mystique rooted in country music and the blues, where the man in black

meets the black man.

"My baby left me this morning, and I don't care what the people say ..." So begins John Lee Hooker's 'I'm Gonna Kill That Woman.' Cave sounds dangerous enough to do it, as an interpretation of blues forms it works wonderfully. Just as the country death classic 'Long Black Veil,' with just enough menace to chill. An interesting choice is Johnny Cash's 'The Singer,' bleak and cynical.

"There is no place I belong ... did you forget my song." An album about desperate living needs a way out, a safety catch, something of inspiration. Here we have a supreme cover of the Alabama Singers' 'Jesus Met the Woman at the Well,' with the Bad Seeds offering bass encouragement. This is where the Black Crow King of the last album meets his maker. Two glorious surprises in Jim Webb's 'By the Time I Get to Phoenix,' and the Seekers' 'The Carnival is Over,' both done deliciously straight.

Fine album of interpretations that leaves nothing to be desired, except that you may be able to beat the devil, but he still has the best songs.

Kerry Buchanan

## Steve Earle Guitar Town MCA

Just when you thought that the hottest country album had already been released this year (I'm talking about Dwight Yoakam of course), along comes another

good ol' boy from the panhandle and fair gives Dwight a run for his money as the contender of the year. Goes by the name of Steve Earle and he writes real nifty songs and has a hot dawg band (the Dukes) to back him up all the way.

He's apparently been round for 10 or so years, playing the honky tonks and bars, so it's no wonder the man is liberal in his lyrics of truck stops, gas stations, lost loves, pickup trucks, etc etc, but the way the guy wraps these words round his tunes is mighty fine music to these ears — "Everybody told me you can't get far on 37 dollars and a Jap guitar / Now I'm smokin' into Texas with the hammer down / and a rockin' little combo from the guitar town" — with plenty of Duane Eddy guitar twanging in background. I love it!

He's got a grand-daddy who was a miner ('Hillbilly Highway'), he's pumped gas on the interstate — "They ask me how far into Memphis son, and where's the nearest beer / and they don't even know that there's a town around here" ('Someday'); and he's never short of his best friend — "Another lovely night, a nameless town / If sleep don't take me first, you'll come around / 'cause I know I can always count on you, my old friend the blues."

If there's a touch of cowboy and the travelling man in your soul, this album has definitely got your name on it.

Greg Cobb

THE ELATION FOUNDATION

'WHEN THE SHINE COMES OFF'

...ON B.F.M.

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Reaction

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