



311

GETTIN' THE FUNK OUT

BY RAY MEYER

As the world continues to rotate on its axis on this very date in 1999, there can be little debate among those who understand and love the rock and roll form that the band known as 311 now stand as one of the most singularly distinctive groups currently inhabiting the contemporary music realm. And, come to think of it, that's with good reason. After all, vocalist SA Martinez, vocalist/guitarist Nick Hexum, guitarist Tim Mahoney, bassist P-Nut and drummer Chad Sexton make some of the most positive, uplifting and entertaining music available on the rock and roll market, an oft-intoxicating blend of rap, rock, reggae and metal that has continually led this Omaha-based unit to the very apex of chart life.

Over the last few years, these corn-fed rockers have made a living (and quite a good living at that) by presenting their sprightly fusion of superficially conflicting rock elements to an audience apparently craving for something different, exciting and entertaining. Their recent discs have sold a combined total of over five million copies, while such songs as *Down*, *Beautiful Disaster* and *Freak Out* have emerged as clear-cut staples of both radio and MTV programming. In addition, as proven on their latest disc, *311 Live*, this unit may well emerge—along with the likes of Korn, Sevendust and Rage Against The Machine—as one of the leaders of hard rock's next great renaissance.

"What we're doing is a continuum of the most basic form of communication," Hexum said. "It goes all the way back to tribal drum circles where some people banged on drums while others danced. For us it's all about creating a zone of positive energy and letting it flow through every person in the venue. It really doesn't matter if we're playing in front of 20 people or 20,000—that energy is the key."

As far back as the appearance of their debut disc, *Music*, in 1992, this hard rocking quintet has made a living by walking the fine line between unadulterated rock energy, raw funk rhythms and pure up-beat emotionalism. Few bands could pull off such an unusual amalgam without sounding preachy, sanctimonious or stale—but 311 has managed to do it with style to spare.

Nick Hexum:
"We're creating a zone of positive energy."

PHOTO: EDDIE MALLUK

On both their 1993 disc, **Grassroots** and on their breakthrough 1995 outing, **311**, the band further refined their admittedly unusual approach, honing it to near cutting-edge perfection. By the time their 1997 effort, **Transistor**, rolled along, these guys were already well aware that they had emerged as one of the most visible, important and influential bands of their generation. But true to their grass-roots style, such a realization has had little impact on 311's good-time aspirations and focused determination.

"We've never looked over our shoulder at anyone or anything," Sexton said. "We've always believed that good things were going to happen to this band ever since we started. You've got to have confidence to come from a place

vehicle for satisfying the band's long-time fan base, and as a perfect introduction to the group's style for those just jumping aboard the 311 ship. All the expected fan faves are here, from the propulsive energy of *Homebrew* to the rock-steady rhythms of *Omaha Style*, all presented just the way 311 want their audience to hear them. That in itself stands as a major victory for this too-often-bootlegged unit.

"We've really had a lot of people bring recording equipment to our shows and make their own tapes," said Hexum. "There are some really poorly recorded 311 bootlegs that are available illegally on a pret-

that there are indeed to be no artistic or commercial limitations to be recognized by this special unit—and nothing could make the members of 311 happier.

"Rock and roll should never be exclusionary," Sexton said. "For years it seemed as if certain fans had this kind of music and other fans had that kind of music; city kids liked one thing and suburban kids liked something else. There's no reason that those fans can't enjoy a lot of the same music—as long as they're exposed to it. MTV has helped by playing a wider variety of artists in recent years. That's opened people's eyes and ears to the fact that it's never 'white music' or 'black music', rather it's 'good music' or 'bad music.'"

It would seem from Sexton's

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like Omaha and believe that you're going to make it in the music world. We knew there would be difficulties, but we've been very lucky. We know that, and we appreciate that. But I can honestly say that we've always believed that there's nothing capable of standing between us and the goals we've set for ourselves."

With their ever-growing fan base, as well as all segments of the rock media, now firmly in their corner, it's easy to understand 311's confident attitude. Response to **311 Live** has been uniformly positive from virtually all segments of the rock world, with the metal, pop and hip-hop communities all recognizing familiar elements housed within the band's slew of instantly infectious songs. Recorded during various stops along the group's 1997 world tour, this 14-song in-concert collection serves as both an ideal

ty wide-spread basis. We just decided that by professionally recording and mixing our own shows, we could officially release something we are really proud of."

As they've returned to the road, touring throughout Europe and America in support of **Live**, the members of 311 have been confronted by hordes of racially mixed, radically supportive fans all of whom have been drawn together by the band's rich blend of contrasting musical influences. Quite simply, there's something for everyone housed within the high-intensity grooves of 311, and that's just the way these guys want it to be. After touring the world over with everyone from Kiss to Beck to the Wu Tang Clan, 311 realize that they are in a unique position to reach beyond the limiting bounds so often placed on a hard rock band. It would seem

words as if the members of 311 certainly have their heads screwed on straight. With the success of **311 Live** they have added yet another glowing chapter to their fast-growing book of rock and roll conquests. On a scene too often filled with angst-riddled, self-possessed and short-sighted artists only concerned with their own status in the music world, 311 have come along to prove that a band can have a liberal artistic approach, a bold social consciousness, and an up-beat attitude while still maintaining their rock and roll credibility. That alone should be enough of an accomplishment for *any* band.

"We've always believed that a 311 show is a real experience, and this recording captures the essence of that experience," Hexum said. "This is our way of thanking the fans for their continued support."