

= Reckoning (R.E.M. album) =

Reckoning is the second studio album by the American alternative rock band R.E.M. , released in 1984 by I.R.S. Records . Produced by Mitch Easter and Don Dixon , the album was recorded at Reflection Sound Studio in Charlotte , North Carolina over 16 days in December 1983 and January 1984 . Dixon and Easter intended to capture the sound of R.E.M. ' s live performances , and used binaural recording on several tracks . Singer Michael Stipe dealt with darker subject matter in his lyrics , and water imagery is a recurring theme on the record . Released to critical acclaim , Reckoning reached number 27 in the United States ? where it was certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America in 1991 ? and peaked at number 91 in the United Kingdom .

= = Background and production = =

After its debut album Murmur (1983) received critical acclaim , R.E.M. quickly began work on its second album . The group wrote new material prodigiously ; guitarist Peter Buck recalled , " We were going through this streak where we were writing two good songs a week [...] We just wanted to do it ; whenever we had a new batch of songs , it was time to record " . Due to the number of new songs the group had , Buck unsuccessfully tried to convince everyone to make the next album a double record . In November 1983 , the band recorded 22 songs during a session with Neil Young producer Elliot Mazer in San Francisco . While Mazer was briefly considered as a candidate to produce the band 's next album , R.E.M. ultimately decided to team up again with Murmur producers Mitch Easter and Don Dixon .

R.E.M. started recording Reckoning at Reflection Sound in Charlotte , North Carolina , on December 8 , 1983 . The group recorded over two eight @-@ day stretches around Christmas 1983 , separated by two weeks of canceled studio time that allowed the band to play a show in Greensboro , North Carolina , go out to see a movie , and shoot a video in the studio . While the studio diary listed 16 days for recording , the album sleeve later claimed the album was recorded in 14 days , while in interviews Buck at times commented that the album was recorded in 11 days . The producers both disputed that the sessions were that short ; Dixon insisted that they were at the studio for at least 25 days (during which he worked eighteen @-@ hour days) , while Easter said " When I read ' eleven days ' I thought , what the fuck ! It was twenty days , which was still short , but it 's not eleven . "

During recording there was pressure from I.R.S. Records to try to make the album more commercial . The label sent messages to Dixon and Easter , which the producers told the band that they would ignore . While the producers respected I.R.S. president Jay Boberg , they expressed dismay at the comments he made when he visited during the last day of sessions . Dixon called Boberg " record company clueless " , while Easter said " I got along with Jay Boberg OK [...] but now and again he would express an opinion that would make me think , ' holy shit ' , because it would strike me as really teenage . " Buck said he was grateful that Dixon and Easter acted as a buffer between the band and its label . He said that " it got to the point where as much as I respected the guys at I.R.S. , we basically tried to record the records so they wouldn 't know we were recording them ! " , and explained that part of the reason why R.E.M. recorded the album so quickly was that the group wanted to finish before representatives from I.R.S. showed up to listen to it .

The recording sessions were difficult for singer Michael Stipe , who , among the band , was particularly worn out by the group 's 1983 tour schedule . Getting usable vocal tracks from Stipe was difficult ; Dixon recalled that he and Stipe would show up around noon each day before the rest of the band , but that " he was kind of shut down , and it was difficult to get him to open up " . While recording the song " 7 Chinese Brothers " , Stipe sang so quietly that Dixon could not hear him on the tape . Frustrated , the producer climbed a ladder to a spot above the recording booth Stipe was in and found a gospel record titled The Joy of Knowing Jesus by the Revelaires , which he then handed to the singer in an attempt to inspire him . Stipe began reciting the liner notes from the album audibly , which enabled Dixon to move on to recording the vocal track to " 7 Chinese Brothers

" properly (the initial recitation take was later released in 1987 as " Voice of Harold " on the compilation Dead Letter Office) .

= = Music = =

With Reckoning , Dixon , Easter and the band wanted to capture the energy of R.E.M. ' s live sound . Dixon had not seen the band perform live before working on Murmur ; after he had done so , he had a greater sense of the band 's strengths and weaknesses . Dixon wanted the guitars to sound more like they did in concert , but at first met resistance from both the band and the label . However , by the time R.E.M. started to record , Dixon said the group " wanted to rock out a bit more " .

