

BEN FOLDS WAY TO NORMAL

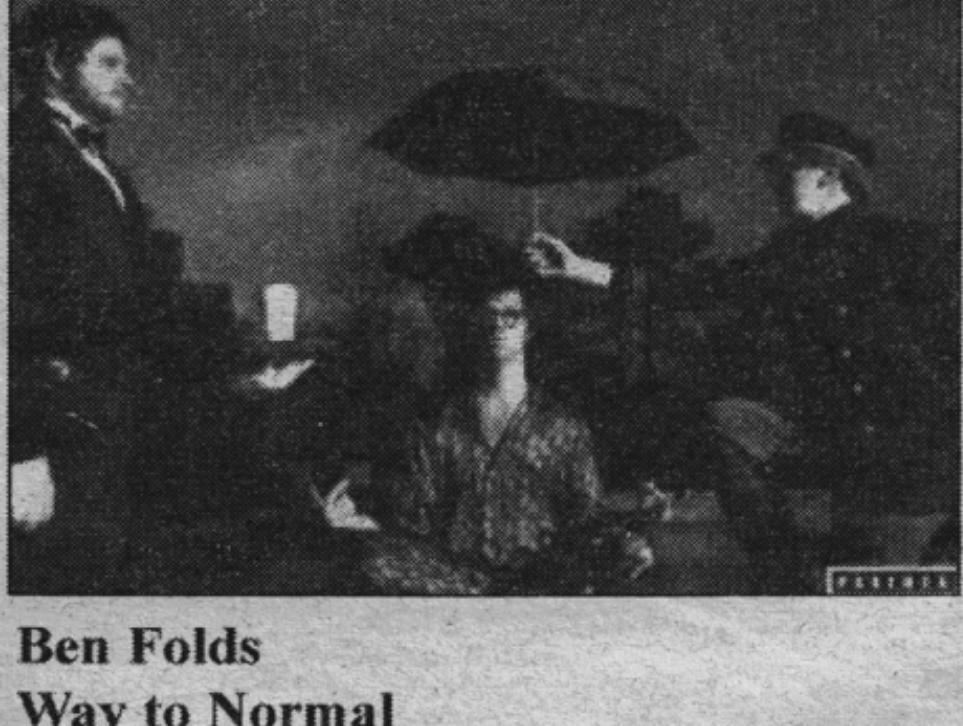


Photo: J. M. STICKLER

Ben Folds Way to Normal (Sony)

In spring 2007, we saw Ben Folds at ISU's Braden Auditorium. Midway through, he announced a new song that he'd written on the way to Normal from St. Louis—a tribute to a little town he'd passed on the interstate called "Effington." He jokingly sang about Effington's residents "effing" in their yards and in their cars. Fast-forward to fall 2008: we discover that Ben Folds's new album is called *Way to Normal*. As we scan the track list, our eyes stop at "Effington." As spectators at the genesis of that song, we were witnesses to a moment in rock history! Well, it wasn't Woodstock, but we still felt part of something kind of important.

Way to Normal is a more upbeat effort than his last album (the introspective *Songs for Silverman*)—it sounds looser, rocks harder, and moves faster. His dark humor permeates the disc. Ben Folds must be a master of the art of the break-up song, for better and for worse, and he shows his range here from the puerile "Bitch Went Nuts" to the more gracious, wrenching "Cologne." With a charming disregard for commercial potential and classical posterity, he deploys cussing in most of the songs, even in the choruses. There are at least two moments where you can hear him or someone in the band laughing mid-song. Folds also ventures beyond the piano, which is a cool departure. Funky, fuzzy sounds like mellotron and Moog abound.

We endorse this disc, especially for parties, dog owners, recent divorcees, or people living in downstate Illinois.

*This review originally appeared
in smilepolitely.com.
~ Crystalline Scoggins
and William Gillespie*