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Reed gives listeners sarcasm and wit on 'Ecstasy'

By Josh Krauter Senior editor

It happens about a third of the way into "Ecstasy," Lou Reed's surprisingly good new album.

I say "it" because I don't know what else to call it. "It" is the 18-minute song "Like a Possum." "It" is also most definitely the worst song Reed ever has recorded, ever will record, ever will listen to, ever will be within 100 feet of.

It is long. It is boring. It is pretentious. It is interminable. It would be unintentionally funny if it weren't so long, pretentious and interminable.

The musical backing is just one long guitar drone, with occasional drum thwacks and bass thumps too infrequent to matter. Over this symphony of boredom, Reed intones such

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lyrics as, "Good morning, it's Possum Day/Feel like a possum in every way/Like a possum/Possum whiskers possum face/Possum breath and a possum taste/Like a possum."

So, let's play devil's advocate for a moment and assume Reed is aware of all this and is, in fact, in on the joke. It's not the first time, and certainly won't be the last time, that Reed has toyed with his audience.

Like Andy Kaufman, Reed loves to confuse, manipulate and provoke his fans. In 1975, Reed was riding a wave of near-mainstream popularity. To cap-italize, he released "Metal Machine Music," a double album that contained no songs, just feedback from amplifiers.

There are numerous other examples, and maybe "Like a Possum" is one of them. Maybe it's a deliberate, Andy Kaufman-esque move.

But maybe it's not. Once, on an episode of ABC's "In Concert," Reed referred to himself as Lou "The Inimitable" Reed. He wasn't joking. But maybe he was. He doesn't sound as though he's joking on "Like a Possum."

But maybe that's why I like Reed. Kaufman forced the audience to become a participant, whether it liked it or not. Reed does the same. Whether he's soothing, taunting, rocking or enraging the listener, at least he's getting a response, which is more than most current pop and rock music aims

And by including one of the world's worst songs on an otherwise solid rock album, Reed will get a response.

LASSIFIEDS

Except for that pesky possum, what an album it is. It's the best band Reed's had since 1982's "The Blue Mask," and includes that band's bassist, Fernando Saunders, his latest long-time crony, the inventive guitarist Mike Rathke and drummer Tony "Thunder" Smith.

These guys are a crack band, making frightening and beautiful music that veers as far away from cliche as a guitar-rock band possibly could.

And occasionally, a biting and honest lyric pokes through. On "Baton Rouge," Reed sings, "Well, I once had a car/Lost it in a divorce/The judge was a woman of course/She said give her the car, her house and your taste/Or else I set a trial date."

This lyric is sexist, bitter and offensive. It's also honest, funny and power**TITLE:** Ecstasy **LABEL:** Reprise Records GRADE: B+ FIVE WORDS: Good.

Lou Reed

except for pesky possum. ful in its simplicity.

"Ecstasy" only has a few moments of lyrical honesty, but there's lots to like. "Turning Time Around" is a good soul ballad, the title track has an ethereal, jazzy feel and Reed's and Rathke's guitars wind around each other like mating snakes on "Big Sky." And there's a lot more than that, too.

If you don't mind eating a little possum with your steak, "Ecstasy" is a great rock album.

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