

Jai Agnish  
Automata

Review by Rick Evans

It's guys like Jai Agnish that help restore one's faith in the 'do it yourself' ethic. Here's a young man that doesn't think twice about doing it for himself. He's not going to be held back by the multitude of seemingly insurmountable corporate music machine obstacles. Jai's been publishing a groovy little indie art zine, "Flygirl" and releasing other people's music on his little label for years. Now, his first CD, "Automata," is out, which wonderfully reflects his (put art first) values.

Automata is the sound of a folk singer from the future. We essentially have one troubadour, his guitar, and his songs, and then all the neat little electronic squiggles and experiments laid on top. Where other artists are incorporating hip-hop beats into their mix, or are dropping the vocals altogether, Jai is into a strange brew of Kraftworkian autotopia and the stark acoustics of a Will Oldham. Agnish is refreshingly unique. Possibly the most satisfying aspect of the 'Automata is Agnish's commitment to his own style.

The songs average less than three minutes, allowing the listener to enjoy interesting analog experiments, without tiring self-indulgence. Most of the songs contain Agnish's vocals, sometimes deep in the mix serving more as another sound effect, and just as often in the role of the confessional singer/songwriter. 'Automata opens with a short narrative sample-- seemingly taken from a children's tv show -- about rockets and imagination, that sets the stage for Agnish's innocent and wide-eyed view of the world. It's not until the third track, "How Do You Dream," that you hear the sort of tune Agnish is most comfortable, with its relaxed yet slightly emotional singing take center stage, backed by his trademark mix of acoustic guitar and simple yet hypnotic synth programming.

"Finding Ways" is the most out there tune on the CD, and Agnish's most commendable in its risk taking. "Finding Ways" is once again a core acoustic guitar song, but is overridden with haunted vocals and a completely atonal yet infectious analog figure. As the world of free and avant garde music increasingly captures the ears and hearts of today's opened minded listeners, its exciting to hear atonality applied directly to pop music, and an area Agnish should continue to explore.

'Automata exudes both a childlike innocence in it's self-discovery as well as a certain integrity in its unconventional sonority. As rock continues to try to find a new footing, Agnish's honest experimental pop music will be something to watch.

