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Review



The Fall

Ersatz G.B.

8 / 10

Cherry Red

Released: Monday 14 November 2011

So the new Fall album's getting a bit of a kicking in 'da meeja', isn't it? But is this because it genuinely isn't that good, or is it just because it's about time for a Fall album to get a kicking? The last Fall album, *Your Future, Our Clutter*, was roundly hailed as something of a masterpiece (including [here](#), by me). And it was very, very good. But how much of that was down to cyclical nature of journalistic opinion when it comes to this undying, ever-mutating band? It's hard to tell.

John Peel said (yes, I know you know!) that thing about The Fall being always different, always the same, but what this means is that the band's music is something of a black hole where taste levels are concerned. Because, no matter what the line-up is, you basically know what you're getting and you can judge accurately in advance how you'll feel about that. Do you like the sound of Mark E Smith yelling over basic rock 'n' roll riffs and Krautrocky rhythms (I do)? If the answer's 'yes' then, really, no Fall album will be a complete disappointment to you, just as to a chocaholic, no box of Quality Street is a wasted investment.

That said, there's no disguising the fact that the likes of 'I've Seen Them Come' is just substandard, aimless ramalama thrashing. The perennial concern, faced by whichever musicians find themselves conscripted into The Fall, is how to frame Smith's bellicose rambling in such a way as to make its shortcomings (can't hold a tune, increasingly incoherent) palatable while not detracting from its unique power. It's a fine line and one problem with *Ersatz G.B.* is that this current line-up play it a little too safe.

It's by no means a wash-out. 'Taking Off' and 'Cosmos 7' are bracing garage rock work-outs, exactly what you want from a Fall album, while 'Monocard' and 'Greenway' are heavy, trippy, near-metal tunes full of doom-laden riffs and lacerating synth



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sounds. There are some classic Smith one-liners and non sequiturs as well - none greater than these: "I'm so sick of Snow Patrol/ and where to find Esso lubricant" (on 'Mask Search', the obligatory rockabilly number) and "I had to wank off the cat to feed the fuckin' dog!" ('Greenway', on which Smith sounds like he's gargling cement).

Now in his mid-50s, the professional misanthrope remains mightily pissed off about... Well, everything, including, bizarrely, US teenexploitation drama *Gossip Girl*, which he takes aim at on the fabulously squelchy, freaky 'Nate Will Not Return'. How anyone can judge something as brilliantly surreal as this to be sub-par Fall fare is beyond me.

Relief from the Mancunian Maelstrom comes in the form of 'Happy Song', sung by keyboard player and bride of Smith, Elena Poulou, who gives us Ari Up-esque vocals over a pleasant, Sugarcubes style indie strum-along. For the most part, however, there's no let up from the angry riffs and unfocused ranting. And maybe that, more than anything, is the issue here. Where *Your Future, Our Clutter* was full of odd little detours into spaghetti western or ambient experimentalism, *Ersatz G.B.* makes for a claustrophobic listen. Two songs seem to stem from time Smith spent slumped in front of the TV, possibly in an advanced state of inebriation, which only strengthens the feeling that you're basically getting complained at for 45-odd minutes by a pathologically irascible man with too much time on his hands.

All that said, this still sounds like no one else (save for those shameless Fall copyists who are always knocking around). This is the work of a complete iconoclast, and it will certainly placate those jonesing for their annual Smith fix. It's not a classic, no, but you could do much worse. You could listen to sodding Snow Patrol.

3 Comments

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[russell](#) on Fri 2 Dec 2011 @ 20:54 said:



Had another listen to this and Greenway really is fantastic. It starts off sounding like the most cliched of metal riffs but by dint of relentless repetition is unwillingly battered into what can only be the Fall.



[soundbunny](#) on Fri 2 Dec 2011 @ 21:03 said:

Yay!

[soloadultos](#) on Wed 7 Dec 2011 @ 12:04 said:



Clearly, I disagree, "I've seen them come" to me sounds much better than "Nate". Musically "Nate" sounds great but the lyrics and vocals of MES come off way too gimmicky but each Fall fan has their own special tastes but "nate" is the worst track on the album for me. To be critical partially of "I've seen them" I could say maybe it recycles the rolling guitar sound featured on DRAGNET a bit too much in live versions but there is less of it in the studio version



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