

SIMPLE MINDS

Good News From the Next World

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PERFORMANCE **4/8** SOUND QUALITY

For a brief period in the '80s, Simple Minds seemed a logical successor to U2: The band's music was filled with spiritual concerns, its concerts were stirring affairs, and its keyboard-driven sound on *Sparkle in the Rain* was strikingly dramatic. Then success befell the band, in the form of "Don't You (Forget About Me)," the theme song from *The Breakfast Club*. Frontman

Jim Kerr groused about being identified by that song (it wasn't even written by the band), but Simple Minds' sound immediately ossified on 1985's *Once Upon a Time*. The album was filled with pounding drums and stately melodies echoing the band's big hit. Simple Minds always had gone for the big statement, but now its music seemed aimed at winning over the charts, instead of hearts and minds.

After treading water with a two-CD live set, the band struggled to regain artistic integrity with the simplistic politicks of *Street Fighting Years*. That proved disastrous in every sense, so Simple Minds retreated once again to safe waters with *Real Life*, which put the band back on top (commercially) in Europe. America wisely stayed away, and will probably do the same with *Good News From the Next World*. Religious themes (on "7 Deadly Sins"), vaguely ecstatic lyrics ("I feel like running water/It's the water of the soul/I feel like a spinning wheel/Spinning way beyond control" on "Night Music") and that same, plodding sound—it's all here.

There's a switch in emphasis from keyboards to guitars, but it's merely a matter of flavoring. Any track here could be dropped into the previous three albums without anyone raising an eyebrow. Kerr does sing with conviction. Like Michael Been (formerly of the Call), he manages to bring enough passion to the proceedings to avoid appearing silly—no matter how banal the lyrics may be. But hearing the disc in one sitting only emphasizes the lack of ideas. Simple Minds has not been born again.

—Michael Giltz