

Yves Tumor: Safe in the Hands of Love

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Safe in the Hands of Love is one of the year's more stylistically impressive records and, as his Warp debut, a fine introduction of provocative Tennessee producer Yves Tumor to the world. Tumor, born Sean Bowie, made a small splash under the moniker Teams in the chillwave days before finding himself at the vanguard of a wave of underground producers blurring boundaries between genres, between chart pop and avant-garde, between digital uncanniness and animal sensuality. Most of these artists are queer people of color who present themselves through glamorous press photos and lurid album art; think Arca, Lotic, Sophie or serpentwithfeet.

Of these artists, Bowie is the most restlessly itinerant. There's plenty of dark body music with low rumblings of bass on the album ("Economy of Freedom"). There are also rock 'n' roll songs ("Licking an Orchid"), things that sound almost emo ("Recognizing the Enemy"), violent sound collages ("Hope in Suffering," filled with the putrid buzz of flies), nods to his blunted beatmaker days ("Noid") and songs that mix these elements together ("Let The Lioness in You Flow Freely," whose sheets of noise are stirred up by sid-echained drums, as much Toro Y Moi as Throbbing Gristle).

We find familiar sounds in new contexts. Bowie likes a somber, just-slightly-out-of-tune guitar, which we heard throughout last year's stunning collection of miniatures *Experiencing the Deposit of Faith*. When "Licking an Orchid" starts, we expect something similar: a snow globe with a few precisely placed elements. Not so. It's a grunge song, very much in line with indies' '90s alt-rock fetish except instead of a dynamic shift to crushing guitars we get blasts of static.

As the album begins, we think we might be listening to some sort of sickly ambient record. It opens with a fanfare, except the horns sound diseased instead of triumphant, drooping sadly and yielding timidly to a horror-movie drone. "Economy of Freedom" continues in this vein, with little sparks of synth dancing and fizzling out. Then Bowie sings! Yves Tumor the singer is the album's most immediate revelation. With his precise annunciation of words stacked into boys-choir harmonies, he sounds just a bit like Panda Bear, especially in such a sampledelic setting.

"Noid" is an obvious standout and a bona fide pop song, its string sample forming a staircase over big-beat drums as Bowie's lyrics about police brutality are answered by abstracted sirens. It came on strong when it dropped as a single, and so does this album, which doesn't work in the abstract like *Experiencing the Deposit of Faith* and its small-label predecessors but hits us with cues we respond to instinctively. *Safe in the Hands of Love* doesn't play like an indie drama but rather a horror movie, the flies on "Hope In Suffering" likely representing the murder scene.

Bowie often works best through subtlety, and that strength is not particularly amplified on *Safe in The Hands of Love*. *Faith* was self-released right before he announced he'd signed to Warp. Maybe he wanted to get those tracks out of the way in case his new label would want something that made a bigger bang. Outré-minded fans might wish this record coiled in the brain as beguilingly as it does in the earphones. But if anything's clear about Yves Tumor, it's that confines aren't his thing, and even on his "pop" album, there's plenty of room for mischief.