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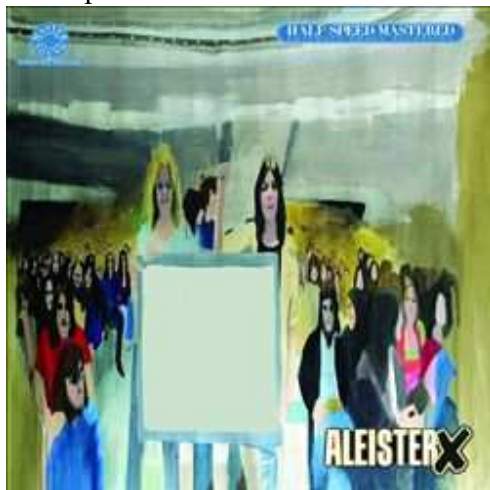
Half-Speed Mastered (February 18, 2013) 4 Fred Thomas Mysterious N.Y.C. performer Aleister X first emerged in the late 2000s with a series of EPs, cameo appearances, and mixtapes, building steam toward his proper debut album, Half-Speed Mastered. The record's 14 tracks present a collection of endless stimuli and demonstrate an intentionally obscured mastery of different musical styles in constant clash. While certain reference points could be made to try to explain the sound, nothing neatly wraps up the experience. Some of the same intensity that characterizes Andrew W.K.'s recordings (incidentally, the album was mixed by W.K. and released on his Steev Mike label) is pushed through a psychedelic filter that drains into a melting pot of grimy bedroom beats, screwed samples, and an almost Ariel Pink-meets-Lil B production. Aleister X's conceptual approach is so deep it becomes invisible, with both the brilliant production choices and litany of hooks sometimes overshadowed by the incredible weirdness of the project. Gritty street raps centered around Hollywood debauchery are delivered in a faux-British accent with frequent shout-outs to New York City. Bouncy sunshine pop basslines ride on scattershot electro beats on catchy tracks like "LAX" and the mantra-like "Bad Vibrations" before disintegrating into either depraved rhymes or gorgeous vocal harmonies buried deep in the mix. Equal parts guitar rock, Streets-styled bedroom rap, and even the druggy paranoia of early Royal Trux recordings play into walls of noise like "California Gurls," and elsewhere "Comedy City" is little more than a list of comedians as recited while on some particularly bad acid. "Dome Master Mike" manages to strangle contemporary dancehall elements around a stuttering drum machine, wrangling even more disparate sonic elements into the album's ever-expanding patchwork. The strength of Half-Speed Mastered that might not come through at first listen is that its seemingly random mess of strange sounds and its wild combinations are completely considered and sculpted with intention and control. Listening closely, it's easy to see that it'd be impossible to accidentally create something this astonishingly weird and yet surprisingly engaging. Aleister X has built an intricate and totally befuddling world on Half-Speed Mastered, one less accessible but not too far removed from Beck's weirdo beginnings or Kool Keith's most bizarre sidetracks. The music may be too ahead of its time to connect with every listener, and no doubt will see a fair amount of controversy, but the secretly infectious songwriting and utterly head-scratching elements of X's persona make it a sound that's hard to ignore whether you understand it or not.

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