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 - [Reel Reviews](#)
 - [Singled Out](#)
- [MP3](#)
- [Mixtapes](#)
- [Photos](#)
- [Blog](#)

[Home](#) → [Reviews](#) → [Album](#) → The Fall – *Ersatz G.B.*

The Fall – *Ersatz G.B.*

written by: [David Carter](#) January 2, 2012

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Release Date: Nov. 14, 2011



With an active musical career that surpasses the lifespan of many musicians, Mark E. Smith and his band The Fall are outliers, both statistically and in the music community. Smith and his perpetually changing cast of bandmates (although the group has been relatively stable as of late) have lasted 30 years in this business and without ever quite falling into total obscurity.

Well, they've never fallen into it, really; they've just always sorta been there.

But that's entirely by design.

Even on his 29th album, Smith keeps up the antagonistic aggression that seems to challenge you to hate The Fall, like some sort of misanthropic attack toward his listeners. While this would seem like grounds for despising Smith, it's actually kind of endearing. And once you understand Smith's angle, you start to like the music on *Ersatz G.B.*

However, if judged solely on face value, this album can be excruciating. Artists who battle with the idea of trying to gain fans' respect while hating the world or looking down upon it generally are or will become self-indulgent. Case in point: Smith is known for having lyrics blown dry to a crisp with his wry sense of humor (refer to "Laptop Dog"), but anyone who expects a listener to tolerate his disinterested vocals over spinning riffs to the point where they could pick up on the humor clearly has a love for himself that eclipses empathizing with an audience.

Because of this and a few catchy singles, The Fall, during its history, has received reviews that range from horrible to genius; Evidently, critics can't decide whether to believe Smith's projection of himself (brilliant rebel) or their gut feeling (bitter oddball).

By Smith's own admission, *Ersatz G.B.* is gloomier than his earlier work. The riffs are more guttural. Smith's lyrics are more cynical. A heavier dosage of keyboard gives this album a spookier emptiness than The Fall's others. The effort is noticed but not necessarily appreciated.

This is most apparent in "Greenway," where Smith's vocals stumble into being cartoonish as he softly rumbles a growl into his voice for every "Grrrr-reenway." Because he's singing over a slashing, metal guitar, one's mind turns to thoughts of Zappa or Les Claypool. It's hard to embrace the feeling he was trying to evoke.

Smith's vocals are switched out with keyboardist Eleni Poulou's in "Happi Song." What's more miraculous than Smith giving up his frontman duties is that he was able to find someone with a more sedated vocal effort than his own. "If I can see/And you can see/Why can't they see?" is dully repeated throughout the track and sung with the enthusiasm of a passive-aggressive teen going through vocal exercises her parents signed her up for.

One becomes easily frazzled listening to this album. Smith said that lighter tracks were excluded from this album for the sake of cohesion. Knowing that, one has a hard time not wishing the album took a departure from its dreariness.

Maybe on the 30th album, Smith and Co. will find the right blend.

The Fall – *Ersatz G.B.* tracklist:

1. "Cosmos 7"
2. "Taking Off"
3. "Nate Will Not Return"
4. "Mask Search"
5. "Greenway"
6. "Happi Song"
7. "Monocard"
8. "Laptop Dog"
9. "I've Seen Them Come"
10. "Age of Chang"

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