



## Album Review: The Fall – Ersatz G.B.

BY CHRIS WOOLFREY ON DECEMBER 2ND, 2011 IN

ALBUM REVIEWS

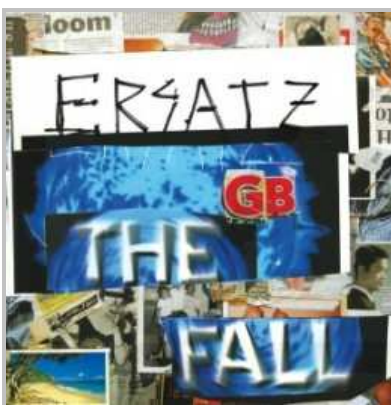
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*Ersatz G.B.* is [The Fall's](#) 29th album. And with so many distinctive elements to their music – the ever-present Mark E. Smith, on whom most of the band's writing falls, that frenetic post-punk energy, and the garbled, often subversive, offensive, or disgusting lyrics – it becomes difficult to write about one album without placing it in the context of the others.

In Britain, The Fall are so closely tied to alternative music – on their own merit but also because of their immense influence – that any new album is something of an event. The British press have already made their judgements. [The BBC was damning](#), arguing of the current lineup that “The problem with The Fall in 2011 is straightforward, really. The band isn't very good.” And [The Quietus](#), while noting some flaws, admitted that “*Ersatz G.B.* still trumps most records released this year as, one suspects, The Fall always will.”



Our rating: ★★★★★

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That's the place the band occupies in the British musical canon: The Fall are simply *there*. Formed in 1976, they've released an LP, on average, every year and two months. They've never done anything massively bad; they've done plenty that is very good. *Ersatz G.B.* (“ersatz” being a poor substitute for the real thing) is perhaps on the slightly below average end of The Fall scale, and it is, in being so named – as The Fall usually is – already political.

Assuming that *G.B.* refers to Great Britain, Mark E. Smith clearly has a few issues he wants to take up. At a couple of points, he lays into British music, Snow Patrol being one of his victims. And on the thrash metal-esque “Greenway”, a rework of “Gameboy” by Greek metal band Anorimoi, he sings, “I had to wank off the cat to feed the fucking dog,” as well as “I had to wank off the dog to feed the fucking cat.” That (uncanny) image of urban deprivation was a feeling that persisted in British alternative culture throughout the 1980s, during Margaret Thatcher's reign, and during The Fall's ascendancy. Maybe it's felt now, too.

Of course, and this is part of the charm of the album and perhaps The Fall in general, that interpretation only works if the line is correct. Some have transcribed it as “wake up.” The mumbled words on *Ersatz G.B.* bring the album, as much as aggression, an ambivalence: On final track “Age of Chang”, Smith and his backers repeat the lyric “time for change,” but the words in between are often difficult to discern. A sign of the lack of solutions, perhaps? “A dam of vast proportions will break,” claims Smith, but we're offered little more than that. Maybe the [New York Times](#) put it best: “Trying to make wholeness of purpose out of Fall records is a waste of time.”

**Essential Tracks:** “Greenway”, “Age of Chang”, and “Taking Off”

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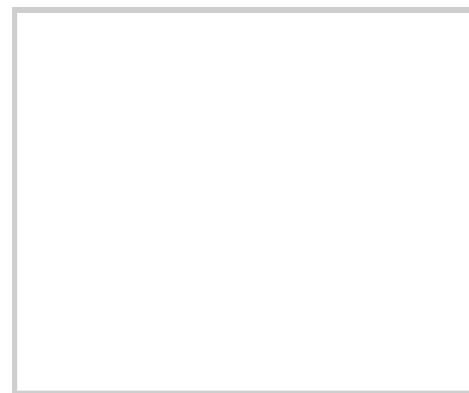
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