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CD Review



COURTESY PHOTO

THE MEMBERS OF 311 are (clockwise from left) SA Martinez, Nick Hexum, Chad Sexton, Timothy Mahoney and P-Nut.

311
"Transistor"
Capricorn/Mercury
Grade: A

"Am I really deserving?"

The question is asked by lead singer and guitarist Nick Hexum of former Omaha band 311 during the track "No Control." After struggling for seven years developing a grassroots following and recording what could be its best album yet, "Transistor," the answer is a resounding yes.

The August 5 release, featuring 21 brand new tunes, has several groove-centered mixes that may seem a bit slow at first glance. However, 311 lets it rip on songs like "Beautiful Disaster," "Borders" and "Starshines," leaving even the true "Music" fans happy.

"Transistor" takes a good five listens to fully indulge, and one can still pick up new things every time around. Like the cat's meow echoing on "Light Years," or a firecracker going off on "Stealing Happy Hours,"

a lot of dub sounds were added to this album, yet these noises don't interfere with the formula that has given 311 its longevity.

SA Martinez shows he is not just the band's "rapper," but sings a lot more on this album, harmonizing on songs like "The Continuous Life," "Inner Light Spectrum" and "Creature Feature." But he still leads off the first hard-nosed song on the release with "Galaxy," a track that would be a great way to start off any show.

Hexum's talent level on guitar is obviously better than it was on the last album, as he plays on every song this time. Contributing most of the song writing for the band, he has done some of his best work. Unlike on past albums, it is also the first time he hasn't used lines from past songs, although he does shout, "Be positive and love your life," a line used to close most 311 shows.

Guitarist Tim Mahoney wrote some of the song "Running," and delivers amazing lead guitar on every song, especially on the album's best all-around song "Beautiful Disaster." His guitar play is light years ahead of when he started with the band, and his best work is right here.

Bassist P-Nut and drummer Chad Sexton provide the backbone for the band. Sexton's drumming is as excellent as ever, although he is given no solos on the songs. P-Nut goes off on "What's Was I Thinking," a hard-edged track also featuring Hexum singing with Anthony Kiedis' "Warped"-style distortion.

The first track and single is

"Transistor," a track that covers all of the different sounds of 311, and is a great transition between the band's last album and the current one. However, the song is not to be mistaken as a representation of the entire release, as no other song reflects its style.

The second single is set to be "Prisoner," a slow-tempo tune sung by both Hexum and Martinez. The video is set to be shot July 29, and is said to be the largest 311 video production to date. There are plans for a special "Prisoner" maxi-single featuring remixes and songs that didn't make it onto the album.

There will also be a special insert inside the packaging of "Transistor," which is being kept a secret by Capricorn. But the surprise will only be included in the album's first pressing.

311 will be in Council Bluffs, Iowa, at the Westfair Ampitheatre Sept. 21, when the band members will play with their longtime friends from Fishbone. They will also be in St. Louis Sept. 19 and at Sandstone Ampitheatre Sept. 20. Overall, this album is best not labeled as "Grassroots," or "Dammit!" but more as just its own thing. However, it's not some completely new sound for 311 that makes little sense. If anything, it is the band's most complete album, feeding off of the sounds of previous albums and taking them further. And as on any of their other albums, the band is evolving, and the future is now.

-- Pat Miner

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