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Aimee Mann -- @#%&! Smilers



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Superego Records

by Al Kaufman

Aimee Mann has a great sense of humor.

Yes, she was the intense blonde screaming, "He said, 'shut up!' He said, 'Shut up.'" in a theater on MTV for her Til Tuesday breakthrough video, "Voices Carry." And, yes, many of her songs have been vents about evil record companies or ex-boyfriends. But Mann now has her own record label, Superego, and has been happily married to fellow musician Michael Penn for many years. The Youtube videos of her trying to find comedy acts for her Christmas tour are downright hilarious, with Mann playing a better straight man than Bud Abbott did for Lou Costello.

That said, don't tell Aimee Mann to have a nice day. The title of her brilliant new CD, *@#%&! Smilers*, stems from an alt.bitter news group. In one of the threads, people complained about people who told them to smile when they passed by. Mann, whose songs often conjure up the word "depressing," could relate.

The characters on *@#%&! Smilers* are typical Mann characters. They've fallen, and they're having a hell of a time trying to get up. They're bored, depressed, or just feel like life is passing them by. They've fallen out of love; with other people and with life. Yet what makes Mann so fucking amazing is that instead of wanting to slit your wrists to the music, you find yourself wanting to sing along. If opening cut, "Freeway," had the name "Sheryl Crow" instead of "Aimee Mann" after it, it would be the monster hit of the summer; it just wouldn't sound as good.

For the new CD, Mann eschews the electric guitar for keyboards, giving some of the songs a more synth sound that recall her early Til Tuesday days. She also throws in some horn, which promote a sort of ragtime feeling to a couple of cuts. It's beautiful, instantly accessible music punctuated by Mann's silken vocals.

For her summer tour, which takes her to the Variety Playhouse in Atlanta on September 5th, Mann will bring two keyboard players and no guitarist. She has enjoyed reworking

some of her older material with the new arrangements, so old fans may be in for some pleasant surprises.

She's also been known to tell a joke or two on stage. She may even give a little chuckle after she delivers the punch line. But if you don't want to smile, she won't make you.