



The Fall  
Re-Mit  
Cherry Red

Don't take blogged reports of Mark E. Smith far gone in glossolalia as proof the post-punk poète maudit has lost his wits or voice. Both are in fine gutshot form on this thirtieth studio album by the Fall and, in any normal year, a whole LP side of Smith's morning Lavis recital wouldn't make the papers, but the world is a scary place these days for rockcrits. The Fall's music isn't at all comfortable stuff and a long procession of albums have alternately braced and puzzled listeners for over three decades, so the main man babbling like a loon on the second track is no thing. If anywhere, the surprise comes from kicking off the album with a vicious little surf instrumental like "No Respects." Such gall is truly astounding.

On the wobblejawed "Sir William Wray," Smith sinks teeth into word-curry lyrics as if fitted with hydraulic jaws and the new album settles into a series of weird shocks, catchy riffs and kaleidoscopic moodiness common to Fall music since well before "Oswald Defence Lawyer" or "Barmy" startled the first punters out of their parachute pants. As befits any talk of old times, Smith's yawlp on "Kinder of Spine" sounds as if Joe Strummer drank a vial of chilled Drano, which makes perfect sense as lyrics recall the plight of the human-headed musca domestica in the original version of *The Fly*, complete with "Help meeee!" Believe it or not, this is easily the set's most commercial track. "Noise" is self-explanatory but the verbal hounding of a guitar-toting pizza is as complicated and meaningless as a G.O.P prayer breakfast harangue or one of Charles Bukowski's beer belches. "Hittite Man" sports hodad guitar lines along with much wheezing and coughing plus obscure histrionics that bring to mind Kim Fowley as backed by the Insect Surfers. There's druggy fun in "Pre-MDMA Years," an Allen Ginsberg-style rant and "No Respects" gets a reprise with vocals heavy with age and orotund incoherence. At this point, Smith goes syllaballistic and the album begins to resemble the extended remarks of a congressman steeped in ether and LSD. He howls and heaves, taking (and giving) voluptuous pleasure in cracked, cackled intonation. These antics remain a big part of Smith's charm. Remember that mood of exciting indecipherability when you first encountered songs like "Fun House," "Get Off of My Cloud" or "When the Music's Over"? Well, on a Mark E. Smith joint, that feeling never entirely goes away. The current lineup of the Fall acquits Smith's faith in the results he's gotten for the past three albums. The narcotized opening of "Victrola Time" applies tension that the vocals wind like a mechanical clock. Springs snap and gears begin to fly apart on "Irish," in

which lyrics bitch mysteriously of James Murphy and showing your bollocks when you eat. More fear and loathing for a living attends “Jetplane,” a load of old famous built around a lumbering beat and grunts about human freight at Heathrow Airport. “Jam Song” comes closest to conventional crooning, which—to be fair—resembles little in the way of Crosby or Hope, who likewise get their laughs by other means. “Loadstones” rounds things out with invocations of bleeding skin and the Isle of Wight, with the band hammering and sawing up a terrifying din until the last abrupt crash and the album shuts off like a toy apocalypse.

Re-Mit is as spaciouly unsettling as the rest of Smith’s vast discography, so there’s no conceivable way this record will disappoint an old-line fan. His music is louder, angrier and less coherent than in his winsome youth and makes even fewer concessions to popular taste. Perversely enough, the Fall’s albums began in recent years to climb the charts again in the U.K., where Smith reigns like five furious James Browns, incoherent but no less eloquent. Late arrivals to the Fall might well start here and work backward though Imperial Wax Solvent (2008), The Marshall Suite (1999), I Am Kurious Oranj(1988), all the reverse-widdershin way to 70s sides like “Psykick Dance Hall” to hear the frontman’s first innocent burbles.

—Ron Garmon

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