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The Fall - "Sir William Wray"

Much to my regret, I've never had the (some would say occasionally dubious) pleasure of witnessing The Fall in concert, despite my long-held love of this most singular of bands' music. I have, however, had a dream where I was at one of Mark E. Smith and Co.'s shows in a hotel pub in Great Yarmouth, during which the garrulous frontman barked lyrics at a

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small audience whilst sitting in front of a beleaguered drummer who rolled out ramshackle backbeats whilst an invisible guitarist jangled away, mixed way lower than Smith's microphone. Reality kind of slipped away from me when this dream-world Smith invited the audience up to join him on the cramped stage, which I somehow can't imagine him doing in reality. More importantly, and rather mystifyingly, my warped subconscious managed to generate a Fall sound that veered remarkably close to the one the band achieves on *Re-Mit*, the nine millionth or so album of a lengthy, and often surprising career, and, predictably, that's not really a good thing. But, because this is The Fall, it's not exactly a bad thing, either. In fact, *Re-Mit* might be the most confounding Fall album in quite some time. Which is saying something.

Mark E. Smith has said that one of the aims he had on *Re-Mit* was to create a sort of "anti-music", and with that in mind opener "No Respects (Instrumentals)" is a shock, as its an inconsequential one-minute fragment of the blandest of jangly pop-rock tropes. But, as the album advances at a pace never much off breakneck speed, the band seems to literally collapse, as splattery guitar riffs and gonzo synth noise battle for space around rollicking rhythms, with Smith placed front-and-center, spitting, spluttering and croaking his half-sung, half-spoken lyrics with nary a regard for the music's progression. On their last album, 2011's *Ersatz GB*, The Fall developed an oddball form of punk-inflected metal thrash, but here they revert somewhat -- albeit not entirely -- to the sort of punkabilly-via-post-punk that defined early albums like *Perverted by Language*. Lead single "Sir William Wray" is introduced by a burble of synths that quickly make way for a jagged, choppy guitar lead and Smith's full-throated chattered vocalizations. It's a catchy number, not quite in the oddly anthemic style of, say "The Classical" or "I Am Damo Suzuki," but pretty close. The rest of the album veers across the territory set up by "Sir William Wray," from the choked faux-rockabilly of "Kinder of Spine" to "Jetplane"'s martial drumming and scything guitar licks, via the amped-up Wire-esque full version of "No Respects (Vocals)." "Irish," meanwhile, wouldn't sound out of place on a garage-psych compilation from the 1960s, whilst "Victricola Time" is a pleasantly motorik slab of krautrock-inspired rock.

This psychedelic undercurrent means *Re-Mit* differs greatly from its predecessor, although it takes a while for this to become apparent. The more I listen to the album, the more I find myself thinking about that other great maverick of the post-punk era, Genesis P-Orridge, who will always be associated with his early industrial incarnation but who, like Smith, has long hailed the influence of psychedelic garage rock on his music, and has pointedly referred back to those roots in the latest incarnation of Psychic TV. Of course, Mark E. Smith's psychedelia is more pill, booze and cigarette-driven than P-Orridge's (or anyone else's), but the woozy synth textures that dot the album have a pleasingly disconnected vibe. On the flipside, The Fall chuck in a couple of abstract pieces to keep us on our toes, the most interesting of which is the appropriately-titled "Noise," where Smith pays something of an homage to his guitarist Peter Greenway over

distorted synths and arrhythmic drum rolls. However, for the most part Greenway is underserved on *Re-Mit*, his guitar too often being pushed back in the mix like the guitarist in my dream, with Mark E. Smith's snarl smeared all over the top of the instruments like slightly waxy paint.

In fairness, Smith is in fine voice throughout the album, as odd as that sounds, seeming positively gleeful as he unfurls his garbled narratives in typically disjointed fashion, including unsurprising jibes at other denizens from the music world, such as "*James Murphy is their chief, they show their bollocks when they eat.*" The lyrical highlight of the album is "Hittite Man," a somewhat gothic slab of fantastical weirdness on which Smith imagines a ghost Hittite rising from the grave and concludes with him hacking up a gobful of phlegm. OK, it's not pretty, but it's pure Fall. And that's what makes them a difficult band to feel disappointed with, even if the release is, like *Re-Mit*, something of a second-rate offering. This incarnation of the band is as raucous any Mark E. Smith has had, and at times they hit just the right blend of raw power and subtlety that allows the frontman to really shine. That'll do just fine for most fans of the band, I feel, who will be indifferent to the moments across the album when the band get downright sloppy and Smith's rasps and snarls start to grate. After all, that's what Smith and The Fall are all about, and no one else has really captured whatever it is that makes them unique, both at their best and worst.

By Joseph Burnett

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