Dixon was enamored of the technique of binaural recording , and used it extensively on the album . Easter recalled that Dixon " made this sort of fake binaural head out of a cardboard box and stuck two microphones in it " to record the group . In Easter 's opinion the method made drummer Bill Berry 's parts " fresher sounding " . Binaural recording also allowed bassist Mike Mills ' backing vocals to be loud without covering up Stipe 's lead vocals . Dixon explained , " Mike Mills was often singing 12 to 15 feet away from the microphones that were recording his part , but because it was in a studio binaural field , we would tend to hear him as behind [Stipe] . "

Biographer David Buckley wrote , " While the music moved away from Murmur 's slightly airless feel , the subject matter was a little darker . " Buck noted in a 1988 interview that water imagery was abundant in the album . Buckley interpreted that imagery as representing the change presented by the band 's increasing success , as well as the changing music scene of the group 's Athens , Georgia hometown . The song " Camera " addressed the death of a friend from Athens who died in a car crash . Easter said , " [Stipe 's] vocal was so exposed on that track , and because of that , it could really show any technical imperfections with regard to pitch . " The producer tried to get Stipe to sing a better take , but the singer was more intent on getting the feeling of the song across , and at one point refused to record further . While many of the album 's songs were new compositions , some had been in R.E.M. ' s show setlists for years . In particular , " Pretty Persuasion " and " (Don 't Go Back to) Rockville " had been played live as far back as October 1980 . The band was reluctant to record " Pretty Persuasion " as the members considered it too old , but Dixon and Easter convinced the group to do so . R.E.M. originally intended to release " (Don 't Go Back to) Rockville " as a non @-@ album single between Reckoning and its next release . When the band recorded it for the album , the group rearranged the song from its live incarnation and gave it a country music feel in tribute to its lawyer Bertis Downs , IV , who was a country fan .

= = Packaging = =

For the cover of Reckoning , Stipe drew a picture of a two @-@ headed snake , which he then gave to artist Howard Finster to fill in as a painting . Stipe stated that the imagery was an attempt to define the elements , explaining , " Part of it is rocks and part of it is the sun and part of it the sky . " The end result was considered a disappointment , as Stipe had to work with Finster on a long @-@ distance basis , and the reproduction of the artwork for the album sleeve was problematic . The spine of the vinyl version of the album features the phrase " File Under Water " . Stipe told NME in 1984 the phrase is the true title of the record . He added " In America , both titles are on the spine , with nothing on the cover . Here [in the United Kingdom] they insisted on Reckoning being on the cover . " Instead of labeling the sides of the record as " side one " and " side two " , the sides were designated as " L " and " R " , respectively .

= = Release and reception = =

Reckoning was released on April 9 , 1984 in the United Kingdom , and on April 17 in the United States . The album quickly reached the top of the college radio airplay charts , whose audience had highly anticipated the album . However , the band hadn 't received much exposure on commercial radio and MTV by that point . Instead of the music industry standard of waiting for mainstream radio

stations to pick up the band's music, I.R.S. hoped to "convince reluctant programmers to add the group by pointing to the press response, word-of-mouth reaction to local live performances and sales figures", according to a July 1984 Los Angeles Times article. The album's first single, "So. Central Rain (I'm Sorry)", was released in May and reached number 85 on the Billboard Hot 100 singles charts. A second single, "(Don't Go Back to) Rockville", came out in August; unlike its predecessor, it did not chart. Within a month of its release Reckoning peaked at number 27 on the Billboard 200 album chart, and it remained on the chart for nearly a year. While the album's domestic chart placing was unusually high for a college rock band at the time, scant airplay and poor distribution overseas resulted in it charting no higher than number 91 in the United Kingdom. In 1991 the record was certified gold (500,000 copies shipped) by the Recording Industry Association of America.

Rolling Stone gave Reckoning a four out of five star rating. Reviewer Christopher Connelly wrote that in comparison to Murmur the "overall sound is crisper, the lyrics far more comprehensible. And while the album may not mark any major strides forward for the band, R.E.M.'s considerable strengths? Buck's ceaselessly inventive strumming, Mike Mills' exceptional bass playing and Stipe's evocatively gloomy baritone? remain unchanged". However, Connelly felt that Stipe's "erratic meanderings" were an impediment to the band that "will prevent R.E.M. from transcending cult status". Nonetheless, he concluded, "R.E.M.'s music is able to involve the listener on both an emotional and intellectual level." Joe Sasy of The Washington Post felt that the songs on the album "trump even Murmur's outstanding songwriting" and stated "there isn't an American band worth following more than R.E.M." NME reviewer Mat Snow wrote that Reckoning "confirms R.E.M. as one of the most beautifully exciting groups on the planet" and called the album "another classic". The album placed seventh in that magazine's Best Album of the Year critics' poll, and ranked sixth in the Village Voice Pazz & Jop poll. Slant Magazine listed the album at number 81 on its list of "Best Albums of the 1980s".

