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R.E.M. UPDATE

Reflections of musical '84 ring with an American beat. And for R.E.M. fans across the globe, 1984 was clearly the year of "Little America," the year in which the critically-acclaimed band from the little South-East American town of Athens, Georgia, had their music heard across the world. The nearly-perpetual "Little America '84 Tour" ground to a halt, finally, on the last night of Orwell's calendar year.

In support of their Reckoning album, the quartet crossed the country twice and then embarked on an International Dateline-defying tour of Hawaii, Japan and the U.K.

After a stop in Honolulu for an Aloha-style Halloween, it was on across the Pacific to the Land of the Rising Sun for their first mini-tour of the country. R.E.M. was well-received by enthusiastic students at four Japanese universities.

Transported from Sashimi to Fish & Chips in one deft flight, R.E.M. took the British Isles by storm with first-time visits to Edinborough, Scotland and Cardiff, Wales. During an encore-prompting performance in Dublin, the foursome were joined on stage by Irishman Steve Wickham, who plays for groundswelling local band IN-TUA-NUA, and is featured on the last pair of albums by fellow countrymen, U2. Their highly successful U.K. stint was brought to fever pitch by a packed-to-capacity, SRO performance at London's Lyceum.

R.E.M. returned to the U.S. in just enough time to celebrate New Year's Eve in a spectacular show with regional warm-up acts Love Tractor, Guadalcanal Diary and a few thousand hometown fans, at the Atlanta Civic Center. R.E.M. rang in the new year with a sparkling combination of Scottish bagpipes, confetti and champagne (the latter inevitably the spoils of the front rows). The "encore" (or second act, as many would contend) began with R.E.M.'s rendition of Donovan's song/story, "Atlantis," replete with tape-loop chorus. Crumpy Edwards of Athens band the Landsharks played bass while R.E.M.'s Mike Mills moved to keyboards. This arrangement lasted for a couple of numbers, until Landshark member Wade Hester assumed keyboard tasks sending Mills back to bass for a sampling of a new R.E.M. tune, "Wendell Gee." Other acts on hand for the festivities were OH-OK, Club Gaga, Is-Ought-Gap and Time Toy.

Presently, R.E.M. is hard at work writing and rehearsing new material for a third album with a working title so good you'll just have to content yourself to watch for it in a future update. Although no studio or producer have been confirmed for the LP, a May 15 release date is targeted.

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