

Uneasy Flowers, the second album by Autistic Daughters, is an incremental improvement over their fine 2004 debut *Jealousy and Diamond*. But any other degree of advancement would feel inappropriate, since this group's music deals in small steps and minute shifts. This can make for a sleepy listen-- sometimes it even sounds like the trio has drifted off into musical unconsciousness. But more often this album is like a quiet dream, filled with moods and images that linger past the end of each song.

That effect combined with the fact that Autistic Daughters are on *Kranky* might imply their music is pure ambience. But the trio is actually a song-based entity, relying on vocals, guitars, drums, and some modest electronic effects. The seven tunes here sometimes evoke the soothing drift of *Kranky* stalwarts like *Stars of the Lid*. But they're closer sonically to the slow melodies of *Low*, the soft glitch of the *Books*, or even *Wilco's* mellower moments (the alluring bent of Dean Roberts' voice at times recalls Jeff Tweedy).

The miniaturist feel of *Uneasy Flowers* is enhanced by Roberts' lyrics, which explore ideas in subtle shades. Phrases and images recur, tracing the outline of an enigmatic character named Rehana. Through clever repetitions of terms like "rain," "gin," and "value judgment," Roberts paints an impressionist portrait that makes surreal sense. On the title track, over chopped snare hits, he describes an elusive "it"-- "tell your brother it's a balancing act"; "it makes our laughter more easily stomachable"-- without ever fully revealing his subject. Later, on the sparse "Bird in the Curtain" and the minimal "Hotel Exeter Dining Room", Roberts slyly dodges meaning, singing about uncertainty and awkwardness with apt imprecision.

Musically, the songs on *Uneasy Flowers* are skeletal, offering bare bones where more impatient bands might pile on sonic flesh. Sparse and measured, each tune forms gradually, letting its elements grow into each other like ivy on a wall. This encourages the listener to connect dots and color in shapes that may never actually be there. Not every tune rewards the effort, but enough do, especially "Gin Over Sour Milk", the album's masterful midpoint. Over a descending rhythm, Roberts whispers about a pretty obvious choice-- who wouldn't take alcohol over spoiled dairy? But as in most of Autistic Daughters' music, that simplicity hides a more complex idea lying just beneath the surface.

— Marc Masters, April 17, 2008