

Maxwell ★★★★★

BLACKsummers'night

Columbia

Soulman returns with heavy heart and killer album



FOR THOSE WHO remember Maxwell as the Casanova behind bou-doir jams like "Sumthin' Sumthin'," his first disc in eight years holds a surprise: bad vibes. *BLACKsummers'night* is a breakup record, with storm-tossed songs full of regrets and recriminations. "I go insane/Crazy sometimes/Trying to keep you from losing your mind," Maxwell sings in "Fistful of Tears." He remains a student of Marvin Gaye (*Here, My Dear* is a model) and sumptuous Seventies grooves. But ballads like the mesmeric "Pretty Wings" prove he's an auteur in his own right, with surprising digressions and crescendos that mirror the songs' conflicted emotions. The result is an R&B album about love, not just sex, for grown-ups who know the difference. JODY ROSEN

Key Tracks: "Pretty Wings,"
"Bad Habits"
