

= Rocket to Russia =

Rocket to Russia is the third studio album by the American punk rock band the Ramones , and was released on November 4 , 1977 , through Sire Records . Its origins date back to the summer of 1977 , when " Sheena Is a Punk Rocker " was released as a single . That summer was known as the peak of the punk rock genre , since many punk bands were offered recording contracts . The album 's recording began in August 1977 , and the band had a considerably larger budget with Sire allowing them \$ 25 @, @ 000 and \$ 30 @, @ 000 ; much of this money went toward the album 's production rather than recording .

The album 's cover art was directed by John Gillespie . John Holmstrom and guitarist Johnny Ramone both worked on illustration , with the entire back cover contemplating a military theme , while the inner sleeve artwork depicted many of the themes portrayed in songs . The subject matter of songs varied throughout the album , though nearly all the tracks on the album incorporated humor into the lyrics . The musical style showed more of a surf rock influence , and many songs had minimal structuring .

The album received positive reception , with many critics appreciating the matured production and sound quality as compared to Rocket to Russia 's predecessors . Music critic Stephen Thomas Erlewine called it his favorite Ramones album as it contained several hooks and featured more variety of tempos . The album was not as commercially successful as the band had hoped , peaking at number 49 on the Billboard 200 . Band members blamed the Sex Pistols ' for their lack of sales , saying that they changed the punk image for the worse . This is the last album to feature original drummer Tommy Ramone who left the band in 1978 to work solely on production . The album was ranked at number 106 in Rolling Stone 's " 500 Greatest Albums of All Time " in 2012 .

= = Conception = =

= = = Background = = =

In the summer of 1977 , " Sheena Is a Punk Rocker " was released as a single , being an outtake from the band 's previous release , Leave Home . This period was extremely significant to the punk rock genre , as it was the initial wave of New York City 's underground punk bands retrieving recording contracts . New York based clubs CBGB and Max 's Kansas City began to see bigger audiences crowd in to hear these bands . Punk fans commonly believed that this musical style would soon top the market , to which author Tom Carson explains : " To be in New York that summer was to have some sense of what it might have been like to live in San Francisco in 1966 or ' 67 , or in London when the Beatles and the [ Rolling ] Stones first hit . "

= = = Recording and production = = =

Sire Records allowed the band between \$ 25 @, @ 000 and \$ 30 @, @ 000 to fully record and produce the album , which is a considerably larger budget compared to the band 's previous albums . The band spent most of the money Sire had given them on the album 's production value . The studio rent was \$ 150 per hour , usually using the first take of a song as its final recording . Johnny explained that " it 's best to do it quickly ... You do not wanna sit there and bullshit . It 's your money they 're spending . "

The recording began on August 21 , 1977 and took place in Midtown Manhattan at Media Sound Studios , a premises of a former Episcopalian Church . On the first day of sessions , guitarist Johnny Ramone brought a copy of the Sex Pistols ' single " God Save the Queen " with him , remarking that their type of music " robbed " the band . He emphasized that the album 's sound engineer Ed Stasium needed to incorporate better production than that of the Sex Pistols , to which Stasium replied " no problem . " Johnny relates : " These guys ripped us off and I want to sound better than this . "

Though the album cites Tony Bongiovi and Tommy Ramone as the head producers , much of the album 's production was done by Stasium ; Johnny so far as to insist that Bongiovi was omnipresent during the band 's recording sessions . Rocket to Russia 's final mastering was mainly done in Bongiovi 's Power Station studio . Infamous record producer Phil Spector offered to fabricate Rocket to Russia , but the band denied , feeling as though the album would not be the same without Tommy and Bongiovi .

= = = Title and packaging = = =

The album was released on November 4 , 1977 under the name Rocket to Russia , though it had a working title of Get Well . John Gillespie directed the artwork on the album , and the cover photo was taken by Danny Fields . Arturo Vega is credited as Artistic Coordinator , and Punk magazine editor John Holmstrom illustrated for the album . Holmstrom and Johnny collaborated on the back cover 's concept , eventually conceiving a military theme with an anti @-@ communist cartoon drawing . The back cover art depicts a " pinhead " riding a rocket from the US to Russia . The drawing features many landmarks which pertain to their global position , including The Empire State Building and Capitol Building , and Saint Basil 's Cathedral in Moscow . The original artwork is now featured in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland , Ohio . The inside sleeve features cartoon illustrations of each song 's basic concept .

= = Lyrics and compositions = =

Compared to the band 's previous albums , the songs from Rocket to Russia were more surf music and bubblegum pop influenced . But similar to their previous releases , the lyrics integrated humor , specifically black comedy with themes circling mental disorders and psychiatry .

