

Will Long: Long Trax 2

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Will Long's *Long Trax 2* resembles an empty swimming pool or an abandoned pier extending out into the open sea. It deepens, but does not do a whole lot else, and though long stretches of it are featureless, it's vast enough to be inherently awe-inspiring. A bassline is a luxury in this music; the drums sound like the rinky-dink automatic rhythm tracks on cheap keyboards; thick synth chords hang low, sad and heavy. Even house fans adapted to formidable repetition might find this stuff too stagnant to enjoy, but for those versed in the spartan ambient music Long makes as *Celer*, this should be familiar terrain.

Though *Long Trax 2* and its predecessor are technically house music, this music works as ambient. These tracks don't move linearly, nor do they build and release. They hang in place for anywhere between just under to just over ten minutes (long trax, indeed), and though the kick drops out often, it's seemingly at random. Without the drums, these tracks would just be static washes of pad, but the dull thump of the kick and the gentle hiss of the hi-hat (no snares here) means the music changes often enough to keep our attention—and, if we want to take this music for a walk, keeps our feet moving forward.

Something else happens. On most of these tracks, Long weaves in mournful samples, all from

prominent African-Americans—Richard Pryor, Angela Davis, Barack Obama and Jean-Michel Basquiat. (Long is a white man, living in Japan.) “The struggles, the difficulties, that’s supposed to be in the past,” laments Davis. “Should we pretend we live in a colorblind society?” says Obama. “Nothing’s changed.” Perhaps the inertia of these tracks is meant to mirror these quotes. The music doesn’t change; neither does the world.

Long is an acolyte of Terre Thaemlitz, better-known as the New York house producer DJ Sprinkles, who 10 years ago released one of the most salient protest albums in recent years, *Midtown 120 Blues*. Thaemlitz’s strategy on that album was to spin impossibly lush and immersive house tracks and overdub them with passionate rants on the decontextualization and corporatization of house music. You literally couldn’t enjoy the music without sitting through the context. It’s not a stretch to suggest Long is trying a similar strategy on *Long Trax 2*. The albums even sound similar, with their rainy pads.

If so, it’s nowhere near as effective. Thaemlitz’s examination of the specific context in which house music developed invited thought and self-examination from listeners who might not have given any thought to their consumption of corporate dance music. The themes here don’t reward much thought, and it’s hard to tell if they’re deployed to make a statement or simply as a tribute to great black leaders and artists. The cultural stature of Obama and Pryor means their voices alone take on a certain grandeur; I was reminded of Coldplay’s “Kaleidoscope,” which opens with Obama singing “Amazing Grace.”

To those with the proper attention span, *Long Trax 2* works phenomenally well as ambient music. It’s astonishing how much space and grandeur Long is able to generate with the rudimentary trappings of house music. It’s easy to sink back and zone out to this album, even as it continuously suggests that’s not how you’re meant to experience it.