The 1992 British Compact Disc reissue of the album included five bonus tracks. A 25th anniversary deluxe edition of the album, which was remastered and packaged with a bonus disc featuring a concert recorded at Chicago's Aragon Ballroom on July 7, 1984, was released in 2009.

= = Left of Reckoning = =

Eager to explore the music video medium, Stipe secured funding for a short film that would accompany music from the first half of Reckoning. Stipe's concept was to film the project at folk artist R.A. Miller's Whirlgig Farm, and he recruited Athens filmmaker James Herbert to direct it. In March 1984 R.E.M. filmed Left of Reckoning at the Whirlgig Farm in Rabbittown, Georgia. The short film draws its title from the fact that it is soundtracked by five songs that appear on the "L" side of the vinyl version of Reckoning: "Harborcoat", "7 Chinese Bros.", "So. Central Rain (I'm Sorry)", "Pretty Persuasion", "Time After Time (AnnElise)", in addition to "Second Guessing" from the R side. In contrast to standard music video imagery, the film consists primarily of footage of the band members wandering around the farm, while Herbert utilizes close-ups, silhouettes, and slow motion footage. Herbert utilized rephotography during the editing process, which involved taking photographs of film frames at random, while also closing in or pulling back from the image with no regard to narrative. According to Buck, "It was really inexpensive to make and kind of fun. We just asked [Herbert] to edit something to four minutes' length, but he's used to making 20-minute films, that's the length he works in. He just made this film that goes along with the first side of the record." While MTV did not air the complete film, the channel's program The Cutting Edge (funded by I.R.S.) aired the "Time After Time (AnnElise)" segment, and the snippet featuring "Pretty Persuasion" was aired by other music programs.

= = Track listing = =

All songs written by Bill Berry, Peter Buck, Mike Mills, and Michael Stipe except where noted.
Side one? Left

" Harborcoat " ? 3 : 54
 " 7 Chinese Bros. " ? 4 : 18
 " So . Central Rain (I 'm Sorry) " ? 3 : 15
 " Pretty Persuasion " ? 3 : 50
 " Time After Time (Annelise) " ? 3 : 31
 Side two ? Right
 " Second Guessing " ? 2 : 51
 " Letter Never Sent " ? 2 : 59
 " Camera " ? 5 : 52
 " (Don 't Go Back To) Rockville " ? 4 : 55
 " Little America " ? 2 : 58
 1992 I.R.S. Vintage Years reissue bonus tracks
 " Wind Out " (with friends) (Jerry Ayers , Berry , Buck , Mills , Stipe) ? 1 : 58
 " Pretty Persuasion " (live in studio) ? 4 : 01
 " White Tornado " (live in studio) ? 1 : 51
 " Tighten Up " (Archie Bell and Billy Butler) ? 4 : 08
 " Moon River " (Henry Mancini and Johnny Mercer) ? 2 : 21
 2009 Deluxe Edition bonus disc (Live at the Aragon Ballroom , Chicago , Illinois , July 7 , 1984)
 " Femme Fatale " (Lou Reed) ? 3 : 19
 " Radio Free Europe " ? 3 : 54
 " Gardening at Night " ? 3 : 38
 " 9 ? 9 " ? 2 : 48
 " Windout " ? 2 : 13
 " Letter Never Sent " ? 3 : 03
 " Sitting Still " ? 3 : 13
 " Driver 8 " ? 3 : 28
 " So . Central Rain " ? 3 : 23
 " 7 Chinese Bros. " ? 4 : 27
 " Harborcoat " ? 4 : 34
 " Hyena " ? 3 : 26
 " Pretty Persuasion " ? 3 : 49
 " Little America " ? 3 : 23
 " Second Guessing " ? 3 : 07
 " (Don 't Go Back To) Rockville " ? 4 : 30

A vintage radio promo for the album is hidden in the pregap of the bonus disc .

The original pressing of Reckoning included a clip of an untitled song at the end of the album , making " Little America " 3 : 43 . This was restored on the Mobile Fidelity Sound Labs re @-@ release of the album and on the Deluxe Edition .

= = Personnel = =

R.E.M.

Bill Berry ? drums , percussion , and backing vocals

Peter Buck ? guitar

Mike Mills ? bass , piano and backing vocals

Michael Stipe ? lead vocals and harmonica

Additional musicians

Bertis Downs ? backing vocals on " Wind Out " (With Friends)

Jefferson Holt ? lead vocals on " Wind Out " (With Friends)

Production

Don Dixon ? co @-@ producer

Mitch Easter ? co @-@ producer

Howard Finster ? art direction

= = Chart positions = =

= = Release history = =

? ? Remastered Deluxe Edition , with Live at Aragon Ballroom bonus disc