The album opens with " Cretin Hop , " which pays homage to Ramones fans , and was inspired by Cretin Avenue of St. Paul , Minnesota , named after former Bishop Joseph Crétin . When the piece was performed at concerts , the band would pogo dance on stage . " Rockaway Beach " was written by bassist Dee Dee Ramone , and was inspired by the Beach Boys along with other surf music bands . The title refers to a neighborhood and beach in Queens which Dee Dee was a fan of , as confirmed by Tommy and Joey . " I Don 't Care " is composed of three chords and features minimal text composition . The song is among the first pieces written by the band , and was originally recorded as a demo that was released on the 2001 expanded edition of the Ramones debut album . " Sheena Is a Punk Rocker " was written by Joey , who explains that the lyrics are about a young female outsider named Sheena who strayed away from the popular disco and surf music and instead visited nightclubs and listened to punk rock . The mid @-@ tempo song deviates from a three @-@ chord pattern and starts off with Joey shouting " Go ! " , followed guitar riffs deemed to have a " raucous " texture by author Tom Carson . The author also suggests that these chords " bump [ ed ] " into each other until the song 's fade @-@ out ending .

" We 're a Happy Family " is a caricature of the conditions which 20th century middle @-@ class American families lived in . The song 's lyrics depict a dysfunctional family where the father is a lying homosexual , the mother is addicted to prescription drugs , the infant has chills . The writing also tells of how the family are friends with the President of the United States and the Pope , and indicate that the family sells " dope , " which is slang for marijuana . The song fades out with various different lines taken from fake dialogue , which illustrate a side of Joey 's personality according to his brother Mickey Leigh .

Side B of the album begins with " Teenage Lobotomy , " which deals with the brain surgical operation lobotomy . The lyrics outlines how this procedure can cause serious consequences to the brain , with the line " Gonna get my Ph.D , I 'm a teenage lobotomy . " The composition features more complex melodies than that of other songs from the album , with Stasium proclaiming it to be a " mini @-@ Ramones Symphony . " Rocket to Russia is the first album to feature two cover songs : " Do You Wanna Dance ? " ( originally performed by Bobby Freeman ) and " Surfin ' Bird " ( originally performed by The Trashmen ) .

= = Reception = =

= = = Critical = = =

Rocket to Russia was well received by critics , and was often given a positive review . Many critics appreciated the band 's progression of sound quality and production value , as opposed to the album 's predecessors . Stephen Thomas Erlewine , a music critic at AllMusic said that the production " only gives the Ramones ' music more force . " He rewarded the album five out of five stars , stating that although it lacks the revolutionary impact that their debut had , Rocket to Russia is the band 's " most listenable and enjoyable album " because of its surplus of hooks and varying tempo .

Critic Robert Christgau reaffirms that the album 's content evolved significantly since previous releases . Christgau noted that the album had " something for everyone " and called it a " ready @-@ made punk @-@ rock classic . " Rolling Stone critic Dave Marsh began his review of the album by stating : " Rocket to Russia is the best American rock & roll of the year and possibly the funniest rock album ever made . " Like other critics , Marsh recognized the advanced sound quality , explaining that " the guitars still riff relentlessly , but they are freer within the murky sound , and the songs give them much more to work with . "

= = = Sales and aftermath = = =

Though the band expected the album to spawn a few hit songs , Rocket to Russia sold few records . The album charted on the US Billboard 200 at number 49 , making this album one of the most successful of the Ramones ' releases . It also debuted at number 31 on the Swedish charts , 36 on the Canadian charts , and 60 on the UK Albums Chart .

The lack of record sales was largely due to the fellow punk band Sex Pistols turning people off the genre " with their antisocial behavior , " as put by author Brian J. Bowe . Rock music historian Legs McNeil relates : " Safety pins , razor blades , chopped haircuts , snarling , vomiting--everything that had nothing to do with the Ramones was suddenly in vogue , and it killed any chance Rocket to Russia had of getting any airplay . " Joey also insisted that the Sex Pistols were partially responsible for the low sale numbers , concluding that before 60 Minutes 's focused on the Sex Pistols , Rocket to Russia had decent airplay . After this , Joey asserted that " everyone flipped out and then things changed radically . It really kind of screwed things up for ourselves . "

= = = Departure of Tommy = = =

Drummer Tommy , who had also worked to co @-@ produce the album , was troubled by the lack of sales and began debating on continuing with the Ramones . He also considered touring to be " depressing , " and that the audience at unfamiliar gigs were " a bunch of very eccentric , high @-@ strung , crazy people , from one shit @-@ hole club to another . " The drummer left the band to continue on the album 's writing and mixing .

" I was thinking , ' What 's best for the Ramones ? ' There was all this tension between me and Johnny . I was trying to release the pressure , to keep the band going . I told Dee Dee and Joey first that I was leaving the band . They said , ' Oh no , don 't go , don 't go , blah , blah , blah . ' I told them we had to do something , because I was losing my mind . "

= = Track listing = =

All songs were written by the Ramones , except where noted .

= = Personnel = =

The following personnel can be verified with AllMusic and the album 's liner notes .

Performing

Joey Ramone ? lead vocals

Johnny Ramone ? lead guitar

Dee Dee Ramone ? bass guitar , backing vocals

Tommy Ramone ? drums , producer

Production

Tony Bongiovi ? producer

Ed Stasium ? engineer

Don Berman ? assistant engineer

Greg Calbi ? mastering

Danny Fields ? photography

John Holmstrom ? artwork