

Matmos: Plastic Anniversary

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Matmos's music is so good it tends to outstrip its concept. Usually that's a good thing. Martin Schmidt and Drew Daniel are highly skilled at repurposing things like the sound of liposuction or the clank and rattle of a trusty old washing machine into sentimental, good-humored, funky music. So much conceptual electronic music drifts too far from the ideas that fuel it, but Matmos are a mischievous antidote to these doldrums at their best.

Plastic Anniversary, made of sounds sourced from plastic, juggles a lot of heavy themes. It's a celebration of the two musicians' 25th anniversary as a couple, and like their romance, plastic lasts an awfully long time. Also at play are the inherent, inevitable problems with plastic: its disposability, its effect on the environment, the fact that it can be used for good (condoms, blood bags) as well as evil (3D-printed guns, riot shields).

How to fit that into a 40-minute record? Matmos...doesn't, really. It's cute to use a riot shield to make joyous sounds instead of to oppress the disenfranchised, but the shield—like the other loaded tool, a breast implant— isn't recognizable in the same way as the body sounds on *A Chance to Cut Is a Chance To Cure*, which sounded about what you'd expect liposuction to sound like. We don't get the same synchronicity of subject and

emotion we get from, say, that album's "For Felix (And All the Rats)," which uses sounds sourced from a lab rat's cage to evoke fear, sympathy and, yes, the squeaks of a small mammal in terror.

Because of how many instruments are at play and how futile it is to try to tell which is which in order to get the full thematic package, we end up paying unequivocal attention to the sounds themselves. This is the correct focal point. Schmidt and Daniel are gifted at chopping the sounds of things like billiard balls and the breaking of vinyl records into recognizably musical cues, and they are inspired in fitting those noises into an environment that makes sense. The menagerie of disposable junk, for instance, that's transmogrified into an endless "Plastisphere." Or the giant squeaking novelty "The Crying Pill," shown on the cover, that sounds like a trumpet but much, much more unsettling.

Daniel's spoken about the album's balance of "sweet and sour," and though most casual listeners would find the hollow shrieks and 2D thuds that dominate *Plastic Anniversary* unbearable, these are, in fact, some of the most pop compositions Matmos has ever made. The chord progressions they follow aren't terrifically unconventional, and the beat that opens "Breaking Bread" should be instantly recognizable to anyone who's turned on pop radio in the past two years. If Schmidt and Daniel know that the name "dembow" derives from a homophobic slur, that'd be the most delightful subversion on an album whose purpose is in part to celebrate an enduring gay romance.

Horns dominate the album, and Matmos use both plastic curios that sound like horns and actual plastic horns, played in part by a Montana high school marching band. There's a neat push-pull between what are obviously "real" instruments and what aren't, and even then, we can't be certain. There's a nice drum-line feel to the whole thing, especially on the title track, which Daniel's likened to a small village celebrating their anniversary, "maybe with some Morris dancers in there."

The last time they threw a banquet so grand, it was for King Ludwig II of Bavaria on 2006's *The Rose Has Teeth in the Mouth of a Beast*, their tribute to their favorite queer historical figures. Appropriate for an album celebrating the couple's history, there are some easter eggs for Matmos fans: some of the drum figures approximate 2003's *The Civil War*, and the use of synthetic fat in one track will immediately bring to mind that infamous liposuction. But if you're an astute enough fan to foster these associations, you'll likely come out of *Plastic Anniversary* astonished by the couple's skill and audacity in chopping up these sounds but wanting of that marriage of musical and thematic heft that makes Matmos so exciting.



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