

R.E.M.'s inspiring LP leads us from sorrow to possibility.

BY ADAM BLOCK



A week before R.E.M.'s LP *Out of Time* (Warner Bros.) was released, my friend Jeffrey was already stoked. "Have you heard the single?" he demanded. "Michael's singing is so beautiful. It makes me want to cry," he marveled

with a burst of laughter.

I grinned in agreement, and today I'm still marveling at an LP that sustains that single's promise. To this longtime fan, the band's 1988 commercial breakthrough, *Green*, sounded stiff and studied. Catching their breath, trading instruments, even adding strings, the band members have emerged with music that is rich, supple, and seductive. They have reclaimed their dreamy, rugged grace with the best album of their career.

The LP opens with Michael Stipe pleading, "The world is collapsing around our ears./I turned up the radio/but I can't hear it!" Then he proffers this alternative: rough-hewn love songs locked between desperation and delight, rage and humor—delivered with an intimacy and mystery that make the Top 40 sound both glossy and vacant.

R.E.M.'s response to this collapsing world is full of heart and hope. On that first single, "Losing My Religion," from their latest album, Michael cries against a shimmering mandolin and a drum like a racing heartbeat, "Oh, no, I've said too much./I haven't said enough," his vertiginous doubt fueling a heartbreaking hunger for communion.

The theme is echoed on "Belong." Here, embracing, wordless chants rise behind Stipe's spoken account of a mother who takes her child to the window to watch the beasts that have broken free from their restraints while she chants "belong" like a benediction.

From the gleeful Beach Boys-meet-the-B-52s rave-ups "New Wild Honey" and



R.E.M.

Singer Michael Stipe (below, center) and other members of an inspiring band.

"Shiny Happy People" to the back-porch poignance of "Half a World Away" and the short-circuited desire of "Country Feedback," R.E.M.'s inspiring LP leads us from sorrow to possibility. It's music that is fierce and fine enough to make you shiver and laugh out loud: like a tryst with an old friend you feared you'd lost.

THE ANTI-TED NUGENT

I got a couple of letters asking, What happened to the San Francisco band Until December—and more specifically what happened to their Aryan hunk lead singer Adam Sherbourne? Well, the brazen stud who used to flash his pierced nipples through a leather harness and flirt lasciviously—mocking macho poses with androgynous athleticism—reemerged last year with the industrial agit-funk trio Consolidated.

When Consolidated toured to promote its debut LP *The Myth of Rock* (Nettwerk), Sherbourne dressed in grim shapeless cotton duds and performed from behind a podium. Since then he has worked with drummer Phil Steir and keyboard programmer Mark Pistel to reinvent himself as a radical rap commando: a militant

vegetarian who is antisexist and antiracist, sort of an anti-Ted Nugent.

The group's second LP, *Friendly Fascism* (Nettwerk), continues the assault. The first single, "Brutal Equation"—already cracking turntables at progressive clubs—promises, "We don't play that female degradation/Just to get our record played on some radio station." The follow-up, "Unity of Oppression," asks, "How can we discuss gender, class, or race/when we can't respect the rights/of lesbians and gays?"

In Consolidated's raps, oppression and bigotry are of a piece: Animal's, woman's, and queer's rights are indivisible from black pride. Sherbourne hasn't lost his stubborn charisma. He promotes his political convictions without spotlighting his dashing lats and perfect ass. Old fans would do well to check out the new band.

Challenge yourself. He certainly has.

HOT TIP

Kitchens of Distinction's LP *Strange Free World* (A&M) has hit the number one spot on the Gavin Report's College Albums chart. The brilliant British trio with an openly gay lead singer are headed here for their first U.S. tour. Invite a student. ▼

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