

# Washed Out: Mister Mellow

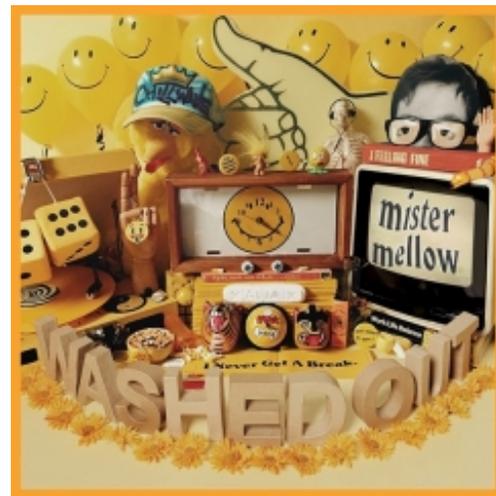
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*Mister Mellow* starts with a thick mist of phasers and a riot of sampled coughs and manic laughter. Are we supposed to think of “Laughing Gas,” from Neon Indian’s *Psychic Chasms*? It’s possible. And it’s also possible we’re meant to think of Toro Y Moi’s “Blessa” when a sampled voice sighs, “I go to work, I try my best” on “Floating By.” This is an album that embraces—or, perhaps more accurately, reckons with—chillwave rather than running from it.

Ernest Greene helped define chillwave with his first two EPs, but he could never quite escape it. By 2011, the genre had hit saturation point, and peers Neon Indian and Toro Y Moi turned left into weirder territory. Greene refined his sound instead, perhaps out of stubborn commitment to his style or a disinterest in leaving his comfort zone. *Paracosm*, with its acoustic guitars, was marginally more serious but didn’t gain him much more than a few Pandora plays.



*Mister Mellow* returns to the sound of his early tapes, especially *High Times*. There aren’t too many songs proper here, mostly sample-focused doodles. Greene is 34, but this sounds more like the product of a kid’s bored summer than anything he’s done since his career took off. It’s better for it. It might not be as immersive as *Within & Without* or *Paracosm*, but it’s more interesting, quickly introducing ideas and never lingering too long on atmosphere.

The persistent theme is boredom. Greene sighs about daydreaming and days slowly going by, his voice thick with reverb and underlaid by the occasional harmony. The sampled voices seem forlorn. “My life, you know, it’s boring,” says one. “I’ve just been busy, sort of, and bummed out, sort of.” Chillwave and boredom have always gone hand-in-hand, but *Mister Mellow* makes ennui its raison d’être, and there’s less of the escapism on something like “Feel It All Around.”

Perhaps his embrace of the genre he helped create is in earnest. But it seems so... aggressive. Look at the word “chillwave” scrawled on the cover, and the song titles: “Burn Out Blues,” “Time Off,” “Floating By,” “I’ve Been Daydreaming My Entire Life,” “Zonked,” “Instant Calm,” “Million Miles Away.” It’s being presented as a “visual album,” but while those tend to be ambitious signifiers of auteurism, the visual component to *Mister Mellow* mostly consists of footage of people smoking weed and eating burgers.

Is he joking? It’s hard to tell how Greene feels about chillwave, and it’s hard for the listener to know what to feel, either. The music’s gorgeous and will work as well on a hot summer day as anything he’s ever done, and on a musical level it frequently approaches the highs of his early EPs. But does Greene respect this material or mock it? Are we supposed to enjoy it or laugh at it? Do we treat it as a chillwave album or an album about chillwave? For that matter, is it a love letter or a sardonic Dear John? These questions nag at us, keeping us from zoning out like we want to.

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Stones Throw
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