

# Diversions

The Daily Nebraskan's Entertainment Revue



Courtesy of IRS Records

REM

## Success hurts R.E.M.'s latest work

By Paul Morin  
Staff Reporter

Bill Berry is the unusually honest, always congenial and sometimes strange drummer for the band R.E.M., playing at 8 p.m. Tuesday in the Music Hall in Omaha.

Caught during a short rest in his hometown of Athens, Georgia, Berry found some time to talk about the band and its latest album, "Fables of the Reconstruction."

"Success has caught up to us," Berry said.

Most of the earlier R.E.M. records were repeatedly tested live to discover weak and strong points. A heavy road schedule prevented them from testing the latest album.

"We need the personal feedback that we get live," Berry said.

That feedback never existed for any of the songs on "Fables." R.E.M. went into the studio with rough drafts, so to speak.

Critics and fans alike have complained that the most recent album lacks the coarse, exposed sound of previous albums. Berry didn't beat around the bush on that one.

"If we lost the raw edge, it's because we went in with reservations," he said. "Naturally some of the recklessness might be lost."

However, Berry was ambivalent about the album.

"Listening to it, some of the things sounded good and some of them sounded bad," he said. But it doesn't look as if the band's method of writing can change.

"We're going to have to write songs in hotel rooms," he said, because their

schedule is so busy.

R.E.M. was born April 5, 1980, in Athens. The four members, vocalist Michael Stipe, guitarist Peter Buck, bass guitarist Mike Mills and Berry began by playing for friends in the basement of a church where they lived.

Berry said R.E.M. started out as an experiment — the four wanted to have fun.

They all attended the University of Georgia at the time and their increasing success regionally affected their school work.

"Our studies suffered," Berry said. "It was at the point where we either shit or get off the pot."

They gambled, releasing a demo tape that was nearly successful. Their first effort drew a single review, but a rave one, in the influential "New York Rocker" magazine.

In 1981 the band released "Radio Free Europe" as a single. Its success gave the band the impetus to return to the studio to record the extended play record "Chronic Town." That EP reached an audience 30,000 strong and paved the way for the band's 1982 album "Murmur."

From then on R.E.M. wasn't just a band from Athens, Georgia. It was a band from America that happened to call Athens home. The popularity of R.E.M.'s later releases "Reckoning" and "Fables" verified their status.

Berry said he's amazed about the band's unusual success, when other bands of comparable or superior talent haven't progressed at its rapid pace.

"It's (R.E.M.'s success) open for discussion. It's ridiculous," he said.

"Why do we sell more records?" he

asked. "I don't know."

Berry said he feels some other bands aren't receiving enough attention.

He cited the example of the dB's. Three weeks after signing a record contract, the label that the band had signed with folded, leaving the "been-around-too-long" dB's high and dry. Last year the dB's opened for R.E.M. at the Music Hall.

"Maybe we were in the right place at the right time," Berry said, "but we certainly weren't first."

The band's success has raised a standard complaint.

"We've been accused of commercial sell-out, which is ridiculous," Berry said. The band has some values that they stand by.

"We play the way we want. If those are the hits, that's great," Berry said. "You know, there's a lot of fans out there who enjoy the way we do things — enjoy the anti-hype."

R.E.M. received a negative reaction from the crowd at last year's show in Omaha. Lead singer Stipe and some of his political insights nearly were booed off the stage.

"Crowd reaction varies," Berry said. "Michael Stipe's not going to pander to the crowd. He's got an aloof attitude, but that's part of his stage appearance."

When asked about his feelings toward the band's video, Berry said, "The only reason it's popular is because my car is in it. I've got the coolest car in Georgia." The video features Berry's 1960 lavender Ford Galaxy. "It's my pride and joy," he said.

Later Berry mentioned his taste for the writing of Flannery O'Connor, and I was reminded of a line from her story

"Wiseblood": "Nobody with a good car needs to be justified."

The band recently returned from a European tour, including stops in France, Scotland, Norway ("Norway's really cool," Berry said), Belgium and Ireland, home of Berry's favorite beer.

Berry said he drinks Budweiser at home but his favorite beer is Guinness Stout from Ireland. He stressed that it should be on tap. "You like milkshakes?" he asked. Yes. "You like beer?" Yes, yes. "Well, imagine those two together."

Berry shared another insight into his personality when he described his

shopping habits.

He does his shopping at Salvation Army stores and thrift shops. When asked if he ever bought anything new, he said, "I never wear underwear, so that's out, but I buy socks new."

His sock-buying process is strange in itself. He buys a few pairs at each city the band stops in, then wears them until they get "dirty."

"Then I throw them into a garbage sack I carry around, and tie the sack real tight so I don't offend anyone," he said.

General admission tickets for R.E.M.'s Tuesday concert are \$12.75.

### WEEKEND

#### LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

**Chesterfield, Bottomsley and Potts**, 234 N. 13th St. — The Tugboats, today. No cover charge. Cold Spring, Friday and Saturday. Cover charge is \$2.

**Drumstick**, 547 N. 48th St. — Boys With Toys and Brian Hammer, today. Cover charge is \$3. The Lunchcats, Friday and Saturday. Cover charge is \$3.

**Green Frog**, 1010 P St. — Justice, today through Saturday. No cover charge.

**J. J.'s Lounge**, North 84th Street and Cornhusker — Halloween Costume Party, today. Cherrywood, Friday through Sunday. No cover charge.

**McGuffey's**, 1042 P St. — Jazz

Underground, today. Blue Grass Crusade, Friday. The Avenue Four and The Jazz Underground, Saturday. No cover charge.

**Misty Italiano**, 6232 Havelock Ave. — Fat City, Friday and Saturday. No cover charge.

**Mountains**, 311 St. 11th St. — RV's, Friday and Saturday. Cover charge is \$1.

**Pla-Mor Ballroom**, 6600 W. O St. — Orville Von Seggern, Saturday 8:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. Ernie Kucera, Sunday 6 to 10 p.m.

**Speakeasy**, 3233½ S. 13th St. — Brandy, today through Saturday. No cover charge.

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