

"E.S.P."

...silence means security
 silence means approval
 while zenith on the tv
 tiger run around the tree
 follow the leader
 run and turn into cutter
 let's begin again
 begin the begin
 let's begin again...

REM

"TAKE THIS JEWELRY

WHEREVER,

WHEREVER YOU GO"

REVIEW

BY CHARLES LIEURANCE

"...in the half-lost phrases and buried lyrics, there was an ambiguity that opened up the world with real force. The songs captured the yearning for home and the fact of displacement that ruled out lives; we thought that the Band's music was the most natural parallel to our hopes, ambitions and doubts, and we were right to think so. Flowing through their music were spirits of acceptance and desire, rebellion and awe, raw excitement, good sex, open humor and a magic feel for history — a determination to find plurality and drama in an America we had met too often as a monolith."

— Greil Marcus, "Mystery Train."

First and foremost, you can't begin to make the lists you'd like to make. The guitars combine the exquisite electric folk picking of the Byrds with the urban proto-slash of Television. Something of the Underground in their sentimental guitar figures for "Flowers of Guatemala," an aching tinge of feedback lacing the romance with danger, like VU's "Candy Says," or "Femme Fatale."

Michael Stipe's vocals are a history of American rock and folk music, the mumble of Blind Willie McTell (see "John the Revelator" from the depression days) and the growl of Guthrie/Dylan, the soaring choruses bring to mind even stronger voices: Muddy Waters, George Jones and Elvis.

There is nothing quite definite. The list is impossible. It is slowly reduced to scribbles, poetry and day dreams that are only partially relevant.

Bass and drums roll around behind the buzzsaws-in-the-distance guitar lines, the fragments of ghostly voice,

planting the ethereal firmly into rock. The rock.

There is a mystery to it that defies the cordial naming of influences. The mystery of over-expansionism, of the Lewis and Clark ghosts that haunt our planning for cities, farms and resorts, corporations and power plants, a fear of manifest destiny.

"It would seem that dancing came into being at the beginning of all things, and was brought to light together with Eros, that ancient one, for we see this primeval dancing clearly set forth in the choral dance of the constellations, and in the planets and fixed stars, their interweaving and interchange and orderly harmony."

— Lucien

"Life's Rich Pageant" is REM's fourth album, a solid masterpiece and a continuation of the epic that began with "Murmur." What was at first a whisper, a pop enigma whose hooks and novelty made the band stars become a prototype for an era of new bands who passionately clutch their microphone stands and yowl only semi-coherent, fragmented verse over a resounding tunnel of guitar.

"Pageant" is mountainous. A brilliant display of synthesis. Seamless rushes of liturgical guitar lift echoing choruses into the realm of Brahman missals, huge and cavernous. Topographical sounds. Bleak and uncorrupted. National and oblivious. Skull fragments shot all over the room, synapses carpeted in 12-string verdure, neurons blindly dancing barefoot. . . Specific and completely without a shred of meaning.

Once inside, though, the dance of Siva begins, the celestial interweaving and interchange, something grand and interplanetary and as motionless as deep hollows at midnight,

ominous darkness. . .

The sound is a lost one, a search, a head-down eyes half-open hunt for pretty pebbles.

"Pageant" isn't as bleak as "Fables of the Reconstruction," an album that defined the ghost in REM's sound, that made the spook tactile, gave it the motion of train wheels, the bleat of night birds, the motion of canoe oars, the carnage of a long lost war.

"Pageant" is full of an almost political hope, an anticipation of paradise, a brooding on essentials.

A dream of morning filtering through the green dead wood of barns, sword shafts of new order.

The Band took on the myths of America, created new Paul Bunyan's and Pecos Bill's for the '60s. REM is also concerned with myths, legends, historical idols, but they are the empty-eyed idols buried in rubble and ruin. Fallen paganism, and a romantic lust for the ancient.

"...take these jewels, wherever, wherever you go. . ."

— REM, "These Days"

The Russian filmmaker Eisenstein once incorporated a soundtrack to one of his films that echoed the composition on the screen. The music would correspond to the features on the screen from left to right. If the left hand side of the screen depicted a flat plain, the music would flow along on one pitch. If the plain gradually became a mountain, the music would get higher and build to a crescendo.


REM's music is like this, for a film as yet unmade. The music is inherently geographical and evokes geographical images without a coherent word being spoken. It is a map for a country long ago swallowed by the sea, by the destiny of its people, by the lies inherent in its mythos, by ambitions made cold and sterile by the passage of time.

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