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Some Joe Jackson news, he's releasing new music which will be a Duke Ellington tribute on June 26.



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The Fall: Ersatz GB

by Joe Gallo



Dear Mark E. Smith,

It was so nice to hear your voice again... I mean, initially. To know that you're still alive is good news, especially since all of my heroes are dying or have retired or have just given up. But I just spent the last 3 hours listening to the Fall's 29th album, Ersatz GB, over and over and over again. Now, you know I've always liked your music. I want you to know that. Not because I think you're insecure or bound to collapse into a heap of psychic despair, but simply because I have spent so much of my misbegotten youth listening to and enjoying most of your previous 28 albums.

I said most.

I mean, it's no secret that you've been inconsistent over the years. Amid the catalog of great songs, there have been some dire clunkers. This doesn't mean you don't have genius. How else could someone with so many limitations create a body of work as compelling as yours? You've even admitted that you've got no voice, hardly know your way around a keyboard or a guitar neck, and

that you couldn't do squat without a band to back you up. Your genius is in poetry, and you've got that strangely expressive voice that sounds like you're broadcasting the apocalypse ... or a football match that's gone terribly awry... Either way, that voice is the key to everything Fall. At best it's cunning and snide and cuts through life's crap with a barbed and satirical tongue. At worst, you're barely intelligible and if not for lyric sheets, I'd be lost.

And with this last album? This Ersatz GB? Frankly, it sounds more like Ersatz Fall. The music drags, the mix is awful, and your voice—I really can't get past the sound of all that phlegm rattling around your throat. It's disturbing. Not because the lyrics hit hard, but because it's just disgusting to have all of that sputum gurgling in my ears. As mentioned, it's never been a cakewalk understanding your lyrics, but you've added an element of obfuscation that does nobody any good. Not the listener and certainly not the singer.

In short, Mr. Smith, this is a low point in a career that has had many peaks and, possibly, just as many pits. But I don't think you've committed yourself to creating a group of songs as lackluster, uninspired, and—I hate to say it—as boring as those that grace the disappointing Ersatz GB.

I don't want to denigrate this recording any further by rifling through the songs one by one. It's not worth it and I don't want to denigrate you in the process. This is about the music (and your phlegm).

Sincerely,

Joe Gallo

Note to readers:

About 10 years ago my brother-in-law gave me the CD, 50,000 Fall Fans Can't Be Wrong: 39 Golden Greats. If anyone wants to delve into The Fall's back catalog, this is the place to start. Jarring rhythms, mostly intelligible (and phlegm-free) vocals, and a constant source of amusement, anger, and self-awareness. At best, The Fall is an attitude that fits like a leather jacket. No faux, no ersatz, no kidding...

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Melanie D

WTF. It's like he's dueting with some metal singer and playing both parts. Sounds like the voices in MEF's head have won this round. Well, back to listening to Touch Sensitive then.

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