

# 'Alone in a Crowd'

## indie rock's favorite sons

### come home

BY KEVIN LANGSTON  
NEWS EDITOR

The past year has been hell for R.E.M.

Members Peter Buck, Mike Mills and Michael Stipe had to adjust to being a three-piece band after friend and drummer, Bill Berry, left the group last year. On the verge of a breakup, R.E.M. was held together by their desire to do what they love most and the enthusiasm surrounding the new material for their latest album, "Up." The sound was going to be different, and with Berry gone, R.E.M. was going to push the moment to its extreme.

The Walnut Creek Amphitheater in Raleigh, N.C. was one of the last tour stops in the Southeast. R.E.M. has been known to pull out all the stops for their homeland, and this show was no exception.

The lights dimmed on the sweaty crowd, and cheers rose up in anticipation of the inevitable event that was mere seconds away. The music heard over the roar of the crowd was the intro to "Airportman," the first track on "Up." The crowd's roar peaked as three familiar silhouettes emerged from behind the stage curtain. Mills strode to his bass, Buck strapped on his guitar and Stipe gingerly took his place behind the microphone.

The dimmed lights on the stage caught fire and lit up the night sky as Joey Waronker, resident drummer in Berry's absence, counted off the beat to "Lotus," the more rocked-out song of "Up." Buck stood over a keyboard and pounded out the seven chords that build the song up to its teathy guitar riff. He jumped back from the keyboard and let his guitar take over.

Stipe was pouncing all over the stage with no reservations. The once shy and inhibited front man had long since shed that skin, and now it would be a news story if he would stand still for the du-

ration of a single song. He wailed "Hey Hey," and the show was under way.

The set was wonderful. Neon lights gave life to several objects that hung from the rafters. Some of these objects were a banana, a monkey, a milk carton, a parakeet, the words "thank you" and the promotion of their official Web site, "www.remhq.com."

These lights would help dictate the mood of the song, making the louder songs that much louder and the ballads that much more meaningful.

Stipe gave the crowd a few seconds to gather themselves before he screamed, "I look good in a glass pack," signaling the start to "Wake Up Bomb." The lights were shaking and blinking with a fury as Stipe violently paced from one side of the stage to the other.

R.E.M. reached back into their catalogue to play their next song, "Fall On Me." Stipe made you believe his sincerity, and Mills' harmony was quite beautiful. This song alone exhibited the way Stipe and Mills complement each other with their harmonies.

Stipe introduced "Suspicion," one of the slowest songs in the R.E.M. catalog, by saying, "We're taking it back to 1953 for this song." The keyboard-driven song was pure delight, and fans were now seeing firsthand how the critics were wrong in saying "Up" would be a hard album to play live. R.E.M. was doing a splendid job with the material, and no fan was going to say otherwise.

After "Suspicion," Buck walked to the rear of the stage and grabbed a banjo. My eyes were affixed on Buck as I tried to guess the show's next song. Seeing Mills take a seat behind a keyboard only fueled my suspicions, and as Stipe sang "Your eyes are burning holes through me," I knew it was "Electrolite." This country-esque song closed out their previous album, "New Adventures in Hi Fi,"



SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK

**R.E.M.: Peter Buck, Michael Stipe and Mike Mills (from left) played Raleigh, N.C.'s Walnut Creek Amphitheatre Aug. 27.**

and it enjoyed radio success. During the violin solo, the spotlight was turned to Stipe as he did a little Celtic jig in the middle of the stage. He was obviously comfortable with the crowd. Fans laughed and cheered at this special moment.

The jovial mood of the evening was soon lost when the familiar keyboard chords sounded out the tune to "Everybody Hurts." Fans joined Stipe in lifting the words of this song. Stipe was exhibiting true emotion, as if he were singing this song for the first time. When it was over, Buck walked up to Stipe and said, "that was beautiful."

"Daysleeper," the first single from "Up," followed the chart-topping hit from Automatic for the People. After a series of slow-paced songs, fans needed a change of pace.

Stipe took to the center of the stage and told how he and Buck were in Carrboro, N.C., the previous day and how they realized they were across the street from the first venue outside of Georgia that R.E.M. had played in. To commemorate the event, Stipe said they were going to play a song they had not played in 15 years. He said he had to look the lyrics up on the Internet, and he made a point to say how wrong they were.

It took me a few seconds to realize what they were playing, mostly because I had never heard the

song performed live, and because I would have never expected them to play it. When I realized it was "Camera," from their second album, "Reckoning," I was in a state of shock. Although the song is another one of R.E.M.'s slowest, the sheer mood and power of the song made it the evening's highlight.

The pace was dramatically changed when they played "The Apologist." It came across as a strong rock song. Mills at one point was jerking around and flapping his arms like an idiot. He was giving the people in front of him a great show throughout the entire night.

The new version of "Sweetness Follows" was simply magical, and it gave a new twist to a strong song.

Stipe then told the crowd of their latest efforts with the upcoming Andy Kauffman film "Man In the Moon," named after the popular R.E.M. song. They worked on the film's score, to be released in October, and a new song, "Great Beyond." It was a mesh of powerful lyrics and chords. Fans can rest assured knowing that more great things are to come from this band.

Earlier in the night, a fan had given Stipe a bouquet of flowers. He delicately placed them on the

**R.E.M. SEE PAGE 8**

# Robyn Hitchcock plays acoustic poems on new album

BY PETE JOHNSON  
GAMECOCK CRITIC

**Robyn Hitchcock - Jewels For Sophia**

★★1/2 out of ★★★★★

"People flocked like cattle to Seattle after Kurt Cobain and before him the rain. Hendrix played guitar just like an animal that's trapped inside a cage—and one day he escaped," sings Robyn Hitchcock on "Viva Sea-Tac," off of his new album, "Jewels for Sophia." Hitchcock, born in London, has

been labeled eccentric by many music critics over the years. But the aura surrounding Hitchcock



seems to be only a manifestation of his unique imagination and sense of humor.

"Jewels for Sophia," Hitchcock's 16th full-length release, in-

cludes an all-star cast of Grant Lee Buffalo's Grant Lee Phillips, members of the Young Fresh Fellows and R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck, who once cited Hitchcock and his first band, the Soft Boys, as one of R.E.M.'s greatest influences. It features an eclectic mix of electric and acoustic folk ballads, varying in subject from cheese to love. Hitchcock has had a cult following among the English folk-rock scene for almost 20 years now, but his sound has always had the ability to stay fresh and interesting to his fans.

Hitchcock has toured extensively throughout his career and is now getting some valuable ex-

posure while on the road with indie-rock supergroups The Flaming Lips and Sebadoh, along with Japanese DJ sensation Cornelius.

"Jewels for Sophia" is an interesting album, and Hitchcock is quite a character, but it doesn't stand out in a crowd by any measure. None of the songs are memorable, even seemingly nonsensical. But scratch just beneath the surface and Robyn Hitchcock seems just a bit like a jester poet, you just wouldn't know it.