

A Re-Mit wonder

By Kate Bradley

Kate Bradley gives The Fall's latest 3 stars

When people hit the big 3-0, they often greet their burgeoning maturity with mixed feelings. Some put their age-counter on pause for the rest of their life, whilst others humbly embrace the wisdom of early middle-age.



The Fall have not simply reached 30 – they've now reached their 30th studio album, a feat not even Sonic Youth can rival. And like Thurston Moore with his ever-trendier haircut, true rockstar Mark E. Smith has thrown his age-counter out of the metaphorical window.

In the late '70s, The Fall were precocious – they were making 'post-punk' before the punk era had even finished. Now, they're still making post-punk of a kind, and it doesn't differ hugely from their earlier material. But because The Fall were so ahead of the times, it still sounds fresh now. The production of *Re-Mit* is crisper than on earlier releases, Smith's voice even drawlier, but the concept is the same: playful, high-tempo, garage-rock tracks, shot through with deliberately bizarre noises and lyrics. In some songs on *Re-Mit*, The Fall sound like a lo-fi, drunken version of The Stranglers, but at their most experimental on tracks like 'Jam Song', they're unique.

At times, Smith seems adamant on sounding as much as he can like a mentally-ill schizophrenic loudly addressing the voices in his head. This has become Smith's favourite tone in recent years, giving the songs instant recognisability, but rendering his lyrics almost indecipherable. When the words can be heard clearly, they're often awesome. On 'Noise', Smith gives us an amusingly patronising (or perhaps just grouchy) lecture on how to treat his guitarist: "Kiddies, as we get older, we have to try and understand people who are different from us. Peter is one of these people. In his hands is a guitar. Why don't you try some of it yourself? At least, unlike Peter, you won't be twitching all over the F-fret. That's what they're called on a guitar." The lyrics of 'Hittite Man' are also charmingly off-the-wall, to the extent that it's hard to tell whether Smith labours over every single word, or adopts a Bowie-inspired cut-and-paste writing technique.

Mark E. Smith's reputation as an "irascible genius" makes a review like this feel a little futile; 30 albums on, what can a student journalist say that hasn't been said already, and duly ignored by Smith and his fans? *Re-Mit* could be described as predictable, but more positively, you could see it as an expression of Smith's impenetrable integrity: he will continue to pay no heed to the critics, making albums for himself, and if they sound similar to the old ones as a result, who cares? Where Wikipedia has data, The Fall's average UK chart position is 63, and whilst *Re-Mit* probably won't beat their personal best of 9, I doubt that will stop them from making brilliant, crazy music.

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