



Matthew Sweet
In Reverse
(Volcano)

I stand firm when I say Matthew Sweet writes brilliant songs, but not brilliant albums. As many were quick to point out, yeah, *Girlfriend* (1991) was seminal. It was even a commercial success. That doesn't mean it was flawless, or even the best Sweet can do. It just means it's the best he's done so far. Likewise, his 1993 follow-up, *Altered Beast*, was mostly inspired, but a track-jumper; *100% Fun* (1995) was 70 percent, and 1997's *Blue Sky on Mars* was downright

disappointing. It's 1999 now, and he's *In Reverse*—getting back, he says, to who he was before. He's got the "Millennium Blues." He's "half in one and half in the other." Agewise, Sweet points out, he's hitting the middle of his life as the century turns. Musically, the album's theme seems to be past meets future, or at least Sweet's usual "ahead of the times" present. First, he was "Superdeformed"; now, he's got a "Split Personality." *In Reverse* is a mixed bag of modernish '50s girl-group harmonies, Lenny Kravitz-like pseudopsychedelica and early piano rock à la Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis.

"Trade Places" is perfect pop, "Faith in You" is solid, reverby retro-rock, and "Thunderstorm" is a seamless splicing of four short songs into one, traveling from total heartbreak to acceptance. This nine-and-a-half-minute epic is the "Girlfriend" of *In Reverse*. It's the one you'll choose for compilations and the one you'll skip to when you play the disc. And it's the reason I stand firm when I say that Matthew Sweet writes brilliant songs, but not brilliant albums.

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