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Radiohead

Kid A (Capitol Records)

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What does the music wrenched from the reluctant psyche of a tortured man sound like? *Kid A*. With more audience anticipation than the birth of a nation, Radiohead has released *Kid A*, the fourth album from the media-defined Most Important Band in Rock. To listen to *Kid A* is to witness the internal struggle of Thom Yorke. The English group's creative mastermind has described the music-making process behind this album in terms usually reserved for stomach viruses and military combat: painful, nightmarish, frustrating. After 1997's *OK Computer*, Yorke was a broken man. Unhinged by frustration with his industry, his political environment, his commercial world, Yorke and company nearly split. Instead of disbanding, Radiohead has emerged from the rubble of self-destruction and

recreation with a paragon uniquely Radiohead. The paradox of *Kid A* is that it's an album almost purely about alienation, but it speaks intimately to the masses. Radiohead is a phenomenon for that fact: a thinking man's band that also sells millions. *Kid A* documents the panic of realizing immortality, the weariness of frustration, and the anxiety of isolation. To its advantage, *Kid A* is more dreamy and stream-of-conscious than *OK Computer*. Even the hidden CD booklet borrows from Dadaism with its random buzz phrases and clichés cluttering the page in old-fashioned red-and-black typeface. While *OK Computer* boldly challenged voodoo economics, yuppies networking, and pragmatism not idealism, *Kid A* dips into the more intimate spaces of the human mind and emerges feeling woozy and confused. It's as though Yorke took his eyes off the face of the global marketplace and stared face-to-face with himself. His conclusion? "That man, that's not me," he mutters on "How to Disappear Completely," a bitter song made bittersweet only by Jonny Greenwood's broad strokes of howling guitar, sympathetic strings, and random, percolating trumpet. "Disappear," like a pleasant specter, is one of the loveliest and most haunting songs on the album.

"Everything in its Right Place," the first track, is engaging from the first warm note. Like many Radiohead songs, "Everything" seems to be a simple track: keyboard, voice, metronomic beat. Behind those basic elements is Yorke's voice, sampled and spliced, then twisted and layered. Though many of the songs contain dreamlike lyrics ("I slipped away," "I woke up," "sleeping pills," and "beds"), the music remarkably mirrors those images. "Kid A," an electronic track that chimes like early Aphex Twin, gives way to a crescendo of





synth strings that eventually fades, just as dream images wash in and out. (In fact, it may be argued that *Kid A* not only details dream images, but also induces lucid dreaming. I woke up to the album today, then slipped back into sleep only to awaken with the vibrant image of landing on a barren planet, while panicking from isolation though in the company of a hundred others, and having to slay a goliath squid. Not kidding.) The instrumental "Treefingers" sounds like a Brian Eno B-side, or Vangelis' scoring for *Blade Runner*, but that's not a good thing. This is a unique song only for Radiohead; the formula has been inserted into modern rock too many times.

"In Limbo" seems to describe that post-sleep state where the line between subconsciousness and consciousness is blurred. "You're living in a fantasy world," Yorke repeats atop a staccato keyboard, and Greenwood's swaying guitar. Again, the music is mellow until everything threatens to destruct (the backward-tape effect), Yorke wails, and then it washes away. Connecting water with the state of sleep, Yorke warns, "I'm lost at sea/Don't bother me/I've lost my way." Nevertheless, despite the intensity and shadows, Radiohead hasn't lost its way with melody and rhythm; like nearly every track on *OK Computer*, these songs get stuck in your head. You may be congregating with capitalists at the water cooler, but you'll be repeating to yourself, "I'm not here, this isn't

happening." Perhaps this is Yorke's way of subverting the masses. I think it'll work. --**Jessica Parker**

You've already bought this record, and undoubtedly think it's brilliant. At least, that's what you tell anyone who asks, and you probably sort of believe it. But admit it, if this didn't say Radiohead on the cover, you'd be desperately searching for your receipt. This is not a case of the band's throwing a curve when everyone was expecting the fastball--they've left the field entirely, decided to start a new game, and won't let anyone watch. But, before I go any further with this, please understand that I wanted to like this record; I wanted to love it, to sit with my headphones on, smiling at every new discovery. I wanted to be just like everyone else, spilling tears on the keyboard as I wrote about the First Great Album of the 21st Century.

This, however, isn't it, and it isn't worth exploring anymore. I listened to it a few times, found the good song(s)--"How to Disappear Completely," maybe "Optimistic"--and barely endured the rest. My girlfriend summed it up best as "Motion Picture Soundtrack" began: "Can we please listen to anything else? Because this is putting me in a really bad mood." (And no, she didn't mean Thom Yorke's poor-me lyrics were bumming her out. That would mean she could actually hear them. Or that there was anything to hear.) Forget what you've read and what you pretend to believe--this is not a great record. It's a grating one.

That said, there are some intriguing sounds/ideas here, but most of them are little more than B-side-quality experiments, dot-dot-dash excursions into mechanical melodies. Only, you know, without the melodies. This is what happens when a rock band plays with electronics: It all sounds about as decipherable as the instructions that came with whatever machinery is being used on *Kid A*. Honestly, I'd rather listen to Johnny Greenwood tune his guitar for an hour or so, because at least then I'd be

hearing him--or anyone, for that matter--play guitar. If Yorke and company really want to disappear completely, they'll keep releasing records like this. --**Zac Crain**

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