Psykick Dancehall Horror House Repetition

*The Singles 1978-2016*, The Fall (Cherry Red)

Mark E Smith's head may have expanded, but his musical output has been pretty consistent in its casual approach to... well, everything really, from lyrics to structure via production values. Motormouth Smith rants whatever seems to come in to his head over sloppy, jangly, awkward sonic backdrops, with pauses for either him to shout or the band to lurch into another rhythm. And then it trips back again.

For the first CD of this seven CD box set (also available as a three CD set of just the A-sides) this is entertaining and, for me at least, an enjoyable exercise in nostalgia. Too many nights listening to John Peel on the radio and friends' mixtapes mean that the likes of 'How I Wrote "Elastic Man"', 'Kicker Conspiracy', 'Marquis Cha-Cha' and 'C.R.E.E.P.' are ingrained into the brain, encouraging me to lurch around the room engaged in bad dancing like we did back in the day. But the effect soon wears off: even the second CD is only made listenable by the dismal cover version of 'There's a Ghost in My House' (which is so bad it's good) and the clever and funky 'Telephone Thing' from one of The Fall's best LPs, *Extricate*.

This sets the tone for the rest of the box set, indeed most of The Fall's zillion albums: one or two good, if not great, tracks, but too much [definitely not cosmic] slop and energetic, amateur-sounding songs which appear to have been casually thrown together in the studio. Quality control? Forget it. As long as there are old indie-kids (indie-parents?) queuing up to buy this stuff then it will continue to be churned out. Mark E Smith may be a national treasure, but really he's had his day and is coasting. I'm afraid this over-generous box set suggests he's been doing so for a long time now and never learnt when to shut up.

I really wanted to like this release, but for me it's a nail in the coffin: Smith is, I would suggest, taking the piss (and no doubt the money) on the back of the current post-punk revival. All power to his Mancunian elbow then, just don't make me listen to this all the way through ever again. Please give the man his pension, put a waxwork in Madame Tussauds, sit him in a corner of the bar and buy him a beer. But no more songs.

 Rupert Loydell

Telephone Thing youtube link:

 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=soXdnisOWCs