



R. E. M.

"Second records are a time of reckoning for every band," admits R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck, "And we wanted to face up to that." And, with their aptly-titled second album, *Reckoning*, R.E.M. had plenty to face up to. Their 1983 debut LP, *Murmur*, racked up more accolades than most bands garner in a career:

Murmur: Album of the Year, Rolling Stone Critics' Poll
Murmur: Debut Album of 1983, Record Magazine Critics' Poll
Murmur: No. 2 Album of the Year, Village Voice Annual
Pazz & Jop Poll
R.E.M.: Best New Artist of 1983, Rolling Stone Critics' Poll

Such extravagant praise is nothing new for R.E.M. Their 1982 *Chronic Town* EP and independent single, "Radio Free Europe" b/w "Sitting Still," also were consistent Top 10 choices in their respective years. But each new release from the band has heightened both expectation and achievement, making 1984 the true year of *Reckoning*.

Consequently the band worked hard to avoid simply recycling proven formulas of their past successes. Instead, they took a turn in a new direction. "Quite often a second album sounds like an inferior rehash of the first, but *Reckoning* represents a real departure from *Murmur*," Buck explains. "We didn't want it to be the same type of production. *Reckoning* is less of a mood record, more of a song record."

As with R.E.M.'s previous releases, all ten tracks on *Reckoning* are group compositions, with Buck, bassist Mike Mills, and drummer Bill Berry taking primary care of the music, and vocalist Michael Stipe carrying the weight of the words. To record the album, R.E.M. returned to Reflection Sound Studios in Charlotte, N.C., where *Murmur* was made, and once again called on the production talents of Mitch Easter (member of I.R.S. band *Let's Active*, as well as producer for *Pylon*, the *Individuals*, half the *Bongos* and a host of others) and Don Dixon.

The familiar ring and surge of R.E.M.'s sound emerge again on *Reckoning* in such tracks as "S. Central Rain (I'm Sorry)," "Pretty Persuasion" and the raucous journey through the Heartland, "Little America." Murky ballads like "Time After Time" and "Camera" evoke the mysterious emotional world *Murmur* explored so movingly. Yet these and the remaining five tunes all reflect the streamlined approach the band and its producers took to recording *Reckoning*.

Reckoning relies heavily on R.E.M.'s basic instrumental lineup of guitar/bass/drums, with overdubs held to a relative minimum. The result is a straightforward set of honest, heartfelt songs that communicate the band's live sound much more directly than *Murmur* did.

"We expected to have to take our time recording *Reckoning*, because we had a hard act to follow." Buck reports, "but things went really fast. We cut six songs done in the first two days, most of them in two or three takes. We just looked at each other and said, 'Hey, we'd better slow down a little bit!'"

Rhythmic rockers like "Harbor Coat" and "Second Guessing" convey the excitement R.E.M. could barely contain in the studio, and the irresistible "Rockville" captures the enigmatic Michael Stipe drawling a rousing country saga with crystal clarity. R.E.M.'s studio chops also come across compellingly in the video for "S, Central Rain (I'm Sorry)," filmed by Atlanta video artist Howard Libov with the band recording live at Reflection.

As a final touch, Reckoning's distinctive cover was created by the renowned Georgia folk artist, the Rev. Howard Finster, who has exhibited his works in galleries throughout the country and appeared as a guest on the "Tonight Show."

R.E.M. formed in April, 1980, with the express purpose of combating the boredom of life in Athens, Ga., the bucolic college town which still serves as the band's headquarters. Buck and Stipe were living together in a dilapidated, abandoned church, which conveniently had a stage. At Stipe's urging, the duo decided to put together a band. To round out the lineup, they recruited fellow U. of G. students Berry and Mills, who had played together in combos since their high school days in Macon, Ga. Picking their name from a random scan of the dictionary, R.E.M. debuted at a bacchanalian party they threw for friends at the church.

These spontaneous origins set the tone of the resolutely independent attitude and style that still characterize the band. In both their music and appearance, R.E.M. has staunchly resisted following fashionable trends, preferring to allow their own unique and personal vision to shape their artistic development. As a result, the group has become a model for musical integrity and an inspiration for young American bands who want to pursue creative success without succumbing to tired, prefabricated formulas.

Now that the murmur about R.E.M. has reached a crescendo of general acclaim, anyone interested in demanding a reckoning from this band will find a second album that meets and exceeds all their expectations. And creates new and higher ones, as all great records do.

4/84

Discography:

1981 - "Radio Free Europe" b/w "Sitting Still" (Hib-Tone, independent 45)

1982 - Chronic Town (I.R.S. EP, SP-70502)

1983 - Murmur (I.R.S. LP, SP-70604)

1984 - Reckoning (I.R.S. LP, SP-70044)