

= Rather Ripped =

Rather Ripped is the 14th studio album by the American experimental rock band Sonic Youth , released on June 13 , 2006 by Geffen Records . It is the band 's first album after the departure of multi @-@ instrumentalist Jim O 'Rourke , who joined the group as a fifth member in 1999 . Unlike its immediate predecessors , the album was produced by John Agnello and recorded at Sear Sound in New York City , the same studio where the band 's 1994 album Experimental Jet Set , Trash and No Star was recorded . It also completed Sonic Youth 's contract with Geffen , which released the band 's previous eight records .

Rather Ripped is generally considered one of the band 's most accessible albums , featuring an abundance of concise and catchy songs that deal with melancholic topics about adultery , sexual frustration and infidelity . Upon release , the album peaked at No. 71 on the US Billboard 200 chart and No. 64 on the UK Albums Chart . The album 's only single , " Incinerate " , was released in 2006 , alongside an accompanying music video by French director and writer Claire Denis . Rather Ripped received very positive reviews and was ranked at No. 12 in The Village Voice 's 2006 Pazz & Jop critics ' poll . Journalists generally praised the vocal delivery of singer and bassist Kim Gordon and the album 's simpler and cleaner melodies .

= = Background and recording = =

Rather Ripped is the follow @-@ up to Sonic Youth 's 2004 album Sonic Nurse and the band 's first record after the departure of multi @-@ instrumentalist Jim O 'Rourke , who joined the group as a fifth member in 1999 . According to guitarist Lee Ranaldo , O 'Rourke left the band to pursue film work and other recording projects . His departure affected the sound of Rather Ripped , with singer and guitarist Thurston Moore stating that the new record " is just a far more straight up rock and roll album " , in contrast to the " darker , twisted , complex quality " of O 'Rourke 's contributions . Moore also explained that he decided to write simpler songs " for everybody to plug into immediately " . The album 's working titles were Sonic Life and Do You Believe in Rapture ? The name " Rather Ripped " came from a Berkeley , California record store that later moved to Pittsburgh , Pennsylvania .

Unlike its immediate predecessors , which were recorded at the band 's own Echo Canyon studio in Lower Manhattan , Rather Ripped was recorded at Sear Sound in New York City (the same studio where their 1994 album Experimental Jet Set , Trash and No Star was recorded) , from December 2005 to January 2006 . The album was quickly produced and much of the material was not reworked due to the band 's limited time in the studio . During the recording sessions , Moore 's gear included two Fender Jazzmasters and a Fender Princeton . Ranaldo , on the other hand , played a Gibson Les Paul guitar for half of the album and used his Fender Telecaster Deluxe , " Jazzmaster copy @-@ made " by Saul Koll , and modified Fender Jazzmaster with humbuckers for the remaining tracks . Guitars were directly plugged into the mixer with no guitar amplifier in the signal chain . The band chose John Agnello as the album 's engineer due to his work with Don Fleming on albums by Screaming Trees in the early 1990s . He was also recommended by fellow musician J Mascis of Dinosaur Jr . , who had been working with Agnello for years . Additional work was done in early 2006 at Echo Canyon , as well as J Mascis 's Bisquiten studio in Amherst , Massachusetts . The album was mastered by Greg Calbi at Sterling Sound in New York City in March 2006 .

= = Music and lyrics = =

Rather Ripped is generally considered one of the band 's most accessible albums , featuring an abundance of concise and catchy melodies . Moore described it as " a super song record " that contains " rockers and ballads " . In addition , seven of the album 's 12 tracks have a duration of less than four minutes , a feature that is uncommon in previous Sonic Youth releases . The album generally favors guitar textures over feedback or noise , which typically characterized the band 's earlier works . Dave Heaton of PopMatters remarked that the guitars on Rather Ripped are joined together to form a vibrant and mysterious sound , stating that " it often feels like Sonic Youth are

taking all the instrumental tricks they 've learned over the years and putting them in the service of building a lasting landscape of guitar sounds , one that reverberates with the sounds of the past but also feels eternally youthful " .

Lyrically , *Rather Ripped* deals with melancholic topics about adultery , sexual frustration and infidelity . In the opening track , " *Reena* " , whose working title was " *Stonesy* " , singer and bassist Kim Gordon is involved in a secondary relationship with a woman . Lead single " *Incinerate* " is built on a conventional love @-@ as @-@ fire metaphor , while " *What a Waste* " attributes sexual lust . " *Pink Steam* " , which is the longest track of the album , features a lengthy instrumental part that was described as " gorgeously windswept and violently romantic " . Its title was taken from a book by San Francisco author Dodie Bellamy . The song " *Do You Believe in Rapture ?* " is a political reflection on Christians in the office , while " *Rats* " , which is the only song on the album written by Rinaldo , was described as a " fulfilling ghost @-@ narrative " . The album ends with the semi @-@ acoustic ballad " *Or* " , which starts with strip @-@ club imagery and ends with Moore recounting various interview @-@ like questions such as " What comes first ? The music or the words ? "

