

# NOW HEAR THIS

A weekly trip through the new-release aisle of your local music store

## R.E.M.

Reveal

(Warner Bros. Records)

College Rock is dead after a long illness. The genre was 21.

Georgia's R.E.M., with a little help from the Violent Femmes, created an entire style in the 1980s, defining something loosely called "college rock." Its fiery energy, crisp guitars and literate lyrics offered Gen-Xers welcome relief from the heavy-metal glam rock spawned by Van Halen and the bloated pop fathered by Michael Jackson. It is not too much to say that Michael Stipe and crew were the fathers of alternative rock. Critics routinely called R.E.M. the best band of the 1980s. It managed to survive the transition to mainstream success in the early 1990s and continued to produce the vintage R.E.M. sound — energetic, enigmatic and tinged with the rich folk tradition of the group's native South.

So it is a profoundly unpleasant shock to hear how dramatically the band has declined in just a few years. "Reveal" wraps Mr. Stipe (and buries without a trace guitarist Peter Buck and bassist Mike Mills) in a bloated swirl of overproduction that is the antithesis of what R.E.M. was about in its heyday. The songs on "Reveal" are electrified and mechanized, full of useless beeps and swirls and drum-machine beats pathetically unable to replace drummer Bill Berry, who left the band in 1997. R.E.M. apparently has lost its way, signaling that the exuberant brand of music it created has nothing left to say. — Sean Scully

March 17, 2001

## JUNIPER LANE

Tightrope

(Monkey Paw Records)

We haven't heard much about the Charlottesville sound lately. Since the Dave Matthews Band broke out in the mid-1990s, there hasn't been much heard from the town that once billed itself as the next Athens, Ga.

But Juniper Lane, a Northern Virginia bar band with roots at the University of Virginia, is releasing its second CD, "Tightrope," a dense and literary collection of folkish alternative rock songs, on April 7.

Singer Vivion Smith and guitarist Chris Bonavia, the UVA-grad founders, create a swirling and engaging sound. Miss Smith's voice is reminiscent of Fiona Apple's. The mixing and engineering is by alt-rock hero Mitch Easter, of REM fame, helping to heighten the college-radio jangle of Mr. Bonavia's guitars.

Unfortunately, the 10 tracks of the disc have a sameness in their swirl that makes it somewhat difficult for the casual listener to tell them apart. Yet, the sound is pleasing, so this is a relatively minor quibble.

— Sean Scully