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12/02/2011



## The Fall



Ersatz G.B.

(Cherry Red)

[www.cherryred.co.uk](http://www.cherryred.co.uk)

Mark E. Smith has, perhaps, always been a mad old coot. Even in his 20s, he had a certain filthy-bathrobed menace, as he mouthed inscrutable threats, meandered off-topic and incessantly repeated himself. He was your crazy grandfather before his hair turned grey, and now, with his 29<sup>th</sup> album he has finally begun to look (and sound) the part.



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*Ersatz G.B.* finds him in fine and vicious form, savaging Snow Patrol and laptop users and British folk singers with geriatric venom. His band, the same since *Your Future Our Clutter*, locks in behind him, furnishing the hard-hammered foundation, the funk-punk-robot rigor, that give his rantings scale and drama and a weird euphoric edge. Consider, for instance, how "Mask Search" bounces bodily on an elastic bass line, how its guitar twitches with ecstatic tension, how the whole thing shimmies and pulses with sensual life, and how Smith hems and haws above it all, muttering about encaustic and lime. Or, the bizarre, metal-crunching "Greenaway" how Smith's gargling, ravaged voice rises above the mayhem to inject some existential uncertainty. ("Channel hopping the other day through Danish Rock TV, I noticed a video where the person had a remarkable, coincidental resemblance to myself, to the video I was in recently," he recounts, entirely discounting the possibility that it *was* him.) The band's *discipline*, its blocked out musical precision, contrasts powerfully with Smith's visionary wanderings. Neither would work nearly as well by itself.

Smith even upends the one what-the-fuck track, "Happi Song", the one where his wife and keyboard player Elini Poulu sings sweetly, perhaps naively, about a need for greater understanding. It's a track singularly lacking in the bile, the tight-wound violence, the rhythmic hammering that define the Fall, and, for that reason, the album's weakest interval. Smith, Poulu's mate of ten years, hovers around the back of her track muttering and growling, and that alone comes close to redeeming it.

*Ersatz G.B.* is a lesser Fall album, not as good as *Your Future Our Clutter* or *The Real New Fall LP*, and certainly not on a par with earlier landmarks like *Slates* and *Hex Induction Hour*. Some of the longer tracks seem to go on for no real reason. "Monocard" even starts and stops several times, as if the band had tired of its slow grind, but then thinks better and picks up again. And the six-minute long "Nate Will Not Return" starts in flames but then gutters. You wonder if it goes on only so that Smith can think of more words that rhyme with "Nate."

Even so, an energy as volcanic as Mark E. Smith's can be expected to spill over sometimes, and there's enough fire and venom here to excuse occasional soft spots. Even spitting and foaming about laptops and cell phones, even mad as the geezer who won't throw your ball back when it lands in his yard, Smith has a certain kind of power. *Ersatz schmersatz*, he's the real thing.

**Download:** "Mask Search", "Greenaway" [JENNIFER KELLY](#)

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- While you were away... Blurt played. Over the holidays, that is. (Hooboy, understatement.) Here's what you missed: <http://t.co/nr0H3JSv> 26 minutes ago
- Let's watch that clip of Guided By Voices on Letterman last night: <http://t.co/P2O1ozs0> @gbvtweets 29 minutes ago
- Jack White prepping to dicker for swag with the American Pickers crew. Broadcast on the History Channel Jan. 9. <http://t.co/F7DBYM21> 29 minutes ago
- Anybody remember late, great Chapel Hill band The Popes? They have a 20-year reunion gig coming up: <http://t.co/4ohZxiba> 31 minutes ago
- His "folk album," yep! New Andre Williams due in Feb. Dig that Blaxploit-style record sleeve. <http://t.co/hCPHiN6C> @bshq 31 minutes ago

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- Beirut – The  
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(Pompeii)
- Black Joe  
Lewis & the  
Honeybears  
– Scandalous  
(Lost  
Highway)
- Black Keys –  
El Camino  
(Nonesuch)
- Bon Iver –  
Bon Iver  
(Jagjaguwar)
- Crooked  
Fingers –  
Breaks In the  
Armor  
(Merge)
- Drive-By  
Truckers –  
Go Go Boots  
(ATO)
- Foo Fighters  
– Wasting  
Light (RCA)
- PJ Harvey –  
Let England  
Shake  
(Vagrant)
- Jason Isbell –  
Here We  
Rest  
(Lightning  
Rod)
- Tommy  
Keene –  
Behind the  
Parade  
(Second  
Motion)
- Lykke Li –  
Wounded  
Rhymes (LL)
- Mogwai --  
Hard Core  
Will Never  
Die But You

Will (Sub  
Pop)

- My Brightest Diamond – All Things Will Unwind (Asthmatic Kitty)
- Neon Indian – Era Extrana (Static Tongues)
- Oneohtrix Point Never – Replica (Software)
- Panda Bear – Tomboy (Paw Tracks)
- Radiohead – King of Limbs (self-released)
- Real Estate – Days (Domino)
- Those Darlins – Screws Get Loose (Oh Wow Dang)
- tUnE-yArDs – whokill (4AD)
- Tom Waits – Bad As Me (Anti-)
- War On Drugs – Slave Ambient (Secretly Canadian)
- Wilco – The Whole Love (Nonesuch)
- Wild Flag – Wild Flag (Merge)
- Wooden Shjips – West (Thrill Jockey)

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