

THE GREENING OF AMERICA



Life has never been so sweet for REM. After doing the customary American apprenticeship of slogging the hard roads for seven albums and ten years they've now gained entry into the Alladin's Cave of the mainstream American market.

Mind you, if any band deserves riches and recognition this is it, and with *Out Of Time* and two singles from it having gone Top 10 in most places I congratulate Peter Buck who, it seems, took the call in his home in Athens, beginning:

"Thank you. You can't be anything but happy when people like your work. I'm surprised because I didn't expect it to sell very well."

Why surprised, especially since *Green* broke so much ground for the band?

"There was a feeling that before we even played the record for the record company that it wasn't a commercial record. I liked the songs a lot but I couldn't see them up in the charts with Paula Abdul and Michael Bolton. It is now fitting into that world although I don't know how. I guess

we have something vaguely in common with U2 but there aren't many bands left that are in the charts — unless you think of Roxette as a band."

Between *Green*, REM's first record on a big label, and *Out of Time* two years have elapsed. In that two years the texture of the band's sound changed quite radically.

"We spent all of 1989 on the road which is a real static experience so all of the following year we experimented with stuff and decided that we wanted to try something differently musically, not the big rock'n'roll band that we'd hear playing stadiums and stuff."

So what approaches did you

consider remembering that *Out Of Time* is smooth by REM standards and doesn't have the edge of your previous albums?

"Right, given that the four of us write the songs and Michael is a very distinctive vocalist, the way we approached the songs was different as we played different instruments and brought in a lot of outside people and that's gonna change the way the songs sound on the outside."

"And I think the songwriting improved as we felt that we weren't following as many formulas as we had in the past — y'know, the verse-chorus-then-the-bridge. This time we just put the pieces together and made sense of those pieces that were interesting."

During that two year gap was it going through your minds that you had to change?

"We felt we changed step by step every second but being on the road with *Green* for so long we felt that we'd worn out that big guitar thing and the way that record sounded wasn't something we wanted to do again. So it was like where do we go from here?"

Specifically, what aspects of *Green* did you want to leave behind?

"We wanted to prove to ourselves and the audience that what they think our band is we aren't. We wanted to make a record that relied less on guitars. We felt that the strong part of the band were the songs and if we threw away the jangling guitar and used a keyboard and string bass you'd still get the sense of the song."

"I love playing guitar but I also like playing acoustic guitar and mandolin and although the last few albums have had very little jangling guitar this one has hardly any guitar at all and then it's mostly acoustic or muted, pretty twelve string."

So what's your opinion of *Green* now?

"I like it a lot. Some of our fans didn't because they felt it was too rock'n'roll. But I like rock'n'roll and that was a period where we were playing bigger and bigger venues and you do tend to play a little bit

louder, you do play that rock'n'roll stuff."

"On the other hand the album was kind of divided — 'You're The Everything', 'Wrong Child' and 'Hairshirt' weren't stadium songs and 'Stand' wasn't either but it's a big rock'n'roll song. So there's a bit of everything there except blues — we need to do a good blues orientated track."

But getting rid of the guitars on *Out Of Time* and replacing them with strings has meant that the rawness isn't there any more.

"True, but on the other hand the tracks were cut more live than on any other album we've ever done. We had Peter Holsapple along to play drums, keyboards and guitar and then Bill, Mike (Mills) and myself would cut the tracks quite spontaneously and then the strings were overdubbed or something that was fairly lively. So I think the album has a nice balance of real tracks played by humans and then lots of professional players."

Along with *Out Of Time*, as with *Green*, the record company released a promotional video (not for general release) where Stipe alludes to West Coast influences on the new album.

"Mention West Coast and people think of the Byrds, and to a certain degree my playing is influenced by them. But we all grew up playing R&B and soul stuff and so at soundcheck we're liable to do an Al

Green or Freddie King song — although maybe not with Michael. But our influences are so widespread that you can't put your finger on them anyway."

Was there ever any record company pressure to follow up *Green's* success?

"I'm not sure because we don't have anything to do with them until after the record comes out. I have friends at the label and if we go for a drink they're even too polite to pump me about what the record sounds like. Our contract is pretty ideal as all we have to do is present them with the record and the cover by a certain day and then they put it out. That's it, there's no question about it. The only pressure for us is to make a good record and the way to do that was not make the rock'n'roll record that we probably should've and make it a little more baroque or whatever."

Buck's contradiction slides by, so why are REM out of time?

"We've always felt that we're not a band that fits into the pop world and if you listen to the record it doesn't sound like 1991, in fact, it doesn't sound like any given year in rock'n'roll either. And we kinda like to think, although this may sound arrogant, that what goes on in the pop business doesn't have a lot to do with us as stand outside of the mainstream. Our record's number one in a strange world."

GEORGE KAY

FORTHCOMING RECORDINGS

MOTLEY CRUE, A Decade of Decadence.

BOB SEGER, Fire Inside.

JOAN JETT, Out of Bounds.

STEVIE NICKS, Timespace: The Best of Stevie Nicks.

ALLMAN BROTHERS, Shades of Two Worlds.

YOUNG MC, Brainstorm.

RICKIE LEE JONES, Pop Pop.

ROBBIE NEVIL, Day 1.

NORTHSIDE, Chicken Rhythms.

JAMES BROWN, Love Overdue.

BOMB THE BASS, Unknown Territory.

ALICE COOPER, Hey Stoopid.

COLOUR ME BADD, C.M.B.

SYDNEY YOUNGBLOOD, Passion, Grace & Serious Bass.

DEACON BLUE, Fellow

Hoodlums.

REBEL MC, Black Meaning Good.

SLICK RICK, The Ruler's Black.

AZTEC CAMERA, High Land,

Hard Rain.

SQUEEZE, Play.

TOM PETTY &

HEARTBREAKERS, Into the

Great Wide Open.

PRINCE, Diamonds & Pearls.

HEART, Rock the House (live).

LIVING COLOUR, Biscuits (6

song EP).

ELVIS SLAG, Eat My Vomit.

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