

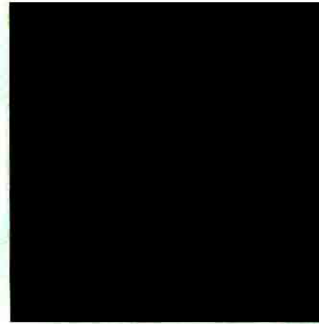
TimeOut New York

Scott Walker

The Drift (4AD)

In discussing Scott Walker's current work—some of the bleakest music you'll find these days—it's hard not to think, But he was such a nice boy.... The Ohio-born singer achieved teen idol-hood in the '60s as part of the syrupy blue-eyed-soul trio the Walker Brothers. His subsequent solo work was darker, revealing a fascination with the demimonde, but 1995's *Tilt* (which followed an 11-year silence) was positively ghoulish, like an industrial song cycle performed by a deranged x-opera star.

The Drift follows another 11-year gap, and it pushes *Tilt*'s strangeness to new extremes. It demonstrates that Walker, like Björk (one of only a handful of artists who could be considered Walker's aesthetic kin), is an omnivorous composer who's quick to use musique concrète methods when traditional instruments won't do. On "Clara," which depicts the desecration of Mussolini's corpse, the artist forgoes drums in favor of arrhythmic thuds that suggest a fist striking a torso; at the climax of "The Escape"—after



Walker moans, "world about to end"—a hideous gurgle bursts in, sounding like a tracheotomy patient's death rattle. But these pieces are songs as well as soundscapes. Though Walker's hyperstylized baritone dominates every track, each has its own weirdly catchy cadence and lyrical flavor, from the grotesque "Jesse" ("Nose holes caked in black cocaine") to the loopy "Psoriatic" ("Neath the bougie a thimble rigger"). If *The Drift* is the last we're to hear of Walker for another decade, its lush, vile vision will give connoisseurs plenty to savor.

—Hank Shteamer