



Serious men: Muse, with Matthew Bellamy (center)

Muse's Heavy-Rock Circus

Brit heroes mix dire prophecies about the fate of mankind with their biggest, craziest music yet

Muse *The 2nd Law* Warner Bros. ★★★½



Muse have specialized in drama-rock gigantism for more than a decade – long enough to get really good at it. The trio's sixth LP is their most expansive and varied yet, filling out a go-to mix of Queen boom and Radiohead gloom with disco Bowie, Eighties U2, metal, dubstep and enough strings to support a suspension bridge – then wrapping this distinctly English prog-rock crazy quilt around a distinctly English prog-rock theme (something about thermodynamics and economic collapse). When a song that was entrance music at the Olympics ("Survival") barely gets the bronze for Most Epic Thing on Your Record, that's a triumph that would make Freddie Mercury's mustache tingle.

"Wake to see your true emancipation is a fantasy," Matthew Bellamy moans on "Supremacy," a jeremiad against the hubris of modern man that turns Led Zeppelin's "Kashmir" into a black-booted march. It's not all collapse and misery: "Madness" blows up the dub-soul minimalism of the xx into a slinky, slow-burn love song complete with Brian May guitar pyro. But the album-ending mini-opera –

KEY TRACKS:
"Supremacy,"
"Survival"

"The 2nd Law: Unsustainable" and "The 2nd Law: Isolated System" – makes it clear Muse's rehearsal space is fully stocked with bottled water and canned goods. Against orchestral swirls, bass drops and lush Radiohead pantomime, a British scientist direly informs us that "an economy based on endless growth is unsustainable." It's bad news that makes for some fine spectacle.

JON DOLAN