



J Mascis photo by Timothy Herzog



**J Mascis:**  
**Several Shades of**  
**Why (Sub Pop)**

J Mascis has released a few albums solely under his own name. Back in 1996, *Martin + Me* consisted of acoustically reworked Dinosaur Jr. songs and assorted covers. (*Live at CBGB's* from the same year is similar in content.) In 2005, Mascis released *J + Friends Sing + Chant for Amma*, a six-song album devoted to the Indian saint Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, but that was mostly a curiosity and never saw wide release. So it's a big deal that Mascis is finally releasing his first proper studio solo album.

*Several Shades of Why* is a largely acoustic affair, and the album contains no drums, leaving Mascis' voice and guitar clear and direct. It would seem that Mascis might sound completely out of his element in this sort of setting, but the opposite is true. Mascis sounds perfectly at ease here, as if he's finally been able to break free of the weighty

chains of feedback and laid himself bare, for all to see. This might not be any more true than on the title track, a delicate finger-picked melody, gentle strum, and violin, with Mascis sounding more vulnerable than he ever has on record (the way the guitar and violin interweave through the song's final instrument-only minute is simply stunning). "Not Enough" is balanced by three-part harmonies that sound like they were cribbed from a Crosby, Stills & Nash album, or Grateful Dead's "Uncle John's Band." "Make It Right" features acoustic lines reminiscent of "Here Comes the Sun," augmented by gentle slide and what sounds like flute accompaniment. And by the time the electric guitar solo wails overtop the bouncy acoustic strum, three minutes into the jaunty "Is It Done," all has come full circle, and genius is affirmed.

It's funny: just when Mascis seems like he might be getting into a rut or regurgitating the familiar, he comes from the left and surprises, making everything new again.

(www.jmascis.com)

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By Frank Valish

