

Hype Williams: Rainbow Edition

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If Dean Blunt is to be believed, *Rainbow Edition*—the first album proper from his Hype Williams project in six years—wasn't made by him or his partner Inga Copeland but by some people named Slaughter and Silvermane. This is classic Blunt bullshit. This music sprouts logically from what he's been doing with his recent Babyfather and Blue Iverson projects, and about half of it was quietly released earlier this year as *Sweetchinmusik Vol. 1*. Some of the low-key Hype Williams tapes that preceded it are in line with the sounds Copeland's been exploring with her recent Lolina project. This is likely a solo Blunt joint, but one can only guess; Blunt likes it that way.



Rainbow Edition evokes encroaching dread, rusted metal façades and rainy urban hellscapes. Damaged, diminished chords hang low like a toxic fog as stray sounds from radio rap and R&B slither about in search of a song. Like the post-club music on London label Night Slugs, *Rainbow Edition* repurposes popmistic cues—Auto-Tune, trap drums, untreated MIDI sounds—for deliberately difficult music. To match, Hype Williams repurposes bits of R&B detritus for its aesthetic; the title of “Spinderella’s Dream” references a Salt-N-Pepa song, while “This Is Mister Bigg. How You Doing Mister Bigg” takes its name from a lyric from “Friend of Mine” by Kelly Price—whose music video was directed by one Hype Williams.

These aren't just hipster cues to make Blunt sound smart. His recent work has been defined by an appreciation of black art in the face of the withering systematic inequality that would destroy those artists' livelihoods. *BBF Hosted by DJ Escrow*, the first album from his Babyfather project that was a dark horse for album of the year last year, framed its loving grime tributes against the paranoid, incessant sound of police sirens. Its opening refrain: “*This makes me proud to be British,*” repeated until the syllables lose their meaning. His references are cheeky, but they're not ironic; Blue Iverson's *Hotep* featured the famous Lauryn Hill stencil not as a joke but because Lauryn Hill's the shit.

There's some of the same worldbuilding-as-social-commentary here. The album begins with a woman castigating a group of “Uncle Toms” in the stilted language of blaxploitation acting, and it poignantly ends with a sample from Jim Cartwright's play *Road*, in which a group of working-class youths chant “somehow we will escape” as a mantra in pained, strained voices. In between, a man sighs about how “#Blackcardsmatter.” There's no explicit statement here as on *BBF*, but it's possible the hellscape he creates is a sonic visualization of the quagmire of systematic racism. The music itself feels dead and oppressive, and its beats seem hopelessly stagnant in their refusal to groove. The voices, outbursts of frustration amid the blank deadness of the landscape, are a relief.

The flaw in this approach is that this deadness has a certain appeal, especially in the vaporwave age where eerie artificiality is music-nerd catnip. This is actually one of the more likable and listenable recent Blunt projects, in part because his half-joking, heavy-lidded rapping and singing are absent from the picture. More listeners are likely to listen to this to bring a bit of *Blade Runner* aesthetic to their day than to scour it for its societal criticisms. It's hard to say how we're meant to approach the album. But do you really think Blunt would be one to tell us?

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