

Prins Thomas: Prins Thomas 5

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Prins Thomas's new album is called *Prins Thomas 5*. The ones before that were titled, respectively: *Prins Thomas I*, *Prins Thomas II*, *Prins Thomas III*, and *Principe Del Norte*. Any guesses as to which one was the bravest and most experimental? *Principe Del Norte* wasn't a great album, but its sprawling length and explicitly astral ambitions meant it felt like a leap of imagination from the most workmanlike of the Norwegian disco producers. A six-hour mix album, *Paradise Goulash*, and an even stranger (and arguably better) remix record only confirmed that Thomas was finally ready to get weird.



That's why it's so disappointing that *Prins Thomas 5* proceeds as if nothing happened since *III*. It's every bit of a piece with its numbered brethren: a collection of tracks that probably work in the club but are less conducive for a sit-down listen than the work of peers like the Lindstrøm and Todd Terje. He seems to undersell it on purpose. The press release makes a big deal out of Thomas's recent bout of bronchitis, which doesn't deliver any poignancy to this music but might be an excuse for why it's so scattered and unambitious compared to the behemoths he's been making lately. Maybe he's just tired.

It opens promisingly. "Here Comes the Band" is aptly named, its rinky-dink organs and distant glockenspiel pings seeming to herald the coming of an oneiric parade. "Bronchi Beat" is creeping, chord-drunk microhouse whose title suggests the great pop group Bronski Beat but is clearly indebted to Chilean wildchild Ricardo Villalobos, who made two of the best tracks on the *Principe Del Norte* remix album. "Αθήνα" suggests getting lost in Drexciya's storms. "Æ" (good luck with these track titles) is placid acid house that evokes the burbling TR-303 soundscapes of Mr. Fingers' recent *Outer Acid*.

But as it creeps on, interesting textures give way to by-the-numbers space disco built around uninspired sequencer patterns, most conspicuously on "London Til Lisboa" and the concluding "Aske Hermansen." The album gets incrementally less interesting as it goes deeper, which is a problem given that it's 70 minutes long. *Principe Del Norte*'s sprawl was justified by its intent to conjure up a vast space. On *Prins Thomas 5*, the tracks are haphazardly placed next to each other, and while they're interesting in their own, especially during the second half, there's no rhyme or reason to their arrangement.

Sick or not sick, it's a shame Thomas would take such a dramatic step back at this time.

Lindstrøm's *It's All Right Between Us As It Is* from October suffered from a similar problem, though that producer's previous risks didn't necessarily translate into critical acclaim. By contrast, Thomas—who's long lived in the shadows of his better-known partners—finally seemed to be establishing himself as a force to be reckoned with. *Prins Thomas 5* is deflating, and it won't sway anyone who sees Thomas as the least of the three musketeers of Norse disco. I can't wait for the remix album: it needs one.

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Prins Thomas Musikk
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