

Radiohead Fans Rejoice

A new CD and book hit the stores.

By Keith Powers



Radiohead
Kid A
 (Capitol)
 (radiohead.com;
 hollywoodandvine.com)

A healthy dislike of the music business is usually a good thing. Bands that get too cozy with the business often aren't creative enough to keep on making music—they make product instead.

Don't worry about that ever happening to Radiohead. The British fivesome had their first hit with the single "Creep" in 1993, and has three solid albums to their credit: *Pablo Honey* (1993), *The Bends* (1995) and *OK Computer* (1997).

Now, after three years of silence, their newest work, *Kid A*, bolts off in a new direction. Musically, it's an inviting soundscape. The songs flow from one to another without breaks. The vocals are atmospheric—most of Thom Yorke's words are incomprehensible anyway. It's a concept album without the overblown pseudointellectualism of work like the Who's *Quadrophenia* or any of the weaker Pink Floyd albums. No 90-minute marathons here—you're in and out in less than one hour.

There is much appealing music here; it's just not packaged in digestible chunks. Radiohead is a three-guitar outfit, a fact that individualizes their sound, but you're hard put to find much guitar on *Kid A*. In the second half of the album, especially "Idioteque" and "Morning Bell," the band finally gets a groove on. But the predominant mood is synth-pastiche, with swirling tunes surrounding the altered vocal tracks.

Followers of the group love the CD—it sold 207,000 copies in its first week. But it will bring very few new members to the Radiohead fan club. (The word is that the band has already recorded another CD, set for release early next year. They are hardly touring behind *Kid A* at all—only two U.S. dates were scheduled.)

Musicians are artists, and if they don't follow their muse, they stop being artists. But rock 'n' roll musicians also need to sell CDs, or they go back to playing bars in their hometown. Hardcore fans are willing to take a chance on music that is unconventional, but a couple more releases like *Kid A* and we'll all be saying, "Remember Radiohead?"

But if their career were on the line, the band would never make an album like this. The phony "lyric sheet" buried in the jewel case under the CD has a sentence that sums up *Kid A*: "You can do anything and not have to face the consequences." This is where Radiohead is in their career. They can't stay there, but they probably weren't planning to anyway. •

Exit Music: The Radiohead Story

(Delta Music)
 By Mac Randall
 (bantamdell.com)

Timing is everything. Mac Randall's *Exit Music: The Radiohead Story* (Delta Music; \$13.95), is being released just as the band comes out with their first new work in three years, *Kid A*.

Randall is a frequent correspondent to *Steamtunnels*, and has written about music for *Musician* magazine, *Rolling Stone* and the *Boston Phoenix*. He's currently the East Coast editor of launch.com, as well as being an accomplished guitarist.

What first attracted Randall to the band was their musicianship and their don't-make-me-into-a-star attitude. True to that spirit, Radiohead declined to officially participate in the making of the book. Fortunately for Randall though, he had done several interviews with the band around the release of their first three CDs, so they had already talked to him about the important stuff—the music.

The lack of cooperation makes for a better read, since there are no "band approved" quotes around. When Randall talks about the songs, he describes them straightforwardly, interspersing quotes from the band members about the genesis of the music. He was forced to sleuth out the facts about the bands' early years in Oxford, and comes up with an interesting read that's part interview, part research and all music. •



For more info on Radiohead, go to steamtunnels.net and search for keyword "Radiohead."

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