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## MUSIC REVIEWS



### The Fall

#### Ersatz GB

(Cherry Red)

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How do you review a new album by The Fall? It seems obligatory to mention somewhere at the start the fact that this is the  $n$ th album in the band's lengthy and prolific career. So to oblige, I can reveal that this is indeed the 29th album The Fall has released since their debut, **Live At The Witch Trials**, in 1979. With most bands who have survived for so long it is possible to divide their output (albeit sometimes arbitrarily) into early, middle and late periods. With The Fall, however, that is not such an easy task. Where would you put the dividing lines? Early: up to and including **Seminal Live** (1989)? Mid: **Extricate** (1990) up to **The Marshall Suite** (1999)? Late: **The Unutterable** (2000) to present? See what I did there? I just used the decades to delineate and divvy up the goods; stylistically, there is no real reason by one album should be on one particular side of the fence or another. And that, really, is the point of The Fall. Once they'd got past the scratchy sound of the early 1980s, their sound has been remarkably consistent: a marriage of punk, rockabilly and electro that has, for the most part, been pretty thrilling and unique. The band's line-up has changed constantly over the years. In fact, this album's personnel have been relatively stable since around 2007. By the law of averages that must mean we are in store for a band implosion any time now.

**Ersatz GB** kicks off with the driving *Cosmos 7*. It's a speedy little number that sets out the template for the rest of the album: Pete 'PP' Greenway's rocky guitar is brought to the fore, while Mark E Smith's vocals sound like he's been gargling gravel – a phlegmy snarl that recurs on several tracks, making this album the angriest-sound Fall album I've heard. The best song here, *Nate Will Not Return*, sees Smith attacking the

lines with real urgency, ransacking his rhyming dictionary so that each line rhymes with "Nate". Musically, it's vintage Fall - a repetitive guitar-led groove with a pulsing Krautrock-meets-hard-rock rhythm section. Next track, *Mask Search*, continues in this vein with some classic Smith-isms such as "*I'm so sick of Snow Patrol, and where to find Esso lubricant...*" A perennial problem surely we all have shared. *Greenway* is the most bizarre moment on the album, the closest The Fall have ever come to metal, but with Smith's ranting pulling the track in a completely other direction. This song gives way to *Happi Song*, sung rather sweetly by Smith's wife and Fall keyboard player Eleni Poulou. Her vocals, although rather slight, make the song reminiscent of Broadcast, which is never a bad thing. Quality control does slip slightly in the second half of the album. The eight-minute *Monocard* is at least three minutes too long, while *Laptop Dog* is the nearest song here to Fall-by-numbers. The urgency and vitriol return in time for album closer *Age Of Chang*, a banging punk rock tune that just begs for a pogoing turn on the dancefloor.

So, **Ersatz GB** is another good album by The Fall. It's not up there with their very best (I'll probably be on my own on this, but for me that was 2000's **The Unutterable**, released at the time to a deafening chorus of critical disinterest), but it's actually not that far off. I'm sure it's been said before, but if this was a debut album by a promising bunch of young upstarts from, say, Boston, the music press would be all over them. But it's not. It's just another good album by The Fall, a 35 year old post-punk band from Salford, England fronted by a 54 year old bugger with a penchant for blouson-style jackets. So it will probably go largely ignored and become another statistic in The Fall's unique and treasured career. There's no justice.

16 November, 2011 - 04:13 — [David John Wood](#)

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