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The Drift

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Artist: **Scott Walker (2)**
 Genre: Alternative/Punk
 Styles: Avant-garde, Alternative Experimental
 Label: 4AD - Beggars Group

Average: (23 votes) **NEW!** pick

★★★★☆

REVIEW by J. Edward Keyes, *eMusic*



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Challenging, chilling, breathtaking — get The Drift?

To cut to the chase: *The Drift* is terrifying. Scott Walker exaggerates his legendary baritone to the point of grotesqueness. He croaks and croons passionlessly, floating wraith-like around his shadowy compositions. The songs groan and swell and collapse and awful, nightmarish noises spiral up through the blackness. Guitars flex slow and icy like skeletal fingers; the thundering, urgent drumming sounds like someone trying frantically to kick their way out of a coffin. It's a kind of orchestral Grand Guignol, a full-on waking nightmare.

The record resists casual listening — thirty-second previews are pointless, but while the first few listens are challenging, with time things begin to solidify. It's like that moment in a dark room when your eyes finally start to adjust — doorways appear, details emerge, and what once seemed fuzzy and vague takes on corners and dimension. The opening "Cossacks Are," which at first sounds like the galloping of the pale horse, eventually resembles a something like a rock song.

The Drift is heavy with history, but Walker isn't content to sermonize or simplify. "Buzzers" may start out being about ethnic cleansing in Bosnia but ends with Walker moaning about the evolution of the horse. "The Escape" seems equally obsessed with both the Iraq war and Looney Tunes cartoons (Walker sickeningly squawks "What's up, doc?" near the song's conclusion). And "Jesse," far and away the record's most chilling composition, juxtaposes the events of September 11 with an apocryphal tale about Elvis Presley crying out into the night to the spirit of his stillborn twin brother for comfort. Walker sets up the metaphor early: The song opens with the same two chords as "Jailhouse Rock," but they've been radically detuned, sounding here sickly and ominous. In place of the two kick drums, Walker whispers the word "Pow!" — first in the left channel, then in the right — a mirror of the planes striking the towers.

As with Walker's sepulchral wail, the instruments don't carry the melody so much as replicate real-world events. In "Clara," a percussionist punches a side of pork to mimic the sound of peasants beating the corpse of Mussolini and his mistress with sticks. A bowling ball is rolled across an enormous wooden crate to suggest a sinister shell game in "Psoriatic." And in "Cue," sudden banshee-wailing strings signify the entrance of a spectral presence. These would all be little more than parlor tricks if the combined effect wasn't so deeply disconcerting.

The record's one pure moment of melody comes near the end, with the stark and fragile "A Lover Loves." Over a brittle acoustic guitar Walker, sounding as grim and haunted as he did when he first hit with the Walker Brothers' presciently titled "The Sun Ain't Gonna Shine Anymore," moans the song's beautiful, oblique opening. It's a tease, though. No sooner does the first verse end than Walker breaks the calm with a harsh, unsettling "Pssst! Pssst! Pssst!" This is what he does — lull, then lunge. A morbidly, masterfully riveting series of precipitous drops, weird shadows, and moments of pure horror, *The Drift* demands both patience and surrender. It is the richest and most rewarding music of Walker's long, strange career.

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	Listen	Tracks	Length	Download
1.		Cossacks Are	4:32	
2.		Clara	12:43	
3.		Jesse	6:28	
4.		Jolson And Jones	7:45	
5.		Cue	10:27	

6.		Audience	5:49	
7.		Buzzers	6:39	
8.		Psoriatic	5:51	
9.		The Escape	5:18	
10.		A Lover Loves	3:11	

 Total Length: 68:43 

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