

16 | R.E.M.

Club Foot, Austin, Texas, July 1981

Luke Torn That night, sandwiched in between some local upstarts (neo-Mod trio The Make) and Texas' newest New Wave darlings (The Judy's) were a touring band from Georgia virtually no one had heard of, making their first-ever trek out of their native Southeast.

The club was hardly full that night, most drinking, anticipating the ironic whimsy of the Judy's. But when R.E.M. took the stage, the atmosphere changed. Never mind that the songs, save a cover of the Velvet's "There She Goes Again", were completely unfamiliar. The band were all over the stage, manic blurs of tangled hair and electrical cords and flying sweat.

Peter Buck's Rickenbacker rifled through the songs (two identified the next day - "Sitting Still" and "Radio Free Europe"), pushing them with a jangly urgency that - yes - echoed The Byrds, sped up to 78. But this was the opposite of nostalgia. Intense yet unassuming, taking an anti-rock star everyman stance amid the era of glitzy hair bands and MTV, R.E.M. provided a tantalising glimpse of America's post-punk underground future.

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