

NAKATOMI PLAZA

NAKATOMI PLAZA "Unsettled"
(Red Leader Records)

Right now is a pretty surreal time to be in a punk band. It seems like these days words like "originality" and "inventiveness" have been stricken from most bands' vocabularies, only to be replaced with "regional Soundscans" and "target demographics." It's ironic, really, that a subgenre that was initially born out of contempt for the mainstream culture and brazen capitalism has turned into a commodity of forced rebellion.

Then there's Nakatomi Plaza.

Formed in New York City, in 1998, the Brooklyn-based Nakatomi Plaza—guitarist/vocalist Oscar Rodriguez, Bassist/vocalist Al Fair and drummer Lou Maiolica—have embodied punk rock's DIY ethic via tireless touring and self-promotion for the past eight years and their third full-length, *Unsettled*, is the culmination of their career. Produced by J. Robbins (Jawbox, Burning Airlines), the album is a unique amalgam of influences that juxtaposes post-punk's angular riffs with virtuosic guitar solos, electronic flourishes and even the occasional screamo yelp to create a sound that's instantly hooked countless listeners, including Robbins himself.

"I gave him the Nakatomi demos two or three years ago and didn't really expect him to write back—but he wrote back that week and said we should talk about doing the record," Rodriguez recounts. Inspired by the band's music, Robbins traveled to Brooklyn for two weeks in the winter of 2004 recording the album you are currently holding in your hands. "I thought we were going to have to pay for his hotel, but he slept on our couch for two weeks while we were recording!" Rodriguez exclaims as if he can't even believe it himself. "It was a lot of fun."

If there was one adjective to use to describe the collective personality of Nakatomi Plaza, it would be "perfectionist"—a trait which is responsible not only for how groundbreaking *Unsettled* is, but also for how long it has taken to be released. From finding the right label to getting the ultimate guitar tone, Nakatomi Plaza spared no expense with *Unsettled* (the album was eventually mastered six times). "We almost broke up a few months ago because the shopping was taking so long," Rodriguez admits. "But now that we have a fresh start and someone who's actually excited about putting the record out, that's great."

Lyricaly, *Unsettled* is remarkably intelligent, however you don't need a Ph. D. to comprehend the album's inspiring themes. Sure, the opener "A Manifest Destiny Grows In Brooklyn" parallels the gentrification of Brooklyn against the American expansion to the West, but most of the songs on *Unsettled* focus more on feelings and abstractions. "If I had to describe the lyrical content of the album, it'd be mildly political songs with overlying themes of depression and anxiety," Rodriguez says. "The lyrical themes are personal, but with an emphasis on the social fabric that holds everything together."

"The gates are closing/escape while you still can," Rodriguez sings on "Combustible/Jettison," summoning the urgency that informs every second of Nakatomi Plaza's music. With *Unsettled*, the band have delivered a collection of songs that are vital, deliberate and now more than ever, relevant. So, for a second, forget about genres and buzzwords and MySpace and just listen. Because ultimately, that's why we all got into this in the first place; sometimes all we need is a reminder.

-Jonah Bayer



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