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THE FALL - Ersatz GB

MONDAY, 05 DECEMBER 2011

(Cherry Red/Fuse)

Manc legends' 29th LP offers more of the same

On this side of the globe, The Fall remain the band music fans "in the know" tend to admire, but few others seem to care about. Long one of England's most acerbic lyricists and a markedly singular vocalist, Mark E Smith has sneered, grumbled and snarled his way through nearly three-and-a-half decades, and on Ersatz GB - the Mancunians' album number 29 - he resembles a disgruntled pensioner with a cold. Recorded between London and Berlin, the LP features the same established line-up that provided the instrumentation for 2008's Imperial Wax Solvent and 2010's Your Future Our Clutter. Sonically, it's probably The Fall's heaviest-sounding record to date, with rockers like Greenway and sinister, eight-minute Monocard respectively driven by cod-alt-metal and cod-drone-rock guitar riffs. As expected, Smith's non-voice and semi-intelligible diatribes are still very much an acquired taste, as is the band's patented mixture of rockabilly and krautrock (marvellously dubbed "country & northern" by cranky old Mark himself). Keys player and Smith's spouse Elena Poulou takes the lead on the (relatively) languid Happi Song, and Mask Search is a perfect faux-rockabilly number in the vein of How He Wrote Elastic Man - commendable stuff. Sadly, not many other moments here match the mighty 2000 release The Unutterable and for their money, a Fall newcomer would be better served by either that or a true classic like 1985's This Nation's Saving Grace.

DENIS SEMCHENKO



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