

# Baba Stiltz: Showtime EP

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A major-label debut, or at least a debut on a vaunted indie, should tell us who the artist is and what they have to offer. *Showtime*, Baba Stiltz's debut EP for XL, doesn't even tell us if he's kidding. There's this post-modern, post-ironic plague of artists who sidetrack sincerity with smirking self-awareness, and it just seems pointless. If you're for real, why mask it with winking irony? And if it's all a gag, doesn't that mean that any sincerity in the work is just a red herring?

Stiltz is a 24-year-old Swedish singer-producer who made a couple of wispy freak-folk albums as the Babylon Beard Syndicate as a teen before switching to soul-sampling hip hop and deep house. He's made beats for Yung Lean, and like that artist, he seems drunk off the novelty of a waifish, white indie kid imitating the affectations of mainstream pop and rap. The title track is a Drake pisstake, with Stiltz grousing about fake friends while showing off "*bags full of money/you've never seen this much money before.*" Does he really have all that money? I'd guess not.

"*Now we're having fun,*" he sings on "Situation," singing the last word like a voice actor trying out for the role of a henchman. He could have gotten away with singing the line sincerely. We know he can sing. There's a moment earlier on the song where he triumphantly declares his

love for the girl he's singing to in a voice that sounds just a little bit like the raspy West Coast singer-rapper Anderson .Paak. So when we hear him sing "fuhhhn," we can assume he's taking the piss out of pop stars who sing guilelessly about having fun. But we can't be sure, and it doesn't make the music beguiling but frustrating. Are we not supposed to be having fun?

The first two tracks on the EP are dusty crate-digger hip-hop. He knows his way around a soul sample, but not more than a lot of beatmakers still toiling in the pits of SoundCloud; we end up retaining his slurring and durr-ing more than the music. The latter two tracks are house, and on both, Stiltz's voice is slathered in Auto-Tune. Auto-Tune is a boon for his music if only because he can't bend notes off-key to let listeners know he's being smart. These tracks sound better while they're on, but they're less memorable. The first half is infuriating, the second just boring.

What was Stiltz thinking? The EP is ostensibly so-named because it's the young producer's biggest stepping stone yet. But bring him before XL's Richard Russell—a man who could buy his kids fresh new ponies for every new Adele or Tyler, the Creator album—and he puts on this clown show? The word "showtime" will always make me think of Mr. Incredible popping on his mask before dashing off around town for some do-gooder work. But *Showtime* is more like some egotistical class clown's YouTube channel. Maybe it should have been titled *What's Up, Guys!*