



« Mugstar – Serra (Distant Sun remix)

Front page

Kevin Coyne – 1979 Live at WDR-Studio L Cologne »

The Fall – Ersatz GB

Cherry Red



"I had to wank off the cat/ to feed the fucking dog"

On their...John Peel...members...alcohol...living [if we must] 'leg-end'...some bollocks about Germanic renderings...millionth... [cough]...returntoformbusinessasusualwhydotheystillbother [delete as applicable]...wife...relatively...uh...always the fucking same but fucking always fucking different...fucking...

...Seminal:

had to wank off the dog/ to feed the fucking cat"

I very nearly decided to write this review as a review of reviews of **The Fall**. If anyone from any broadsheets is reading, I'll happily write the next ten years of Fall albums reviews for you by tomorrow (and I'll probably have time left over to grout *Swindon*)

The new Fall album is very, very good.

...I read, ages ago, somewhere...what do you mean where? It doesn't matter, it's a fucking anecdote. For fuck's sake...anyway. I read somewhere the **MES** gave a couple of talks to the **James Joyce** Society. Sometime in the 80s. Have you read *Finnegans Wake*? Ruined my ability to read fiction, I tell you. It's brilliant, but in a way that ruined books for me for a long time. I get into this conversation with people about it from time to time – "but it's just nonsense!" they say (ideally delivered in a prime shrew's voice)... the conversation always ultimately resolves to this *Daily Mail*, petty-fascist view that art should be something *impressive* involving *craft* and all that sort of bollocks. Well. The point is that Joyce earned his stripes. He didn't just jump in at the deep end. I mean – *Portrait*... is simply gorgeous. Unfathomably elegantly written. Joyce wasn't some verbose dilettante twat wanking off over a keyboard. There's a progression. Ok, that doesn't make the *Wake* amazing. The fact that it's brain-twatingly impossible to read, his facility with language, his invention, his self-enfolding parody of over-referentiality... well, this isn't about Joyce. But you get the point. You don't read the *Wake* in isolation. You don't listen to the Fall in isolation. And they are a lot like Joyce. Everyone knows them, but ultimately most people would rather they go back to the easy stuff (*Totally Wired* and that) rather than persisting with, y'know, being amazing in a mostly unconventional way.

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viz: Track 3, "Nate will not return." Terminal rhyme is an -ate phoneme, with a bit of bending for some pronunciation. Nate/ maid(t)/ sublimate/ Nate/ mate/ replicate/ Nate/ state/ crate/ 38/ state/ straight/ irate/ late/ cake. There's no particular meter. Smith comes in and out. He's not particularly on the beat of the music either. It's a strong rhyming scheme, but it's not in a strict lyrical form. From memory, the last strong rhyming scheme was on "Tommy Shooter" (*Imperial Wax Solvent*) which has a strict meter.. and the rhyming scheme disappears after the first verse. From memory, I'm not entirely sure anyone's gone so out of their way to use a strong rhyme in an apparently free verse song at an impenetrable cross-rhythm to the song's actual rhythm. I mean, if they have, you'd think it was shit. But like I say, you don't take these things in isolation.

... do you know what I find most arse-dredgingly boring about Fall reviews? The need to comment on the high turnover of members. I like to think (and I don't care whether I'm right or not) that the reason Smith always insists it's a *group* is because bands tend to mean the same people, rather than the right people. It's one of those peculiarities of Western rock music. The old big bands and what not would get the right trumpeter for the job. No-one's interested when the principle clarinetist leaves the **LSO**. I'll find a cap and doff it if anyone can name any of **Madonna's** backing musicians in the last 30 years. Smith does away with all this 'our gang against the world' bollocks. And makes proper art, properly.

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I'd imagine at this point two things are obvious: First, I'm more than quite fond of the Fall; second, it's very difficult to talk about their albums. In fact, I suspect it'll continue to be very difficult to talk about their albums for their living duration. They just don't work in terms of "this new album is good, for example track 6 has a nice guitar solo."

Smith was always smart with his lyrics, smarter than anyone else – there's never any 'I love you' songs (unless you count "Birthday Song" from *The Marshall Suite*) and he's always been meticulously ambiguous – in the sense of being poetically elliptical, rather than studiously obscure. Evocation rather than avoidance. Again, remember the context we're coming from – the Fall of the mid-80s were positively crawling in a murky lyrical world. Later Fall stuff – the last 5-10 years or so – have had a massive sense of parity as well. Fragments of fragments. I know a lot of people take that as him losing his lyrical form. Which is bollocks, frankly. Again, context.

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[Welcome to windows on priapic urges]... of course, this isn't really a review. If you like the Fall, you've bought it already, if you don't it's another for the 'one day give them a proper listen' pile. But then... it kind of is a review, in so far as there are a few things to point out – this is a fucking brilliant Fall record. They all are (as my mates no doubt tire of hearing) with the exception of some of the early ones before Smith went from 'good' to 'world-leading' lyricist. The eternal problem I have with the Fall is that they're a fair way beyond the album cycle. You can't really listen to them twice and go "oh, that's a nice cymbal sound." Takes a while, to seep in y'know. Usually comes out in queues for the cash machine, those lyrics that molest the skin of your unconscious and shit out blood at inopportune times.

I haven't taken it off the decks since I got it a few weeks ago. "Greenway" is *incredible* (that's where the line about the cats and dogs is from). The production is mostly pretty plain, but there's nibbles of the sort of pan-fidelity trick he's been doing since about *Levitare* (1997) – odd mixes of mics and what not. Subtle, but there.

Oh, that was the other thing I was going to say. God, you must think me terrible, I'm all over the show here. Anyway, yeah – the drunk thing. I don't know if you know any drunks, but none of the ones I know have consistently put out alarmingly brilliant, world-beating records over 30 years. Most of the ones I know are nice enough chaps who have a few problems and need some help. I was saying just the other day actually – what happened to that generation who'd be down the boozier most days, 20 B&H and a natter? But anyway. Heavy boozier or not, Smith's always worth listening to.

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There's also a really nice Eleni song, "Happy Song," which is a nice bit light relief (not suggesting it's flimsy – just different in tone to the rest of the record).

Yeah, so, basically, here's the thing: every year the Fall put an album out, I tell everyone it's the best record of the year. My opinion is almost irrelevant – saved only by the fact that I'm entirely and utterly correct in all cases, without exception, forever. This is the album of the year.

10 out of 10. I know you think **Freq** doesn't have ratings systems, but it does, it's just that most records aren't a 10 out of 10. You see?

[eulogy]

-Kev Nickells-



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