

Album reviews

The Electric Soft Parade



No Need to Be Downhearted
(Better Looking/East West)



For a while there, it seemed like the Electric Soft Parade might not release another album, at least not in this country. Though the Brighton band's debut, *Holes in the Wall*, was nominated for Britain's Mercury Prize in 2002, it never came out in America. A second U.K.-only record, *The American Adventure*, was a critical disappointment. Meanwhile, brothers Tom and Alex White, the group's only permanent members, were busy squabbling with their label (BMG) and touring as part of Brakes (now known stateside as brakesbrakesbrakes), which they formed with erstwhile British Sea Power frontman Eamon Hamilton in 2004. Would the Electric Soft

Parade peter out before having a go at the States?

Far from it: *No Need to Be Downhearted* could be the band's U.S. breakthrough. The excellent, self-produced album maintains ESP's reverb-heavy, future-folk sound while cycling through angsty rock and mellow balladry, a tension-and-release pattern of struggling with self-doubt. "Someday/You'll come out of this okay," Tom White promises himself on the chorus of "Woken by a Kiss," a sprawler that jumps from sweeping melodies to dreamy interludes. On the explosive single "If That's the Case, Then I Don't Know," everything the Electric Soft Parade does well falls into place: Fuzzed-out guitar riffs balance with bright, jangly ones; vocal harmonies add pop sheen; and the whole thing ends in glorious distortion. Tracks like this will make American listeners glad the band stuck it out.—Cristina Black