

Rapid success for band

United Press International

NEW YORK — No one is more surprised by the dizzying critical success of R.E.M., a young Georgia-based band whose two albums have won across-the-board raves, than lead guitarist Peter Buck.

Buck says the band was formed "on a whim" and he uses words like "amateur" to refer to his own guitar playing. But he says making music with R.E.M. "is pretty loose — we're happy doing it."

R.E.M., the acronym for rapid eye movement, made a critical splash with its 1983 debut album, "Murmur." Its second album, "Reckoning," generated equal enthusiasm.

By mid-June, the album was 37th and climbing on Billboard's list of the 50 bestselling rock albums in the country.

"Reckoning" is a sunny, satisfying album, dominated by uplifting melodies and ballads with a pleasant country inflection.

But R.E.M. is a thinking man's band. Its lyrics — vaguely impressionistic, not literal statements — leave what some may feel is too much room for interpretation.

Lead singer Michael Stipe has a soft, emotionally detached voice. He also writes the lyrics, although all four members of the band have a hand in writing the music.

They are most successful with "So Central Rain," which is the album's first single, and "Don't Go Back to Rockville," perhaps the most contagious tune R.E.M. has constructed.

The band, touring across the country this summer, does not have mainstream popularity yet, but it has developed a sizable following among college listeners.

Commercial success is important, "but it's not important enough for us to go out and sell our souls and completely change our music to do it," Buck, 27, said recently in a telephone interview from Los Angeles.

Their music has been likened to the Byrds ("I don't think it's the most valid comparison in the world") and their lifestyle to an episode of the Monkees TV series.

R.E.M. was formed by four friends in Athens, Ga. "We thought we'd get 100 bucks and all the beer we can drink, and maybe we'd put out an independent single sometime," Buck said. "It just kind of blossomed overnight."

"I'd never really played (but) I've always been a music fan," he said. "I'm an amateur. I guess I'm a musician. I'm really not a great guitar player. There are a lot of people who are better."

He said he hopes the band stays together for "10, 11, 12 years — if we want to keep doing it."

"Ten years seems optimum," he said. "Then what? I can't see quitting. So maybe we'll go on forever."

Book review: News for computer hungry

United Press International

The number of books published to capitalize on the hunger for information about personal computers is reaching epidemic proportions. What follows is a selection of recent computer books that stand out — for better or worse:

Getting the Most From Your Micro, by Ernest E. Mau (Hayden Books, 128 pp., \$14.95)

This is an excellent reference guide for the care and feeding of your personal computer. It deals clearly with the internal workings of computers without getting overly technical. I liked the approach of taking nothing for granted. Too many "beginner" computer books assume a level of understanding far beyond today's typical computer owner.

The IBM PC User's Reference Manual, by Gilbert Held (Hayden Books, 384 pp., \$24.95)

If you can understand the "IBM PC User's Reference Manual," you don't need it. If, as I suspect, you are lost after page three, you also don't need it. I'm no stranger to Tech-Talk, but this book is a bit much for even a fairly knowledgeable micro-computer user. I would be upset if I had just plunked down several thousand dollars for an IBM PC and turned to this book for help through that initial stage of panic in setting up and using a personal computer.

Understanding dBase II, by Alan Simpson (Sybex Books, 220 pp., \$22.95)

Aston-Tate's dBase II is one of the most popular and useful database programs currently on the market. For small business use, it is nearly unbeatable. The major drawback to dBase II is that it is necessary to learn a complicated set of program commands. It takes patience, dedication and a certain mindset to master dBase II. Therefore, there is a booming business in how-to-use-dBase II books. Most of them, unfortunately, are as hard to understand as dBase II. But "Understanding dBase II" is different. Simpson's step-by-step tutorial method is easy to follow and the layout of the book helps enormously.

Overcoming Computer Fear, by Jeff Berner (Sybex Books, 100 pp., \$3.95)

This is a little book for the hardcore technophobe — that person who wants to move into the brave new world of computers but has serious doubts about their ability to cope with the arcane rituals involved in personal computing. Berner is clearly a cheerleader for computers and as such evokes a somewhat evangelical fervor at times. His enthusiasm does not, however, cause him to fall into the trap of forgetting who his audience is: those reluctant to wholeheartedly embrace the technology. And I give Berner a grateful pat on the back for waiting until chapter three before giving us the obligatory "Computer Literacy Course." He titles it "A very short course." He is a man of his word. For that alone, I recommend this book.

Confessions of an Infomaniac, by Elizabeth M. Ferrarini (Sybex Books, 215 pp., \$12.95, \$6.95 pb)

This book had everything going for it. It was published by the company widely considered one of the best at publishing computer books. The subject matter, telecomputing, is one of the hottest trends in computerdom. And it had sex.

Where did it all go wrong? The gigantic flaw in this book is that it is fiction. It comes right out in an opening disclaimer and says it is fiction.

It does not need to be fiction. Dating and romance really does take place by computer.

I've seen some of the steamy messages that are posted on the hundreds of electronic bulletin boards around the country. If someone wanted to do a book about consenting adults having electronic tete a tetes, it's really out there! There is no reason to make this a work of fiction.

Interestingly enough, just after I finished the book, I noted a message on one of the computer bulletin boards announcing the wedding of two people who used to communicate via computer.

Now there's a computerized love story!



Photo by ERIC EVANSH

Goin' straight

Allen Estill, a grounds maintenance employee for Texas A&M and a sophomore general studies major from College Station, restripes parking spaces in Parking Annex

51. Each space in the lot which is located across from Zachary Engineering Building will be one foot wider when the striping is completed.

Quick glimpse of China for travelers in a hurry

United Press International

HONG KONG — For the traveler on a tight time schedule, or just seeking a respite from the shopping temptations of Hong Kong, a short trip to the neighboring city of Canton offers a glimpse of China.

It is a quick and carefully controlled glance organized by the government's China International Travel Service, but certainly interesting for the first-time China traveler.

The basic tour offers three days and two nights, all meals included,

for about \$175 a person. The price includes double-occupancy hotel room, transportation and sightseeing in Canton and vicinity by bus with an English-speaking guide.

CITS offers other, longer versions, at greater cost, all centered around Canton, the capital of Guangdong province.

And for the really rushed, there's even a one-day tour featuring a quick drive through Macao and a brief stop just across the Chinese border from the Portuguese enclave, Canton, which the Chinese "spell"

Guangzhou, is 75 miles northwest up the Pearl River from Hong Kong. The home of 3 million people, it has been a major trading center with the West since the 17th century.

The tourist enters China via a three-hour hoverferry trip up the Pearl River that offers a panorama of the diversity of Chinese river traffic, from sculled sampans and sailing junks to modern container ships.

After cursory entry formalities, the group is whisked by bus to lunch in the foreign trade center, site of the semi-annual Canton Trade Fair,

and then taken on a tour of Canton city.

The number of sights seen by each group seems to depend on the state of Canton's traffic jams. The standard sights include the Zhenhai Tower, a five-story structure built in 1380 and now serving as the Canton city museum, the Five-Rams statue — the symbol of the city — in Yuexia Park, and the Sun Yat-sen Memorial hall, a huge theater commemorating the founding father of the Chinese republic.

The second day includes visits to

the nearby city of Foshan for stops at a 1,000-year-old Taoist temple, and a pottery factory, as well as a visit to a rural "People's Commune."

The groups are shuttled from stop to stop by comfortable Japanese-built coaches as the guide points out sights, give impromptu Chinese lessons, answer questions — mostly frankly — and, on occasion, give brief lectures on the current Communist Party line.

The Canton tours are available through most travel agents.

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