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The Album Reviews Cont'd



# The Comeback?

Photo by Marcelle Amick  
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Who could have guessed that Omaha, Nebraska would be the home to one of the most successful reggae/ska rock groups of the past few decades? For over 25 years, 311 have been blending their Caribbean smoothie of rock, reggae and rap into a unique mold that saw great success in songs like "Amber," "Down" and "All Mixed Up." Those hits were released a decade ago and since then the band has released relatively forgettable records that left many fans disappointed. This month 311 release *Stereolithic*, their 11th studio effort, and so far it's been a gleaming beacon of hope for their loyal legion of fans who have been waiting for a solid comeback.

Within the first 10 seconds of opening track "Ebb and Flow," 311 release a can of worms filled with crisp guitar riffs. Guitarist Tim Mahoney's use of palm-muted distortion can drive a song without taking over the wheel and it's used frequently on *Stereolithic*, but not enough to call him a one-trick guitarist. He lets loose on "Friday Afternoon" switching up his guitar tones and styles like a fidgety GPS monitor. Beginning with some smooth riffs, "Friday Afternoon" moves around before landing in an almost metal-like climax and finish.

*Stereolithic's* lead single is "Five of Everything" and serves as an appropriate appetizer to the rest of the record. It offers a danceable groove and a nice contrast of vocals between lead singer Nick Hexum and Doug "SA" Martinez. Lyrically, "Five of Everything" can be interpreted as a call against commercial living with a pessimistic viewpoint. Maybe Hexum hasn't caught the end to *True Detective* and can't see the light winning?

There are a few left turns on *Stereolithic* including the bubbly track "Sand Dollars." The guitar sound is something out of a wa-wa pedal fantasy and reaches its highest peak after the first chorus where the chill waves of blues and funk collide. Another track that catches your attention due to its irregular craft is "Simple True." Commanded by a slap bass direction, the track recalls that of early Incubus where funk and metal played together side-by-side.

Closing out the album is the distinctive cut "Tranquility." Aptly titled for it sounds like the most relaxed cucumber by the sea, "Tranquility" is marked by an "Ooo" lathered chorus and laid-back bravado. For either the setting or the rising of the sun, the song washes over you with a calm comfort.

For me it was "Amber." That was the track that grabbed me by the ear lobe and lead me to a restless lounge that gave life to 311 in my collection. (Also, doesn't the chorus of "Amber" sound like he's singing "Jay and Silent Bob displayed naturally" instead of "shades of gold displayed naturally?") But the past 10 years haven't produced much for 311 in my repertoire. But this album isn't for me, the casual listener. *Stereolithic* is for the fans of 311, the groups of people who joined them on their Caribbean Cruise and Pow Wow Festival. These people have been waiting for an excellent release from 311 and they can find it in *Stereolithic*. The record strikes when it needs to and knows when to lay back from over stepping any reestablished music boundaries. 311 are still the same alternative reggae rock band we've known for 25 years.

**Artist:** 311  
**Album:** *Stereolithic*  
**Website:** 311.com

★★★★★  
**Label:** 311 Records  
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