

# PLANET WEEKLY

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## 311 // STEREOOLITHIC

If 311 had one plan of action going into the making of its current album, "Stereolithic," it was not to have a game plan.

"Our manager was trying to get us to sit down and talk about what kind of an album we wanted to make," singer Nick Hexum said in a recent phone interview. "I remember (drummer) Chad (Sexton) saying 'Don't try and do that. We're going to get in there and we're going to write songs. It's best if there are no rules and we just let it come out.' So I wouldn't say there was any real like mission statement except to do the best album that we can."

But the band knew one thing that would make "Stereolithic" a different kind of album project was its choice of a producer. Instead of bringing in a big name to produce, the group chose Scotch Ralston, who for most of 311's three-decade career had served as the band's live sound engineer.

Hexum and his bandmates — Sexton, SA Martinez (vocals/deejay), Tim Mahoney (guitar) and P-Nut (bass) — got more than they bargained for with Ralston, who in addition to producing the album became closely involved in the songwriting for "Stereolithic."

Having a new person in the songwriting mix brought some new dimensions to the songs, particularly in the lyrics to some songs.

"One characteristic I can pinpoint of Scotch's is he has some clever wordplay that I don't necessarily know what it means, but it's interesting wordplay," Hexum said. "A song like 'Made In The

Shade,' he had a really strong, he wrote more than half of the lyrics on that. And to me, it's a lot of imagery, and then you have to kind of look further into it to even glean a message from it, where my stuff might be a little more obvious."

Ralston also helped add to the number of songs being written by band members by doing something the group calls "gold mining."

"He would go through the hard drives of old demos that we had and be like 'You guys really have something here,'" Hexum said. "Then he would suggest a melody. I think that really helped us have a bigger output. Having 15 songs (instead of 10 or 12) was because of having that extra voice."

The music that emerged on "Stereolithic" continues the recent trend of 311 weighting its albums toward rocking — yet melodic — material. Songs like "Five of Everything," "First Dimension," "The Great Divide" and "Ebb and Flow" are driven by gritty guitar riffs and hard-hitting drums.

The album gets some variety from tunes such as "Sand Dollars" (with its quirky guitar tone and grooving rhythm), "Friday Afternoon" (a tranquil ballad that segues into an edgier finish) and "Tranquility" (a ballad with a soothing melody balanced by just a bit of guitar grit).

The emphasis toward harder-hitting material has partly been a product of considering the types of songs that work well in concert.

"It (the live show) does influence what we're doing when we're pre-producing and writing songs, like 'Oh this is going



to rock a crowd," Hexum said. "Then we also just want to have some departures from the obvious things that are going to rock a crowd. So it is something we keep in mind, but we don't want a whole album of all rockers. That would just be too linear."

Hexum said it's hard to say which band members favor certain types of songs because each member's musical leanings can change and the band members tend to influence each other musically. But in general, Hexum said he's usually the band member pushing for, as he put it, the "more melodic, chill moments."

"Coming up with the departures (from the rocking songs) is probably, for me, the most freeing and fun part," he said. "To come up with songs like 'Friday Afternoon,' this really trippy epic journey, or something like 'Tranquility,' which feels

like a real new sound for us, that for me is the most exciting."

With 11 studio albums in its catalog, 311 has plenty of song choices for its concerts. And now the band has also released "Archive," a four-CD set of b-sides, unreleased outtakes and demos from across its career. But the band also has a good amount of time to fill, since recent concerts have stretched into the two hour-neighborhood.

"I think it's going to be just a nice even balance," Hexum said of 311's set list. "We make a fresh set list (for each show) after sound check. We get together and have a full band meeting and just hammer out the (set) list. I guess it's always tricky to find the right balance between classics, new songs, some for first-time fans who want to hear some hits. So we just find the right blend and it's a mixture of all five guys voicing their opinions to make that."