

Curren\$: Pilot Talk: Trilogy

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Curren\$y makes weed rap for people who *love* weed, not for people who like the *idea* of weed; they can stick with their Afroman and pot-leaf-printed beanies. I mean people who still remember *why* they started burning the bud in the first place. There's a pervasive sense of comfort and serenity in the man's music. He's always curled up in a couch, or jetting off to some faraway place, or staring out the window and remarking on just how beautiful the view is. Even those who don't smoke can understand his fixation with creature comforts, often the kind you'd expect to be enjoyed by a middle-aged man rather than an MC in his mid-'30s. He's the type to brag about his argyle socks or recommend the hand-squeezed lemonade at his favorite diner.

The most lovable facets of the man's music are on full display on his *Pilot Talk* trilogy, now freshly packaged together and finally available to stream. Each tape is about 45 minutes, and together they sprawl to about the length of one of Curren\$y's favorite classic films. Some songs have hooks; some have guests; some are just Curren\$y rapping for two or three or four minutes with no chorus or guests or interruptions. And though his discography's full of surprises, like the live-band *Muscle Car Chronicles*, he doesn't stray far from his comfort zone on the *Pilot Talk* series, working mostly with soul-enamored beatmaker Ski and sticking to weed, cars, jets and women as subject matter—with plenty of digressions that make his rhymes all the more delightful.

That this sameness can sustain itself for so long is a tribute to just how complete and enjoyable Curren\$y's aesthetic is. His music is weightless, decked out with lounge guitar and gossamer string samples. He's not far off on "Montreux" when he compares his music to Marvin Gaye's 1980 performance at that famous jazz festival. And though his rhymes are dense and drunk with language, they're never hard to follow. If you miss a detail, there's bound to be something else you can sink into a couple bars down. It's the kind of luxury rap you can listen to in just about any situation and feel like you're sipping mimosas by the beach. You could even fall asleep to it.

So the compilation passes by like a cloud, and the individual tapes blend into each other. It's a listening experience not unlike Todd Rundgren's *Something/Anything?*, the gold standard for double albums that deepen and get weirder as they go on. The first *Pilot Talk* is the most song-oriented and, accordingly, has the best individual songs—"Skybourne," a posse cut with Big K.R.I.T., Smoke DZA and the psychedelic shimmer of a Shuggie Otis song; and "Breakfast," which is the best song about getting high I've ever heard. *Pilot Talk 2* is all about language, light on the choruses and heavy on the shenanigans, and the beats are earthier and less baroque than on the first. It's a little weirder, a little harder to just put on in the background.

Pilot Talk 3 is the black sheep of the three, released nearly five years after the other two into a vastly different rap landscape. It's more story-oriented, opening with a narrative of Curren\$y's come-up and featuring the only song among the tapes where his perpetual philandering and home-wrecking actually seems like a cause for concern ("Cargo Planes"). Ski is less involved here, and accordingly, it's slower, less lush, more Southern. Riff Raff even appears on "Froze," rapping through a frightening Travis Scott filter. Taken on its own, it's the least of the tapes by a significant margin. Here, it darkens the mood as the album seeps into its late hours.

Pilot Talk 3 isn't as good a *Pilot Talk* release as *Weekend at Burnie's*, a lovely little record that rivals the first two tapes in the trilogy. I always thought *Burnie's* should be called *Pilot Talk 3* instead, but tacking it to the end of this release might tire out listeners. As fun as it is to hear Curren\$y talk about his amazing life over smooth soul-dream



beats, two and a half hours of it with no switch-up would tire anyone out. 3 ultimately provides a smooth, welcome comedown, and the tape sounds miles better here than it did on its own. Strictly chronological sequencing can often make for incoherent listening, but Curren\$y can surely take comfort in knowing everything worked out. I imagine him sitting back in his favorite chair, putting on *Pilot Talk: Trilogy*, exhaling a big plume of Blue Dream, and musing to himself: “This turned out fucking great.”

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