

UNDER THE RADAR

Aug/Sept 2015



Foals

What Went Down
(WARNER BROS.)

★★★★★★★ 6.5/10

It's pretty much a given by now that Foals are the leading arena-rock band of the indie-rock era. With 2008's *Antidotes*, they started out as a niche interest—a precise and calculated math-rock band. *Total Life Forever* injected some emotion into their sound, particularly on “Spanish Sahara,” a masterclass in slow-build. By *Holy Fire*, though, it seems Foals had learned something: they are damn good at just *rocking this shit out*. Now we have *What Went Down*, and Foals frontman Yannis Philippakis has stated that it's the band's heaviest, crunchiest album yet and that it comes the closest so far to Foals' live sound.

That is true. *What Went Down* is loud, fast, and polished. It has hooks galore and it contains confident performances throughout, a quality that has only increased with each subsequent release. Even more than that, *What Went Down* is built on rock-solid riffs. In each of the 10 tracks here, Foals practically bow down and worship at the Shrine of the Riff. Lead single and opening track “What Went Down” is a monster, utilizing Foals' signature ability to build up and cut off to maximum effect. You can almost hear the festival crowds foaming at the mouth. On the other hand, though, some songs rely too heavily on the riffs to create excitement: “Snake Oil” in particular replaces a traditional chorus with an easy blues line that sounds a little too late-career Black Keys-esque. Also missing are the intricacies that made *Total Life Forever* and *Holy Fire* so interesting. At their best, Foals are able to reach barn-burning rock heights through a careful blend of volume and multi-layered, swirling guitar and bass lines. *What Went Down* contains a few of those ecstatic moments, but they're disappointingly sparse.

All in all, *What Went Down* sounds like a collection of songs built for the stage, and that's not a bad thing, especially since Foals have become an absolutely formidable live beast. It's just hard not to miss the breathing room and layers that defined the band's past work. (www.foals.co.uk)

By Scott Dransfield