

Shinichi Atobe: From the Heart, It's a Start, Work of Art

SC spectrumculture.com /2017/06/04/shinichi-atobe-heart-start-work-art/

Daniel Bromfield

6/4/2017

Shinichi Atobe has nearly eight times as much music to his name now as when he dropped his debut EP, *Ship-Scope*, on Chain Reaction in 2002 before disappearing from the public eye for the rest of his life. That EP has become an ambient holy grail, and rightfully so; in 18 minutes, it dives deeper into a hermetic, nautical soundworld than most albums three times its length. But in one of the most astonishing archival projects in recent memory, Demdike Stare's DDS label managed to coax not one but *three* new album-length compilations of unreleased music from the man, all in about the same league as *Ship-Scope*. Still, to this day, the Japanese producer remains an enigma; he refuses to tour or give interviews and shows no signs of new output.



From the Heart, It's A Start, Work of Art is the least of the new Atobe collections, but it's worth wondering if it wouldn't have been a more pleasant surprise had it come out before its peers: the sprawling *Butterfly Effect* and the shorter but more texturally beguiling *World* from last year. *From the Heart* isn't as easy to get lost in as *Butterfly Effect*, and it strips away a lot of the acid-bath grit that made *World* so interesting. But the definitive elements of his work are still there: the pneumatic chords that probably got him signed to Chain Reaction in the first place and the sense of mischief that allows his music to stand tall even on that label's roster.

Had all this music been released in the early '00s when it was made, *From the Heart* might have been the breakthrough that catapulted Atobe from dance-nerd obscurity to higher levels of hipster knowledge. Opener "Regret" is by miles the poppiest thing we've heard yet from Atobe, lacking almost any static and focusing on plush, hi-fi chords that pop and fizzle like miniature fireworks. You could imagine a diva singing on it, and don't be surprised if you hear a star like Rihanna sample it; the pop world is already hip to Atobe, if the sampling of *Butterfly Effect's* title track deep within Drake's *More Life* doodle "Nothings into Somethings" is any indication.

"Regret" and "Republic," another lengthy techno banger whose pads swoon and slosh deep behind a stubborn kick, take up nearly half of *From the Heart's* runtime. The rest of the cuts are classic Atobe, down to their forbidding titles. Two tracks are entitled "The Test of Machine," and both sound like exactly that: short sketches of echo-slathered sequencer that go nowhere and mostly just kill time between the longer cuts. The real keepers are the three "First Plate" tracks, which are exemplary dub techno, all pistoning chords and drums that sound like they're eroding in real time (these tracks were ripped from vinyl, and age has indeed worn them.)

It's not clear exactly how DDS got a hold of these tracks. Did they procure them through a middleman or through the elusive Atobe himself? And who determines what tracks end up on what albums, and in what order, or even what they're called? Did Atobe curate these records or did DDS simply compile amorphous masses of his music into neat album-sized packages? For that matter, how much Atobe music is left? Are those "Test of Machine" tracks really just synth tests scraped from the bottom of the archival barrel to fill enough space for a proper record?

It's hard to tell whether or not the comparative slightness of *From the Heart* is cause for concern. Though the vinyl-only status of the Atobe releases means he hasn't enjoyed the lost-genius status afforded to so many similarly reclusive artists, the exemplary quality of his last three releases means his name is beginning to take on a legacy, at least among those who care about the dark and murky strains of underground techno Atobe embodies. With the producer out of the picture, DDS are in charge of that legacy, and they'd do well not to tarnish it.

- Label:
DDS
- Release Date:
May 12, 2017