

THE ALARM

Greatest Hits Live

(Beyond Music)

For a band that is lodged so firmly in the footnotes of musical history, the Alarm has a surprising number of songs that are familiar and worth hearing.

Anyone old enough to remember the pre-Nirvana heyday of college rock will recall the Album's strident anthems "Strength," "The Stand" and "Sixty Eight Guns."

The Welch band made its debut in 1981 and was rightly tagged by critics as humor-challenged U2-wannabes. It sank quickly into obscurity in the late 1980s when irony trumped earnestness as the dominant force in alternative rock.

The band split for good in 1991 after lead singer Mike Peters stunned his fans — and his three unsuspecting band mates — by announcing during the final seconds of a live show that he was leaving the group.

So what to make of this curious live-greatest-hits recording, based on several live shows in late 2000? Well, the truth is, it isn't the Alarm. Mr. Peters, after a mid-1990s brush with cancer, tried unsuccessfully to revive the band. His fellow band mates, perhaps still smarting from his unorthodox departure, have so far refused to cooperate.

So Mr. Peters just got together a band of unrelated musicians and declared himself "The Alarm 2000" (and more recently "The Alarm 2001") and began touring. Although the liner notes don't say so, this live collection is the result of Mr. Peters' faux-Alarm effort.

For the record, Mr. Peters' voice sounds as strong as ever and his new backing band effectively re-creates the sound of the Alarm at its peak. The nearly forgotten songs also sound surprisingly vibrant and relevant 20 years later.

But let's face it — this isn't an Alarm album (although, curiously, the album is dedicated to his three former Alarm colleagues). It's a solo vanity project by Mr. Peters, who seems intent on cashing in on his marginal musical legacy. — *Sean Scully*

"Now Hear This"