



strike a match

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There Is a Future!

by Chris Ziegler

THE CROWD PUNK OFF (13-TRACK CD)



Punks hoping to go gray gracefully could take a lead or two from the Crowd. After 20-plus reasonably uninterrupted years of snotty, poppy punk, this way-back-when HB band can still crank out a full-length with plenty of bite—even if these old-timers might have switched to dentures by now (we kid, guys, we kid!). And while *Punk Off* isn't a track-for-track classic, it's no relic: snottier (how does still-hyper-after-all-these-years singer Jim Decker do it?) and sometimes even poppier than ever, it's amazing how right-now this record sounds. Blame some of that on the generation of punkers still copping elements of the Crowd's sound, but credit most of it to the band's unflagging energy and still-respectable songwriting skills—the Crowd helped put together that beach-blanket-Brit-punk sound, and it continues to work just fine. Album opener "I'm Not Happy Here" is a mean little fuck-you number that kicks in on Decker's ragged "You nicknamed me 'Trash'/You called your chick a gash/And you hit the gas/Exploded!" while "Say" is a really goddamn sweet love song that spins long-ago, flash-in-the-underpants adolescent lust into something, well . . . *touching*, you know? In fact, *Punk Off*'s best moments are rooted in the band's more, um, *mature* perspective—they're not kids anymore ("I'm older than your parents and I've got no time to kill," sneers Decker on the smartly appropriate "500 in Punk Years"), and they aren't trying to pretend otherwise. Instead of contrived tripe about fucking shit up, we get honest reflection on longtime loves and long-lost friends, on growing up and growing old, and it never feels fake or forced—even the not-infrequent cheesy parts are delivered with enough humor to keep everything fun. Maybe that's why *Punk Off* works—whether you're 16 now or were 16 the first time around, the Crowd should still sound just as good. Who knew? Guess there was a future in this punk thing after all.

Info: www.unitysquadrecords.com; www.thecrowd.com.

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