

# Troye Sivan: Bloom

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It's not just that Australian pop singer Troye Sivan is gay—it's that he's *sothoroughly* gay, painting same-sex love with the same nuance and carnal detail straight relationships have been afforded since the dawn of pop music. He wields the word “boy” like a scepter, animated by the energy of being someone whose brains a lot of people want to fuck out. It's awfully helpful to be handsome and famous when the dating pool's a tenth that of your straight friends.

*Bloom* is unusual in another way: it's the rare album by a male pop star that's not so much about what he does to you as what he wants you to do to him. A submissive partner, he makes much of specifics, and even the album's title is a most lovely euphemism for grostulation. The metaphor of the title track hits you incredulously, like an old showtune—“is he talking about what I think he's talking about?” we might ask. There's lots of kinky topography about oceans and rivers, but he gets creative with it, skipping stones across a lover's body on “Lucky Strike.”

Sivan comes off as smart and self-aware. He likes to sing about formative sexual experience: lying about his age to fuck older men on “Seventeen,” receiving for the first time on “Bloom.” There's often a push-pull dance between his body and the racing brain that governs it, and at its best—the artificial angel's garden of “The Good Side,” the alien moans of “My My My”—the

production reflects this, casting him as a chart-side mirror to underground queer provocateurs like Arca and Lotic who use squishy, tactile sounds to reflect tenuous trust in their own bodies.

Weird production looks good on Sivan, and indeed post-club wonder boys Jam City and the Haxan Cloak (who produces for serpentwithfeet, another singer who writes incisively about gay sex) have production credits here. But *Bloom* too often falls into the trap of bass-drunk, post-EDM production that's plagued pop since Justin Bieber's *Purpose*. "My My My" is pleasingly alien, but a distant Diplo whoop ruins the illusion towards the end. And it's hard to separate the flute sample on "What a Heavenly Way to Die" from its forebear in Bieber's "Where Are Ü Now."

Prominent guest Ariana Grande's *Sweetener* from earlier this month was an astonishing pop album because Pharrell's beats were so nimble on their feet. You might recall Tyler, the Creator's remix of Zayn's "Pillowtalk," which deconstructed the kind of pop Sivan traffics in by quickening the tempo of the One Direction alum's turgid trap-metal ballad and making it fun like sex ought to be. Troye ought to hit up Tyler. God knows he's Tyler's type.

In a perfect world, this album wouldn't be as transgressive as it is. Even though openly gay male pop stars have more of a chance on the charts than ever (Sam Smith, Years & Years' Olly Alexander), they keep a certain distance from the nitty-gritty of same-sex relationships, as if afraid audiences might be grossed out. Hopefully, *Bloom* will help clear a space on the charts for carnal, queer music. But it's easy to wish it were revolutionary for more than simply existing.