THE RAMONES

Mondo Bizarro

Radioactive Records.

By Russ Newman

It is the press kit that accompanied Mondo Bizarro, Joey Ramone claimed it is "the best Ramones album ever." The album, the band's first containing new material in three years, is also their first with new bassist C.J. Ramone. Longtime listeners will probably not agree with Joey's statement, but neither will they say Mondo Bizarro is a bad album.

Mondo Bizarro starts off strongly. The first two cuts are standard Ramones, with the walls of guitar that attract most people to the group in the first place. "Convent/blah," with its blatantly obvious political message, combines an all-out attack on Tipper Gore ("Ah, Tipper come on, ain't you been getting it on?/Ask Ozzy, Zappa or me/We'll show you what it's like to be free/Hey, hey all you senators'/Ozzie, Zappa or me/We'll show you what it's like to be free/Hey, hey all you senators'/"), with a strong blast of noise.

"The Job That Ate My Brain" is by-the-numbers, trademark Ramones, which of course is good. With the help of former Ramone Dee Dee Ramone, the group tries their usual hand at melodrama on "Poison Heart," a song which they apparently intend to become the "success" of the album, because a video is being prepared for it. Usually, when something becomes the "success" of the album, because a video is being prepared for it, they overdo it. However, here they balance the emotion with enough fury to allow the song just a tad annoying. "Anxiety" has a good barrage of guitars, but there is nothing truly different about it.

The rest of the album is a definite mixed bag. "Strength to Endure" isn't a bad song, yet it is not a real winner. New Ramone C.J. takes control of the vocals for this one, as he does on a later cut, "Mass Man." "It's Gonna Be Alright" is more laid-back, with an appropri- octave guitar adding harmony to the sonic bombardment at the other end of the spectrum. "Take It As It Comes," which according to the press release, "demonstrates the Ramones' longstanding knack for inventive cover versions" (in this case, of a song by The Doors) is another track which has a video planned for it, but it honestly isn't one of their stronger efforts. "Main Man" and "Tomorrow She Goes Away" are two louder, strong songs on the level of "The Job That Ate My Brain." They sharply contrast the following "I Won't Let It Happen," a weak Ramones-brand ballad that is not truly bad, but also is not very good. "Cabins On Crack" is an average effort that isn't as pleasing as other songs on the album. Continuing in the "Someone is a Something" tradition, "Heidi is a Headcase" is an above-average buzzsaw guitar outing. The album concludes with "Touring," a well-intentioned pumped-up filliss-style tune complete with "Wha-oo, hop top's. Some may find this song just a tad annoying.

Mondo Bizarro is simply an above-average effort from the Ramones, but this is quite an achievement for a band that has been around for 16 years. Anyone who has any number of older Ramones albums has undoubtedly heard all these songs before; the structures are the same, with only minute chord changes. Basically, if you like The Ramones, you will like this album. If you are new to the Ramones, get their original self-titled album so you can truly experience the full-force fire that once burned within this band. The fire is still there in Mondo Bizarro, but it's a bit watered down.

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The Ramones

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