

## **MECHANICAL CANINE**

*To My Chagrin* bio

James Walsh's house has a few issues. The home inspector neglected to note the foundation caving on the west side. The retaining wall out front isn't doing much retaining. And ceiling spots are getting worse by the day from pipe leakage. Oh, and there's the rat problem. Walsh wasn't expecting the rats. He'd set out to find a comfort we all seek at some point, when you're thrown out into the world and you're obliged to build your nest. He found himself an old house, and it's the one he turns into an arcing metaphor on his band's new album, *To My Chagrin* by **MECHANICAL CANINE** (*Don Giovanni Records*).

The devotedly DIY Philly emo-punk band are on their third effort, following 2020's *Good Photography* and 2022's *Walls Covered In Mildew*. The debut was a RADIOHEAD-indebted take on indie-punk by a new college band testing its capabilities, and its follow-up trimmed down the fat into a whirlwind of Walsh's inner dialog set to zany rock music, unconstricted by any preconceived notions of the emo tag's boundaries. *To My Chagrin* is a further sharpening of the band's sound. Thirteen tracks fly by in 23 minutes, and the first 11 are an assortment of 30-second intrusive thoughts blurted into mini-songs, and two-minute bangers squeezing multiple compelling ideas - maybe a country strut or a folksy outro - into the songs' anti-structures that inevitably revert to punk meter. It's all over the place. If you hear a catchy hook, don't expect its return.

Within the unpredictable course of a **MECHANICAL CANINE** song is a look-alike reflection of Walsh's self, and the picture isn't always pretty. On lead single "Mechanical Canine Saves Emo," he drops perhaps the deepest-cutting couplet on the LP: "Reality sank my realized dreams / And it could sink me / I'm barely treading." It's a defeatism that pops up throughout the LP; the tragic monologue of a chronic overthinker. And when he tries to encourage himself, it can read as cynical - like he doesn't believe the positive affirmations that conventional wisdom tells him to make. With the five-minute finale, "Watercourse," Walsh returns to his house analogy: "We live with these walls, and I love what's between them," he shouts on the song's screamo midsection. To that point on the album, he hasn't earned the listener's trust as a reliable narrator, making it hard to take such a warm-hearted proclamation at face value. Walsh is doing his best to hang on, praying that he can save him from himself. What's doubtful is if he believes he can.

On *To My Chagrin*, **MECHANICAL CANINE** know their sonic identity and refine what they do well: playing frenetic, explorative, sometimes-wacky emo-punk music that opens a cracked window into the ugliest fissures in Walsh's mind. It can be kinda scary in there - just keep an eye out for rats.

- SAM CRISLER