



R.E.M.
"Up"
Warner Bros.
Grade: C-

New Releases

ed much further than the drum set; his absence on the album seems to dominate the entire recording.

Drums are the first thing you don't hear on "Up," which carries as its first track a mumbled hymn to mundane existence titled "Airportman." It escalates as imperceptibly as a moving sidewalk and induces the same feeling of exhilaration.

"Up" boasts as its co-producer Pat McCarthy, who engineered R.E.M.'s last two albums, both of which broke new ground for the band: one a celebration of classic rock and the other a foray into electronic sound.

McCarthy must have liked the latter, "New Adventures in Hi-Fi," so much that he decided "Up" should be as similar as possible. Just as "How the West Was Won And Where It Got Us" served as a musical preamble to the raucous paean to glam rock, "Wake-Up Bomb," "Airportman" quietly introduces a rowdy second track, "Lotus."

Berry's invaluable contribution to R.E.M. is painfully clear by the fourth track, "Hope," which attracts attention only because it contains the album's first tickings of a drum line.

R.E.M. fans surely are teary-eyed by this point as the synthetic, lifeless snare/bass combo sounds as if it were lifted off a Wal-Mart Casio keyboard display.

The rest of the album wanders into boredom and oblivion, occasional bursts of energy are enveloped in repetitious crescendos and only sporadically is there the slightest inclination of

activity.

The dazzling exploration of "New Adventures in Hi-Fi" has become a routine stroll for R.E.M. without the punchiness of Berry, and to a lesser extent, longtime producer Scott Litt, who has moved onto other projects.

To be fair, "Walk Unafraid" and "Why Not Smile," which appear more than halfway through the recording, recall better days for R.E.M. and are the album's brightest spots. The inclusion of lyrics, an unexpected bonus (perhaps to compensate for its other inadequacies) enhances the listening experience by making it possible to understand what Stipe is saying, even if you don't understand what he means.

Although Stipe is as lyrically deft as ever when it comes to exploring his favorite psychological crevices, he alone cannot compensate for the album's glaring omissions.

Berry retired, claiming he needed more time for his family and himself. Based on this recording, it sounds like the rest of R.E.M. needs a break, too.

- Bret Schulte

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