

T-Pain/Lil Wayne: T-Wayne

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“Wanna feel old?” You’d be surprised how often the answer is yes. The Internet loves our memes reminding us of the things turning 10 or 20 any given year. A sampler of the things turning 10 this year: Kanye West’s *Graduation*, “Crank Dat (Soulja Boy),” and the third *Shrek*, *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Spider-Man* movies. Feel old yet?

How about this? Eight years ago, in 2009, Lil Wayne still cared about rapping and it was completely acceptable, commendable even, to hate Auto-Tune. This was before Rikers and before Cash Money held *Tha Carter V* hostage. Young Thug was still Jeffery Lamar Williams from Zone 3, Future was a peripheral member of the Dungeon Family, Lil Yachty was ten, and “D.O.A. (Death Of Auto-Tune)” got heavy airplay at bar mitzvahs.

This is the climate into which T-Pain and Lil Wayne would have dropped their joint *T-Wayne* tape, but they didn’t, and the project languished in T-Pain’s hard drive until he impulsively decided to drop it this year. The tape might have been massive rather than a curio had it dropped around when it was made, but perhaps it’s better that it came out now. Wayne’s long lost his drive and seems to just be waiting for *Tha Carter V* to come out so he can retire. His canned, younger self seems more lively than what we hear on his latter-day verses. And now that T-Pain’s come to be hailed as an innovator rather than the guy who “ruined music” with his ecstatic Auto-Tune use, he fares well here.



T-Wayne is a 28-minute celebration of the most unfairly maligned musical technology since the electric guitar. No one has ever sounded better than Wayne through Auto-Tune, and it’s exhilarating hearing him purse his lips and stretch his vowels and cluck his consonants to get the most he can out of the technology. Listen to how he projects and retracts his voice during his “lil’ mama” variations on “Damn Damn Damn,” creating an undulating wave of robo-voice – then prepared to be flattened as the two play hot-potato with the titular word through fields of Auto-Tune, like some sort of Renaissance fugue.

These are the roots of rappers like Young Thug and Future, who bend their voices to the demands of Auto-Tune rather than the other way around. Weezy actually adorns his voice more than T-Pain, who mostly spits in that rushed I-can-rap way where every word sounds wrested from the rapper’s throat through a Herculean display of force. He’s not a terrible rapper, even if he’s prone to clunkers like “*head game sick like cancer.*” But it’s clear he’s trying *really* hard, perhaps to prove he had “talent” in the face of relentless pop-cultural scapegoating. He’d later go on NPR’s authenticity-baiting Tiny Desk Concert series to belt “Buy U A Drank” ballpark-style (“he can actually sing!” went the comments).

It’s lucky his foil is Wayne, who has a lifetime of experience sharing the booth with guys who are trying way too hard to keep up. Recall “Black Republicans” from the epochal *Da Drought 3*, where Juelz Santana sounded like he was rapping on a treadmill while Weezy slobbered and slurred all over the mic and generally ran laps around his guest.

This is the tail end of peak Weezy, but it’s still peak Weezy, and the vibe is similar to his tapes from that period in its musical eclecticism and batshit sampling. Wayne ends the album by bursting into Don McLean’s “American Pie.” “Snap Your Fangas” sounds a *lot* like an American Football song in its first few seconds, and no, I’m not kidding. “Listen to Me” cribs from the Oompa-Loompa song from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* but doesn’t use it to cultivate a “peculiar” aesthetic, as Nicki Minaj might, but to turn the “if you are wise you’ll listen to me” refrain as a threat to anyone who dares to talk shit.

Speaking of Minaj, the “Did It On ‘Em” beat makes an appearance on “Breathe.” This might seem like the kind of classic Weezy blasphemy that led him to rap on top of literally anything on the radio during his untouchable period. But “Did It On ‘Em” wasn’t even *out* when T-Pain and Wayne laid down this tape. *Graduation* still feels like it dropped yesterday, but it really does feel like eight years since Weezy could rap like this.

- Label:
Nappy Boy/Young Money
- Release Date:
May 19, 2017