= = Release = =

Rather Ripped was released on June 13 , 2006 and completed Sonic Youth 's contract with major label Geffen Records , which also released the band 's previous eight albums . The UK edition of the album includes two outtakes , " *Helen Lundeberg* " and " *Eyelinor* " , which were previously released as a 7 " single on the band 's own label , Sonic Youth Records . To promote the album , the band embarked on a tour across the United States , starting at New York 's famed CBGB on June 13 , 2006 , where the band had not performed since 1992 , and ending at the Bank of America Pavilion in Boston on September 3 , 2006 . Bassist Mark Ibold , formerly of the indie rock band Pavement , joined the band as part of the touring group .

Upon release , *Rather Ripped* peaked at No. 71 on the US Billboard 200 chart and No. 64 on the UK Albums Chart . The album also charted in other countries , including Australia , Belgium , Finland , France and Norway . The song " *Incinerate* " was released as a single in France and Australia in 2006 . Additionally , five music videos , one for " *Incinerate* " and four for " *Jams Run Free* " , were directed by French director and writer Claire Denis . The video for " *Incinerate* " is a performance of the band that was recorded at Le Nouveau Casino in Paris prior to their 2006 tour in support of the album , while the others are set in an apartment and repeat images of cats , roofing tiles and TV antennas . The videos were shot with a consumer @-@ grade digital video camera and feature a dissolving image resolution and fluctuating color palette .

= = Critical reception = =

Rather Ripped received generally very positive reviews from critics . PopMatters editor Dave Heaton felt that the album was a graceful and elegant way to end Sonic Youth 's unique relationship with Geffen , describing it as a " cohesive story about a band seeking the best way to take the reckless , brave spirits of free jazz , punk , and experimental music , and generate them within the confines of traditional rock song structure " . He also praised Moore 's lyrics , stating that " his Beat @-@ style poetry is especially evocative , and especially terse ? a quality that fits well with an album that musically seems to be doing much the same , communicating a lot with a little " . Similarly , Dave Simpson of The Guardian felt that the band reinvented themselves with poppier songs , calling *Rather Ripped* " an extraordinary state of affairs in Sonic Youth 's 25th year " .

Writing for Rolling Stone , Rob Sheffield highlighted Moore 's guitar playing for giving the album " a sense of emotional urgency " and considered " *Incinerate* " and " *Pink Steam* " some of the album 's highlights . Gordon 's vocal delivery was widely praised , with Ben Ratliff of The New York Times comparing it favorably to The Velvet Underground singer and collaborator Nico . Prominent music critic Robert Christgau also remarked that Gordon sounds " breathlessly girlish " despite being 53 at the time , and that both she and Moore " evoke visions of dalliance , displacement , recrimination , and salvation that never become unequivocally literal " . Sheffield concluded that the album features

her first worthwhile songs in a decade .

Steve Hochman of Los Angeles Times credited the album 's catchy melodies for being smartly and effectively handled , commenting that " it almost makes you wonder what would have happened if Television and Peter Frampton had worked together " . Tom Sinclair of Entertainment Weekly wrote that , although the band " can still knock out a noisy punk stomper when the mood strikes " like on the track " Sleepin Around " , the cleaner and quieter melodies are the ones that " really rip up your emotions " . Slant 's Jimmy Newlin stated similar pros , noting that " quiet is the new loud " , and felt that the band 's shift towards romantic poignancy was " a welcome growth as the band advances well into its second decade of existence " .

Other reviews were less enthusiastic . Spin editor Joe Gross criticized Rather Ripped for its lack of expansive songs , stating that the album " is about three- or four @-@ minute songcraft ? never the highlight of their résumé , even when [Gordon] lends her singular rasp " . Brandon Stosuy of Pitchfork Media felt that the second half of the album was weaker than the first and criticized the lyrics of the closer " Or " . AllMusic reviewer Heather Phares remarked that the band 's playing can occasionally outpace their songwriting , but nevertheless judged Rather Ripped as " a solidly good album " that " shows that Sonic Youth is still in a comfortable yet creative groove , not a rut " . In February 2007 , Rather Ripped was ranked at No. 12 in The Village Voice 's 2006 Pazz & Jop critics ' poll . Additionally , Rolling Stone editors ranked the album third on their Top 50 Albums of 2006 list , while Pitchfork ranked it 43rd on a similar list .

= = Track listing = =

All songs written and composed by Sonic Youth .

= = Personnel = =

Credits are adapted from the album 's liner notes .

= = Charts = =